THE END OF "OLD CORRUPTION" IN BRITAIN 1780-1860*

THE COMMON OR NARROW MEANING OF "OLD CORRUPTION" IS FAIRLY plain. It is the widespread use of pensions, sinecures, and gratuitous emoluments granted to persons whom the British government, between the earlier eighteenth century and the Age of Reform, wished to bribe, reward or buy. It was an all-pervasive feature of British politics in this period — indeed, among the elements which most distinguished eighteenth-century British politics from that of the nineteenth — although many historians have seen its essential passing, in the wake of Burke's "economical reform" of the 1780s, as predating the Age of Reform by fifty years.

My aim in this essay is to draw attention to the much wider and far more extensive ramifications for the evolution and transformation of British society which Old Corruption and its passing seem to have had, not merely for British high politics but in areas at first glance far removed from the narrower sphere of bribery and corruption usually taken as comprising the realm of Old Corruption and which, I believe, have received little or no systematic treatment from the historian. Putting a concise but cogent definition of this wider meaning of Old Corruption that is initially compelling is somewhat difficult, and perhaps the most fruitful way in which this can be done is to relate briefly how the subject attracted me and something of what has gone through my mind in the course of my research. In the course of my work on Britain's top wealth-holders I found, much to my surprise, that a sizable proportion of those who flourished during the early nineteenth century were neither landowners in the strict sense, nor manufacturers nor merchants, but were engaged in activities which would now be classified as in the professional, public administrative and defence occupational categories, including especially Anglican clerics, soldiers, lawyers and judges, government bureaucrats and placemen. Nearly 10 per cent of all British half-millionaires1

* Previous versions of this paper were read at Professor F. M. L. Thompson's seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, London, and at the 1981 Modern British History Conference in Melbourne. I am most grateful for the comments received there. I am also most grateful to Professors Ian Christie, F. B. Smith, F. M. L. Thompson and Martin J. Wiener, and to Drs. J. R. Dinwiddy and I. Prothero for their helpful comments and suggestions. My wife, Dr. Hilary L. Rubinstein, assisted by a Deakin University grant, undertook much of the source research for this study, for which I am especially grateful.

1 That is to say, persons leaving between £500,000 and £1 million in personalty after 1809, when the probate valuations from which my research is derived begin in a usable form. This is discussed in my Men of Property: The Very Wealthy in Britain since the Industrial Revolution (London, 1981), pp. 71-2.
deceased in the early nineteenth century, and as many as 23 per cent of those leaving more than £150,000 but less than £500,000 during the years 1809-29 were engaged in such activities. Their numbers, moreover, decreased strikingly between the early and middle nineteenth century. For example, the number of lawyers and judges who left fortunes of between £150,000 and £500,000 declined from fifteen to four between 1809-29 and 1850-69, and this decline is paralleled in other related occupational fields. The routes by which such men acquired their fortunes appeared to be strikingly and in some cases grotesquely pre-modern or early modern in nature and ambiance, and glaringly at variance with the historian's common perceptions of wealth-making in Britain during the period of industrialization. To cite some examples of this, Sir William Wynne (d. 1816), Official Principal of the Court of Arches and Master of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, left £180,000; Samuel Richard Fydell (d. 1868), Receiver-General for Lincolnshire between 1794 and 1834, left £250,000; Charles, Lord Arden (d. 1840), brother of Spencer Perceval and Registrar of the Court of Admiralty for fifty years, left £700,000; Hon. William Stuart, archbishop of Armagh (d. 1832), left £250,000; George Pretyman-Tomline (d. 1827), Pitt's tutor and bishop of Winchester, left £200,000. An obscure archbishop of Canterbury, John Moore (d. 1805), was said by one recent historian to have left £1 million at his death. More celebrated, and very much in the same mould, were such men as Lord Eldon (d. 1838), the symbol of Tory reaction, lord chancellor for twenty-seven years, whose father is described in the son's framer biographies as the owner of a coal barge at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and who accumulated a fortune of £707,000 in personalty and great quantities of land; or, indeed, the duke of Wellington himself, the younger son of a none-too-wealthy Irish earl, whose personal fortune of £600,000 and ducal estates were the product of the munificent parliamentary and foreign grants which came to him in the wake of his military victories. Such men — and there were many others of a similar stamp — were among the very wealthiest of their time in Britain, far richer than most successful manufacturers. Yet Wellington’s death in 1852 marked the virtual cessation of this type of top wealth-holder in the British élite structure.

In considering these men and their milieu, several things must strike the historian as requiring a fresh — or, indeed, a preliminary — examination, especially that there was a major fraction of the British élite structure in the later Georgian period which remains little explored in any serious history of the age, and that this world vanished almost completely between about 1830 and about 1860, a fact which

must have had a profound effect upon the structure of Britain's élites. The existence of this world and its subsequent disappearance is also surely significant in coming to terms with several important elements of Britain's historical development in the nineteenth century, as well as important to understanding a number of areas at first glance apparently far removed from the subject of political corruption as such, and to which this essay will shortly return. For want of a better descriptive phrase, I will continue to employ the term Old Corruption, as radicals of the day like William Cobbett and John Wade often referred to it, to specify this wider general milieu as well as political corruption in the narrow sense, and indeed it is this wider meaning of Old Corruption, the nature of its milieu in British society and the manner of its ending, rather than the details of corrupt political practice as such, which the historian ought most usefully to research.

The term Old Corruption was used by radicals to mean not one, but a rather wide variety of practices which they held to be at the heart of much of what was wrong with Britain's unreformed government. Briefly, one might usefully distinguish between the "political influence of the crown" — the patronage which the government continued to have at its disposal to bribe or reward members of parliament, voters, municipal corporations and the like — and the pre-existing varieties of corruption, or the fruits of previous corruption which, though gradually reformed, continued to exist and continued to be a charge on the public purse. Among the latter — and from the most to the least objectionable, according to the radical critics of the English ancien régime — one may distinguish between existing sinécures (rewards or lucrative office without any duties), sinécures for those who had performed services in the past and which continued to be paid, reversions (expectation or promise of a future sinecure) and the pluralist holding of office by leading government officials with or without real duties to such an extent as to be the source of real wealth to these officials.

It seems clear that while the "political influence of the crown" had by 1830 been reformed to a very considerable extent,³ and while much, but certainly not all (and less than many historians have credited) of the other varieties of corruption were mitigated between 1783 and 1832, much still remained, while other aspects of Old Corruption, invariably viewed by radicals as part of the system, had hardly been touched. These included the highly unequal emolum-

³ It has been pointed out to me that, for instance, when Wellington said in 1830 that he commanded, as prime minister, virtually no patronage, his statement was not refuted; crown influence was widely regarded as — in the words of one "Old Whig" of 1831 — having been "completely destroyed" since the eighteenth century. Brougham's attempted revival of Dunning's motion (in June 1822) similarly fell flat. Michael Brock, The Great Reform Act (London, 1973), p. 45 n. 78.
ments paid in respect of similar services (as with the varying salaries paid to Church of England clergymen, especially bishops), the enormous fees earned by many office-holders, especially those in the legal world, the near-universality of nepotism and patronage among aristocratic families, particularly those with links to the Tory party, and the nexus which had been built up between the Tory government and the older sections of the middle class. Additionally, such features of the pre-reform landscape as the closed municipal corporations and the East India Company awaited genuine reform. Each of these was consistently included under the heading of Old Corruption by radicals of the period, and the remaining sources of such corruption were, it is contended here, lucrative to a degree largely unappreciated by subsequent historians and, indeed, one of the major hinges upon which the English ancien régime turned.

Whether the term be employed in a narrow or wider sense, several facets of the nature and ending of Old Corruption seem to suggest that this is a somewhat unusual historical problem. In the first place Old Corruption remains to a large extent a historical blank. To be sure, there are innumerable studies of borough-mongering and high politics in this period, as there are very many studies of radical and reform movements, but there is seemingly little which focuses specifically upon this world, its anatomy and ambiance, the level of its top rewards and their implications for Britain’s élite structure, and its manner of passing. One of the best general accounts of the manner in which successive governments prior to 1832 attempted to modify the network of crown influence still remains Archibald S. Foord’s article, “The Waning of the ‘Influence of the Crown’”, which appeared as long ago as 1947. This is surely rather strange.


The most important recent study of this topic is Sir Norman Chester, *The English Administrative System, 1780-1870* (Oxford, 1981), esp. pp. 12-30, 58-66, 123-68. Its outline of the various steps by which sinecure posts were abolished (pp. 123-40) is especially valuable and impressive. Nevertheless I do not believe that this work—written from the perspective of an authority on public administration—takes sufficient
as one has only to open a radical journal or newspaper dating from the period between 1810 and 1835 to find, with almost unvarying regularity, an exposé of the extent of patronage and perquisite and an attack upon their existence.

Secondly and, it might be suggested, of more fundamental importance, the world of Old Corruption is, as it were, not “right”. Much of it appears, as has been suggested, to be a relic of the early modern period or of distinctly pre-modern modes of thought which somehow lingers on into the age of the Stockton-Darlington railway and the cotton factory. If historical research into modern British history is to advance beyond those frames of reference which normally mark its conceptualization, it is surely just to these bizarre and anomalous — and hence, ignored or camouflaged — trends and tendencies to which the historian ought to turn, and it is one of the aims of this essay to draw attention to this element in Old Corruption.

The question of why so few have ever studied the world of Old Corruption in detail remains obscure, and one cannot really point to any compelling reasons for it. There was, of course, no dramatic and specific reform movement similar to that which effected the Great Reform Bill or the New Poor Law to sweep away Old Corruption at a stroke; there is no Old Corruption reform movement to study. Reform of Old Corruption was piecemeal, while reformers and radicals of the period were never centrally concerned with Old Corruption, although they were certainly well aware of its existence. There is as well a continuing impression that Old Corruption was largely synonymous with the political influence of the crown, and that the type of patronage it represented diminished substantially with Burke’s “economic reform” in the 1780s and with the long Pitt ministry, and was almost wholly gone before 1832. In Archibald Foord’s words, “The destruction of the influence of the crown occurred, not in the 1780s nor in 1832, but in the period in between”. In the *Reign of George III* John Steven Watson has noted, concerning Burke’s economical reforms that “the real curbing of patronage lay in the day-to-day scrutiny of the working of the public offices, conducted by Pitt in ensuing years, and not in Burke’s over-simplified plan [of 1782]”, and that “economic reform, the cutting away of sinecures and influence, had not been a Foxite speciality since Burke had left them. It had rather been Pitt’s quiet achievement”. While (n. 4 cont.) note of the extent of the monetary rewards still possible under Old Corruption, especially in its extended definition. Significantly, none of the radical critics of Old Corruption like Wade and Cobbett appear to be mentioned, or their critique discussed. Nor is there any discussion of the great individual beneficiaries of Old Corruption, like Eldon, or of the size of their fortunes.

no one would deny that both Burke and Pitt did much to reform the type of direct venality in government so common during the eighteenth century, and while several historians, including J. Mordaunt Crook and M. H. Port in their study of the King's Works, have drawn attention to specific reforms of corrupt government administration undertaken long before 1832, it is surely mistaken, given the wide variety of practices which came under the heading Old Corruption, to view it, except in its narrowest sense, as a phenomenon which had vanished by 1832. Certainly no British radical of the period believed that it had, and time and again they presented detailed evidence of the continuing volume of patronage and sinecure of the old sort. The celebrated Black Book and Red Book, first published in 1816, detailed the names and takings of literally thousands of placemen and pensioners in many editions; even the 1832 edition of the Black Book, consisting of 683 dense pages, contained a detailed 83-page list of government placemen. But more important, to focus narrowly upon the political influence of the crown is to miss the wide and extensive ramifications of Old Corruption, virtually coextensive with the pre-1832 British Establishment itself, which Cobbett and Wade plainly had in mind in their indictment of Old Corruption, and which, as has been suggested, persisted until the Age of Reform. It is thus crucial in considering Old Corruption not to conflate the waning of the crown's direct electoral influence via bribes and patronage with the much wider and more fundamental notion of Old Corruption which is arguably of much greater historical importance. It was certainly true for instance that thanks to Burke's reform of the 1780s, government contractors could no longer sit in parliament, but it nonetheless also remained true that in 1820 Lord Eldon received not merely £18,000 per annum from his formal salary as lord chancellor but additionally had in his gift other legal offices and perquisites estimated in the Black Book as worth £42,000 per annum, while Eldon's brother Sir William Scott earned £6,740 per annum from his post as judge of the Admiralty Court and other offices, and while Eldon's eldest son was to receive nearly £7,000 per annum from two offices coming to him in reversion. It was still true

Apart from the Black Book, systematic attacks upon Old Corruption emerge from the writings of radical commentators like Cobbett — whose works might be read as a very extended dissertation on this subject in all its aspects — and Francis Place. At least as systematic in their continuing descriptions and denunciations of Old Corruption between circa 1810 and 1835 were the radical journals of the period, especially The Black Dwarf, The Independent Whig, The Poor Man's Conservative and The Poor Man's Guardian. The various Black Books and Red Books offered extended analyses of corruption in all its manifestations. The most complete and interesting were edited by John Wade (1788-1875) — leader-writer to the Spectator and middle-class radical — The Black Book: or, Corruption Unmasked (London, 1820), and The Extraordinary Black Book (London, 1832; repr. New York, 1970). Parliamentary inquiries into sinecure offices were held in 1807, 1810 and 1831.
in 1832, according to the *Black Book*, that Lord Bathurst received no less than £32,700 per annum as clerk of the Crown Court of Chancery, Secretary at War, Commissioner of the Affairs of India, Teller of the Exchequer — a post which, claimed the *Black Book*, paid him £23,117 per annum — and as holder of an office entitled Clerk of Dispensations and Faculties, which provided him with £4,313 per annum, while two of his close relatives received £6,400 per annum from the three offices which they held. Even in the 1820s such offices and salaries could be multiplied many hundredfold, if the radical journalists of the period were even approximately accurate. Shortly before, in 1809, the *Supplementary Report* of the Committee of Public Expenditure showed that the net value of the principle sinecure offices alone, including those of the English law courts, was £356,555 per annum. The same report also claimed that seventy-six members of parliament at that time received £164,003 in salaries and pensions. Whatever retrenchment had occurred in the intervening years, by 1820 Wade found 1,109 persons in receipt of £642,621 per annum in pensions and grants alone, including £51,589 per annum paid to forty-seven retired ambassadors. In the same year, Wade’s *Black Book* identified forty persons who received £10,000 or more annually from the public revenues. Wade included in his list royal dukes and cabinet ministers, but among the wealthy placemen still in receipt of such enormous incomes in 1820 were Lord Arden, who is credited with a gross income of £38,574 and a net income of £12,562 as registrar of the Court of Admiralty, Rt. Hon. W. W. Pole (Wellington’s brother) who received £12,450 as Master of the Mint.
and Joint Remembrancer of the Court of Exchequer in Ireland, and Lords Henry and Robert Seymour, jointly in receipt of £14,043 per annum from three obscure Irish legal offices. Wade also found fifty-four such offices with a salary of between £5,000 and £10,000 and 413 worth between £1,000 and £5,000. Although praising the Whig government of 1830-2 for some reduction in the salaries of offices, Wade found even in 1832 that the number of offices, places and pensions worth £1,000 or more had actually risen to 956. However many of these positions were legitimate offices of government, some remained sinecures and reversions of the old type, and many office-holders continued to be paid salaries and fees grossly in excess of their rational deserts.

It is this world, this way of conducting British government, which ought to be studied as an integral part of Old Corruption. And, equally importantly, the radicals of the period viewed as integral to Old Corruption not merely the direct sinecures and offices, or even the fringe emoluments received by the major office-holders and their relatives, but the close involvement of many middle-class businesses and professions which, they claimed, also benefited directly or indirectly from both the general policies pursued by Pitt and Liverpool, and, as well, from the ethos which produced the wealth of Eldon and Bathurst. This is an important and interesting point, for it suggests that a fundamental nexus existed between the aristocratic government of the British ancien régime and the older commercial and professional middle classes. For example, in The Black Book (1820 edition) Wade discusses the Bank of England and one of its directors, John Whitmore, and it is worth citing him at some length:

It hardly appears possible that any disinterested individual should be the advocate of the present system of pillage and injustice; and, therefore, we generally find those who come forward in its defence, are connected with it either in state, law, divinity, or some other way. As soon as we saw the name of John Whitmore affixed to a Declaration of London merchants, bankers, traders, and others, in defence of property and social order, we felt quite sure that John Whitmore would turn out to have some great stake in the sort of social order that Declaration was intended to support. Accordingly, we found, after a little inquiry, that this gentleman was the governor of the Bank of England, at the time of the famous Bullion Report in 1810, and that the same person is now a Bank director.

This circumstance alone will sufficiently explain Mr Whitmore’s meaning, when he declares his abhorrence of “seditious and blasphemous publications”, and his “full reliance on the efficacy of the laws, the purity of their administration, and the wisdom of the Legislature”. This language is now well understood; and no one is so little informed as not to comprehend its meaning when proceeding from the mouths of sinecurists, placemen, judges, bishops, and Bank directors.

There is no establishment which has such a powerful interest in the continuance of the present system as the Bank of England. The policy of the last twenty-five years has been the source of all its wealth and influence. It is to the war against liberty and knowledge, the Bank owes all its greatness and inordinate gains . . . It

12 Ibid., pp. 11, 75-6. Namely Prothonotary in the Court of King’s Bench, Ireland, Crown Officer, and Keeper of Declarations.
is to the war, too, the Bank is indebted for the increase in the amount of public deposits... It is not merely the Bank of England, but nearly the whole banking-system of the country that is indebted for its origins and prosperity to the war... [W]e should suppose that there are at least 2000 individuals in the metropolis; who, from dependence on the Bank, as well as their own supposed interests, would be ready at any time to sign any Declaration to which John Whitmore might affix his signature.

The whole of these classes owe their origin to the Pitt System, or, to ascend a generation higher, to the Borough System... [which] begat the whole race of bankers, loan-contractors, and speculators;...14

Wade and other radicals of the day similarly linked such middle-class institutions as the East India Company, professional groups such as lawyers and the Anglican clergy, and, of course, the unreformed parliamentary system together as forming, in some salient sense, parts of a whole. One does not have to go the entire way with this radical critique to recognize the considerable element of truth in their perceptions and, once again, the limitations inherent in viewing "economical reform" as having effectively ended this world and the nexus implied in Wade's critique. Indeed Wade and his colleagues argued that the French Wars and the "Pitt System" materially increased the scale and dimensions of Old Corruption and their arguments surely deserve a serious analysis.

Finally, in considering the neglect of this topic, it should not be forgotten that subsequent historians, rightly concerned with restoring a balance to the radicals' perception of the ills of Georgian England as mainly due to the influence of blood-sucking placemen and parasites, have themselves overlooked the actual importance of the wider and extremely lucrative features of Old Corruption for maintaining the unreformed system. In their indulgence towards the enlightened and defensible features of the British aristocracy, they have failed to quantify and often neglected the rapacity which underpinned the whole system.

These considerations in turn raise another fundamental question, namely what it was about Old Corruption that was corrupt. Joel Hurstfield in his essay on "Political Corruption in Modern England: The Historian's Problem" explicitly links eighteenth-century corruption as a continuous piece with the time-honoured British tradition of the chief ministers of the state enriching themselves as, say, Thomas Cromwell and Francis Bacon did in the sixteenth century.15 Foord notes that the "chief resources employed" by the crown in the mid-eighteenth century "may be grouped under four headings"16 —

government money, used to subsidize the ministerial press, to provide pensions, and carry on election campaigns; patronage, to provide jobs for voters, placemen, relatives and minions; honours; and "im-perceptible influence", the distribution of contracts, loan issues, the lease of crown lands, and the like, which, he suggests, played an important part in securing the support of both mercantile and landed classes.\textsuperscript{17} It is thus significant that Foord does not seem to include under any of these headings two of the facets of Old Corruption which, it might be argued, were at least as typical and lucrative: what may be termed the secondary and fringe rewards of office and place — the fees and payments which came to, say, a judge or bishop as unofficial but expected perquisites of office, and simply the grossly non-egalitarian features of the system itself, which largely vanished during the Age of Reform. According to Norman Sykes, while the income of the see of Canterbury averaged £19,182 in 1829-31, that of York £12,629, of London £13,292, and of Durham £19,066, the income of the poorest bishopric, Llandaff, averaged only £924, with Rochester at £1,459 and St. Davids at £1,897.\textsuperscript{18} With the most lucrative rewards — real wealth in most cases — went the ceaseless search for lucrative place and office which marked the entire Georgian period: bishops and prebends and, \textit{a fortiori}, secular placemen, shamelessly seeking preferment by any and every means, and offices openly acknowledged as a legitimate form of property, often hereditary property. Everyone knows of this as a commonplace of Georgian history; yet a narrow focus upon the strictly political forms of influence exercised by the crown and ministry has, perhaps, led many historians to ignore the structure of the system itself and the multiplicity of its wider ramifications throughout English society which the system continued to engender down to the 1830s.

Yet perhaps the major reason for the void in the historical literature concerning Old Corruption is that it wears, as it were, two faces. To employ an overworked word, there is a dialectical (or, if you will, contrapuntal) appearance to the subject and its meaning for English history which must, in my view, be kept in mind by historians. The bizarre, pre-modern nature of Old Corruption was mentioned above, and this aspect must be enlarged upon, for it forms one side of the dialectic in our understanding of the subject, both in the narrow and extended senses of Old Corruption we have tried to distinguish. This side of the dichotomy is extraordinarily intriguing and suggestive in its implications for English history and is perhaps the most significant wider insight which a study of this subject provides. Many of the patronage offices and places — and, more widely, the system itself —

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., pp. 494-7.
\textsuperscript{18} Norman Sykes, \textit{Church and State in England in the 18th Century} (Cambridge, 1934), p. 409, citing a report of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1835. The see of Llandaff, it should be noted, was usually held with another preferment.
were, I should like to contend, pre-modern and non-rational in the Weberian sense of failing to obey the rational criteria of all modern bureaucracies which Weber and other sociologists have distinguished as crucial to, and inherent in, the process of modernization. Rewards did not accord with effort or duty; promotion did not occur according to merit or seniority even in a nominal sense; the highest and most lucrative places had the fewest duties and, often, the least raison d'être. Indeed, the most lucrative and impressive offices frequently had no duties at all, and their holders no objective qualifications for holding them. Succession to responsible office was often determined by hereditary succession to that office or by open sale, criteria which even the Victorian period would find unacceptable. It may seem at first as if all governmental bureaucracies and, indeed, structured organizations of all sorts exhibit some or all of these characteristics, but this in fact is not so: all modern bureaucracies and structured organizations, as sociologists have pointed out, obey certain rational criteria of appointment, promotion and hierarchy. Promotion is determined, at least in part, by merit, and offices bear some resemblance to the needs and duties they are supposed to discharge, with the most senior and best rewarded offices in any organization responsible, at least nominally, for taking the most fundamental decisions.

The rationalization and modernization of


20 Bendix has usefully summarized Weber's theories of bureaucratic organization: Bendix, Max Weber, p. 419. Among those relevant to the argument here: "a bureaucratic organization . . . is conducted in accordance with the stipulated rules in an administrative agency characterized by three interrelated attributes: (a) the duty of each official to do certain types of work is delimited in terms of impersonal criteria; (b) the official is given the authority necessary to carry out his assigned functions; (c) the means of compulsion at his disposal are strictly limited, and the conditions under which their employment is legitimate are clearly defined; . . . Every official's responsibilities and authority are part of a hierarchy of authority. Higher offices are assigned the duty of supervision, lower offices, the right of appeal . . . Officials . . . do not own the resources necessary for the performance of their assigned functions but they are accountable for their use of these resources. Official business and private affairs, official revenue and private income are strictly separated . . . Offices cannot be appropriated by their incumbents in the sense of private property that can be sold and inherited".

Bendix also summarizes Weber as believing that "the bureaucratic official's position is characterized by the following attributes: (1) He is personally free and appointed to his position on the basis of contract. (2) He exercises the authority delegated to him in accordance with impersonal rules, and his loyalty is enlisted on behalf of the faithful execution of his official duties. (3) His appointment and job placement are dependent upon his technical qualifications. (4) His administrative work is his full-time occupation. (5) His work is rewarded by a regular salary and by prospects of regular advancement in a lifetime career" (ibid., p. 421).
Britain's civil service and much else of its governmental structure of course form one of the central themes of the Age of Reform, and certainly by the time of the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms and Gladstonian retrenchment had become aims almost universally approved by intelligent opinion and by the political nation. Only a generation before, however, this was far from being the case. One could here cite literally dozens if not hundreds of examples, ludicrous and bizarre, of what appear to be pre-modern, non-Weberian offices and hierarchies in the world of Old Corruption — examples abound in the Black Book on nearly every page and in many radical journals in nearly every issue. The Black Book, for instance, noted the case of Lord Auckland, who received £1,400 per annum as Vendue-Master at Demarara, "where he had never been", and £1,900 per annum as "Auditor at Greenwich Hospital", in its words "for doing nothing", as he certainly never audited. Similarly, Hon. Charles Wyndham had received a salary of £4,000 per annum since 1763 as Secretary and Clerk of Emoluments in Jamaica, while his brother, Hon. Percy Wyndham, had likewise received £7,000 per annum as Registrar in Jamaica. Cobbett noted in 1822 that "they have received £649,000 principal money from these places without, I believe, ever having seen poor Jamaica". Cobbett remarked that Percy Wyndham also held the office of Secretary and Clerk of the Courts in Barbados and concluded that its salary "would, perhaps, go far towards marking up the round million". There is the case of Lord Henry Seymour, who in 1830 received compensation of £1,251 for loss of his office of Craner and Wharfinger of the Port of Dublin. The duke of St. Albans, who was Hereditary Grand Falconer and Hereditary Registrar of the Court of Chancery, in the words of the radical journal Medusa, "without catching or keeping a single hawk or registering a single dudgeon entangled in the meshes of the law, pockets £2,000 per annum of the public money . . . wrung from the wants of sickening misery". Hon. Patrick Plunkett received £300 per annum as Purse-Bearer to the Chancellor of Ireland, who happened to be his brother, Lord Plunkett. Hon. Thomas Kenyon held the position of Filazer, Exigenter, and Clerk of Outlawries in the Court of King's Bench, which brought him some £1,254 per annum in fees. When this vital office was abolished in 1826, Kenyon received compensation of £5,463. In 1832 Wade took note of an annual hereditary pension of

Weber contrasted the modern-rational bureaucratic structure with what he termed "patrimonialism", where government is organized as a direct extension of the royal household. This was characteristic, for instance, of early China, but must itself be contrasted with feudalism, which is organized, according to Weber, on the basis of fealty between ruler and vassal (ibid., p. 119 n. 7). Thus it would seem that British Old Corruption, according to Weber's criteria, is more akin to "Oriental despotism", as in the Ottoman empire, than a continuation of feudalism. This might usefully be kept in mind in trying to account for its emergence in Georgian England.
£4,000 still paid out of post office revenue to the “heir of the duke of Schomberg” and found “there is no peerage of the name, and to whom the pension is paid, or for what, we are unable to ascertain”. The Band of State Pensioners, created by Henry VIII in 1509, had the duty:

to attend the King’s person with their pole-axes, to and from chapel royal, and receive him in the Presence Chamber on his coming out of his privy lodgings. They likewise attend at all great and solemn occasions . . . On the Coronation Day and at St. George’s Feast, they have the honour to carry up the King’s dinner.

As the True Sun, another radical journal, put it, “the annual cost of the pole-axing brotherhood to the country (omitting the salaries of the secretary, paymaster, harbinger axekeeper, and messenger, which we have not at present ascertained) was a sum equal to the salary of the President of the United States”. Its captain, Lord Hereford, received £1,000 per annum, its Standard-Bearer £510, while its forty ordinary members received £100 each. The journal also stated that they are “to call a general meeting of its members to consider the propriety of petitioning the King for an increase in salary”! A similar logic to those seen in these examples perhaps prevailed in 1805 when at the death of Lord Nelson, a grateful nation bestowed an earldom, £100,000, and a perpetual annuity of £5,000 per annum upon Nelson’s closest living male relative, his brother, who happened to be, not a sailor, but a Norfolk clergyman who had never been to sea in his life. Wade commented that he “could have had as little claim to the rewards of the hero of the Nile as any other chance person picked up in St. Paul’s Church-yard”. Similar, too, was the case of Arthur Onslow, Speaker of the House for thirty-three years, who retired with a pension of £3,000 per annum payable for his own life and that of his son. As The Poor Man’s Guardian put it in 1832, “the fortunate youth, the younger Onslow, must have received £130,000 for performing no service whatever, but simply for being born the son of a public officer”, and contrasted this case with that of the Speaker of the American House of Representatives, who “receives for similar labour $3,000 or £660 per annum, and this only while he holds office, without a shilling of pension after he leaves it”. In the endless search for preferment and financial reward the accepted norms of status and apparent occupational description often seemingly disappeared. Wade pointed out that as late as 1832:

From the large emolument of Sinecures, and the granting them in reversion have originated some ludicrous incongruities. Many noble lords and their sons, right honourable and honourable gentlemen, fill the offices of clerks, tide-waiters, harbour-masters, searchers, gaugers, packers, craners, wharfingers, prothonotaries, and other degrading situations. Some of these offices are filled by women and some

21 The Nelson dynasty’s perpetual annuity continued to be paid until 1947, when the Attlee government ceased being grateful to the hero of Trafalgar. While large cash grants to victorious military commanders continued in Britain until 1919, the point is that they were given to the officer himself, not to his non-combatant relatives.
by children . . . the duchess dowager of Manchester [receives] £2928 a-year, as late collector of the customs outwards! Not long since a right honourable lady, a baroness, was sweeper of the Mall in the Park; another lady was chief usher in the Court of Exchequer . . . Then of noble Lords: the Beresfords hold the appropriate offices of wine-tasters, storekeepers, packers, and craners, in Ireland: the Duke of Grafton, and Lords Ellenborough and Kenyon, with deputies to help, are clerks, sealers, and keepers of writs . . . and Lord Wm. Bentinck, now located in India as governor-general of Bengal, is clerk of the pipe, part of whose office it is to attend or assist the man who holds up Lord Chancellor Brougham’s train.22

In other spheres, even those not merely far removed from politics, but ostensibly dependent upon a pervasive and omnipresent rationality, one can often catch a glimpse of the same thing. Witness, for example, the mooted appointments in political economy at Oxford:

[W]hen Nassau Senior resigned from the Oxford Chair of Political Economy in 1829, Richard Whateley was elected; he had no obvious professional qualifications, but was persuaded that as a prominent Christian he might be able to rescue economics ‘permanently from disrepute’. On Whateley’s elevation to [the archbishopric of] Dublin, Frederick Denison Maurice let himself be proposed (unsuccessfully) on the grounds that no one else was ready to come forward and argue that ‘political economy is not the foundation of morals and politics, but must have them for its foundation or be worth nothing’ . . . Maurice had even fewer qualifications than Whateley: ‘I shall of course endeavour to master the details of the subject — with its principles, alas! I am not acquainted’ [he wrote] . . . He was turned down by the Puseyites, not because of his unfitness for the job but because of his views on baptismal regeneration.23

Similarly, in Brougham’s famous six-hour speech of 1828 on the abuses of the judiciary, he noted that although the privy council acted as the ultimate court of appeals for the whole British empire:

it had neither a regular Bench nor a regular Bar. Of the lawyers only the Master of the Rolls attended, assisted by an ex-ambassador or ‘now and then a junior Lord of the Admiralty who was neither ambassador nor lawyer, but would be exceedingly fit for both functions only that he happened to be educated for neither’.24

What does the existence of these offices without duties, whose rewards were either grotesquely higher than their deserts or palpably misdirected, signify? I would suggest — and I reiterate that this is but one side of the dichotomy of explanation — that they and their analogous phenomena are genuinely indicative of a pre-modern, non-Weberian conceptual mode, which lacked at least an element of the modern notions of merit, individual responsibility, and organizational rationale and which, furthermore, must be taken at least partly at face value. In a word, the world of Old Corruption was irrational (in Weber’s sense of rationality); there is a dreamlike or nightmarish quality which pervaded the system and which, I think, must be appreciated by its historians. It is perhaps just this conceptual

Closely akin to this is the survival of the old in Britain for anomalously long periods of time. A number of historians have recently drawn attention to the subject of what might be termed ready-made customs — the investiture ceremony of the Prince of Wales, invented in 1911 to seem a time-honoured survival, is the best-known of these — but the reverse of this, the survival of the old, and the mentality and rationality which attended it, must be equally striking to nineteenth-century historians, who encounter it in the unlikeliest places, and as well, I think, to the many social and economic historians who have increasingly recognized how misleading it is to view Britain as an urban industrial society prior to the late nineteenth century. Something of the irrational, pre-modern ambiance of Old Corruption may be seen in many other spheres of British life at the time — for instance, in much of the penal system, with its incredibly savage punishments founded in a rationale alien even in the early

25 It is perhaps not far-fetched to identify other striking examples of the irrational in government or society in non-Western societies; their amusing benightedness offered much pleasure to Victorians whose view of Old Corruption was probably similar. For instance, J. R. McCulloch, the Benthamite Whig liberal economist, noted a good many in his monumental gazetteer-with-commentary, A Dictionary, Geographical, Statistical and Historical of the Various Countries, 2 vols. (London, 1844). Of Japanese jurisprudence, McCulloch states, “It frequently happens, also, that the courts visit with punishment not only the delinquents themselves, but their relatives and dependents, and even strangers who have accidentally been spectators of their crimes;...”: ibid., ii, p. 74. Of the Ottoman empire — naturally a treasure house of corruption and irrationality in all its aspects — McCulloch notes that “no previous study or preparation, nothing, in short, but the favour of the prince... is required to elevate individuals from the very lowest to the very highest stations! ... When Marshal Marmont visited Constantinople, towards the close of the late sultan’s reign,... a black eunuch was a general of brigade; and Achmet Pacha, who was then a general of cavalry, had been bred a shoemaker, and practised at a more recent period as a waterman in the harbour! And a short while subsequent to this the same Achmet Pacha was made capitan pacha, or high admiral of the fleet, of the duties of which station, it is hardly necessary to add, he knew no more than he did of the Principia of Newton”: ibid., p. 826.

It is perhaps not too far-fetched to note here than “Irish humour”, emphasizing the ludicrous illogicality and self-contradictions of Irishmen, especially Irish peasants, is possibly unique in Europe: elsewhere the peasantry is renowned for its shrewdness and hard bargaining abilities, especially towards outsiders.

Much has been written in social anthropology about the concept of rationality which is useful here. See especially Bryan R. Wilson (ed.), Rationality (Oxford, 1974), and the works of Levy-Bruhl on the thought of “primitive” people as “pre-logical”.

26 I am not here necessarily referring to such survivals as brass-rubbings, cathedrals and castles, colourful fishing villages, or any of the other quaint “olde world” stops on the tourist circuit. Their existence is too obvious to need pointing out and, rather often, not genuine. The locus of what I have in mind — whose ambiance must perhaps be intuited or felt as much as described — is as often urban as rural, and exists in London at least as strongly as anywhere else. A brilliant recent synthesis which argues that all of Europe remained pre-modern and pre-industrial in its essential features until 1914 is Arno J. Mayer, The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War (London, 1980).

nineteenth century, or in the rights enjoyed by the Church of England
in non-ecclesiastical spheres, for instance the monopoly it enjoyed
until 1858 in the probating of wills. Perhaps the most important pre-
modern and non-rational survival was the unreformed House of
Commons itself, not so much because its forms and constituent
elements had their origins in medieval England — as Michael Brock
has noted, any long-lived political system necessarily consists of
survivals28 — but because it advantaged and disadvantaged sections
of the community and even social classes on an entirely haphazard
basis. “This was not a system based on property”, Brock astutely
notes, “but a caricature of one”.29 All of these old frames of reference
were, needless to say, utterly antithetical to whatever we mean by the
Victorian consciousness, which identified individual reward strictly
with individual merit and voluntary agreement — from status to
contract — according to rational and “modern” criteria of merit.
Yet as late as the mid-nineteenth century or even after in some
cases, Britain contained wide areas of custom and authority surviving
from a previous epoch. These were not destroyed by industrialization
or by the revolutions in government down the centuries. When in
the early part of this century the Webbs magisterially surveyed the
history of English local government, with an erudition and indeed a
perception that has not been surpassed, they were genuinely sur-
prised at the extent of pre-Reform ordinances, institutions and cus-
toms surviving at every hand, and their thick volumes on the history
of local government are virtually an extended description of these
survivals. Manorial courts — which even well-informed modern
historians might be excused for believing had not outlived Piers
Plowman — continued to function, though much decayed in power,
until the mid-nineteenth century or in some cases later still:
At the outset of our inquiries we shared the common opinion that these Manorial
jurisdictions had, so far at any rate as Local Government functions were concerned,
come silently to an end before our period [i.e., before 1688]. But as we extended
our researches from County to County this impression wore off. We are even
inclined to suggest that, in 1689, the holding of a Manorial Court for the suppression
of nuisances, the management of the common pasture, and, less frequently, of the
commonfield agriculture and the appointment of Constables and other officers for
the district, was, in the thousands of Manors that must still have existed, the rule
rather than the exception.30
The Webbs give numerous examples of such ancient local customs
28 Brock, Great Reform Act, p. 18.
29 Ibid., p. 26, and see also pp. 17-36 for an excellent description of these haphazard
and illogical features.
30 Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Local Government from the Revolution to the
p. 116. As late as 1688 there occurred the trial for parricide of Philip Stanfield, “the
last person convicted in [Scotland] upon the ancient ordeal of Bahr-recht or Law of
the Bier — the bleeding of the slain corpse at the murderer’s touch”, according to the
famous criminal writer William Roughead, “The Ordeal of Philip Stanfield”, in his
and institutions surviving till the nineteenth century or later. Another striking mid-nineteenth-century example of this may be found in a description of the surviving rights of the Lords of the Manor of Hampstead, as depicted in James Thorne's *Handbook to the Environs of London* (1876):

It was on the slope behind the Castle that the corpse of the unhappy John Sadleir, M.P. for Sligo, was found on the morning of Sunday, Feb. 17, 1856... Hampstead is an awkward place for a suicide to select. The lord of the manor possesses very extensive rights, among them being that of deodand, and is therefore, in the case of a person who commits suicide within the manor, entitled as heir to "the whole of the goods and chattels of the deceased, of every kind, with the exception of his estate of inheritance, in the event of a jury returning a verdict of *felo de se*" [that is, lord of the manor was entitled to all personality belonging to an intestate suicide]. Sadleir's goods and chattels were already lost or forfeit; but the cream-jug was claimed and received by the lord as an acknowledgment of his right, and then returned.

All this is but one side of the coin. The other side, the other way to look at Old Corruption is that it was quite plainly a system of achieving wealth and status, the system *par excellence* of outdoor relief for the aristocracy and its minions. Such an interpretation would dismiss what has been said of Old Corruption as misleading. Most if not all historians of modern Britain, whatever their ideological moorings, would unite in agreeing that Britain was unique among European nations in the degree to which it had, long before, rid itself of pre-modern modes of thought and consciousness and adopted (perhaps via Puritanism, if not earlier still) a national mentality of rationality in Weber's sense and an all-pervasive cash nexus which dissolved all pre-existing bonds. Since the high middle ages if not before, Britain had never possessed a peasantry; its landed aristocracy, differing from those of the Continent in a dozen ways, was virtually a bourgeoisie under another name and had, seemingly, swept away any neo-feudal remainders by the mid-seventeenth century. So runs the familiar interpretation, and no historian of Old Corruption would deny that it can be seen in this light. Rewards did

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31 The Salford Hundred Court Leet, for instance, combined the medieval and industrial in a remarkable fashion on 9 April 1828: "The jurors of our Lord the King upon their oaths present that at Ancoats Bridge within Ardwick... is a manufactury for making sal ammoniac next to the King's common highway... which emits great quantities of noisome and noxious fumes and vapours to the great nuisance of all the King's subjects passing and travelling there, by the default of Ebenezer Breillatt... Therefore he is in mercy... And they amerce him in five shillings...": Webb, *English Local Government*, i, p. 55 n. 1.


possess a rationale, albeit one largely unacceptable to a later age: its rewards were, plainly, the fruits of political patronage or bribery. The hereditary aspects of Old Corruption, so strange to subsequent generations, were simply another example of the desire by all successful Englishmen, then or now, to create a dynasty, a desire as much alive among the industrial magnates who bought their titles from Lloyd George as it had been a century before. The system was both functionally and rationally successful — in the words of one well-known historian, Britain possessed "an open aristocracy based on property and patronage", for, as another great historian has so elegantly put it, "no one bribes when he can bully", while the grosser and more unacceptable features of Old Corruption were indeed modified voluntarily from Burke onwards.

This view of Old Corruption is of course highly plausible and no doubt "correct", but it may be said to beg or leave unanswered a number of important questions about the system and its dimensions. How, for example, did it come about that a country uniquely "modern" in most if not all essential respects by the seventeenth century and perhaps by the thirteenth century could take, as it were, such a giant step backwards? The answer which is perhaps likely to occur to most historians is that which might be termed, pace Wordsworth on Milton, the "fen of stagnant water" view of Georgian England, and especially of its élite structure, half-transformed, half-preserved by the events of the seventeenth century. Locked into a political and constitutional structure which had become virtually unalterable in most important respects despite the economic and social changes of the eighteenth century, Britain's élite structure, as it were, ballooned in grotesque ways, feasting and bloating itself upon the economic enormities which Old Corruption made possible; under little or no necessity to tailor public office or official reward to public need or public opinion, it simply grew fatter and fatter. The necessity for the leading politicians and placemen to become fat and bloated as quickly and voraciously as possible was greatly increased by the fact that status was crucially dependent upon land and a title, and land, especially the broad acreage and its upkeep required to enter the aristocracy, was even then among the most expensive commodities one could buy. It was perhaps for this reason above all that the sheer size of the rewards which the British Establishment paid to itself were so large. No subsequent ruling group in Britain has possessed a modicum of the sheer greed of these men; compared with them, the Victorians were ascetics.34

34 W. D. Rubinstein, "New Men of Wealth and the Purchase of Land in Nineteenth-Century Britain", Past and Present, no. 92 (Aug. 1981), pp. 125-47, which details the virtual cessation of large-scale land purchase by post-1780 business magnates, might be read with this in mind.
Political Register, 113 members of the aristocracy were in receipt of £650,000 per annum of public money. According to Carpenter's Political Letters of November 1830, two families, the Grenvilles and the Dundases had "during the last forty years taken more money in sinecures alone than it had cost during the same time to maintain the whole of the civil government of the United States". "A Peep at the Peers", the continuing column in the Black Dwarf of 1820 described as follows the many emoluments of Lord Liverpool, who is normally viewed by historians as a Tory reformer and under whose government much reform of corruption undoubtedly took place:

He is first set down as First Lord of the Treasury, at £6000 a year! Now one as simple as myself would think that there was business enough in the treasury for the first lord, at any rate (or the others ought to be dismissed) and the £6000 a year was as much as Lord Liverpool was worth to the state. But, God help our poor optics which cannot distinguish the value and abilities of these lordly things! After discharging all the business of the treasury, as first lord, and pocketing the £6000 a year I find him with enough time on his hands to be a commissioner of affairs in India, with room enough in his pocket for £1500 more every year! I have scarcely recovered my astonishment at this, when I am also informed that he has also time to discharge the duty of a Warden of the Cinque Ports which consists, I am told, of putting £4100 a year more in his bottomless purse! But even this is not all — he has leisure enough, by working over hours, I suppose, to be Clerk of the Rolls in Ireland, for which he pockets £3500 a year more! Talk of the business talents of his Satanic Majesty! Can he do more than manage the affairs of the Treasury, India, Ireland, and the Cinque Ports at one and the same time! There are people who say, that these pretended places, are only so many excuses for giving the fellow the salaries! They whisper, that he neither keeps the Rolls of Ireland, nor attends to the affairs of India, nor knows anything about the Cinque Ports; and that a deputy does all his work at the Treasury for a few hundred a year which is also paid by the country! . . . These things are incomprehensible to me.

Even in 1832, the Poor Man's Guardian noted that Lord Grey and nineteen of his relatives had received among them £171,892 per annum from all the government offices and posts which they held. The remarks of the Black Book on Lord Eldon's £18,000 per annum ("This is an huge monster! The noble lord is the Atlas of the borough system . . .") or upon Lord Arden's £38,000 per annum ("This is, indeed, a voracious pauper . . .") seem very just.

If this consideration of the remarkable size of the top rewards possible under Old Corruption is accurate, it in turn raises a number of other important considerations: what, for instance, was the effect of the 1832 Reform Bill and the other major reform landmarks of the period upon Old Corruption? How was it that aristocratic governments, Tory and Whig, changed and reformed Old Corruption so profoundly? And what, if anything, took its place as a source of revenues for the aristocracy and its minions?

Granting that Old Corruption in its broad sense persisted until after 1830, it seems to me to be undeniable that the 1832 Reform Bill and the consequent period of Whig reform during the Age of Reform were the key mechanisms in ending it, despite all the reforming work which had been going on since Burke. Important remnants too, still
survived of sinecures and reversions in the old sense down to 1832. Both in the 1820 and 1832 editions of the Black Book, Wade noted that “A considerable number of offices to which no duties whatever are attached, and of which the holders, without either employment or responsibility, have only to receive the salaries and emoluments” still existed, mentioning such offices as the Chief-Justiceship in Eyre, north of the Trent, and the position of Lord Justice-General in Scotland “held for many years by persons not brought up even to the profession of law”. Wade also presented a list of the “numerous class” of offices whose “salaries are vastly disproportionate to their employment, and of which the duties are discharged wholly by a deputy”. Strictures against numerous existing reversions, pensions and grants follow. Offices in the colonies — described by Wade as “the chief nidus of sinecures” — especially the West Indies, where “The duties of nearly all offices . . . are discharged by [a] deputy, while the principal resides in England” were still a rich source of sinecures, as were “governors, lieutenant-governors, town-adjutants, town-majors, constables, gunners, wardens, lord-wardens, and God knows what beside” of local government. “But the Courts of Justice”, according to Wade, still in 1832, “present the most rank and unweeded garden of lucrative offices without employment, or of which the employment is executed by a deputy”. These are a few of the examples noted by Wade and his colleagues of surviving sinecures in the old sense, and do not include any of the other varieties of corruption — often very similar in nature — which remained. For example, Wade examined the “profuse grant of pensions and compensations to the members of the [former] Irish parliament” to whom “more than £75,000” was still paid annually in 1832. On the other hand it is unquestionably true that much reform of Old Corruption, especially in its narrow sense, had occurred before 1830, while the 1820s in particular saw a degree of reform of Old Corruption in its broader sense. The reform of parliament itself was seen by nearly all radicals as a necessary preliminary measure for the systematic ending of Old Corruption, and whatever the reforming work of the previous Tory governments it is difficult to disagree with this assessment. If one studies the long-term effects of the Great

36 Wade, Black Book, p. 6.
37 Ibid., pp. 7-9.
38 Wade, Extraordinary Black Book, p. 487.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p. 485.
41 Ibid., p. 495.
42 “By the 1820s the ‘economical reform’ movement had reduced the volume of patronage even in Scotland”, where old-style government control had survived longer than in England: Brock, Great Reform Act, p. 32.
Reform Bill upon Britain’s élite structure, I think one sees just how fundamental a reforming measure it really was, and why one should not underestimate its importance or interpret it merely as a clever holding action by the old élite. To find the mechanisms whereby post-1832 governments essentially ended Old Corruption in its wider sense one ought to look to those reforms which have received relatively less attention than the great instruments of reform of this period like the New Poor Law. Most of these were piecemeal in the sense of remedying one separate facet of corruption, but cumulatively they effectively and quietly ended the pre-existent system. For example, the Ecclesiastical Commission, established by Sir Robert Peel’s short-lived Tory government in 1835, together with the subsequent Whig government’s Established Church Bill of 1836, quite effectively ended the possibility of ecclesiastical wealth accumulation on the old heroic scale, as well as many other churchly abuses, so prevalent down to 1832. Bishops could no longer acquire fortunes of a quarter of a million pounds or more by venality and pluralism — the probate records, so far as I am aware, record no instance after about 1860 — and, I think it is fair to conclude, the face of the Church of England was genuinely revolutionized in this period. Similarly, the closed municipal corporations which had governed England’s cities and towns prior to 1835, and which radicals invariably perceived as another rich source of corruption, venality and nepotism, were of course swept away in 1835. But it was not until then that such root-and-branch reform was politically possible.

Apart from self-interest and the limits of the political agenda possible before Reform, there were other salient reasons why patronage and corruption were not rooted out before the mid-Victorian period. Down to 1780 at least, in Sir Norman Chester’s words, “it was well accepted that an office constituted a form of property, particularly the longer and more certain its tenure and the more pronounced the rights and pecuniary benefits attached to it”.\footnote{Chester, English Administrative System, p. 18. See also Brock, Great Reform Act, p. 36.} Even Burke recognized that office could be property, a type of property which, he proclaimed in 1780, when respected by law, was “sacred to me”.\footnote{Chester, English Administrative System, p. 20, citing Cobbett’s Parliamentary History of England, xxi (11 Feb. 1780), col. 48.} Something of this spirit unquestionably lingered throughout the period of Tory rule, although, equally certainly, the modern notion of office as a legally responsible post, to be filled for a specified period of time, became generally accepted. Buying and selling of office was prohibited in 1809, as was the promise of granting an office to procure a seat in parliament;\footnote{Ibid., p. 132. There were several exceptions to the prohibition on the buying and selling of offices, for example the sale of army commissions.} other reforms made at this time...
have also been documented by Chester. Secondly, many extreme Tories, like their radical counterparts, paradoxically considered the unreformed system a whole which could not be reformed in a piecemeal fashion without destroying the system: “touch one atom and the whole is lost” was Eldon’s famous warning.

Yet Old Corruption was reformed by both Tory and Whig aristocratic governments, and this inevitably raises the second question posed above, how was it that an essentially aristocratic government changed the old system so fundamentally? This is obviously a complex matter which no historian could answer without a profound study of the surviving papers of Grey and his ministers. One can, however, draw a few broad strokes which very detailed evidence is likely to support. First, the Whig government and the Whig aristocracy in general represented both that portion of the aristocracy which had shared relatively less thoroughly in the largesse of Old Corruption, and which in any case was generally wealthier than the Tory aristocracy and wealthy enough to live as grandees through the possession of “legitimate” property like agricultural land and mineral deposits. Given that the great Whig families had indeed been excluded from the fruits of office for so long, it was in fact largely true that they did not benefit from place and sinecure in the same sense as the Tories. In contrast, the radicals of the period trumpeted over and over again just how essential to the Pitt-Liverpool Tories was Old Corruption and its bounty, and how opposition to parliamentary reform was founded, as much as anything else, in economic self-interest. (Croker estimated just before Reform that the “Tory aristocracy” controlled 203 nomination seats, the Whigs only 73.) The “Black List!”, a widely distributed poster, compiled by W. P. Chubb following the defeat of the Reform Bill by the House of Lords in October 1831, detailed the “annual amount of pickings of the peers” who had voted against Reform. According to Chubb's

46 Ibid., pp. 131-40.
47 As D. C. Moore has pointed out, the Whig reformers also contrasted “legitimate” with “illegitimate” electoral influence, and, as much as anything, 1832 was about the elimination of such “illegitimate” influence, strongly associated with Tory borough-mongering: D. C. Moore, The Politics of Deference: A Study of the Mid-Nineteenth Century Political System (Hassocks, 1976). See also my “Wealth, Elites and the Class Structure of Modern Britain”, Past and Present, no. 76 (Aug. 1977), p. 120.

One possible result of the ending of the period of Tory hegemony was the ending of the type of social mobility into the old ruling class, often startling and dramatic, which had previously been possible. In 1805, for instance, Lord Eldon told Henry Legge that both he and Admiral Cuthbert Collingwood, ennobled after Trafalgar, “were class-fellows at Newcastle. We were placed in that school, because neither his father nor mine could afford to place us elsewhere...”: Twiss, Public and Private Life of Lord Chancellor Eldon, ii, p. 118, cited in John Derry, “Governing Temperment under Pitt and Liverpool”, in John Cannon (ed.), The Whig Ascendancy: Colloquies on Hanoverian England (London, 1981), p. 145.

48 Cited in Brock, Great Reform Act, p. 36.
list these 200 Tory peers and bishops received “upwards of £2 million” from sinecures, official places, military and civilian salaries and offices, and, in the case of the bishops, livings and prebends. (Agricultural rental incomes and other personal wealth of these men, it must be emphasized, are excluded from Chubb’s list.) Nine living peers (including those in retirement like Eldon) and two bishops received £40,000 or more from official sources.49 Not merely the Eldons and Wellentons appear as massive placemen and beneficiaries on Chubb’s “Black List!”, but very junior and virtually unknown peers as well.50 Even if Chubb and his colleagues were systematically exaggerating the extent to which the Tory aristocracy was financially benefiting from Old Corruption, not merely by attaching inflated values to their takings, but by counting the incomes of aristocratic relatives and from non-political appointments, the sum suggested by Chubb in 1831 (not 1780) may well have been equal to, or even exceeded, the entire agricultural income which the Tory aristocracy derived from its rent-rolls at the time. Surely, at the very least, a connection exists, and this aspect of the British ancien régime demands a searching examination. It is for this reason that, though doubtless true, it is perhaps disingenuous to claim that many different reasons existed for the use of patronage besides the sinister and corrupt — for instance, to supplement the inadequate salary of another office, to assist the dependants of those who died prematurely in service, or to provide retirement pensions for public officials. To focus upon these aspects of pension and sinecure without a more searching look at their role as central prop for the old regime is to miss its single most significant feature.

Secondly, and conversely, the genuine nexus which had been built up between the Pitt-Liverpool Tories and the older, more conservative segments of the middle classes like the East India Company and the legal profession largely ceased to exist after 1832, while the allegiances which the Whig aristocracy was forming were increasingly with the newer segments of the middle class, like the northern manufacturers and the dissenters, who had not fully shared the old consensus. Yet, paradoxically, the price which the Tories had to pay for their consensual government and its many alliances

49 The royal dukes of Gloucester and Cumberland, the dukes of Wellington and Dorset, Lords Bute, Talbot, Eldon, Westmorland and Arden, the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of Winchester.

50 The six most recently created and hence junior United Kingdom barons on Chubb’s list are given as follows: “Glenlyon, A New Peer, late Lord of the Bedchamber . . . £1,000; Scarsdale, sons in the Army and Church . . . £2,400; Hopetown, Lord Lieut. of Linlithgowshire . . . £15,000; Lauderdale, A Retired Ambassador . . . £36,600; Fareham, Governor of the County of Cavan . . . £20,000; Loftus, Ely [sic], Governor of Fermanagh . . . £6,000”. (Hopetown and Lauderdale were Scottish earls who had recently received U.K. baronies.)
with the middle class was that, increasingly, the irrational and pre-modern bases of Old Corruption could no longer be taken as a salient or persuasive framework of state policy even by those who benefited from them. For this reason, among others, the Tories themselves frequently took the lead in apparent reform — under Pitt and Liverpool, and after 1832 with Peel and Church reform, for instance, although they never touched the central props of the system as was done from 1832 onwards. One more than half suspects that the irrational features of Old Corruption were becoming increasingly intolerable and unacceptable to the Tories themselves — certainly the gap between, say, Eldon and Peel (who was the extremely wealthy scion of a cotton millionaire) was immense. There can be no doubt that, for whatever reason, by the 1830s the “spirit of the times” simply could not rationally justify, in the light of day, the abuses of the old system. This may be seen as the third of the reasons why Old Corruption came to an end, because it was increasingly intolerable and unacceptable, for fundamental ideological and cultural reasons, to the élite which benefited from it. Modernity was by stages arriving in England, although whether this should be seen as representing the “triumph of the entrepreneurial ideal”, the middle classes imposing its frames of reference upon the rest of society, as Harold Perkin has argued, is perhaps more debatable, for as we have seen it was the aristocracy which carried through these reforms to the detriment, perhaps, of much of the middle class. Indeed at the end of the day much about the ending of Old Corruption is obscure and rather mysterious, for the end of Old Corruption is surely among the few examples in history of an élite reforming itself in some quite basic respects, which cost it very considerable amounts of money and

52 Sir Charles Trevelyan, main architect of the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms, noted in reply to objections made to him by Capt. H. H. O’Brien M.P. (sent to Gladstone on 11 January 1853) that “Who are so successful in carrying off the prizes at competing scholarships, fellowships, etc. as the most expensively educated young men? Almost invariably, [they are] the sons of gentlemen, or those who by force of cultivation, good training and good society have acquired the feeling and habits of gentlemen. The tendency of the measure [i.e., the proposed reform] will, I am confident, be decidedly aristocratic, but it will be so in a good sense by securing for the public service those who are, in a true sense, . . . [of the governing class]. At present a mixed multitude is sent up, a large proportion of whom . . . are of an inferior rank of society . . . and they are, in general, the least eligible of their respective ranks”: cited in Edward Hughes, “Sir Charles Trevelyan and Civil Service Reform, 1853-5”, Eng. Hist. Rev., lxiv (1949), p. 72.

Earlier, speaking against the Reform Bill on 4 October 1831, the earl of Harrowby protested against reforms “by which the salaries of the great officers of the State have been reduced”. The Reform Bill, to Harrowby, was “odiously aristocratical. By reducing the salaries . . . you leave the offices open only to the possessors of wealth; . . . you deprive the country of the power of calling into its service the most useful and the most brilliant talent which it possesses”: Hansard, 3rd ser., vii, col. 1166 (4 Oct. 1831).
altered many of the recognized patterns of mobility and status attainment.53

This naturally leads to the third of the questions posed above: what took the place of Old Corruption for those aristocrats and placemen who had benefited from it? Given that the aristocracy and its minions no longer had at their disposal the vastly lucrative offices without duties, appointments without merit or responsibilities, how did they get on? Again, this is a complex and ill-explored area, which awaits its historian. The short answer is that those aristocrats who flourished during the nineteenth century were the wealthiest magnates with vast rent-rolls and urban and mineral properties as well.54 Disproportionately they were Whig-liberals rather than Tories.55 The smaller (but still very wealthy) variety of landowner who was apt to have been a Tory before and after 1832 either adapted to the changed conditions, supporting himself from his landed property alone, or underwent a secular decline; in any case by the late nineteenth century, the gap between them and the great magnates was very pronounced. One must conclude that for such men, as well as the erstwhile non-landed minions of the pre-1832 elite nothing took the place of Old Corruption, and a lucrative and invaluable source of revenue had disappeared. To be sure, there remained colonial administration, the army and navy, even the church, and eventually business directorships, but one must conclude that had the period between 1837 and 1879 not fortuitously been one of agricultural prosperity, much of the decline of the lesser aristocracy and gentry, so notable after 1879, would have occurred long before. Similarly, although the military and the empire doubtless absorbed many an aristocratic relative after 1832, its rewards could simply not be compared with those possible in the past; for many minor aristocrats one cannot help feeling that the Reform Bill marked the end of a way of life and the beginning of an era of diminished opportunities.

The dichotomy concerning the nature of Old Corruption was left unresolved; possibly, at least given our present historical knowledge of the subject, it is unresolvable. Nevertheless, whether Old Corruption ought best to be viewed as a rational facet of a rational and

53 It must also be recognized that many of the costs of the unreformed system were exceedingly and prohibitively high. As is well known, the Yorkshire election of 1807 may have cost its contestants over £250,000, while "by 1830 a [borough] seat cost perhaps £1,200 to £1,800 a year, or £5,000-8,000 for the life of a parliament": Brock, Great Reform Act, p. 35. By 1832 what gains or rewards could compensate for such outlays? 54 See Rubinstein, Men of Property, ch. 7; David Cannadine, "The Landowner as Millionaire: The Finances of the Duke of Devonshire, c. 1800-c. 1926", Agric. Hist. Rev., xxv (1977), xxvi (1978).
modern society, or an irrational facet of an irrational and pre-modern one, might become more clear if the impact of Old Corruption and its ending for other spheres of British life is examined and discussed. Some of these are, at first glance, seemingly far removed indeed from the matter at hand. No sensible historian would wish to exaggerate the contribution of Old Corruption to any of these areas, yet equally the lack of attention paid by historians to Old Corruption implies that the limits of its influence ought to be explored.

The effect of the ending of Old Corruption upon the British middle classes has been touched upon before but needs to be made more explicit. It is a common view of nineteenth-century British history that the middle classes “rose” to pre-eminence in the wake of 1832. In many respects this view is surely misconceived. There seems clearly to have been a nexus between the Pitt-Liverpool Tory governments and the older middle classes. The Napoleonic Wars and their economic consequences were perceived by radicals as benefiting the City of London financial aristocracy; the older professions, the church, the bar and bench, the East India Company were certainly as much a part and parcel of Britain’s élite structure and unreformed constitution as the House of Lords itself. The effective ending of this nexus in 1832 had several important consequences for these bonded elements of the Establishment. One was a decrease in the level of top rewards which practitioners of these old businesses and professions could expect. The nineteenth century witnessed a decline in the levels of peak incomes and fortunes which the most successful of these older middle-class institutions could accumulate. It is quite certain, for example, that the spectacle of quarter-millionaire bishops had no parallel by the time of Wilberforce; similarly, the three-quarter millionaire judges like Eldon no longer existed. In many respects the Age of Reform witnessed the passing of an old middle class whose nature and orientations remain ill-explored, but which plainly differed from our common view of the nature and aspirations of the Victorian middle classes which succeeded them. Similarly it might not be entirely fanciful to suggest that, as well as the peak rewards, the power and influence of the middle classes diminished from after 1832 until the Second Reform Bill and possibly until the Third, as the old nexus between government and old non-landed wealth broke up. The Whig grandees and peers who dominated British politics for over fifty years after the Great Reform Bill were much more of a closed, caste-like group than the Pitt-Liverpool Tories had ever been.\(^{56}\)

The importance of Old Corruption for the development of political ideology in nineteenth-century Britain is also considerable and has

\(^{56}\) See Rubinstein, “New Men of Wealth and the Purchase of Land in Nineteenth-Century England"
been underestimated and neglected; here I should like to discuss its effect upon British radicalism, Utilitarianism and conservatism. The attack upon Old Corruption forms one of the most important, popular, and reiterated themes in the British radical press of the period between 1800 and the 1830s, especially during the 1820s. One has only to open a radical journal or newspaper of this era to find attacks upon it in abundance, and, as many of the quotations in this paper indicate, our knowledge of the extent of Old Corruption derives to a considerable extent from this radical indictment. The attack upon the unreformed constitution to which it was closely allied was one which could unite working-class radicals with much of the newer middle classes who failed to share in its bounty (and were taxed to pay for it) and found its irrationality incomprehensible and even repellent. The radical attack upon irrationality in all spheres of public life predated the radicals’ specific attack upon Old Corruption, stemming from Thomas Paine if not from French leaders of the Enlightenment. Then as now, straightforward cases of public money scandals — as much of Old Corruption would be classed — are supremely salient and largely indefensible to outraged public opinion. Nor did Old Corruption cease to be a stock-in-trade of British radicalism even after its passing: it was still present, in much the same format as twenty years earlier, in Chartist periodicals like Feargus O’Connor’s *Northern Star*, and it remained a staple of the popular Sunday newspapers of the middle and even later nineteenth century. What one recent historian has termed “an outdated view of society with an emphasis on the monarchy, aristocracy, landownership, places, pensions, and the church” formed a major component of mass circulation newspapers like *Reynold’s* and *Lloyd’s* down to the 1880s. “There is no doubt of the popularity of such a stance”. Perhaps only in the later nineteenth century, long after the passing of its grosser abuses, and with the elevation of the British monarchy to semi-divine status, the emergence of right-wing press lords dominant over the popular press, and the shift of the left to a


58 British radicalism has always included an important component of rationalism in all its dimensions — from anti-clericalism and the cult of the “auto-didact” to the mechanics institute — which, though it predates the specific attack on Old Corruption, may well have found in its irrationalism a prime target. On this element in British radicalism, see, for example, Trygve R. Tholfsen, *Working Class Radicalism in Mid-Victorian England* (London, 1976), pp. 25-82, 243-57.


60 Berridge, “Popular Sunday Papers and Mid-Victorian Society”, p. 259.
general and "scientific" critique of capitalism, did the final echoes of the radical attack upon Old Corruption die away; even then it is quite probable that there remained, and possibly remains, a latent popular chord ready to be struck again.

Even more than the British radical tradition, Utilitarianism cannot be fully understood, in my view, without situating its development against the background of the pre-1832 constitution and especially, in this case, the irrational features of Old Corruption. While no one would wish to exaggerate the importance of Old Corruption in the thinking of a Bentham, Chadwick, or Westminster reviewer, what might be termed the peculiar ultra-rationality of English Utilitarianism (and, via Utilitarianism, of Fabian socialism) may surely be seen as a reaction, above all, to the irrational elements of the English ancien régime. Bentham frequently attacked sinecures, and is the author of a lengthy unpublished work (written in 1810) opposing them; of course much of his career was taken up with a concerted attack upon the irrational features of the unreformed legal system and with plans for a model, rational government apparatus. This is well understood by all historians. The "massive detail" of Bentham's Constitutional Code, according to David Roberts, "... was exactly subordinated to universally valid, rational, and efficient principles... Nothing differed more from that blueprint than England's public administration in 1833. It was not orderly, it was not planned, it was not centralized, it was not efficient...".

Yet Bentham's concern for rationality, and for the attributes of a rational society, which could be argued is possibly crucial to understanding his whole endeavour, have long been camouflaged in the continuing debate over the attitude of Utilitarianism towards the role of the government, and in the paradox that it seemingly advocated both much greater laissez-faire and much greater government intervention at one and the same time. Much of the mystery surrounding Benthamism would evaporate, I should like to suggest, if rationality, and the goal of increasing the rational organization of society, are seen as central to its view of the just society, and the amount or degree of government intervention a dependent variable which could and should justly be altered to achieve these goals.

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61 It is held among the Bentham MSS., University College, London, box 147. Cf. also his remarks on the "suppression of places and pensions, without identifying the individuals who possessed them".
63 It might be suggested that laissez-faire in economics was advocated by Benthamites because it appeared to entail the most rational use of economic resources, according to political economics as it was understood at this time. More generally, and pace Dicey and his successors, the growth of rationality in government rather than the growth of laissez-faire might usefully be viewed as the central theme of British government between 1820 and 1880.
be understood that Benthamism's advocacy of rational and theoretical general principles of societal organization, including those in the economic sphere, was the product of thinkers who, literally, had little direct knowledge or experience of industrial Britain or the conditions which industrialism brought about in the industrial north of England. Given the revolution in sensibility in the direction of greater rationality in British government and society which occurred in the time of the Philosophical Radicals, it is probably most judicious, in the debate over Bentham’s influence, to view him as an important and central advocate for ideas whose time had come, but no more.

Finally there is the case of British conservatism. Via Burke, Coleridge and Disraeli, conservatism in England enunciated a set of distinctive principles, of which four may be said to stand out in any brief résumé: the commonality of interests shared by the landed aristocracy and working classes against atomistic Manchester liberalism and the ideology of the middle class, the superiority of rural England and its values to urban England, the justification by age of old traditions, and, closely allied to it, the organic genuineness of age-old institutions like the British aristocracy. None of these principles, I would suggest, had much to do with the British élite which existed in the Georgian period, and the ideology of British conservatism seems to no small extent to have been a ready-made utopia devised to meet the radical and democratic attack. Quite paradoxically, the governing classes, especially the aristocracy in Britain, may well have grown much more like the Burkean depiction after 1832 than before, as the nexus between the aristocracy and the old middle classes came apart, and as a wealthy, self-reliant and high-minded landed aristocracy, animated by gravitas and Whig liberalism, superseded the Tory alliance. Burkean conservatism fails as well to understand that the locus of Old Corruption, and of the élite it benefited, was urban as much as rural, and was centred upon London, with its nexus of parliament, and government corruption must similarly have itself affected the attitudes of many in the direction of laissez-faire and against any extensions of government activity. It has been pointed out to me that Sydney Smith "opposed the appointment of factory inspectors because he was sure that, if such were appointed, they would not inspect any factories!"
government offices and older professions and in the legal, clerical, and mercantile worlds. The more familiar and indulgent view of eighteenth-century life, of the squire at peace with his tenants and labourers, was true — if it was true of anyone — for those not at the centre of power and influence. If this is true, then English conservatism cannot claim to enunciate a continuing tradition in any real sense, and must in fact wear the same label which Burke branded upon liberalism, that its doctrines were devised by “sophistors, calculators and economists”, although ironically Burke’s continued depictions may have presented a more appealing vision than the squalid facts of the matter.

Old Corruption is also relevant for aesthetics — not at first glance the likeliest of topics, but one where a connection exists. Although one might discuss at some length the most evident and brilliant use of the Old Corruption theme by artists, its depiction in the great satirical cartoons of the day from Hogarth through Cruickshank, rather I should like here to draw attention to the importance of this world and its ambiance for Charles Dickens, and beyond him to a little-recognized tradition of writers who perceived what might be termed the urban non-dynamic world of London in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with its quaint survivals and inherent and pervasive irrationality so different from the industrial north. In the words of the French literary historian Louis Cazamian:

In childhood Dickens had known and loved the old-fashioned provincial life of Rochester and Chatham. In London he had lived in a lower-middle-class setting, and it had not been the terrors of industrialism that he suffered. In the unique metropolitan situation, where the oldest customs survived cheek-by-jowl with the most up-to-date, chance and temperament had cast Dickens on the side of the former. It was not the factories in working-class districts that he came to know but the small industries housed in old buildings, and the wretched businesses from which small shopkeepers and street-traders scraped a living. He saw the relics of the old economic order, with corporations and apprentices and outdated officials. He loved the monuments to the past which survived in picturesque corners of the City and the Strand . . . he appreciated the drowsy charm of the Temple . . . [and] explored the dusty corridors where legal tradition slumbered . . . [I]ndustrial expansion, the first railways . . . the flight to the towns . . . none of these attracted the young Dickens’s attention.66

I would suggest that in works like Bleak House Dickens emerged as the greatest artistic delineator of Old Corruption, precisely catching its irrationality and the Kafkaesque terror of uncertainty this produced, and that his works ought largely to be read as a critique of this world, above all of its pre-modern and irrational character, rather than as a critique of industrial capitalism.67 Nor is it really

67 The “dark side of Dickens” and his affinity to writers like Dostoyevsky and Kafka, has apparently become a commonplace theme in Dickens criticism over the past thirty years, although to my knowledge no literary critic has yet linked this element in Dickens with Old Corruption or the pre-modern and irrational in an extended way. Useful recent works on Dickens include Alexander Welsh, The City of Dickens (Oxford, 1971); F. S. Schwarzbach, Dickens and the City (London, 1979).

(cont. on p. 85)
paradoxical that Dickens should have been so much of two minds about this world, hating its delay, abuses and injustice, yet loving its irrationality and eccentricity.

It remains to consider whether Old Corruption still exists. Some radical critics of contemporary English society, like E. P. Thompson, have viewed today’s Establishment, with its “old school tie” and “military industrial complex” as in some sense an extension in modern dress of “the Thing” as attacked by Cobbett and Wade, although noting its distinctive differences. Thompson, in his unusually perceptive commentaries on this period and its implications for the present, notes that “if Old Corruption still presides over Oxford and Cambridge, yet London, the Civic Universities, the technical colleges, etc., have long developed upon a different pattern”.68 Although Thompson seems explicitly to reject a direct continuation between Old Corruption and any contemporary political formation,69 yet he and others have perceived a similarity if not a direct connection. Others would perhaps go further, stressing the lack of radical discontinuities in modern British history and the relative unimportance of industrialization in transforming Britain in the nineteenth century.70

The importance and credibility of Mayhew as an observer of the “urban non-dynamic” aspect of London life is now widely recognized. Recent historical works which draw upon the Mayhew tradition include Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London (Oxford, 1971) and Raphael Samuel in several of his unpublished essays on the London working class, which emphasize the survival of the self-employed craftsman and artisan in old-fashioned, often bizarre trades rather than the modern and industrial side of London’s economy. It is evident that the characteristics of this London have much in common with the German Mittelstand, at least those perceived in it by its German conservative apologists. One might further ask what the affinity is between Continental conservatives and the British tradition of “radical patriotism” which embraced Cobbett, Dickens and Chesterton, who typically celebrated this element of London life.

Among other writers of fiction after Dickens who worked in this tradition, one of the most notable and interesting was R. Austin Freeman (1862-1943), the creator of Dr. Thorndyke, one of the immortals of classical detective fiction. Despite the fact that Thorndyke was the greatest “scientific detective” and a supremely rational man, most of the Thorndyke stories are set in the urban non-dynamic areas of London, Covent Garden, Soho and the Inns of Court, hero-worship the eccentric and the self-employed craftsmen, especially in old and dying trades like clock-making and quality furniture building, and hinge upon irrational coincidences, utterly improbable plots, bizarre wills and the like. On Freeman, see Norman Donaldson, In Search of Dr. Thorndyke (Bowling Green, Ohio, 1971). It is probably not surprising to learn that Freeman was a notable figure in the eugenics movement and an evident right-winger whose stories are replete with unflattering references to “foreign agitators” — generally Jews — and condemnation of mass society.

69 He states that “Old Corruption has passed away, but a new and entirely different, predatory complex occupies the State... with its vast influence reaching into the Civil Service, the professions, and the trade union and labour movement itself...” (ibid., p. 56).
70 No doubt it is not in the light of day immediately obvious why, for example, a mastery of the literature of ancient Greece and Rome, demonstrated before the age of twenty-two, was considered the best possible training — indeed a sine qua non — for administering the Ministry of Fisheries, the Ministry of Aircraft Production, or of tropical colonies around the world, as it was for so long.
Although I am personally sympathetic to this view, and although the consensual nature of today's Establishment — battered as this consensus has been in the past decade — has been compellingly argued, the essential differences seem as clear as the similarities. In particular I believe that nothing whatever now remains of the pre-modern non-Weberian elements which formed so striking a part of Old Corruption, despite whatever superficial appearances there may be.\textsuperscript{71} Despite their seeming resemblances, later systems of accumulation which may seem like Old Corruption took as their justification different sets of value and frames of reference. In this regard the radical, revolutionary nature of Victorian liberalism and reform becomes more apparent, as do the real bases of "Victorianism": not sexual prudery or an apology for capitalist exploitation, but the imposition of rationality and "modernity" upon the irrational and pre-modern — a gain for the ordinary man, not a loss — as well as individuality, the coincidence of merit and reward, and the extension of responsibility and of privacy.\textsuperscript{72} The revision of sensibility which began in the Georgian period continues essentially unchanged to the present time, and is marked by frames of reference so different that it is indeed difficult, without effort, to place oneself amidst those which existed before.\textsuperscript{73}

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\textsuperscript{71} For a recent incisive work stressing the continuities, see, for example, Martin J. Wiener, \textit{English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980} (Cambridge, 1981).

\textsuperscript{72} The main vehicle for this transformation was generally taken to be Christianity or, in Dickens, the "good man" animated by Christianity or its morality. The resemblance at base of "Victorianism" to socialism should also be clear.

\textsuperscript{73} In a subject marked by paradox nearly everywhere, two others might here be pointed out: France, which adopted the somewhat radical solution to its placemen and aristocratic parasites of decapitating them, did not industrialize or modernize until much later than Britain — which did so in the heyday of Old Corruption. Secondly, the typical aesthetic motif of the Georgian Age was the mannered, elegant and supremely civilized world of the later Baroque, despite the underlying irrationality of its society, while the nineteenth century, successful at modernizing and rationalizing British society, was Romantic at heart.