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In Praise of Industry: Early Nineteenth-Century Concepts of Work

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> *In short, the way to wealth, if you desire it, is as plain as the way to market. It depends chiefly on two words, industry, and frugality; i.e., waste neither time nor money, but make the best use of both.*
>
> —Ben Franklin[1]

So spoke America's fount of practical wisdom, Benjamin Franklin. His various addresses in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, published from 1732–1758, urged the nascent American nation to seek success through "industry." For Franklin and many others of the early Industrial Revolution in both the colonies and Britain proper, the advances in technology meant a new outlook for success.[2] The creative, the tinkerers, the doers of this new age held the keys of the future, and their work became the *prima exemplar* of the spirit of the age. Yet, for all the successes of the few who launched their futures in this period, there were many who were unable to break free from the proverbial Weberian "Iron Cage." Extreme poverty crippled not only large portions of Britain in urban centers such as London but also in more rural environments such as Cheddar, a city to which we will later turn.

For countless individuals of modest means in England (as well as America), aiding the poor became a dominant focus.[3] Aid societies throughout the British Isles sprang into action attempting to alleviate the ailments of the poor. While many of these societal movements sought simply to ameliorate the physical needs of the underprivileged, after the 1760s, some of these charity structures shifted their focus to teaching and training individuals so they could better their position

in society. This educational endeavor frequently focused on practical, skills-based instruction, including securing apprenticeships for young adults where appropriate. Most important of all was instruction in reading, for, if children could read, the Bible and its wisdom would be available to their young minds.

Of course, training in literacy was a difficult task as most children and young adults worked every day with apprenticeships starting even as young as seven to eight years of age. Work schedules for children, thanks to many evangelicals who wanted children to have free time to learn, were eventually limited in 1802 to a paltry twelve hours per day. Children experienced "free play" only on Sundays, much to the chagrin of church attendees who were frequently disturbed by the rowdy youths playing in the alleys and streets. A key watermark in the availability of education for all children came as William Raikes began Sunday schools around 1780 to instruct poor children in reading as well as societal virtues.[4]

It is to one of these virtues the article turns—industry. Instruction on this particular virtue flooded books in the growing late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century body of juvenile literature—a unique subset of literature that began to appear in force around the 1770s. Through the idealistic language of virtue narratives, concepts are distilled to their base form, granting us insight into the theological underpinnings of the concept of industriousness. In the process, this article will examine one of the more prolific female authors of literature relating to the topic and will pose questions for further research.

Concepts of Industry

What is *industry*? In the minds of many authors during the early Industrial Revolution, *industry* meant setting one's mind to the work at hand no matter the difficulty, knowing that rewards for such toil would ultimately be adjudicated by God. The goal of the industrious is, according to Hannah More (1745–1833), "to learn and labor truly to get their own living, and to do their duty in that state of life, unto which it hath pleased God to call them."[5]

The juvenile virtue narratives dealing with industriousness assume this *Weltanschauung.* The tales are woven in such a way that the main characters of the stories are born into overwhelming circumstances that frequently include the loss of parents. Later stories place the young men and women in difficult ethical or moral situations only to have them rise above the fray to greater success due to their hard work and honesty. In many cases, the protagonists rise above their difficult circumstances to become independent of all other support supplied by the church or extended family.

By way of example, take Mary, the heroine of *The Lancashire Collier Girl: A True Story* by Hannah More. Mary loses her father, which creates such mental distress in the mother that the children are removed from the home. The parish does all it can to care for the needs of the children and the distraught mother. As a young person of industry, young Mary sets to work to care for her own needs.

Prior to the tragedy, Mary's parents worked with her and her siblings to teach them how to be industrious so that after grieving the loss of her parents, Mary, only twelve years of age, "determined to maintain herself, like a little independent woman, by her usual work in the coal pit, where she was generally able after this time to earn at least a shilling a day."[6] Because a shilling was enough for daily sustenance, More, the storyteller, moralized by asking how Mary "employed the fruit of her industry." Was it in "vanity of dress, in nice eating and drinking or other needless expense?" This rhetorical leading question brings us to the crux of the application of our definition of industry: "She, in the first place released the parish from the burthen of maintaining her mother," which she accomplished by the age of sixteen.[7]

However, there is a divine twist to many of these stories. The encouragement for the reader of Mary's story was to understand the power of industriousness in the divine plan that God will eventually bless all those who labor well and trust God for the results. More encouraged her reader to understand, "that they can seldom be in any condition of life so low, as to prevent their rising to some degree of independence, if they chuse to exert themselves." Not only does God use difficulty of life to provide opportunity to develop character and virtue, but he will bless and protect those who labor well.[8]

The writings of Hannah More are not a solitary voice, however. Contemporaries Maria Edgeworth (1767–1849), John Aikin (1747–1822) and his sister, Anna Barbauld (1743–1825), Thomas Day (1748–1789), Sarah Trimmer (1741–1810), and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) formed the inner core of what Isaac Kramnic called the new "Bourgeois Ideologues."[9] These individuals, to a great extent, defined a new generation of literature for the consumption and instruction of children with the aim of encouraging them to improve themselves.

Despite the disparate Christian theologies these leading writers espoused, the common themes of their writing is significant to note in terms of understanding the central push of industriousness and the theologies tied to them. Three of these themes carry significant import to our understanding of the period's theology of work—individual accountability, corrupt human nature and the blessing of industriousness.

Individual Accountability

Central to all of the literature of the time is the understanding that the individual child is responsible, within a limited sense, for his or her own destiny. While far short of the modern individualism that permeates Western culture, the idea that the young adult could somehow shape his or her own future fits within the context of the Romanticism in which the Industrial Revolution was steeped.

This individualistic charter had limits, however. Under divine Providence, the child could only excel as far as his or her calling and station allowed. As Benjamin Franklin advised, "He that gets all he can, and saves all he gets … will certainly become rich, if that Being who governs the world, to whom all should look for a blessing on their honest endeavours, does not, in his wise providence, otherwise determine."[10] Or, as More advised, that individuals were to be content in living according to, "that state of life, unto which it hath pleased God to call them."[11] Those imposed limits on a God who was "about your path and about your bed, and spieth out all our ways."[12]

This mooring of Calvinistic Providence provided the natural limitations so as to encourage youth to excel but then explained why certain attainments, as laudable as they were, would remain outside of the grasp of even the most industrious poor. God provided societal structures and the best one could do was to work for attainment within that structure. If God ordained authorities and the structures that were in place, then comfort for those of high station could be found as well as those of lower.

In many respects, the aim and the goal for those of lower station were to attain the middling class of individuals. In an anonymous flyleaf published in 1795 entitled, "The Contrast Between 'the Rich' and 'the Poor,'" both the rich (those who "live in splendid houses, in unbounded luxury, dissipation and extravagance," etc.) and the poor (those who "live in miserable hovels, in want of coals, food, cloathing, and every comfort, and are forced to work ten hours a day merely not to starve," etc.) are parodied as having excess and want.[13] While contentment can and should be found in every station of life, it is within the ranks of the contented middle class that true happiness is to be found.

In what is often regarded as the first true children's novel written in English, *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* illustrates this concept well. The anonymous author tells the tale of a young Margery Meanwell, a young orphan, who, along with her brother, is taken in by a kindly clergyman and his wife. The two are quite a pair and are described as filthy street urchins with nothing to their name. In fact, Margery has only one shoe. As the family cleans them up, Margery's brother is sent promptly out as a sailor to earn his way in the world and Margery

is given a complete pair of shoes—the first she has ever had. She is so excited about the shoes that she runs about showing them to everyone in town thereby inheriting the name Goody Two-Shoes.[14]

The story demonstrates the intersection of providence (a family intervenes in the life of young Margery) but then allows for her own spirit of industriousness to make her way in the world with the modest means given to her by the hands of Providence, and work she does. In fact, she overcomes every obstacle thrown in her path to better herself in almost every way. She teaches herself to read and then begins to teach others. Her witty sayings, quite reminiscent of the early work by Franklin, encouraged her pupils to be boys and girls of industry:

> He that will thrive must arise by five.[15]
>
> Where vice enters the room … vengeance is near the door.[16]
>
> Industry is fortune's right hand, and frugality her left.[17]
>
> Remember that all you do, is done in the presence of God. The time will come, my friends, when we must give account to God, how on earth we did live.[18]
>
> And, abundance, like want, ruins many, contentment is the best fortune.[19]

Eventually, Margery becomes the main principal of a school and secures a solid future for herself in the middle class. Through marriage and the success of her brother at sea, Margery Two-Shoes becomes a bastion for young men and women who want to make something of themselves.

The moral of the story became simply that individuals engaged in hard work could better themselves, their families, and prove to be an asset to God, the church, and the community at large. At the conclusion of *Goody Two-Shoes*, Margery reflects: "Ah, said I, why did I long for riches. Having enough already why did I covet more? This is a lesson, a load of riches bring instead of felicity, a load of troubles; and the only source of happiness is contentment."[20]

Even in success, the appropriate response to all of life's circumstances is contentment.

Corrupt Human Nature

For the authors of these children's tales, the veil of sin was very thin. For authors such as Hannah More who worked directly in poor areas of the country, children hearing these tales were all too familiar with drunkenness, abuse, and the opposite of industry—laziness. Despite the theological broadness of the dissenting

tradition that undergirded many of these writers, most assumed that the essential state of humanity is fallen. In fact, those who succeed will be the young men and women who escape the very deep chasms of sin in which many of them live. In near militaristic terms, these pupils of industry were to be "united with disciplined habits of observation, tireless industry and a conscientious sense of responsibility."[21]

To heighten the realities of the virtue, many of the stories dealing with industriousness elevate the central character as a near faultless child who must deal with a child of almost the exact opposite characteristics. Maria Edgeworth's *Lazy Lawrence, or Idleness and Industry Exemplified* is a case in point. Edgeworth's tale originally appeared in a collection of stories called *The Parent's Assistant* (1796), but the tale of Lazy Lawrence enjoyed a life of its own, being reprinted in the United States and Britain well into the late nineteenth century.

The story follows Jem, a young boy whose mother suffered from severe ailments and had to mortgage their home to pay some of her bills. Without any income, one of the last assets the family owned was a horse that Jem happened to love. When Jem's mother informed him that the auction house expected the horse within two weeks in order to pay for part of the bills, the young, industrious Jem set himself to work immediately to see if he could earn two guineas—an insurmountable sum—before the horse would be forced to go to market.

And work he did. He worked in yards; he worked in mines; he simply walked past the other children when he was asked to stop and play because he had a purpose. Jem's peers did not understand and began to taunt him—particularly at the leading of a particular child named Lawrence—a child that "never did anything from morning to night; he neither worked nor played, but sauntered or lounged about restless and yawning."[22] Idleness was Lawrence's undoing. His reticence to engage productive life and industry led to gambling, spending time with the wrong crowd, and eventually stealing Jem's hard-earned money.

Without belaboring the point of the story, it is instructive to gain this point: for Edgeworth the status of both boys is equally inclined toward wrongdoing, but it is in the discipline of industry that Jem escapes the clutches of temptation and becomes a young man of honor. Jem's mother trusts him impeccably for, "You are not an idle boy … so there is little danger of your getting into mischief."

Hannah More echoes this point in her seminal *Shepherd of Salisbury Plain.* The account follows a certain Mr. Johnson, a man of some means, who encounters a very poor shepherd while on a journey through Wiltshire. Mr. Johnson strikes up a conversation with the shepherd over the weather and discovers, to his delight, a shepherd who is grateful to God for all that he has, thereby demonstrating contentment in his station. When asked about the difficulty of his life,

the shepherd simply and honestly replies: "To be sure, sir … 'tis not a very lazy life; but 'tis not near so toilsome as that which my GREAT MASTER led for my sake, and he had every state and condition of life at his choice, and chose a hard one—while I only submit to the lot that is appointed me."[23]

When asked about the difficulty of caring for sheep in great variances of temperature, the shepherd emphasizes the benefits of being poor and working hard:

> I am not exposed to great temptations; and so throwing one thing against another, God is pleased to contrive to make things more equal than we poor, ignorant, short sighted creatures are apt to think.… I wonder all working men do not derive as great joy and delight as I do from thinking how God has honored poverty! Oh! Sir, what great, or rich, or mighty men have had such honor put on them, or their condition, as shepherds, tentmakers, fishermen and carpenters have had?[24]

While life for the poor may not be as comfortable, there are certain advantages for those who work hard, according to More's story. They are content, they appreciate all that God provides and ultimately, God blesses beyond expectation and measure. For Mr. Johnson in More's story, he cannot help but be instructed by the "shifts which honest poverty can make rather than beg or steal; and was surprised to think how many ways of subsisting there are which those who live at their ease little suspect."[25] Walking away with this humbling lesson, he determines to live with more frugality and thoughtfulness, being grateful for all that God provides.

In this respect, More's *Shepherd* demonstrates the ideological commitment to industry as part of the moral fabric of Christian society itself. The shepherd communicates the dire circumstances of his family—including his wife's ailments—and how the community of faith supplied for the needs of the shepherd's family out of their own wantonness. Yet, the community knew that the shepherd's family was industrious, and that all need came through no fault of their own. They were thereby worthy to receive true aid.

By the end of the tale, Mr. Johnson endows the parish's Sunday school and places the shepherd in the role of church clerk where he can help other families understand the scriptural teaching relating to industriousness and thereby profit their entire community.

Hannah More, Emissary of Industry

At this point, it may be helpful to take a brief excursus to understand one of the key writers in this genre of juvenile industry literature.

More's personal story reflects much of the literature she would later write. The second to last out of five daughters, Hannah showed an early aptitude for literature and writing. She studied in the schools her father established in the region of Bristol and eventually taught in the schools themselves. As an instructor, she valued the theater as an arena for instruction and authored a series of plays for young women entitled *The Search After Happiness* that sold out numerous editions and launched More into London's social elite. She became part of the "polite society" of London that surrounded Samuel Johnson and Edmund Burke. Part of the famed "bluestocking" group of women, she met and conversed with Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, and other of the rising female stars of late eighteenth-century England. Her work found its greatest audience in the playwright David Garrick who helped stage her tragedy, *Percy*, at London's Covent Garden in 1777.

After Garrick's death, More moved away from London's literary society and engaged in the fight against slavery, becoming close personal friends with William Wilberforce as well as with the Clapham sect. Knowing their familiarity with the region surrounding Bristol, Wilberforce entreated Hannah to help him work to alleviate the dire circumstances of the poor in and around the village of Cheddar, England. Hannah agreed. With funding from Wilberforce himself and the help of her youngest sister, the two spent most of their final years serving this community through educational endeavors and practical job training.

Hannah experienced untold resistance from the farmers and men in the community who believed that education would be the undoing of their community and agrarian way of life. Hannah persisted. In the midst of writing numerous books aimed at both children and adults, she founded over ten schools in the region designed to "learn on week-days such coarse work as may fit them for servants.… My object is … to train up the lower classes in habits of industry and piety."[26] Many of the positive, poor characters that appear in her later, more moralistic tales are typified by the shepherd of Salisbury—happy, contented, and industrious.

At the end of the day, More believed that the battle over the fallen nature of humanity is enjoined on the economic and spiritual battlefield. For those to whom industry is not cultivated, idleness will rule—no matter the social class. Idleness allows the heart to follow every wicked way. Thus, industry must be

followed with a healthy dose of contentment to avoid the other vices that may accompany the successes of industry itself.

Industry as Blessing

In the conclusion of many of the tales of industry, the gains are not only to the diligent. In the case of Goody Two-Shoes, her poor pupils benefit from her industry as she gives of her resources; Mary, the miner, cares for her mother and family out of her industry; Jem is eventually able to pay the debt owed by his mother and secures the favor of the "Lady Preston" who employs his mother and Jem, securing a future for both of them; the Shepherd of Salisbury is blessed by Mr. Johnson who provides the local parish with funds so that the shepherd can be a clerk for the vicar. The list goes on. Industry may be part of the expectation for the individual, but the blessings of industry go far beyond the self to the families and the communities of those who are connected. For the authors, if a generation of children would take individual responsibility and overcome their predispositions to do evil, their families and communities would benefit.

Conclusion

In reading on this topic, one becomes painfully aware of the lack of research into the world of children in much of the work on economics—whether sociologically, historically, or theologically grounded. For the purposes of this article, we have seen how three key themes—individual accountability, corrupt human nature, and the blessing of industriousness—undergird much of the burgeoning category of juvenile literature at the close of the eighteenth century in Britain. By encouraging children to become aware of these issues, they might just become the men and women of the next generation who no longer fall prey to the folly of laziness. As such, it seems that further work on the subject may shed light onto the increasing advancement of the first Industrial Revolution and how it bled right into the second. Could it be that some authors of children's literature such as Hannah More and Maria Edgeworth, paved the way for the growth of an industrious generation bent on taming the ever-expanding western horizon of America?

One of the fascinating aspects of those connected to the earliest days of the publication of this young adult literature has to be the overwhelming number connected to strong dissenting religious communities. Hannah More excepting—she remained a loyal Anglican—many of the other writers spent time in Unitarian

or radical dissent communities even as they wrote and published their volumes. Could it be deduced that the radical nature of these groups encouraged this more "free-spirited" capitalistic industrious literature? If so, what are the direct connections between radicalized dissenter movements—especially those circles that Hannah More indulged in during her early days and Maria Edgeworth participated in a few years later—and ideas of economic liberty during the same period?

As always, further research is needed, but if scholars will simply heed the praise and virtue of industry, there is no doubt that these secrets will eventually be unlocked.

Notes

1. Benjamin Franklin, *Franklin's Way To Wealth; or, "Poor Richard Improved,"* (New York: S. Wood and Sons, 1817), 36.
2. Advances like the Watt steam engine (1763–1775) were essential to propel the movement forward. For more information on the impact of technology on economy during the period, see Robert Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) or Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain 1700–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
3. While many of these issues and ideas can be traced in both America and Britain, for the purposes of this project, we will focus primarily on the British streams.
4. For more on childhood in early industrial Britain, see Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
5. Hannah Moore, "The Lancashire Collier Girl: A True Story," in *Idleness and Industry* by Maria Edgeworth (Philadelphia: Johnson and Warner, 1811), 101.
6. Moore, "The Lancashire Collier Girl," 92.
7. Ibid., 93.
8. Ibid., 100.
9. Isaac Kramnic, "Children's Literature and Bourgeois Identity," in *Culture and Politics from Puritainism to the Enlightenment*, ed. Perez Zagorin (Los Angeles: University of California, 1980), 203–40.
10. Franklin, *Way to Wealth*, 36.
11. More, "The Lancashire Collier Girl," 101.

12. *Goody Two-Shoes* as cited by Kramnic, 219.
13. Anonymous, "The Contrast Between 'The Rich' and 'The Poor,'" (London, 1795).
14. The success of this story gives us the root of the eponymous English phrase "goody two-shoes."
15. *Goody Two-Shoes: A Facsimile Reproduction of the Edition of 1766 with an introduction by Charles Welsh* (London: Griffith wand Farran, 1881), 39.
16. *Goody Two-Shoes*, 40. This is part of Lesson 2, which also includes the oft quoted, "honey catches more flies than vinegar" and "a friend in your need, is a friend in deed."
17. *Goody Two-Shoes*, 41.
18. Ibid., 42.
19. Ibid., 41.
20. Ibid., 144
21. Daniel Drake, *An Introductory Lecture on the Necessity and Value of Professional Industry; Delivered in the Chapel of Transylvania University, November 7, 1823* (Lexington, Ky.: William Tanner, 1823), 12.
22. Maria Edgeworth, *Lazy Lawrence, or, Idleness and Industry Exemplified*, *to which is added the Shepherd of Salisbury Plain by Hannah More* (Philadelphia: Johnson and Warner, 1811), 9.
23. More, *Shepherd*, 49. William Wilberforce stated that he would prefer to "present himself before heaven with the *Shepherd* in his hand." (Fawcett, 219.)
24. Ibid., 49, 52.
25. Ibid., 58.
26. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *Some Eminent Women of Our Times: Short Biographical Sketches* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1889), 211–12. Fawcett makes note that More would, *"allow no writing for the poor"* as that might distract them from industriousness and ultimately their happiness.