SOCIAL REFORM IN WILLIAM GODWIN'S NOVELS

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SOCIAL REFORM IN WILLIAM GODWIN'S NOVELS

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CHAPTER I

SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN GODWIN'S ENGLAND

The era immediately preceding the French Revolution was a time during which men sought sincerely for the answers to the question of political wrong. Revolutionary thought was at the peak of its popularity, and most men's thoughts were stirred by the temper of the times. It seems somewhat strange, therefore, that the period produced little prose fiction that reflected the social ideals and tendencies characteristic of the time. The enthusiasm and excitement of fermenting ideas found expression in the literature of political theory and philosophy, but few revolutionary views are seen in the novel until sometime later, when the full impact of the romantic movement became discernible.[1]

The work of at least one novelist, however, seems to escape this generalization. William Godwin, whose Enquiry Concerning Political Justice had gained him the reputation of being the foremost apostle of radical and revolutionary thought, found the novel a means of expounding and illustrating his political and social theories. These novels, only one of which maintained a degree of popularity, deserve

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[1]Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature (New York, 1926), p. 972.

to be given serious consideration as an index to Godwin's thought on moral and social questions.

For an understanding of Godwin's purpose in these novels and for a working knowledge of Godwin himself, it is necessary to consider the social and economic conditions which were largely responsible for the growth of eighteenth-century radicalism in England, for which Godwin was briefly the prime prophet.

The eighteenth century in England was marked by great changes. Toward the middle of the century, a number of inventions and improved industrial processes brought about a transformation of the economic and social structure of English life. After the inventions of men like Hargreaves, Arkwright, and Crompton made possible the production of good quality yarn in great quantities, textile manufacturing became a booming industry. The steam engine, originally intended as an aid to pumping, slowly began to challenge the supremacy of water as a source of power.[2] Greater supplies of iron ore and coal, the result of improved mining processes, demanded more efficient smelting techniques, such as the substitution of coke for charcoal by the Darbys and Henry Cort, the introduction of Cort's puddling and rolling processes, and the use of Watt's steam engine to provide power.[3]

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[2]Herbert Heaton, "Industry and Trade," Johnson's England, edited by A. S. Turberville (Oxford, 1933), I, 230-240.

[3]J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, The Rise of Modern Industry (New York, 1937), pp. 136-143.

With these changes and others, the shift to an industrial economy began.

Accompanying these changes was an agrarian revolution of sweeping proportions. It was as much responsible for the great industrial change of the end of the eighteenth century as was the revolution in the manufacturing industries.[4] Great advances in agricultural methods had made the substitution of large for small farms a matter of economic advantage, and the consolidation of many small farm areas into large farms was a widespread process. Accompanying this change and closely associated with it was the destruction of the common-field system of cultivation and the enclosure of common waste lands. These processes, desirable as they might be from a scientific and economic point of view, brought great hardships to the rural populations. The consolidation of farms reduced the number of farmers, and the enclosures drove the laborers off the lands since it was impossible for them to exist without their rights of pasturage on common lands.[5]

This decline in rural population was accompanied by a great buildup of population in industrial areas. Revolutions in the iron and textile industries brought about the substitution of the factory for the domestic system of

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[4]Arnold Toynbee, The Industrial Revolution of the Eighteenth Century in England (London, 1908), p. 68.

[5]Ibid., p. 69.

manufacturing. This process was facilitated by the improvement of trade and commerce through a new system of roads and canals.[6] The resulting shift in population to the industrial centers brought new and very serious social and political problems.

Land was the only legal basis of political power. This was the era of the rotten borough, when many of the depopulated country boroughs had extremely limited franchises. Small constituencies were frequently under the complete influence of the local patron; in fact, some "borough mongers" found it possible to control several seats. Very few of the elections could be considered democratic to any degree, and almost all were open to political manipulation of one kind or another.[7]

In the newly industrialized areas, there was no effective system of local government. Unorganized for the more important purposes of administration, few of them were able to handle the problems of uncontrolled growth. The difficulty of providing justice in the new industrial towns was a real problem, and there was a desperate need for "trained and impersonal administration and for a more detached and scientific attitude."[8] The patent corruption of government

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[6] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[7] Dorothy Marshall, English People in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1956), pp. 71-74.

[8] Ibid., p. 94.

and church did little to impede the growth of crime and pauperism after 1760.[9]

The source of much of the lawlessness, of course, was the low standard of living among the poor. All towns of any size were filthy and unsanitary. London, being the largest and most congested, was particularly notorious for its living conditions. It had completely outgrown its system of preserving order and badly needed an improved police force.[10] Its air was contaminated with coal smoke; the streets were all but impassable with decaying offal and garbage, the houses infested with lice and flies. Overcrowding intensified the ills. One-room garrets and dark unsanitary cellars often provided a place of business as well as a home for an entire family.[11] Added to these general woes in the life of the poor were the exorbitant prices of food and clothing. As much as a third of the weekly wage was sometimes required for bread alone.[12]

Although the rich seemed to be burdened by heavy taxes designed to provide relief for the poor, inadequate administration robbed the available funds of effectiveness. Such

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[9]A. E. Rodway, Godwin and the Age of Transition (London, 1952), p. 21.

[10]J. Barrett Botsford, English Society in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1924), p. 200.

[11]Marshall, pp. 168-169.

[12]Ibid., p. 170.

abuses greatly added to the miserable existence of the poor, the sick, and the aged.

In many ways, the poor laws, which made each parish responsible for its own poor, its sick, its children and old people, vagrants and idlers, provided greater hardship than relief. The Act of 1722 set up a workhouse system which permitted the farming out of these unfortunates to unscrupulous contractors who made themselves wealthy while depriving their charges of food and imposing unreasonably heavy labor on them.[13] Agitation did lead to some reform legislation in the passage of the Gilbert Act of 1782, reserving the workhouses for "the aged, the infirm, orphan children, and babies with their mothers," and making more effective and humane provisions for administration and supervision;[14] yet the living conditions of the indigent were unsatisfactory by any standard.

The misery of the poor was increased by the Law of Settlement, which restricted the mobility of labor and added to the woes of nonemployment. Since a person could obtain relief in only one parish in case of sickness or unemployment, it was difficult for a newcomer to obtain a "settlement" in another parish. The unemployed man without a settlement was

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[13]J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, "Poverty, Crime, Philanthropy," Johnson's England, I, 302.

[14]Ibid., p. 306.

in danger from the vagrancy laws, which provided severe sentences in houses of correction for those who were idle.[15]

In criminal cases, the laws were even more repressive. As poverty and wretchedness increased, crime and lawlessness flourished, and the common reaction was to increase the severity of punishment. There were above one hundred sixty capital offenses on the statute books, including such seemingly slight misdemeanors as sending threatening letters, cutting down trees, and breaking down the banks of fish ponds. All of these offenses were punishable by death, or, if leniency were practiced, by transportation.[16]

Imprisonment for debt was one of the most common abuses associated with the system of justice. These prisoners had no legal claim to be fed and frequently had to depend upon relatives or friends for sustenance. When debtors could not afford to pay for rooms, their accommodations were deplorable. Their imprisonment continued until some means could be found to satisfy their creditors, however long that might be.[17]

With very few exceptions, prisons were wretched. They were almost always overcrowded, and there was seldom any provision for air or exercise. The prisoner's food allowance,

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[15] Ibid., p. 311.

[16] George Paston, Side-Lights on the Georgian Period (London, 1902), p. 122.

[17] Hammond and Hammond, "Poverty, Crime, Philanthropy," p. 325.

unless it was supplemented by supplies from friends or family, was inadequate. In most cases it consisted of bread and water, with very little bread. Sanitary conditions were unspeakable; vermin and dirt abounded, and disease and death were common. The indifference, dishonesty, and callousness of most jailers were notorious.[18]

Despite the ever-increasing severity of the penal code, however, the number of crimes was astonishing when judged by present-day standards. Laws against violence and dishonesty which society could not enforce proved to be a small deterrent to the criminal. Eighteenth-century England continued to be a haven for lawlessness.[19]

It seems quite reasonable, then, that after 1760, when George III became monarch and enclosures began to accelerate, discontent and demand for reform began to be increasingly evident. Out of this discontent came the romantic and rationalistic radicalism of the later eighteenth century, which found expression in attacks upon the overwhelming abuses in law, government, and church by idealistic reformers such as William Godwin.[20]

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[18] Ibid., pp. 317-320.

[19] Ibid., p. 328.

[20] Rodway, p. 21.

CHAPTER II

GODWIN'S LIFE AND LITERARY CAREER

William Godwin was born in 1756 at Wisbach, Cambridgeshire. Both his father and grandfather were dissenting ministers, and he was reared in an atmosphere of severe piety which encouraged his early decision to enter the ministry. He studied at the dissenting college at Hoxton and afterward spent five years as a minister. During this time his political and religious affiliations underwent a profound transformation. He began the ministry as a Tory and a Calvinist, but soon discarded both sets of opinions. Among the influences which were instrumental in effecting his change of thought were those of the Latin historians and Swift. He came to a point of view from which monarchical government seemed necessarily corrupt and unjust.[1] His religious thought, deeply influenced by his reading of Rousseau, Helvetius, and Baron d'Holbach, gradually turned to deism.[2] Then, inspired by Priestley's Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion, he became a Socinian. In 1783 he gave up the ministry and went to London with the intention of beginning a writing

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[1]David Fleisher, William Godwin: a Study in Liberalism (London, 1951), p. 13.

[2]D. H. Monro, Godwin's Moral Philosophy (London, 1953), p. 2.

career, feeling that he was destined to make some notable contribution to mankind.[3]

This conversion occurred almost ten years before the publication of Political Justice. Godwin's talents were turned first to hackwork of all kinds. Some of his political and historical articles attracted the attention of Whig leaders, who offered him the editorship of a pro-Whig journal The Political Herald. Rather than sacrifice his freedom through affiliation with one party, however, Godwin refused the post.[4]

During this period Godwin was to make some important and influential friendships. Foremost among them were acquaintances with R. B. Sheridan and Thomas Holcroft. After meeting Holcroft, he became an agnostic and in turn converted Holcroft into "one of the most fervent antagonists of the prevailing order." The association with Holcroft was instrumental in the stimulation of Godwin's creative powers.[5]

At this time Godwin was continually driven by the desire to make a name for himself "by some signal contribution to the cause of mankind."[6] Finally the intellectual and political reform movement which preceded the French Revolution

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[3]Fleisher, p. 13.

[4]Ibid., p. 17.

[5]Rodway, p. 26.

[6]Fleisher, p. 17.

provided the inspiration he needed. Although he refused to join any political society, he was deeply interested in the activities of the reform groups of this movement and was associated with many of the leaders. Among his close acquaintances and friends were Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mackintosh, Barlow, Holcroft, Tooke, and Thelwall.[7]

Under the inspiration of faith in the glorious future of mankind which he shared with these visionaries, Godwin began Enquiry Concerning Political Justice. His publisher agreed to underwrite his expenses while Godwin "settled down to a serious treatise on political theory."[8] Political Justice was begun in 1791 and completed in January, 1793. Its publication in February came just two weeks after the declaration of war between England and France.[9]

Political Justice was an immediate sensation. Godwin had recorded the uncompromising radical beliefs of the revolutionary movement. Nevertheless, the work actually took a stand against revolution as a means of reform, advocating changes which would come only from greater understanding and benevolence. Thus it was that Godwin's idealism protected him against the disillusionment which beset many reformers whose high hopes for the future of mankind were fired by the

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[7] Ibid., p. 19.

[8] Monro, p. 2.

[9] Fleisher, p. 22.

Revolution and turned to ashes by the Terror. Godwin's ability to dissociate his faith from "contemporary circumstance" made it possible for him to maintain his faith and continue to write with the same challenge and assurance.[10]

The public acclaim which Political Justice brought was increased in 1794 by the publication of Caleb Williams and Cursory Strictures. Caleb Williams, an ingenious blend of social criticism and romantic suspense, became Godwin's most popular novel. Cursory Strictures, published anonymously, is credited with obtaining the acquittal of the accused twelve members of the London reform societies who had been indicted for treason. Among them were his friends Holcroft, Horne Tooke, and Thelwall.[11]

These efforts were succeeded in 1795 by Considerations, an attempt to represent a moderate point of view divorced from fanatical party faction. In 1797, in The Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature, Godwin published essays reflecting views on education and elaborating his theory of intellectual perfectibility. The essays on manners were chiefly devoted to a discussion of social problems resulting from the established system of poverty. Godwin advocated the ideal of a society characterized by "cultivated equality."[12]

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Rodway, p. 40.

[12] Fleisher, p. 33.

This was the period of Godwin's marriage to Mary Wollstonecraft, from 1796 to 1797, probably the happiest period of Godwin's life. His happiness was of short duration; Mary died in childbirth in 1797, but she had given him a far greater appreciation of the value of emotion and imagination than he would ever have achieved without her inspiration. The preface of St. Leon, his second novel, published in 1799, gives wholehearted recognition to the change which had occurred in his thought and repudiates to a great degree the attitudes toward marriage which were notable in Political Justice.[13]

Mary's death in 1797 was concurrent with a change in public opinion toward Godwin. He came under attack from all sides, even from his old allies Mackintosh and Thelwall. Later the censure and parody of his works were succeeded by relative literary oblivion.[14] He was constantly plagued by poverty and personal tragedy, under which he was forced to struggle for many years until his death in 1836. During this time, however, Godwin continued to write industriously. He produced several more novels, Fleetwood, Mandeville, Deloraine, and Cloudesley. Among his other works were articles on history and politics, dramas, and children's stories, many

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[13]William Godwin, St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century (London, 1816), I, x.

[14]Rodway, p. 40.

of them literary hackwork inspired by little but the demands of constant poverty.

Never again was Godwin's influence as overwhelming as it had been during the period of his acclaim. Hazlitt recalled those days of glory:

> No work in our time gave such a blow to the philosophical mind of the country as the celebrated Enquiry concerning Political Justice. Tom Paine was considered for the time as a Tom Fool to him; Paley an old woman; Edmund Burke a flashy sophist. Truth, moral truth, it was supposed, had here taken up its abode; and these were the oracles of thought.[15]

Despite the oblivion and hardship of his later years, however, the power of his thought continued to be felt. During his lifetime Godwin's concepts had little lasting effect on political or social thought, but after his death the influence of his doctrines on Owen, Francis Place, and others became apparent:

> Through Owen and Place Godwinism affected the Trade Unions and the Co-operative Movement, and thence the temper of English Socialism. . . . A few individual Socialists like William Morris and George Bernard Shaw reveal a more direct influence. Oscar Wilde, indeed, adopts--and adapts for Art's sake--most of the Godwinian creed in The Soul of Man under Socialism.[16]

Godwin's influence is more easily traced in the literature of the day. His own novels, despite their faults, compare favorably with the other "Godwinian" novels for which they provided a pattern.[17]

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[15]William Hazlitt, "The Spirit of the Age," The Collected Works of William Hazlitt, edited by A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover (London, 1902), IV, 201.

[16]Rodway, p. 43.

[17]Ibid., p. 44.

In another way the concepts of Political Justice provided inspiration for the poets of the Romantic movement. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey all idolized Godwin during the period of his renown. All three renounced the Godwinian doctrines after the disillusionment of 1798, when Napoleon invaded the free republic of Switzerland, but the Godwinian influence is easily discernible in the earlier work of the poets.[18]

The most famous of Godwin's disciples was Percy Bysshe Shelley, who was familiar with all editions of Political Justice and was acquainted with the Godwin who had shifted to some extent from his early "extreme rationalist materialism."[19] Undoubtedly Godwin had a great and lasting influence on Shelley's thought, but there were clear differences in their views. Shelley was also greatly influenced by Plato and tried to unite the two philosophies in his creative work.[20] Godwin's principles remained basic in Shelley's thought, but were transformed as Shelley brought "feeling into the creed, generalized the ideas, and raised them to the plane of poetry, expressing them less as a philosophy than as a vision, of life as it is and as it might be."[21]

At an even later date, although references to Godwin's ideas dwindled, glimpses of them could still be traced in

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[18] Ibid., p. 45.

[19] Ibid., p. 46.

[20] Ibid., p. 47.

[21] Ibid., p. 50.

the literature and in the "optimistic libertarian individualism of the Victorian Age."[22] Today many of the reforms of which Godwin dreamed are commonly accepted social practices.

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[22] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

ENQUIRY CONCERNING POLITICAL JUSTICE

It has become evident that the doctrines which William Godwin outlines in Enquiry Concerning Political Justice were among the most influential ideas of his day. Before his novels are examined for examples of his thought, it is necessary to consider briefly some of the major social concepts of Political Justice.

Godwin's primary concern in Political Justice is a complete analysis of society, not a method whereby immediate alterations in the political structure can be effected. More particularly, Godwin is interested in examining and pointing out the weaknesses in those institutions which he feels are responsible for creating prejudice in society, thus thwarting the happiness of the human species.

In the initial chapter of Political Justice, Godwin describes the general method which he follows in his analysis:

> The method to be pursued . . . shall be, first, to take a concise survey of the evils existing in political society; secondly, to show that these evils are to be ascribed to public institutions; and thirdly, that they are not the inseparable condition of existence, but admit of removal and remedy.[1]

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[1]William Godwin, Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (Toronto, 1946), I, 6.

Godwin's survey of existing evils in society begins with the question of whether the "established methods of protecting mankind against the caprices of each other" are successful in their purpose.[2] Government was originally intended as an implement for the suppression of injustice. The need for control of the "injustice and violence of men in a state of society" created a demand for the institution of government, but the very method of its birth, its concentration of the force of the community, has resulted in "oppression, despotism, war, and conquest."[3] It has assumed the character of mankind's ignorance and error.

Among the social evils which Godwin condemns in Political Justice is the prevalence of oppression and despotism in association with government. The despotic system in existence in modern Europe has succeeded in spreading tyranny through all its subordinate ranks, resulting in a philosophy of law which gives approval to the "rights of nobility, of feudal vassalage, of primogeniture, of fines and inheritance" and exists as the "venal compact by which superior tyrants have purchased the countenance and the alliance of the inferior."[4]

The history of mankind seems to reveal that man is "of all other beings the most formidable to man."[5] War is his

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[2] Ibid., p. 13.

[3] Ibid., p. xxiv.

[4] Ibid., II, 369.

[5] Ibid., I, 7.

most terrible implement of destruction:

> Man directs the murderous engine against the life of his brother; he invents with indefatigable care refinements in destruction; he proceeds in the midst of piety and pomp to the execution of his horrid purpose; whole ranks of sensitive beings, endowed with the most admirable faculties, are mowed down in an instant; they perish by inches in the midst of agony and neglect, lacerated with every variety of method that can give torture a frame.[6]

Throughout history, as Godwin points out, this implement of destruction has been the "inseparable ally of political institution."[7]

The domestic policies of political institutions also leave much to be desired. It is deplorable that "whips, axes and gibbets, dungeons, chains and racks are the most approved and established methods of persuading men to obedience and impressing upon their minds the lessons of reason."[8] Godwin feels justified in condemning a society in which he sees "hundreds of victims annually sacrificed at the shrine of positive law and political institution."[9]

Moreover, Godwin thinks the impartial distribution of property contributes immeasurably to social ills. Despite the fact that England's poor suffer less than those of most countries, at some time, one person in seven requires assistance from the poor's rates. It seems to him that the continual oppression and struggle which accompany extreme

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., p. 8.

[8] Ibid., p. 12.

[9] Ibid., p. 13.

poverty, aggravated by the ostentation and insolence of the rich, must frequently render the poor man desperate. Legislation, "grossly the favourer of the rich against the poor," and the tax burden, an ever increasing part of which falls to the poor man in the form of consumption taxes, appear always to be designed for further oppression.[10]

Moreover, the greatest injustice is practiced in the form of overly severe punishment for crimes of robbery and similar offenses of the poor. In their poverty, they have greater temptation to succumb to such crimes.

The administration of law adds to the misery of these people. Godwin makes the accusation that the individual of limited means will find it less expensive to surrender a contested property than to be forced to pay the numerous fees for counsel, attorneys, secretaries, and clerks. He says that "in cases relating to property the practice of law is arrived at such a pitch as to render its nominal impartiality utterly nugatory."[11] Under these circumstances it seems a small wonder that the inequality intendant upon the possession of wealth is the progenitor of "mischievous effects."[12]

In general, Godwin considers all these prevalent social abuses to be the direct product of political institutions. He stresses the part played by society--or government, since

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[10] Ibid., p. 21.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., p. 22.

it intrudes itself into all phases of society--in molding men's opinions and creating the prejudice and lack of insight that are the precursors of evil and cruelty in human relationships. According to Godwin's doctrine, the actions and dispositions of men are the offspring of circumstances and events and not of any "original determination that . . . [men] bring into the world."[13] The argument that innate principles of judgment can be held accountable for men's behavior is dismissed on the grounds that it is superfluous, unsatisfactory, and absurd.[14] Neither can "instincts to action" be given any responsibility for the functions of the human being. The doctrine of instincts can also be demonstrated to be superfluous, unsatisfactory, and absurd. Moreover, in introducing "that which is occult, mysterious, and incapable of further investigation," the progress of inquiry is halted.[15]

By the same token, no serious credit can be given to the theory that prenatal impressions or differences in the structure of the animal frame may determine the qualities of the mind. Although it would be foolish to question the real differences that exist between men at their birth, it is unreasonable to suppose that impressions before birth will mold the mind of a child. Admitting that physical robustness or

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[13] Ibid., p. 26.

[14] Ibid., pp. 28-30.

[15] Ibid., p. 32.

frailty may be a predisposing factor, one must still consider the force of education:

> There is no fact more palpable, than that children of all sizes and forms indifferently become wise . . . . Those moral causes that awaken the mind, that inspire sensibility, imagination and perseverance, are distributed without distinction to the tall or dwarfish, the graceful or the deformed, the lynx-eyed or the blind.[16]

Here, then, is the key to the conduct of human beings in every situation--education. The term education is understood to apply in the most comprehensive sense that can be attached to the word. It includes every incident or impression that is capable of producing an idea in the mind or inspiring a train of reflections.[17]

Political Justice considers education under three major headings:

> The education of accident, or those impressions we receive independently of any design on the part of the preceptor; education commonly so called, or the impressions which he intentionally communicates; and political education, or the modification our ideas receive from the form of government under which we live.[18]

Important though the education of accident may be, the education of purpose is probably more powerful. Children are "a sort of raw material put into our hands, a ductile and yielding substance." They will be the successful recipients of the preceptor's thoughts only if he succeeds in conveying the truth in a manner "sufficiently frank and sufficiently skillful."[19]

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[16] Ibid., p. 39.

[17] Ibid., p. 45.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., p. 47.

Of all influences, that of government is probably the most powerful. It is actually impossible to separate the education imposed by the teacher or preceptor from that derived from the form of government under which one lives. Although the teacher may wish to counteract the influence of government, he himself cannot escape its power:

> It is beyond all controversy that men who live in a state of equality, or that approaches equality, will be frank, ingenuous and intrepid in their carriage; while those who inhabit where a great disparity of ranks has prevailed, will be distinguished by coldness, irresoluteness, timidity and caution.[20]

Example and habit are strong modifiers of character, and it is as impossible for the parent or teacher to escape the influence of politics and modes of government as it is for the child. These are forces which "educate and infect us all." Political institution, "by the consequences with which it is pregnant," has the power of prescribing to everyone under its influence the path he should follow.[21] The conception that politics is an affair with which ordinary men have little concern is totally misleading.

Each of the three most common forms of government gives impetus to certain social evils and has its own particular shortcomings. The primary objection to monarchy is its foundation on the false premise that a king possesses an intrinsic superiority over his subjects. This imposture is supported by wasteful extravagance, splendor, and exaggeration.[22]

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[20] Ibid., p. 49.

[21] Ibid., p. 50.

[22] Ibid., II, 48-50.

The essential dishonesty of such a system undermines real merit and truth. Luxury and expense are made "the standard of honour"; the standard of intellectual merit is not the man but his title, and the intrinsic morality and courage of the individual is destroyed by fear and submission.[23]

Aristocracy is characterized by two primary features: privilege and the monopoly of wealth. Not only does a system of privilege tend to destroy all ambition in the rest of mankind, but, more important, the injustice of such a system strikes at the "root of moral discernment and genuine power and decision of character."[24] Only a man who is given the distinction to which he is entitled by his personal merit, and no more, can be happy and virtuous. The dissolution of aristocracy, whereby the oppressor will be "delivered from the littleness of tyranny" and the oppressed "from the brutalizing operation of servitude," is to be desired for the benefit of all.[25]

A representative government is necessarily imperfect because it is politically impossible to separate from it the social evils which result when a majority oppresses a minority. Although less objectionable than other types of government, democracy is subject to the evils of political imposture, "the supposed necessity of deception and prejudice

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[23] Ibid., p. 52.

[24] Ibid., p. 96.

[25] Ibid., p. 98.

for restraining the turbulence of human passion," as well as the sufferings imposed by war and the weaknesses inherent in national assemblies.[26]

If such assemblies, and even local assemblies and juries, could be restricted to persuasion and invitation rather than command, Godwin proposes, the reasonableness of man, uncorrupted by institutions which he has been "accustomed to regard . . . as hypocritical," would serve to promote the good of all.[27] In that case,

> shall we not one day find, that juries themselves, and every other species of public institution, may be laid aside as unnecessary? Will not the reasonings of one wise man, be as effectual as those of twelve? Will not the competence of one individual to instruct his neighbors be a matter of sufficient notoriety, without the formality of an election? . . . This is one of the most memorable stages of human improvement. With what delight must every well informed friend of mankind look forward to the auspicious period, the dissolution of political government, of that brute engine, which has been the only perennial cause of the vices of mankind . . . .[28]

By achieving this freedom, it would be possible also for mankind to escape the deleterious effects of political supervision of opinion, Godwin thinks. Striking instances of the injurious effects from political patronage of opinion can be found in any system of religious conformity with its insistence on implicit faith and hypocrisy. Godwin declares, "Whenever the state sets apart a certain revenue for the

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[26] Ibid., p. 124.

[27] Ibid., p. 210.

[28] Ibid., pp. 211-212.

support of religion it will infallibly be given to the adherents of some particular opinion and will operate in the manner of prizes to induce men to embrace and profess those opinions."[29] The inevitable result of political interference into the formation of opinion is the attempted suppression of heresy, despite the difficulty of restraining man's opinions.

In the same light, one may examine the absurdity of tests of loyalty, oaths of office, of duty, and of evidence, libels, constitutions, national education, and pensions and salaries, all implements and institutions of political government.

According to Godwin, one of the fundamental manifestations of despotism in the system of political government is punishment. Since he has shown that government has no justifiable purpose in conferring awards and superintending opinion, it follows that government "can scarcely be of any utility, except as it is requisite for the supervision of force by force; for the prevention of the hostile attack of one member of society, upon the person or property of another, which prevention is usually called by the name of criminal justice, or punishment."[30]

Yet is retributive justice justifiable? Godwin asserts that few reflective minds will deny the principle that "the only measure of equity is utility, and whatever is not

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[29] Ibid., p. 239.

[30] Ibid., p. 322.

attended with any beneficial purpose, is not just."[31] Punishment, "unless for reform, is peculiarly absurd," since the effect that coercion produces is the violent alienation of the mind from the truth with which it is to be impressed, and since it accomplishes none of the ends which it "proposes to itself, restraint, reformation and example."[32]

Furthermore, it would appear that crime cannot be measured by any standard which renders punishment anything but absurd and iniquitous. No two crimes have ever been alike, and the attempt to "proportion the degree of suffering to the degree of delinquency" merely points out the inscrutability of motives, the uncertainty of evidence, and the disadvantage of a defendant in a criminal suit.[33]

The institution of property can be considered a keystone of the system of politics and of Godwin's concept of political justice, the precarious hinge upon which his arguments swing. Godwin sees the right of man to property as an extension of the right of private judgment and asserts that moderate material possession is necessary to the well-being of man. The arguments of Political Justice are intended to show that the end of government is to be guardian of the rights of private judgment, interposing only when one man appears to override the rights of another. Political Justice maintains

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[31] Ibid., p. 324.

[32] Ibid., p. 325.

[33] Ibid., p. 347.

that the equal rights of man entitle him to claim "every thing the possession of which will be productive of more benefit to him, than injury to another."[34]

What happens when one finds himself deprived of something which is rightfully his but which has been taken unrightfully by another? Godwin maintains that "although it may have been determined that one should be the possesser of a certain article, violence is not an acceptable means to obtain it." Since force is unacceptable and ineffective in achieving the state of equal rights of man, there remains

> only one method of arriving at this great end of justice, and most essential improvement of society, and that consists, in rendering the cession, by him that has, to him that wants, an unrestrained and voluntary action.[35]

There remain but two instruments for producing this volition, the illumination of the understanding and the love of distinction, according to Godwin. Men, he believes, "are not so entirely governed by self-interest, as has frequently been supposed."[36]

When the "ill-constructed governments which now retard . . . progress" are removed and all "ranks and immunities" are reduced, many of the obstacles to man's discernment will disappear with them, and the result will be an "equalization of conditions" from which all men will benefit.[37]

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[34] Ibid., p. 452.

[35] Ibid., p. 469.

[36] Ibid., p. 548.

[37] Ibid., p. 549.

It becomes clear, as pointed out by Hearnshaw, that Godwin was a product of his age. His thinking was not original; rather it was a synthesis of many facets of existing thought presented logically and lucidly. For this reason, Political Justice offers an extremely valuable view of the thought from which it originated. Its contribution lies in the "logical unity" of Godwin's scheme and in "the intrepidity with which he pushed his system to its logical extreme as no English philosopher had done before."[38]

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[38]F. J. C. Hearnshaw, editor, The Social and Political Theories of Some Representative Thinkers of the Revolutionary Era (New York, 1950), p. 147.

CHAPTER IV

CALEB WILLIAMS

During the years in which the spirit of the French Revolution brought forth its bitter fruit, there was a surprising lack of prose fiction to reflect the excitement of new concepts and ideologies prevalent in England. In fact, the era was a comparatively barren one for imaginative fiction. It was a time in which men's interests were more easily directed to political theory and world events.[1]

One of the few novels of the period whose reputation, although damaged by time, has survived, does reflect to a considerable degree the rebellious temper of the day. This is Caleb Williams, Godwin's first successful novel, which, along with St. Leon, was lauded by Hazlitt as being among the "most splendid and impressive works of the imagination that have appeared in our times."[2]

This novel was conceived by Godwin as an illustration of the social judgments of Political Justice. Thus, the title of the book, Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams, is an indication of the purpose of showing that

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[1]Legouis and Cazamian, p. 972.

[2]William Hazlitt, Lectures on English Poets and The Spirit of the Age (London, 1910), p. 190.

"the spirit and character of government intrudes itself into every rank of society."[3]

Godwin's remarks in the preface for the first edition of Caleb Williams, which was withdrawn from that edition because of the uneasiness accompanying the Tooke-Holcroft trials but included in subsequent editions, indicates clearly that Godwin's intentions were political and closely attuned to the conflicting trends of the hour:

> While one party pleads for reformation and change, the other extols, in the warmest terms, the existing constitutions of society. It seemed as if something would be gained for the decision of this question, if that constitution were faithfully developed in its practical effects. . . . Accordingly, it was proposed, in the invention of the following work, to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of a single story would allow, a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man.[4]

The book, begun shortly after the publication of Political Justice, was published in 1794. It became an immediate success and added more glitter to the laurels which had come to Godwin as a result of the political treatise. For a number of years Caleb Williams continued to be very popular both in England and on the Continent. In 1796, the story was successfully dramatized by George Colman the Younger under the title The Iron Chest.[5]

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[3]William Godwin, The Adventures of Caleb Williams; or, Things as They Are (New York, 1965), p. xxiii.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Fleisher, p. 27.

Later critics, however, were more discriminating in their approbation, and many agreed that the book survived as a result of its inferior merits as a novel of terror and suspense or as an early example of the "psychological study of a criminal mind."[6]

It is true, as Fleisher suggests, that the major social doctrines in the book become somewhat obscured by its plot.[7] Obviously, Godwin himself became immersed in the problem of creating one of the forerunners of the modern detective novel. Moreover, the plot, lightly knit and interrupted by only a few of the long discursive passages which seem to be inherent in most prose of the day, makes it comparatively easy reading for an eighteenth-century novel:

> Only those who have read widely in the prose fiction of Godwin's contemporary imitators and assailants, in Mrs. Yearsly, Mrs. Barbauld, Mrs. West, Mrs. Robinson, Mrs. More, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Opie, will realize how comparatively bare, direct and vigorous it was.[8]

There is little wonder that in a day when Tom Jones and Humphrey Clinker were considered light entertainment, the very real suspense and atmosphere of terror which Godwin managed to sustain appealed to the popular appetite.

It would seem, however, that the criticism which later appended itself to the novel is not entirely justified. That Caleb Williams may have fallen below its conception is

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[6]Ford K. Brown, The Life of William Godwin (London, 1926), p. 84.

[7]Fleisher, p. 27.

[8]Brown, p. 83.

a possibility. It can be maintained, however, that Godwin did succeed in his avowed purpose of pointing out the injustices which the government permitted and even encouraged. Godwin may exaggerate the frequency of such miscarriages of justice for the sake of emphasis, but the need for social reform is manifest in the illustrations which he presented.

The plot of Caleb Williams is masterfully conceived, although somewhat unorthodox in method, if one takes Godwin's explanation of the genesis at face value:

> I formed a conception of a book of fictitious adventure, that should in some way be distinguished by a very powerful interest. Pursuing this idea, I invented first the third volume of my tale, then the second, and last of all the first. I bent myself to the conception of a series of adventures of flight and pursuit; the fugitive in perpetual apprehension of being overwhelmed with the worst calamities, and the pursuer, by his ingenuity and resources, keeping his victim in a state of the most fearful alarm.[9]

Godwin gives credit to such varied sources as The Adventures of Mademoiselle de St. Phale, God's Revenge against Murder, The Newgate Calendar, Lives of the Pirates and the story of Bluebeard in "exploring the entrails of mind and motive" for the purposes of his plot.[10]

Caleb Williams, a well-educated but unsophisticated boy, begins his adventures when the death of his father makes it necessary for him to find a means of supporting himself. Through the kindness of his landlord, Ferdinando Falkland, a

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[9]Godwin, Caleb Williams, p. xxv.

[10]Ibid., p. xxix.

country squire of "considerable opulence," Caleb is employed as a secretary and comes to revere and love his benefactor.[11] As a consequence of his remorseless curiosity, however, Caleb discovers a deeply hidden and shameful secret of Falkland's past. Years earlier, in avenging an insult to his honor, the young squire had murdered Barnabas Tyrrel, a bullying neighbor who was greatly hated and feared by everyone. To protect his honor and reputation, Falkland had allowed an innocent peasant and his son to be falsely accused and executed for the crime, thus adding to his burden of guilt.

Since Caleb's discovery of this secret brings Falkland's enmity to bear upon him, the boy embarks upon a long and suspenseful attempted escape in which the agents of Falkland, employing the prejudices and advantages of government, law, and court, continually blight Caleb's every attempt to make a place for himself in any community, to find friends or allies for himself, or even to leave the country and achieve freedom from persecution elsewhere.

Finally, in desperation and despite his earlier determination not to reveal Falkland's secret, Caleb turns against his persecutor and brings an accusation of murder against him. Then at last, at the moment of his death, Falkland repents, reveals the long dormant nobility of his nature, confesses, and sets Caleb Williams free.

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[11] Ibid., p. 4.

Although the story is unique and although the novel probably has survived on its merits as a novel of terror and suspense, the premise proposed by Baker that Godwin, possessed by the excitement of developing an atmosphere of suspense, allowed the idea to influence him and dominate his original purpose is debatable.[12] The reader who is unfamiliar with Political Justice and with Godwin's social doctrines might find the theme hazy, but a foreknowledge of Godwin's avowed purpose reveals that he does succeed to a considerable extent in demonstrating that the "spirit and character of government does intrude itself into every aspect of human society and is responsible for the evils thereof."[13]

With few exceptions, characterization in Caleb Williams is intended to reinforce this realization. According to Brown, the characters constitute the first "exhibition of Godwin's power in portraying what became known in the eighteenth century as victims of society,"[14] and each one portrayed is in some way a martyr of the social system and its injustices, which Godwin criticized in Political Justice.

Caleb, himself, if less interesting than Falkland, is probably the most believable and appealing character in the book. Born of humble parents in a remote county of England,

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[12]E. A. Baker, The History of the English Novel (London, 1934), V, 245.

[13]Godwin, Political Justice, I, 6.

[14]Brown, p. 84.

his early life had "been almost wholly engrossed by reading and reflection."[15] His overwhelming curiosity is both the character flaw which leads him to tragedy and the means of his salvation. Caleb "represents the triumph of investigative curiosity and a knack for utilizing every expedient; both are necessary in his discovery of Falkland's crime and his escape from his master's toils."[16] In at least one respect, this quality reflects the concept of education described in Political Justice. Caleb may be considered a product of the school of adversity, which Godwin opposes to the undesirable education afforded privileged members of the aristocratic system:

> . . . again, the only means by which truth can be communicated to the human mind is through the inlet of the senses. . . . If we would acquire knowledge, we must open our eyes, and contemplate the universe. . . . There are other ways of attaining wisdom and ability beside the schools of adversity, but there is no way of attaining them, but through the medium of experience.[17]

Although Godwin's ideas on the effect of environment in the development of personality are not as strongly reflected in Caleb as in some other figures in the novels, Caleb is intended to represent an example of life damaged by the injustices of government and institutions of society designed for the benefit of the rich and privileged.

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[15]Godwin, Caleb Williams, p. 6.

[16]Burton Ralph Pollin, Education and Enlightenment in the Works of William Godwin (New York, 1962), p. 223.

[17]Godwin, Political Justice, II, 10-11.

In the light of the aspirations of Political Justice, the character of Falkland deserves special consideration. Falkland, who is a much less believable literary figure than Caleb, is used by Godwin to illustrate many of his ideas about the development of an individual in relation to his environment. Falkland's great character flaw is false pride and honor. As a child, he was greatly taken with the heroic poets of Italy, and from them he drank "deeply of the fountain of chivalry." In describing the development of Falkland's character, Caleb points out that Falkland had too much good sense to long for a return to the era of knighthood, but he longed to imitate the manners described by the poets:

> He believed that nothing was so well calculated to make men delicate, gallant, and humane, as a temper perpetually alive to the sentiments of birth and honour. The opinions he entertained upon those topics were illustrated in his conduct which was assiduously conformed to the model of heroism that his fancy suggested.[18]

The resulting product is the eighteenth-century man of sensibility, a man of taste and honor. He aspires to an ideal state of purity. He is benevolent and humane, but becomes a murderer. Early influences from the dead school of chivalry create such a distorted image of honor and confuse it so with reputation that murder seems less onerous than disgrace. Falkland's self-knowledge becomes less critical than the importance of being publicly honored.

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[18]Godwin, Caleb Williams, p. 11.

Falkland epitomizes all the weaknesses seen by Godwin in aristocracy, "an order of men of liberal education and elevated sentiments."[19] His conviction that the spirit of government insinuates itself into all ranks of life is demonstrated again and again in the character of the noble figures in his novels. Falkland

> exhibited upon a very contracted scale indeed, but in which the truth of delineation was faithfully sustained, a copy of what monarchies are, who reckon among the instruments of their power prisons of state.[20]

Godwin attempts to show that Falkland is the victim of society even more than is Caleb Williams or the other more oppressed figures in the tale. Falkland is victimized by the very differences in rank and fortune that make it possible for him to oppress others, trapped and infected by the self-perpetuating concepts and hypocrisies of a society constructed on the idea that one man is superior to another by accident of birth. The faithful Collins explains that the disgrace of being insulted by Tyrrel has shattered Falkland's character:

> . . . his mind was fraught with all the rhapsodies of visionary honour; and in his sense, nothing but the grosser part, the mere shell of Falkland, was capable of surviving the wound his pride has sustained.[21]

In another way, also, Godwin sees Falkland as the victim of the social system. He sees that as an individual Falkland

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[19]Godwin, Political Justice, II, 88.

[20]Godwin, Caleb Williams, p. 204.

[21]Ibid., p. 10.

was a tragically isolated figure, cut off from real communication with other men by his own misconceptions and principles. At length, he is, "in the utmost, recluse and solitary," and unwilling or unable to "compensate for his privation by the confidence of friendship."[22]

Caleb's every attempt to establish an understanding with Falkland is thwarted by the inability of both to see things as they are. Until his death, Falkland is unable to receive Caleb's sincere affection. Only the surface demonstration of false honor and acclaim has any real meaning to him.

To Godwin, this concept became the real key to man's failure in the progress toward perfectibility. So much is man the victim of his society that he cannot move to improve it because he is the creature of the misconceptions and prejudices it creates.

If Falkland is not the most tragic victim of society in Caleb Williams, he certainly does represent Godwin's idea of the manner in which an aristocracy infects its members with the inequitable spirit of its organization. Godwin sees Falkland as an example of the manner in which the "evil spirit of a corrupt society will taint, discolor and blight the fairest flowers of its culture."[23] His reverence is for a false ideal of honor, and it is this which destroys him.

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[22] Ibid., p. 6.

[23] Fleisher, p. 26.

After his final appeal for justice, Caleb regrets the wasteful tragedy of Falkland's delusion:

> Falkland! thou enteredst upon thy career with the purest and most laudable intentions. But thou imbibedst the poison of chivalry with thy earliest youth; and the base and low-minded envy that met thee on thy return to thy native seats, operated with this poison to hurry thee into madness . . . . From that moment thou only continuedst to live to the phantom of departed honour. From that moment thy benevolence was in a great part turned into rankling jealousy and inexorable precaution.[24]

Just as Falkland can be seen to represent the spirit of aristocracy, the character of Barnabas Tyrrel can be construed to reflect the spirit of despotism.[25] Both Monro and the Smiths see Tyrrel exemplifying one stage in David Hartley's hierarchy of human development and in Montesquieu's ideal of honor.[26]

Squire Tyrrel's lack of sensitivity, his ignorance, his complete lack of compassion and disregard of the standards of humanity and honor are shown, just as Falkland's faults, to be the result of his education, or lack of it, and his environment. His ruthless attitudes and crassness have been created by the absence of any refinements in his early instruction. At an early age he was left to the tuition of his mother, "a woman of very narrow capacity . . . who had no other child." She was unable to deny the boy anything he

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[24]Godwin, Caleb Williams, p. 377.

[25]Monro, p. 90.

[26]Elton Edward Smith and Esther Greenwell Smith, William Godwin (New York, 1966), p. 89.

desired and allowed him to grow up with little formal education, no training, and complete disregard of others. All who surrounded him were forced to "yield the most servile obedience to his commands."[27]

Godwin takes every opportunity to demonstrate the undesirable aspects of Tyrrel's personality which were produced by such upbringing. Barnabas Tyrrel is described as the "true model of the English Squire" and is depicted as a scoundrel of the basest sort: "he was unsupportably arrogant, tyrannical to his inferiors, and insolent to his equals."[28]

Other classic victims of society in Caleb Williams are Emily, Barnabas Tyrrel's ward, who is befriended by Falkland, and the Hawkinses, father and son, executed for Falkland's crime.

Emily is one of Godwin's several suffering heroines. In this novel she possesses an "uncommon degree of sensibility," having taken advantage of the instruction which Barnabus scorned.[29] As a powerless member of Tyrrel's household, she manages to maintain her sweetness and easiness of temper under circumstances which would have been dissatisfying to anyone. Probably Godwin saw her as an implement in the development of his plot and used her story primarily as an

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[27]Godwin, Caleb Williams, p. 19.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid., p. 44.

illustration of the oppressiveness of law and justice in English society. At any rate, somewhat less attempt is made to reveal her character and motivation in relation to her environment than with Falkland and Tyrrel. Her saccharine goodness makes her less believable than female characters in later novels.

Hawkins is used by Godwin to illustrate doctrines relating to the goodness and purity of the natural man, views typical of the Enlightenment. Before the story begins, Hawkins presumably has had little contact with the evils of aristocratic government and its distorted concepts. Hence, he has developed as a stalwart, independent, straight-thinking man untainted by society. Godwin demonstrates that the political organization allows Hawkins and his son Leonard to lose everything of value to them, even their lives, to the prerogatives granted to holders of wealth and position.

In his individual search for the source of evil in society, Godwin, as a child of the Enlightenment, accepted the premise that environment was chief. To his mind, however, environment was synonymous with government. Government insinuates itself into every field and is responsible for the maladjustments of social intercourse which occur.[30] Men do wrong, he asserts, only because they try to obey and make others obey fixed laws which have their foundation in prejudice, fanaticism, and ignorance.

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[30]Godwin, Political Justice, I, 5.

Just as the characters in Caleb Williams are indicative of Godwin's ideas regarding the effect of education and environment, so do the things that happen to them reflect his feelings about the oppressiveness of the laws and political institutions of government and the evils which they engender.

Godwin's particular design in Caleb Williams was to illustrate how the infiltration of government into individual lives can result in injustice and unhappiness. He creates innumerable opportunities to illustrate this evil.

After a lifetime spent as the victim of such injustices perpetrated through the law, Caleb Williams complains bitterly of the "regular administration of justice which is too solemn and dignified to accommodate itself to the rights or benefits of an insignificant individual."[31] The balance of favor in English law was almost invariably on the side of wealth and position. Caleb professes that the ordinary man has no chance for justice before the law:

> A man under certain circumstances shall not be heard in the detection of a crime, because he has not been a participator of it! . . . The story of a flagitious murder shall be listened to with indifference, while an innocent man is hunted like a wild beast to the farthest corners of the earth! Six thousand a year shall protect a man from accusation, and the validity of an impeachment shall be superseded, because the author of it is a servant![32]

Caleb has good cause for complaint, for he has been persecuted

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[31]Godwin, Caleb Williams, p. 218.

[32]Ibid., p. 321.

unmercifully by Falkland and his agents, who have used the superior prerogatives of aristocracy.

The story of Barnabas Tyrrel again illustrates the immunity from responsibility that such favored members of society may experience. Born to a position of wealth and influence in the community, undistinguished, even substandard, in intellect and education, with a mind "diverted from the genuine fields of utility and distinction," Tyrrel exerts his power in the form of manifest tyranny whenever possible.[33]

Tyrrel is enabled by the law to exert his will over Emily, the gentle ward whose meager inheritance he is allowed to appropriate, and he tries to force her into a marriage she abhors. When she resolutely resists his tyranny, he imprisons her. After she escapes, the law makes it possible for Tyrrel, using the excuse of unpaid board, to have her arrested and sent to prison, where she dies. This tale, if it does portray things as they were, speaks eloquently for a state of justice.

Other instances of Tyrrel's despotism are used to illustrate the indulgence of the law in injustice. Tyrrel's tyranny is even greater over others who defy his will. Weaknesses in the law give him the power to destroy the happiness and peace of his tenants. Such is the case with Hawkins.

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[33] Ibid., p. 19.

Angry because Hawkins refuses to surrender his son to him as a servant, Tyrrel first deprives him of his appointment as bailiff, contrives to flood his land, destroys his crop, kills his livestock, fences off his land so that the road is inaccessible, and employs the "Black Act" to have Hawkins's son imprisoned and condemned to death for opening the gates of these fences. Tyrrel expresses his contempt for those under his power by exclaiming, "Shall a lousy rascal that farms his forty acres, pretend to beard the lord of the manor."[34]

Poor Hawkins is crushed by this final outrage. Every thing he had hoped for for his son has been destroyed. His ambition had been to have his son rise above his own station, but he had feared that the boy would be "contaminated and debased by a servile station, and he now saw him transferred to the seminary of a jail."[35]

Hawkins no longer has any spirit to fight the injustice. Eventually Tyrrel takes even Hawkins's little parcel of land. Embittered by the tragedy and ousted from his land, Hawkins contrives the escape of his son and vanishes with him. Later both are falsely accused, arrested, and finally hanged for the murder of Tyrrel, which was actually committed by Falkland.

Falkland's earlier appeal to Tyrrel on behalf of Hawkins is indicative of the essential nobility of his character:

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[34] Ibid., p. 81.

[35] Ibid., p. 86.

> It is very true, Mr Tyrrel, that there is a distinction of ranks. I believe that distinction is a good thing, and necessary to the peace of mankind. But, however necessary it may be, we must acknowledge that it puts some hardship upon the lower orders of society. It makes one's heart ache to think that one man is born to the inheritance of every superfluity, while the whole share of another, without any demerit of his, is drudgery and starving . . . .[36]

Even Falkland, however, is unable to withstand the pressures brought by society and his indoctrination in false ideals of honor. Rather than be exposed to the disgrace of a trial for Tyrrel's murder, he allows Hawkins and his son to die.

Neither is Falkland, conditioned by the existing evils of social justice, above the unscrupulous utilization of the laws for his own particular brand of tyranny over Caleb. Once Falkland is sure that Caleb has knowledge of his crime, Falkland exerts the greatest pressure to cut Caleb off from contact with others so that the guilt can never be revealed. At length Caleb determines to escape. Falkland then has the boy apprehended and accuses him of theft. Without a trial, Caleb finds himself in prison, subject to the most severe deprivations. Godwin gives a graphic description of prison conditions in the England of his day:

> Our dungeons were cells, 7 1/2 by 6 1/2, below the surface of the ground, damp, without window, light or air, except for a few holes, worked for that purpose, in the door. In some of these miserable receptacles three persons were put to sleep together . . . . It was now the approach of winter. We were not allowed to

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[36] Ibid., p. 88.

> have candles . . . . the doors, the locks, the bolts, the chains, the massy walls and grated windows . . . are the engines that tyranny sits down in cold and serious meditation to invent. This is the empire that man exercises over man.[37]

Caleb's sojourn in prison provides Godwin an opportunity to dwell at length upon his views of prisons and punitive law. He allows Caleb to protest in bitterness:

> Thank God, exclaims the Englishman, we have no Bastille! Thank God, with us no man can be punished without a crime! Unthinking wretch! Is that a country of liberty where thousands languish in dungeons and fetters? Go, go, ignorant fools! and visit the scenes of our prisons! Witness their unwholesomeness, their filth, the tyranny of their governors, the misery of their inmates! After that show me the man shameless to triumph and say, England has no Bastille![38]

Of the jailors he says, "they had a barbarous and sullen pleasure in issuing their detested mandates and observing the mournful reluctance with which they were obeyed."[39] Godwin makes apparent his feeling that political justice cannot exist under such conditions. He points out that "three fourths of those who are regularly subjected to a similar treatment are persons, whom even with all the superciliousness and precipitation of our courts of justice no evidence can be found sufficient to convict."[40] Although it is customary to hold up the right of redress as a salve to these wounds of justice, Caleb denies that such a right exists:

> Where shall the poor wretch, reduced to the last despair, and to whom acquittal perhaps comes just time enough to

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[37] Ibid., p. 208.

[38] Ibid., p. 209.

[39] Ibid., p. 208.

[40] Ibid., p. 210.

> save from perishing,--where shall this man find leisure, and much less money, to fee counsel and officers, and purchase the tedious, dear-bought remedy of the law?[41]

After several unsuccessful attempts, Caleb manages to escape from the prison and finds himself embroiled with a group of thieves, several of whom are also victims of injustice and have been brought to their lawlessness by the same "tyranny and perfidiousness exercised by the powerful members of the community against those who were less privileged than themselves" which afflict Caleb.[42] Mr. Raymond, their leader, makes the claim that the occupation of the thieves is justifiable:

> Our profession is justice . . . . We undertake to counteract the partiality and iniquity of public institutions. We, who are thieves without licence, are at open war with another set of men, who are thieves according to law.[43]

Caleb, however, is a creation of Godwin's belief in nonviolence and cannot accept the thieves' reasoning. He departs the precarious sanctuary provided by the group and finds himself once again in flight from Falkland's pursuit. Even when free from the threat of prison, he is never allowed to make a place for himself in any community or to gather friends who might be tempted to believe the veracity of his story if he should ever disclose it.

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[41] Ibid., p. 209.

[42] Ibid., p. 256.

[43] Ibid., p. 251.

At length, in desperation, Caleb turns to the law, that distrusted medium, at length faces his torturer and triumphs by convincing Falkland of his sincerity. But Godwin shows, also, that Caleb has lost because he has accepted the unacceptable solution; he has chosen to turn to force and the instrument of injustice, the court, for his salvation. At the close of his story, Caleb acknowledges his error:

> Never will I forgive myself the iniquity of this day . . . . Death would be a kindness, compared to what I feel![44]

Godwin's recital of social evils which result from government is particularly vivid in Caleb Williams. He concerns himself with pointing out the powerless position of the poor in society, the inequities in the legal situation of women, the advantage given by law to the rich and powerful, the injustice found in courts, the inhumanity, despotism, and depravity present in the prison system, the travesty of trials conducted as they were, the tendency of such institutions to create even greater violence, vice, and duplicity by their very nature and, finally, the isolation of the individual from his fellow men by these institutions and by the false concepts which they create. These are aspects considered, analyzed, and criticized at length in Political Justice.

It can be maintained, then, that Caleb Williams illustrates rather clearly, as Godwin intended, the dangers and

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[44] Ibid., p. 375.

miscarriages of justice which he discerned in a monarchical system of government.

CHAPTER V

ST. LEON

Once again, in 1799, William Godwin undertook to explain and illustrate his philosophy through the medium of the novel. This novel was St. Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century, published just two years after Mary Godwin's death. It is particularly interesting in a study of Godwin's works for glimpses of a change in his social thought and in his approach to problems of human relations.

For several reasons, the new novel was not accepted with the same acclaim which had heralded the appearance of Caleb Williams. One of these was the decline in the author's personal prestige during the years in which realization of the effects of the Great Revolution forced itself with disenchanted awareness upon many of the minds of Europe. Here, indeed, was no ideal brotherhood of man in freedom. Rather, it seemed a brotherhood of blood. Somehow, the beautifully idealistic theory of the reformers was not working out well in practice, and many men in England followed Wordsworth's path of disillusion.

The bright glitter of the Godwin fad had begun to fade. Godwin's union with Mary Wollstonecraft, his acceptance of her illegitimate offspring, had aroused many critics who

could tolerate Godwin's disregard of convention so long as it was recorded only in statements of political theory, not when it was in evidence in public life.

Other reasons for the novel's lack of lasting success lie in its quality as a novel. Here was no Caleb Williams with a plot which offered new and exciting situations to its audience. Indeed, as a story, it has little organized plot at all and is little more than a series of picaresque adventures of a man who has been given the philosopher's stone and allows his power over fortune and youth to drive him from one escapade to another and beyond the boundaries of normal human association and love.

Weakness can be found also in Godwin's seeming inability to breathe life into his characters and to make their actions reasonable and credible to the reader.[1] Moreover, in St. Leon, Godwin left the realm of reality and possibility and rewarded those disciples of reason who constituted his following with a gothic-trimmed fairy tale.

Fleisher suggests that these faults would have been overcome if Godwin had taken the major theme and concentrated on it, rather than allowing himself and his story to become entangled and lost in a maze of less important themes.[2] This criticism may be valid. Godwin's interest does range from one theme to another with such varying emphasis that it is

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[1]Leslie Stephen, Studies of a Biographer (New York, 1907), III, 139.

[2]Fleisher, p. 36.

sometimes difficult to ascertain whether his primary interest lies in examination of the psychological aspects of gambling, in an analysis of the problems of the philanthropist who endeavors to contribute to the progress and welfare of mankind, or in St. Leon's seeming inability to get himself out of a difficult situation by telling a convincing lie.

Despite these faults, the novel enjoyed considerable success when it was published. Pollin points out its contribution as a "pioneer work in the realm of historical fiction."[3] For many of Godwin's readers it was a favorite, and it was profusely lauded by Hazlitt.[4]

Today, much of the interest of the book is embodied in its illustration of the development of certain of Godwin's sociological concepts. It provides plentiful opportunity for the evaluation of Godwin's application of principles to situations which were, although unrealistic, adaptable to the axioms he wished to emphasize.

Godwin justified his approach in this new novel in his prefacing remarks which warn the reader, "I have mixed human feelings and passions with incredible situations, and thus rendered them impressive and interesting."[5] Elton and Ester Smith suggest Godwin's indebtedness for this approach to

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[3]Burton Ralph Pollin, Education and Enlightenment in the Works of William Godwin (New York, 1962), p. xiii.

[4]Hearnshaw, p. 144.

[5]Godwin, St. Leon, I, viii.

Lyrical Ballads, with its well-known phrase "willing suspension of disbelief."[6]

The preface goes on to enlarge upon Godwin's purpose in the novel:

> Some readers of my graver productions will perhaps, in perusing these little volumes, accuse me of inconsistency, the affections and charities of private life being everywhere in this publication a topic of the warmest eulogium, while in the Enquiry concerning Political Justice they seemed to be treated with no great degree of indulgence and favor. In answer to this objection all I think it necessary to say . . . is that, for more than four years, I have been anxious for opportunity and leisure to modify some of the earlier chapters of that work in conformity to the sentiments inculcated in this. Not that I see cause to make any change respecting the principle of justice, or any thing else fundamental to the system there delivered; but that I apprehend domestic and private affections inseparable from the nature of man, and from what may be styled the culture of the heart, and am fully persuaded that they are not incompatible with a profound and active sense of justice in the mind of him who cherishes them.[7]

As the Smiths say, St. Leon "marks a long step forward in Godwin's recognition of the importance of emotion as a motive for conduct and as a basis of relationship."[8] The short years of happy association with Mary Wollstonecraft had created a great awareness of the importance of affection in the development and fulfillment of man's potential.

The rambling plot of St. Leon provides plentiful opportunity for the development of Godwin's social theories.

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[6]Smith and Smith, p. 91.

[7]Godwin, St. Leon, I, ix.

[8]Smith and Smith, p. 91.

Like Falkland, St. Leon has an early upbringing which creates a marked inclination for the trappings of chivalry and grandeur. The only child of Count de St. Leon, whose name has never been "repeated . . . unaccompanied with the praises due to his military prowess and to the singular humanity of his disposition," he has been reared by his mother, "a woman of masculine understanding and full of the prejudices of nobility and magnificence."[9] His whole education has been directed toward the end of creating a worthy successor to the magnificence of the patrimonial line.

He is introduced to the splendor of court life at an early age and later enters the field of military endeavor, but the defeat at Pavia, "having given a deadly wound to the reign of chivalry, and a secure foundation to that of craft, dissimulation, corruption and commerce," leaves him free to enter court life with its lack of useful occupation.[10] His fortune is seriously impaired by his excesses before he meets Marguerite Louise Isabeau de Damville and enters upon the felicities of married life. After this, St. Leon's life progresses smoothly for ten years until a trip to Paris reacquaints him with a life of dissolution and gambling, brings about his financial ruin, and results in his physical collapse.

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[9]Godwin, St. Leon, I, 7.

[10]Ibid., p. 67.

Marguerite selflessly and bravely upholds him and nurses him back to health cheerfully, disregarding the poverty which his irresponsibility has brought to the family. St. Leon, however, is still plagued by dreams of wealth and grandeur and is delighted to seize upon the secret of the philosopher's stone and the elixir vitae when it is offered to him.

From that time his happy marriage disintegrates, the schism caused by his possession of an unsharable secret. His family rebels against him, suspecting dishonor in his sudden acquisition of wealth. Charles, St. Leon's son, leaves, and St. Leon's closeness with the beloved Marguerite is lost forever. In addition, his sudden affluence is suspect from the outside. He is accused of the murder of the stranger who has given him the secret and is thrust in prison. He escapes, accompanied by a devoted Negro servant of the prison, who unintentionally is responsible for further perils. Losing the will to live, Marguerite fades away, and St. Leon realizes that his secret isolates him forever from his family. He provides for his daughters and flees once again to new adventures with the Inquisition and, later, to Hungary, where he assumes the role of a benevolent philanthropist in reestablishing the economy of a bankrupt state. His plans go awry; the peasants and others he has aided turn against their benefactor. He narrowly escapes once again, this time aided by his son, Charles, who does not recognize him because of

the youth-restoring powers of the elixir. Despite his hopes to establish a friendship with his son, St. Leon finds himself responsible for the estrangement of Charles from Pandora, his beloved, and realizes that he has offended the one person from whom he most wanted love. He manages to restore the two lovers to each other, but is at length convinced that he must remain forever cut off from those dearest to him.

Many of the favorite themes of Godwin may be discerned in the novel, beginning with the effect of the youth's training and environment. Led throughout his formative youth into the adulation of the opulent trappings of wealth and nobility by a mother whose "mind was inflamed with the greatness of . . . ancestors," St. Leon had little opportunity to escape the distortion of his values.[11] Despite his mother's indulgence, however, he was not "pampered into corporeal imbecility, or suffered to rust in inactivity of mind," but was educated by the most accomplished masters and so thoroughly indoctrinated in ideas of false honor and chivalry that even after his advent into the dissolute life of court, with his fortunes rapidly being wasted away by his excesses, his primary concern was "to incur no breath of dishonor" and to draw the line "between the follies of youth and the observations of gross and unprincipled spirit."[12]

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[11] Ibid., p. 8.

[12] Ibid., p. 74.

Thus it was small wonder that a young man so permeated with dreams of grandeur could not withstand the temptation offered by possession of the philosopher's stone, which offered him limitless wealth. His marriage and all he held dear seemed disproportionately light when weighed against such promise.

The greatest danger which threatens him, of course, is that of isolation, Godwin's major theme in St. Leon. Upon gaining possession of the cherished secret, St. Leon reflects in uneasy presentiment:

> Methought the race of mankind looked too insignificant in my eyes. I felt a degree of uneasiness at the immeasurable distance that was put between me and the rest of my species. I found myself alone in the world. Must I forever live without a companion, a friend, anyone with whom I can associate upon equal terms, with whom I can have a community of sensations, and feelings, and hopes, and desires, and fears?[13]

Marguerite confirms his doubts when at length she defines the source of his wealth and the tragedy which disrupts the family. She answers his question, saying, "You cannot have a friend, for the mortal lives not that can sympathize with your thoughts and emotions."[14] Many years later St. Leon reflects that "friendship is a necessity of our nature, the stimulating and restless want of every susceptible heart."[15] Surrounded by all that wealth can provide, he regrets that he is without a friend.

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[13] Ibid., II, 110.

[14] Ibid., p. 234.

[15] Ibid., IV, 252.

More overwhelming still than St. Leon's isolation from the consolations of friendship is the tragedy of separation from his wife and family. Marguerite maintains that there is no hope for the close intimacy of their marriage to endure the stresses to which St. Leon has so irresponsibly subjected it:

> Nor . . . could I be pleased in a husband with the possession of these extraordinary powers. It sets too great a distance between the parties. It destroys that communion of spirit which is the soul of the marriage-tie. A consort should be a human being and an equal.[16]

Having sacrificed all the benefits of home, family, and friends in striving for a return to his paternal grandeur, St. Leon at last achieves some measure of wisdom through his tragedy. Disillusioned, and accused of disgraceful conduct by his former friends, he exclaims, "All other possessions I had ever held cheap and worthless in comparison with that of an illustrious name" and acknowledges that his pursuit has cost him everything of value.[17]

Godwin, indeed, reaffirms at every opportunity the drastic change in his attitude toward marriage and family affection. St. Leon asserts that marriage offers the only real happiness:

> To feel that we are loved by one whose love we have deserved, to be employed in the mutual interchange of the marks of this love, habitually to study the happiness of one by whom our happiness is studied in

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[16] Ibid., II, 230.

[17] Ibid., p. 164.

> return, this is the most desirable as it is the genuine and unadulterated condition of human nature.[18]

Indeed, this statement does indicate a change from the Godwin of Political Justice, who disclaimed marriage as one of the evils of organized society.

This later Godwin has not relinquished his claim to rebellion against the failures of political organization, however. His continuing attempt to delineate the applications of Political Justice are outlined in the initial pages of St. Leon, when St. Leon, the possesser of the philosopher's stone, refutes the argument that wealth substitutes for liberty: "The immediate application of political liberty is, to render a man's patrimony or the fruits of his industry completely his own, and to preserve it from the invasion of others."[19] Without such liberty, Godwin argues, the possession of unbounded riches and immortal vigour is useless, and unless the greater function of achieving freedom to live successfully in a state of equality with other men is served, no benefit can be realized from wealth. St. Leon finds to his regret that he is totally alone: "I had no bonds of alliance but those which money afforded, the coarsest, the meanest, the least flattering, and the most brittle of those ligatures that afford the semblance of uniting man with man."[20]

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[18] Ibid., I, 103-104.

[19] Ibid., p. 4.

[20] Ibid., IV, 112.

Godwin's strong distaste for the legal procedures of justice in institutions of government evinces itself once more in this novel. St. Leon protests to the civil authorities of Constance:

> Is it . . . a part of the justice you boast of, to drag a man of rank and a stranger from his home, without any intimation of the cause of his being so treated, and then, instead of investigating immediately the charge against him, to send him to prison unheard?[21]

And when confronted with the procedures of the Inquisition, he exclaims, "The mode of your proceeding . . . is the mockery of a trial."[22] Godwin compares the despotism and intolerance of the Inquisition to political injustice and suppression elsewhere in its destructive effect on the character of those touched by it:

> This is the peculiar prerogative of despotism: it produces many symptoms of the same general appearance, as those which are derived from liberty and justice. There are no remonstrances; there is no impatience or violence; there is a calm, a fatal and accursed tranquility that pervades the whole. The spectator enters, and for a time misinterprets every object he sees; he perceives human bodies standing or moving around him; and it is with the utmost surprise . . . that he finds at last the things he sees to be mere shades of men, cold, inert, glaring bodies, which the heaven born soul has long since deserted.[23]

St. Leon protests in horror, as Godwin does in Political Justice, that men continue to be "mad enough to subject each other to so horrible a treatment, merely because they were unable to adopt each other's opinions."[24]

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[21] Ibid., II, 253.

[22] Ibid., III, 196.

[23] Ibid., p. 215.

[24] Ibid., p. 246.

Nor has Godwin's fervent belief in the Rights of Man been dissipated in the years since the publication of Political Justice. At last gaining the full stature of wisdom after many tribulations, St. Leon declares, "Liberty is one of the rights that I put on when I put on the form of a man, and no event is of power to dissolve or abdicate that right."[25]

It can be seen that there has been no essential change in the direction or fervor of Godwin's feelings about political injustice since he first took up his pen to support his doctrines, but traces of discouragement and disillusion can be found in the parallel between the Godwin who offers his plans for political reform to an unheeding public and the St. Leon who arrives at the realization that the man who wishes to use his abilities for the good of man must always be alone:

> I had looked for happiness as the result of the benevolence and philanthropy I was exerting; I found only anxiety and a well grounded fear even for my personal safety. Let no man build on the expected gratitude of those he spends his strength to serve![26]

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[25] Ibid., IV, 202.

[26] Ibid., p. 79.

CHAPTER VI

FLEETWOOD

A period of six years followed the publication of St. Leon before Godwin brought forth another novel for public perusal. During this time he was not idle, but devoted much of his time to writing The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer, Antonio, a Tragedy in Five Acts, and essays, always with the hope of assuaging his financial problems. Despite its relatively happy ending, traces of growing discouragement and of the pressures of criticism may be seen in the pessimism of the book, which was entitled Fleetwood; or the New Man of Feeling.

Fleetwood, although less definitive of its purpose than Godwin's other novels had been, nevertheless reveals Godwin's continuing search for illustrative vehicles to "clothe" the ideas of Political Justice in "the living flesh of fiction."[1] Godwin comments in the preface that Fleetwood "consists of such adventures as for the most part have occurred to at least one half the Englishmen now existing who are of the same rank of life as my hero."[2] After the flights

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[1]Smith and Smith, p. 84.

[2]William Godwin, Fleetwood; or the New Man of Feeling (New York, 1805), I, vii.

of fancy indulged in for St. Leon, Godwin comes back to solid English soil for the development of his most thoroughly Godwinian hero, Fleetwood.

Fleetwood has impressed critics in various ways. Certainly, it received less acceptance than had the earlier novels, but this lack of enthusiasm can be attributed to the general change in the attitude of many Englishmen at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The long years during which Godwin had to withstand prolonged detraction had begun.[3]

Fleisher feels that Fleetwood is an unsuccessful novel, wordy and inartistic.[4] Others have stated that it is among Godwin's better efforts at fiction, falling below Caleb Williams in execution, but superior to the later novels.[5] For the purposes of this study, Fleetwood provides some of the most revealing insights into Godwin's social thought.

Once again using the theme of the isolation of the individual from his fellowman, Fleetwood produces a sociological study of the pitfalls and benefits of marriage, a study which is particularly interesting in view of the stand taken against the "natural affections" and the institution

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[3]George Woodcock, William Godwin (London, 1946), pp. 160-167.

[4]Fleisher, p. 47.

[5]C. K. Paul, William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries (Boston, 1876), II, 144.

of marriage in Political Justice. It reaffirms the movement in Godwin's views which was heralded in St. Leon and gives some indication of the personal warmth which endeared his intimates to him but which was seldom glimpsed by strangers.

The story follows the course of the hero's life through his developmental youth among the wild splendors of nature, the indulgence but lack of guidance and restraint given by his father, his education by a tutor and at a large university, his rather late marriage, which offers much to him, but which is marred by his extreme sensitivity, and the eventual changes which bring him to a more satisfactory approach to life.

Like the two earlier novels, Fleetwood stresses the vital effect of early environment and education upon the formation of character. Fleetwood possesses many of the personal characteristics of Falkland and St. Leon, but differs from them in the extreme degree to which his sensitivity has developed under the conditioning influences of his early life. He is like both earlier and later heroes in his dark introspection. Separated from his fellow man by the flaws in his own personality, Fleetwood fully realizes the effect of his errors, continually analyzes the cause and effect of his behavior in retrospect, and seeks for motives in his childhood environment.

Fleetwood looks back to the life of a boy reared in semi-seclusion and loneliness, subjected to the "sublime and romantic features of nature," and allowed to roam unrestricted among the wild mountains, precipices, and shores of the isolated retreat which his solitude-seeking father claims as a home.[6] His father has been so affected by the loss of an "amiable and affectionate partner" that he has determined to withdraw from the world, and the "settled melancholy" of his father's mind, together with the solitude and the "wild and magnificent scenery," is instrumental in molding Fleetwood's temperament and in "deciding the fortunes" of his future life.[7] The association with nature gives "a wildness" to his ideas and an "uncommon seriousness" to his temper. In telling his own story, Fleetwood stresses that his association with such romantic atmosphere without benefit of guidance, direction, or instruction from companions or family has acted as a catalyst to his imagination. The boy is overcome by "a sweet insensibility to the impressions of external nature" and allows his mind to be claimed by reverie and dreams.[8]

This passage, attributing the development of Fleetwood's imagination to association with scenes of natural splendor, is strongly reminiscent of Wordsworth's Prelude and suggests

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[6]Godwin, Fleetwood, I, 1-3.

[7]Ibid., p. 4.

[8]Ibid., p. 2.

a growing debt to the romanticists.[9] Godwin, however, finds the "tendency of this species of dreaming, when frequently indulged, is to inspire a certain propensity to despotism, and to render him who admits it impatient of opposition, and prepared to feel every cross accident as a usurpation of his rights and a blot upon his greatness."[10] Whereas Wordsworth found association with nature to be a rewarding experience which led to the development of benevolence, Godwin discerns the opposite result. In telling his own story, Fleetwood admits, "This effect of my early habits I fully experienced and it determined the colour of my riper years."[11]

Fleetwood's education is another facet of his early experience which holds an important place in the shaping of his character. His early education is with a private tutor, a man of honesty and religion, who possesses a "very decent portion" of learning but lacks the ability to gain Fleetwood's respect. Fleetwood, with the conceit of youth, feels a supercilious disregard of the tutor's discernment and believes his own understanding is infinitely greater.[12]

These experiences create in Fleetwood a "sensibility" which causes him to shrink from the society of men in general,

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[9]Smith and Smith, p. 91.

[10]Godwin, Fleetwood, I, 7.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., p. 9.

although he possesses a "great fund of benevolence in the presence of the "miseries of man."[13]

At the usual age, Fleetwood enters Oxford, where his education is continued. Here, after his first contempt for his fellow students recedes, his whole tone of mind undergoes a change. At the university he learns to "swallow his glass freely" and "despise the character of a flincher."[14] All the refinement which has distinguished him is lost, his understanding is brutalized, and he despises himself for it.

This description of Fleetwood's sojourn at the university demonstrates Godwin's opinion of the type of education which was available to young men of liberal means at the time: "Education is much, but opulent education is of all its modes the least efficacious."[15] Although he condemns the freedom from restraint and discipline which boys were given, his greatest criticism is against the tendency of the group to engulf the individual, lowering his morality to the brutal level of group intelligence.

After his sojourn at the university, Fleetwood embarks upon a third period in his education, a tour of the Continent. The weaknesses which have developed in his character at Oxford become full grown flaws during his travels. His "adventures" have prepared him for the profligacy of the court

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[13] Ibid., p. 12.

[14] Ibid., p. 35.

[15] Godwin, Political Justice, I, 91.

of France. In regret he exclaims, "Could I have been abruptly introduced to a scene like this immediately after my departure from Merionethshire, I should have contemplated it with inexpressible horror. But my experience at the university had killed the purity and delicacy of my moral discriminations."[16]

Still another flaw is revealed by his journey: "At the university I had been driven from a sort of necessity to live upon the applauses of others; and, the habit being formed, I carried it along with me in my excursion to the Continent."[17]

At length, compelled by his father's death, Fleetwood returns to England. He is accompanied by his father's friend, Ruffigny, and when Ruffigny departs at last for his home in Switzerland, Fleetwood is overcome with loneliness. He settles into a trough of self-pity and misanthropy deeper than any he has experienced before. He says,

> My education and travels had left me a confirmed misanthropist. I had seen nothing of the world but its most unfavourable specimens. . . . I had contracted a contamination which could never be extirpated. . . . The universe had lost to me that sunshine, which it derives from the reflection of an unspotted mind.[18]

In his loneliness, he asks himself, "What did I want? I knew not. Yet I was not happy."[19] He answers, "I saw that I was alone, and I desired to have a friend."[20]

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[16]Godwin, Fleetwood, I, 79.

[17]Ibid., p. 80.

[18]Ibid., p. 275.

[19]Ibid., p. 277.

[20]Ibid., p. 300.

Fleetwood is isolated no less than Caleb Williams or St. Leon, but the instrument of his isolation is nothing but his own romantic sensibility, overdeveloped to the point that he is not only unable to communicate with his fellow men, but actually develops a full-grown sense of misanthropy which shades his whole attitude. The greatest tragedy which afflicts Godwin's heroes is that they usually are fully aware of the burden of isolation under which they suffer, but cannot develop the ability, because of prejudice and preconceived ideas, to break through the barrier which prevents free association with other men.

More than any other hero, Fleetwood seems to embody the spirit and mind of Godwin. Often stilted and wooden, Fleetwood impresses the reader that he speaks for Godwin. He gives tongue to many opinions which Godwin would express, and he seems to possess the character, the introspective qualities, the self-consciousness which were Godwin's own.

His search for a kindred spirit compels Fleetwood first to seek companionship with members of a London intellectual society, then, later, election to Parliament. In neither place can he find the community of spirit he hopes to discover, but Godwin is provided an opportunity to express a ringing condemnation of the Parliamentary system of England:

> I saw that the public character of England, as it exists in the best pages of our history, was gone. I perceived that we were grown a commercial and arithmetical nation; and that, as we extended the superficies

> of our empire, we lost its moral sinew and its strength. The added numbers which have been engrafted upon both houses of parliament, have destroyed the health and independence of its legislature; the wealth of either India has been poured upon us, to smother that free spirit which can never be preserved but in a moderate fortune; contractors, directors and upstarts, men fattened on the vitals of their fellow-citizens, have taken the place which was once filled by the Wentworths, the Seldens, and the Hydes. By the mere project, the most detestable and fatal that was ever devised, of England borrowing of the individuals who constitute England, and accumulating what is called a national debt, she has mortgaged her sons to an interminable slavery.[21]

As his malady of misanthropy continues, Fleetwood's discussions with MacNeil, his future father-in-law, bring to light the problems which he encounters in his relationships with other individuals. He describes the "sickly sensibility" of his temper, his disgust with the world, and the sense of desolation which makes him miserable. He explains to MacNeil that he thinks "too highly of the human mind in the abstract, to be able to consider man as he is." Having examined the capabilities of man exemplified by Newton, Milton, and Alfred, he finds himself disgusted by the state of the ordinary human situation.[22]

In Ruffigny, Fleetwood does discover some of the qualities he seeks in the perfected man:

> There was something so venerable in the figure and appearance of Ruffigny, and primitive and patriarchal in his manners and modes of thinking that it was perhaps impossible to converse intimately with him, and yet continue whelmed in the mire of licentious men.[23]

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[21] Ibid., pp. 293-294.

[22] Ibid., II, 29.

[23] Ibid., I, 271.

It can be seen that Ruffigny exemplifies Godwin's theories of the development of man's social being. Here, again, is a personality formed in the school of experience, much of it bitter and disturbing, but the result is a mature, self-fulfilled being, endowed with a measure of wisdom and able to establish a warm relationship with others. Ruffigny's childhood experiences support Godwin's idea that wisdom is most readily, although sometimes painfully, acquired through the medium of experience and contrast markedly with the early training provided for Falkland, Fleetwood, and St. Leon:

> If I conceived of a young person that he was destined, from his earliest infancy to be a sublime poet, or a profound philosopher, should I conceive that the readiest road to the fostering his talents, was, from the moment of his birth, to put a star upon his breast, to salute him with titles of honor, and to bestow upon him, independently of all exertion, those advantages which exertion usually proposes to itself as its ultimate object of pursuit? No, I should send him to the school of man, and oblige him to converse with his fellows upon terms of equality.[24]

The story of Ruffigny's unhappy childhood also provides Godwin with an opportunity to criticize bitterly the growing trend toward child labor in a rapidly industrializing society. As a child of eight, Ruffigny had been brought to begin employment at a textile mill in Lyon. His description of the mill gives expression to the distaste Godwin felt for the abuses suffered by the laboring class:

> You will not suppose there was anything very cheerful or exhilarating in the paradisewe had entered. The idea of the mill is the antipathy of this. One perpetual,

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[24]Godwin, Political Justice, p. 94.

> dull, flagging sound pervaded the whole. The walls were bare; the inhabitants were poor. . . . I need not tell you that I saw no great expressions of cheerfulness in either the elder or the younger inhabitants of these walls; their occupations were too anxious and monotonous--the poor should not be too much elevated, and incited to forget themselves.[25]

The greatest indignation is reserved for the plight of the children, the greatest sufferers. Ruffigny notes that it was not without "much severity" that the children were trained to such regularity.[26] Godwin, the reformer, the intellectual, whose doctrine invisioned the perfectibility of man through education and environment, rebels against such treatment. This Godwin pleads that "the mind of a child is no less vagrant than his steps; it pursues the gossamer and flies from object to object, lawless and unconfined," and begs that such children be released from slavery.[27]

Despite his childhood experiences, Ruffigny survives as a mature individual and, befriended by Fleetwood's grandfather, develops into a character exemplary in every way.

MacNeil, the father of Fleetwood's wife, provides another example for Godwin's ideal man. He expresses Godwin's most optimistic view regarding human perfectibility:

> In every man that lives . . . there is much to commend. Every man has in him the seeds of a good husband, a good father, and a sincere friend. You will say perhaps, these are not sublime and magnificent virtues; yet, if each man were enabled to discharge these, the world

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[25]Godwin, Fleetwood, I, 162.

[26]Ibid., p. 164.

[27]Ibid., p. 167.

> upon the whole would afford a ravishing spectacle. What spirit of forbearance, of gentle attentions, of anxiety to maintain the cheerfulness and peace of his female companion, inhabits every human breast! . . . Look upon the poorest clown in the midst of his children; what a heavenly picture! . . . How much good neighbourhood there is in the world! . . . For my part, instead of joining in the prevailing cry of the selfishness, the wickedness, the original sin, or the subsequent depravity of mankind, I feel my heart swell within me, when I recollect that I belong to a species, almost every individual of which is endowed with angelic virtues.[28]

MacNeil urges Fleetwood to combat the pessimism that drags him down. He presses him to marry, establish a household, and surround himself with people, saying, "There is a principle in the heart of man which demands the society of his like."[29]

This, again, is unlike the attitude expressed by Godwin in Political Justice regarding the natural affections and the institution of marriage. There is every indication that Godwin continues the movement in his thought which he revealed in St. Leon. He now regards marriage as the answer to the question of how advantageous early training and environment can contribute to the social development of man and alleviate the eternal problem of man's isolation from other men. This change, however, brings him to consider another problem, the inequity of the institution of marriage as prescribed by English law at the time, for marriage was still prevailingly viewed as the possession of property. In fact, Godwin states

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[28] Ibid., II, 29.

[29] Ibid., p. 34.

in the preface of Fleetwood that the aim of Political Justice had been to

> ascertain what new institutions in political society might be found more conducive to general happiness than those which at present prevail. In the course of this disquisition /Fleetwood/ it was enquired, whether marriage, as it described and supported in the laws of England, might not with advantage admit of certain modifications?[30]

Fleetwood's marriage to Mary, the youngest daughter of the MacNeil family, provides an opportunity for a detailed study of the problems encountered by a sensitive, older but immature man who enters into marriage with a young and beautiful woman. Through his obstinacy, his prejudice, and his refusal to see things as they are, Fleetwood is estranged from Mary, the one person who could have brought him closer to a feeling for his fellow men. Moreover, he is permitted by the laws of England to persecute her and deprive her of all livelihood in a manner which Godwin sees as unjust.

The remainder of the novel is dedicated to resolving the problems of the two and holds little other indication of Godwin's concern with social and political problems of the time.

Perusal of Fleetwood offers evidence of a discernible trend away from strong concern with political reform in the novels. Many fewer evidences are offered of Godwin's desire to acquaint the reading public with political and social inequities, the strong humanitarian appeal for relief of child

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[30] Ibid., I, ix.

labor practices, the criticism of Parliament and its economic policies, and the concern with legal attitudes toward marriage being the outstanding exceptions.

What is noticeable in the novel, and may be found in the later novels also, is a marked tendency toward serious sociological and motivational interest, indicative, perhaps, of Godwin's belief that change cannot be effected by force and that the genesis for it must be located in the early development of the individual.

CHAPTER VII

THE LATER NOVELS

After the publication of Fleetwood, Godwin's interest in writing novels lagged while he pursued the demands of publishing what was known as the "Juvenile Library." At length, the novel Mandeville, A Tale of the Seventeenth Century in England was begun in 1816, Godwin's first work of fiction for adults in more than ten years. The Godwin family was undergoing a period of great financial stress and harassment when Godwin began work on the novel, and the tragic suicides of Fanny Imlay, Mary Wollstonecraft's daughter, and, later, of Harriet Shelley must have resulted in great emotional disturbance and depression. The influences are reflected in the somber mood of the book.

In the preface, Godwin reflects upon his declining powers and anticipates that Mandeville will be among the last of his works:

> . . . approaching, as I now very rapidly do, to the period when I must bid the world an everlasting farewel, I am not unwilling to make up my accounts with it, as far as relates to this lighter species of composition.[1]

In addition to these remarks in the preface, he gives credit

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[1]William Godwin, Mandeville, A Tale of the Seventeenth Century in England (Edinburgh, 1817), p. i.

to two sources, Wieland, by Charles Brockden Brown, and a play, De Montfort, by Joanna Baillie.

The novel was not particularly well received by the public, although a few outstanding critics and other literary figures praised its power and intensity. Its lack of popularity is understandable. To today's reader, it is unbearably wordy and dull. The most enthusiastic advocates of the Godwinian novel must have found it dreary, and even Hazlitt admitted that it is morbid and disagreeable.[2]

As a psychological study of obsessive insanity and as a historical study of the Civil War period, it is unique. Godwin was frequently a defender of Cromwell and had a "keen interest in recreating a more accurate picture of the Cromwellian era than prevailed."[3]

Mandeville contains many of the now familiar Godwin trademarks. At a very early age, Mandeville is a witness to the massacre of his parents by the Irish in the seventeenth-century Irish uprisings. After several narrow escapes he finds shelter with his uncle, whose miserable childhood and youth have caused him to become a recluse. Mandeville's exposure to the wild desolation of his uncle's dwelling, where the "sound of the dashing waters was eternal, and seemed calculated to inspire sobriety, and almost gloom, into the

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[2]Brown, p. 324.

[3]Pollin, p. xviii.

soul of everyone who dwelt within the reach of its influence," intensifies the seriousness of his character.[4]

The unhealthy solitude to which he is exposed, coupled with a growing dislike of his only associate, the Reverend Bradford, who has helped rescue him from Ireland and has been retained as his tutor, turns the inclinations of Mandeville's nature to gloom and resentment. Bradford is a religious fanatic; his use of Fox's Acts and Monuments of the Church, with its representation of "all imaginable cruelties, racks, pincers, and red-hot irons" as a text, creates even more "confusion and horror" in the boy's thinking.[5] Mandeville explains the effect of Bradford's guidance:

> I came to regard him as my evil genius, poisoning my cup of life, thwarting my most innocent sallies, watching with a jaundiced eye for faults in me which my heart did not recognize, and blasting that sweet complacency in which a virtuous mind is delighted to plunge itself and to play.[6]

Although this misanthropy spreads to taint almost everything about him, it never touches Mandeville's sister, Henrietta, who commands his entire store of love and approbation.

Godwin's dislike of public schools evinces itself again in a description of the young men of Winchester School, where young Mandeville is sent:

> They were prisoners, dismissed indeed, but with some links of the chain still adhering to them. Their motions had not the ease and the grace of a creature in

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[4]Godwin, Mandeville, I, 47.

[5]Ibid., pp. 135-136.

[6]Ibid., p. 157.

> the state of nature; they had a stamp of pertness and insolence and petulance, that said, we are servants but . . . They had felt the weight of the yoke upon their necks; and they were resolved to retaliate their sufferings at the expense of the first victim they met.[7]

At Winchester School Mandeville first encounters Clifford, the possesser of all virtues Mandeville lacks. Mandeville transfers all the ancient resentments against Bradford to Clifford, and as the experiences of the two boys cross and Clifford seems destined to best him at every turn, Mandeville's original dislike becomes an overwhelming hatred. Despite efforts to restore his health by his sister and others concerned with him, the obsession gradually unbalances his mind. When Clifford and Henrietta grow to love each other and plan to marry, Mandeville's enmity drives all semblance of sanity from him. In his mania, he attempts to destroy Clifford, and the fight which results leaves him with a hideous grinning scar. He can only contemplate the ruins of his life from the tragic isolation to which his obsession has condemned him:

> . . . what a different being I should have been if it had been my lot to have been brought up at Beaulieu Cottage, instead of Mandeville House. . . . I also should have been a human creature, I should have been the member of a community, I should have lived with my fellow mortals on peaceful terms. . . . I should then have been amiable; and I should have been happy! But my fate was determined and my character was fixed.[8]

In this same novel, Godwin's portrayal of the evil, conniving lawyer Holloway reveals his old aversion to government, law, and political institution. Otherwise, there is little

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[7] Ibid., pp. 218-219.

[8] Ibid., p. 208.

evidence of Godwin's concern with political reform. All energy by this time is seemingly fixed on the possibilities offered by education and proper training in achieving a more hopeful moral and social state of man.

Godwin's novel Cloudesley, one of a considerable number of works written in the last fifteen years of his life, was published in 1830. It appeared fifteen years after Mandeville, which the author had prophesied would be his last work of fiction.

Contemporaries agreed that his later works, among them History of the Commonwealth (1824-1828) and Thoughts on Man (1831), demonstrated less power than the earlier writings which had brought him acclaim. A few favorable reviews of Cloudesley appeared; Bulwer Lytton contributed an approving review of the novel to the New Monthly Magazine, and one appeared in the Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres which was complimentary enough to be pleasing to the author. Nevertheless, the lack of approbation was disappointing.[9]

The plot of the novel follows familiar lines and recreates many situations similar to those in Godwin's earlier novels. The Smiths point out the "Godwin patterns" discernible:

> There is the youth trained in the traditions of false honor and chivalry, who falls a victim, not to his own folly, but to his mistaken education. There is the

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[9]Brown, pp. 324-325.

> persecuted youth who comes into his own through the power of truth. . . . Cloudesley is a misanthrope, not specifically because he is the victim of an unjust prison sentence, but because, generally any condemnation of man by man is unjust, and any attempt at punishment or forced reformation of the criminal is bound to fail.[10]

Deloraine, the final novel, appeared three years after Cloudesley. In the preface, Godwin compares his productivity with that of Scott, whose novels were by this time being widely read and acclaimed:

> The plan of the following story in its rude outline was first committed to paper on the seventeenth of January 1830. I had just concluded the composition of Cloudesley. The Great Unknown /Scott/ as he has for years been denominated, had sufficiently shewn that it was not absolutely necessary for the mind of an author to lie fallow for years, between the conclusion of one work of fiction and the commencement of another.[11]

Despite his diligence, however, Godwin's power was failing, and, as his final novel, Deloraine deserves reasonably careful scrutiny in a study of alterations of Godwin's thought through a lifetime of change.

The plot reveals similarities to the earlier novels. Deloraine was born to wealth and high position, was indulged but well educated in youth, was introduced into Parliament in early manhood. He tasted the fruits of a happy and successful marriage to a lovely woman, Emilia, patterned on an idealized image of Mary Wollstonecraft. This marriage provides Godwin the opportunity to reaffirm his devotion to

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[10] Smith and Smith, p. 106.

[11] William Godwin, Deloraine (London, 1833), I, i.

marriage as the ultimate source of man's happiness. Deloraine says, "Between man and woman in matters of affection, there is no rivalry, no competition,"[12] and later asserts, "No society is comparable to that of an accomplished wife."[13] He suffers the sorrows experienced by other heroes when Emilia dies in childbirth, but realizes that the "mind of man bends itself after a short struggle to the yoke of necessity" and devotes himself to the upbringing of his daughter.[14]

Years later, he attempts a second marriage to a much younger beauty who still grieves over the loss of her first love. The reappearance of this young man after years of absence precipitates Deloraine into committing a murder, which, in turn, results in the death of his second wife from shock. Then begins the familiar flight of a Godwin hero and the pursuit by a friend of the murdered youth. Deloraine is at last relieved of his persecution by his daughter's intercession with his pursuer. At the conclusion of the story, however, he faces a future in which he is isolated from all he knows by the knowledge of his own guilt.

There is here the customary Godwinian concern for proper early environment and training that is evidenced in all earlier novels, the excusable crime of passion like that of Falkland in Caleb Williams, the noble noncriminal refugee

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[12] Ibid., p. 22.

[13] Ibid., p. 30.

[14] Ibid., p. 89.

from justice, the accolades of happy marriage as the sanctuary of the individual, and the interest in the tendency of man to isolate himself from others by his own mistaken attitudes and actions. In this final novel, however, there are few indications of Godwin's concern for political reform or of his former anger with actions and forms of government, the injustices inherent in a monarchy, and political and legal privileges of the aristocracy.

Deloraine's final reflections on the past give some indication that Godwin no longer asserts that the conditions of a man's early environment relieve him of the responsibility for his actions:

> I knew the conditions under which man is permitted to subsist on the face of the earth. I knew that the state of a moral being admits not of an excuse founded on the idea of his being hurried into an act pernicious and destructive, without the power of resistance. . . . He must subject his passions to the great law of moral right, and must never relax the reins of his conduct. . . . He who allows himself to talk or to dream of a resistless temptation, by so doing enters at once in the catalogue of living beings for a beast rather than a man.[15]

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[15] Ibid., III, 234-235.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As the close of the eighteenth century approached, many men in England sought earnestly for solutions to the political, social, and economic problems caused by the industrial and agrarian revolutions and the resulting buildup of metropolitan and industrial centers. The low standard of living among the poor, complicated by lawlessness and a repressive but unenlightened criminal code, brought increasing demands for reform.

Out of the general discontent came the romantic and rationalistic radicalism of the later eighteenth century which found expression in attacks by idealistic reformers upon the overwhelming abuses in law, government, and church.

These attacks were most often found in polemic writings, but the work of at least one reformer escapes the generalization that no reflection of the revolutionary movement was seen in the novel until the full impact of romantic movement made itself felt. William Godwin, the author of An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Political Justice, found the novel a means of expounding his political criticisms and illustrating his views on social and political reform.

Godwin's primary concern in Political Justice is to present a complete analysis of society, examining the weaknesses of those institutions which he feels are responsible for creating prejudice in society. Only when such institutions, the foremost among them being government, are removed, will the conventions which constitute an unsurmountable obstacle to man's understanding of others be removed. Then political justice will be possible.

The thinking presented in Political Justice was not original with Godwin, but was a synthesis of many trends of thought during the late eighteenth century. The major contribution offered by Political Justice was in the logical unity with which Godwin's theme was organized and carried through to its conclusion.

The novels which followed Political Justice have been criticized for failing in Godwin's declared purpose of showing that the spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society. Despite the failure of the novels to endure as "living" fiction, however, it can be established that each of the novels does to some extent follow the purpose outlined by the author in providing illumination of the principles espoused in Political Justice.

In Caleb Williams, Godwin does succeed in his purpose of pointing out the injustices which government permitted and encouraged. Characterization in Caleb Williams is intended

to reinforce the realization that the spirit of government does intrude into every aspect of human society. All characters are victims of society, either from actual injustice or through isolation created by false conceptions and principles. Godwin proposes that environment is the major factor in creating prejudice and that government is synonymous with environment.

The events of Caleb Williams reflect Godwin's criticism of the oppressiveness of laws and political institutions and the ills which they engender. Among the social evils pointed out in Caleb Williams are the powerless position of the poor, inequities in the legal position of women, legal advantages given in the courts to the rich and powerful, the inhumanity of the prison system, the travesty of trials, the tendency of such institutions to create even greater violence, and the isolation of the individual from his fellow men by these institutions and by the false concepts which they encourage.

Thus, it can be maintained that Caleb Williams, at least, clearly illustrates the dangers and evils of monarchy and aristocracy as Godwin saw them.

St. Leon, on the other hand, is particularly interesting among Godwin's novels because it gives some indication of the changes in social thought which occurred as Godwin grew older. For the most part, St. Leon follows many of the same lines of thought outlined in Political Justice and illustrated

in Caleb Williams. The effect of the youth's training is still seen as being of utmost importance in the development of the social man and his concepts. The improper environment and training results in the individual's eventual isolation from family and friends.

The strong liberal distaste for despotism and intolerance in organized political systems and the championship of the Rights of Man reveals in this novel no essential change in the direction or fervor of Godwin's feeling about political injustice. The greatest single change is in Godwin's attitude toward marriage and affection, which he now regards as one of the immutable necessities of man's development.

Fleetwood reveals Godwin's continuing search for ways to "clothe" the ideas of Political Justice in "living flesh." It gives greater stress to the vital effect of early environment and education in the development of the ideal man. The intellectual and emotional isolation of the individual who has absorbed the prejudices and misconceptions of an ill-designed education continues to be a major concern in the novels, and the endurance of Godwin's regard for marriage and affection is in evidence.

Fleetwood also offers, however, a trend away from Godwin's intense involvement with political reform in the novels, but several notable exceptions to this generalization disprove the assumption that Godwin has lost interest in the

social and political injustices which he once attacked so bitterly.

A marked inclination toward serious sociological and motivational interest is revealed, suggesting that Godwin's belief that change cannot be effected by force, but must be part of the development of the individual in society, is as strong as ever.

It is found that the later novels, Mandeville, Cloudesley, and Deloraine, continue this noticeable movement away from political commitment and toward concern for the individual's adjustment to society as it is affected by his early environment.

There are a number of Godwinian characteristics evident in the later novels. The familiar gambits offered by the crime of passion and the pursuit of the criminal are used once more. The hero who has been educated to false concepts of honor and nobility, and who suffers intensely from the isolation caused by his own prejudices, is again in evidence. There are also the victims of society who are the direct recipients of the injustices of the political state. The themes of guilt and misanthropy recur in each of the later novels. Accolades to marriage and family life continue to be conferred. In fact, Godwin now sees the family environment as that in which the education of the ideal man may be realized.

While there are some visible changes in the direction of William Godwin's thought through an extremely long literary career, his essential concern for the individual and his happiness remains remarkably consistent as a focal point of the novels. Godwin's devotion to the principles of reason, justice, and truth in human relations remains unshaken and is reflected clearly in all of the novels despite the declining tendency to be concerned with the political aspects of man's existence as opposed to his interest in those conditions made increasingly more important with the passage of the years by his belief in the perfectibility of man.

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