Transition and Memory; London Society from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Nineteen Thirties

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ABSTRACT

The attitudes of selected memoir authors are surveyed with regard to their commentary on London Society ranging from the late Nineteenth century to the Nineteen Thirties. The experience of these Society participants is divided between aspects of continuity and change before and after the First World War. During this time-frame, London Society, as the community of a ruling class culture, may be seen to have undergone the transition from having been an aristocratic entity dominated by the political and social prestige of the landed classes, to that of an expanded body, more reflective of democratic evolution and innovation. The memoir testimony treated in this inquiry affords a means of reflecting not only Society's passage of experience but also more pointedly, its evaluation, shedding light on the values and vulnerability of a hitherto assured, discreet and otherwise adaptive class character at a time of accelerated change and challenge.

RESUME

On a étudié l'attitude de quelques auteurs de Mémoire face à la société londonienne de la fin du dix-neuvième siècle aux années trente. Ces auteurs font état soit de changement, soit de continuité dans leur milieu avant et suivant la première guerre mondiale. Durant cette période, la société londonienne serait passé d'une société plus démocratique et innovatrice. On a pu évaluer à travers des Mémoires, non seulement l'évolution de la société londonienne mais aussi les moeurs et la vulnerabilité d'un certain système de classe à une époque de changement accéléré.

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I would finally like to express appreciation to my family who have invariably kept apace with my protracted interest in the musings of a charmed and vanished world.

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We possess nothing certainly except the past

Evelyn Waugh

INTRODUCTION

There can be few social images as durable as that of the English gentleman in the privileged comforts of his London 'Society' setting. To one degree or another he has long become the property of the world. This is surely a remarkable observation when it is considered how versatile a figure the Society participant is to define, embracing as his modern incarnation can, a banker as well as a baronet, and yet remain so immediately vivid in the public imagination. This is not to suggest of course that the gentleman has been the dominant agent of change in the agenda of modern Britain's social, political and economic processes. It has long been in the accepted reading of modern British history to follow the well worn sign-posts that have helped mark the way; the 1832 Reform Bill and its sequels in 1867 and 1884; the House of Lords Crisis and The Parliament Act of 1909-1911; the foundation blows of the two world wars; the rise of trade unionism; the General Strike of 1926; the steady advent of social services legislation and of the Labour Party - all these have in part been seen to enfranchise, both socially and politically, the hitherto nameless and voiceless in British life. It is a progress which has, in a phrase, constituted the march of democracy - or the 'march of improvement', to use Walther Bagehot's perhaps more typically English term.

It would be impossible to deny that this evolution has been instrumental in the creation of contemporary Britain, and yet, amidst

the emergence of compelling new characters and emphatic themes, the historical allure of London's 'beau monde', its aristocratic associations and participants continues to endure. The gentleman perhaps stands no longer at stage center but the audience cannot resist him. Whether his image takes the form of a dashing Guards officer, an Anglican Dean, a red-faced squire with walrus moustache and Norfolk jacket, or the silhouette of the Mayfair rake in evening clothes - the gentleman has kept his gloved grip on the imagination. His presence, good, bad, or indifferent, throughout generations of English public life have ensured his reflection in both the record of the nation's annals as well as in the chronicling of her literature.

In the social landscape of modern Britain, and in particular for the period from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the nineteen thirties, the form and character of London Society occupied a visible but ambivalent position. At one level this culture might be seen as a key-stone in a class system in which its participants have enjoyed a long and seemingly continuous legacy of leadership and privilege. In opposition to proletarian or socialist themes of historical conflict and demands for redress, Society convincingly appears a fortress of resistance guarded, not by turrets or walled borders but, just as securely, by generations of authorative practice and tradition. However, the history of this legacy also corresponds, as suggested above, to the political and social changes that have measurably altered the life and status of other elements in the national equation. This same climate of change had equally affected London society, its culture and participants, they too have undergone

a unique odyssey. In the mid-nineteenth century the intelligible idea of the gentleman as social authority, had largely remained that of the 'landed' gentleman. By the first quarter of the next century the marriage of the landowner to property with its procurement in economic and political power would be effectively reduced in the grip of expanded democracy, industrialisation, war and taxation. The intervening period witnessed, largely manifest in these skeletal outlines, a virtual transformation in the character and context of the ruling class culture. The possibilities of a certain mobility between classes, as well as of the absorption of candidates into the top echelons of Society had historically been a characteristic of eighteenth and nineteenth century British life. And yet, by the close of this period the very acceleration in social and demographic change may be seen as having attained a pace that challenged the social order's ability to easily contain it. This has not been an unfamiliar phenomenon. In its most broadly recognised consequences it has helped characterise the contemporary world's sense of chaos and displacement. In application to the English ruling class of the late nineteenth century, it affords a unique opportunity for analysis.

This thesis undertakes to examine the ways in which London society has been remembered, perceived and observed by those who participated in it for the period between the late nineteenth century and the Nineteen Thirties. This examination offers specifically two interesting avenues of study. Firstly, the extent to which Society's composition may be seen to have evolved during this period, may be measured in the impressions of those who necessarily personified its

processes. Secondly, these impressions reveal both the attitudes and values in those otherwise intangible qualities of social definition, self-regard and leadership that many of these individuals may have perceived in themselves and in relationship to an external world. In surveying the recorded witness and memory of those in Society, by appraising those features and characteristics to which the subjects themselves attach the most interest, concern, or satisfied reflection, one can better understand how ideas such as tradition, gentility, and class prestige had adapted - insomuch as Society proved able to sponsor that adaptation - in an age of transition. The material for this thesis consists of a selection of memoirs and reminiscences as well as diary entries and letters.

In recent decades, contemporary scholarship has applied considerable attention to studies in labour or working class history but comparatively little research has been concentrated on the cultural values of an aristocratic or 'upper class' environment. The decorative visibility of this milieu, coupled with its apparently monolithic security and solidarity in the face of socially more anonymous elements in the nation's life, have perhaps contributed to this scholarly indifference. However, certain works have nonetheless become significant milestones in an aristocratic and upper middle-class historiography. F.M.L. Thompson's English Landed Society in the 19th Century (1963) remains a key work in outlining the economic basis of landed wealth. In a complementary interest, David Rubinstein's influential article "Wealth, Elites, and Class Structure in Modern Britain" (Past and Present, Vol. 7b, 1977) has evaluated the character,

differences and divergences in the upper middle class environment vis a vis its absorption into the broader ruling class culture. These interests have been further considered in Rubinstein's history Men of Property: The Very Wealthy in Britain since the Industrial Revolution (1981). Arthur Marwick's The Deluge: British Society and the First World War (1965) remains a comprehensive treatment of the effects of the First World War on the structure, processes and psychology of the national life. In this respect other works considering the war and its aftermath include J.M. Winter's "Britain's Lost Generation of the First World War" (Journal of Population Studies, Nov. 1977) and B.A. Waites' "The Effects of the First World War on Class and Status in England 1910-20" (Journal of Contemporary History Vol. 11, No. 1 January 1976).

These studies are concerned essentially with economic and demographic realities during periods of stress and re-direction in the history of the upper classes. They are concerned as well with a broader interest in class relations. These studies are often particularly useful from the statistical view-point affording a valuable context in which to measure, with the implements of the social scientist, quantifiable themes of research. Historical studies that have dealt however, with a more exclusive interest in aspects of upper class psychology, values and emotional life, have come to include studies such as Brian Masters' Great Hostesses (1982), Angela Lambert's Unquiet Souls: The Indian Summer of the British Aristocracy 1880-1918 (1984), and Robert Wohl's The Generation of 1914 (1980), Paul Fussell's The Great War and Modern Memory (1975), or Mark Girouard's

The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman (1981). Among other useful works that colourfully suggest a sense of period are, Keith Middlemas' The Pursuit of Pleasure: High Society in the 1900s (1977); Nicholas Courtney's 'In Society' The Brideshead Years (1986) and Martin Green's The Children of the Sun.

At the foundation of this representation of significant secondary source literature, is the great raw resource of the memoir literature itself. The presentation of this material will examine and appraise images of London Society life divided between aspects of continuity and normalcy and of change and departure applicable before, and then after the water-shed of the World War of 1914-1918.

CHAPTER ONE

The characteristic memoir reflection of London Society life in the late Victorian-Edwardian period evokes the urban culture of an aristocratic and self-consciously intimate social community. The memoir recollection of this period suggests the continuity of a landed aristocratic ingredient in London Society's character, activities and leadership. In either implicit or explicit terms of reference, the concerns of memory evoke a pervasive sense of self-assured permanence and legitimacy of position in a charmed setting of familial and caste-like intimacy.

In the appraisal of the most characteristic memoir reflection, allusions to the 1880s and 1890s produce a uniform picture of what might be termed 'Society on parade'. A homogeneous quality of mutual recognition emerges, almost exclusively focused on the 'stage' of Hyde Park and Rotten Row. In Men, Women and Things (1937) The Duke of Portland opens his chapter on 'Life in London' recalling, "I look back with great pleasure to riding in Rotten Row...as not only was it a pleasant form of exercise, but I also found it a most enjoyable way of meeting one's friends; for many of those who did not ride sat on chairs facing the Row, and came to their friends over the rails."[1] In Melton Mowbray and Other Memories (1924) Moreton Frewen, a celebrated sportsman and traveller and a brother-in-law of Lady Randolph Churchill, appreciatively recalls, "The ladies' mile in June! who that saw it will forget its stream of well dressed women and almost smarter men? these sauntered between the Achilles statue and the

pretty Garden of Eden, to and fro, to and fro. A score of coaches on the rails."[2] In Life's Ebb and Flow (1929) Frances, Countess of Warwick, one among the most familiar figures of the late Victorian period, offers her own particularly evocative characterisation of this rarefied pageant. Lady Warwick writes that in the 'eighties' and 'nineties' there was for Society only one Park - others might have been familiar; Regent's for its zoo or Battersea when the cycling craze was on, St, James's and Green Park were a useful 'short cut' to the House of Lords, but 'the' Park always denoted Hyde Park near the Corner.

> If you entered by the Albert Memorial or Marble Arch you were certain to be making for that select spot lying between Albert and Grosvenor Gates. Here the small circle of society with a big "S" was sure of meeting all its members on morning ride or drive, or in the late afternoon between tea and dinner in what was practically, a daily Society Garden Party. Sometimes engaged couples or the partners of illicit assignations wandered as far as the Serpentine banks, but there they were liable to meet "Bayswater"...and all soon shuddered back to the inviolate spot. In the late nineties "Bayswater" - no other suburb was known - invaded The Society Church Parade on a Sunday morning, but the interlopers had scant welcome, and the little Society ranks closed up only the more exclusively by the Achilles statue.[3]

These late Victorian memoir references reflect and confirm the existence of an identifiable 'Society circle' associated with an atmosphere of aristocratic privilege and separateness. The participants and their setting are remembered as if safely cocooned in a charmed embrace of mutual security, behaving, as Lady Warwick recalls, "as if London - our London - was a place of select enjoyment for the circle, as if nothing could change in this best of delightful

worlds."[4] In further memoir allusions a corresponding sense of the intimate and familial relations among Society's participants, again suggesting aristocratic and landed associations, is borne out in references to friends and acquaintances. The Duke of Portland recalls fashionable equestrians - their mounted appearance evoking the image of elegant patricians as ships in full sail - metaphorically in command of Society as they are in the saddle. Some among the once familiar names include; Lord Calthorpe, Lord Lonsdale, Mrs. Walters, Mr. Mackenzie-Grieve, Lord Annaly, a subsequent Master of the Pytchley Hounds (1902-1914), Colonel John Brocklehurst of 'the Blues' (afterwards Lord Ranksborough) as well as Lord Algernon 'Algie' Gordon-Lennox of whom the Duke writes; "When he and his daughter Ivy, now my daughter-in-law, appeared together they made a perfect pair, both as to horsemanship and general turn-out."[5] These names are linked to the memory of admired horsemanship, the exchange of pleasantries and social hospitality, as well as to anecdotes of more-or-less humourous and charming episodes that invariably reinforce the sense of Society's resemblance to an extended family.

In a comparable testimony to Society's aristocratic homogeneity, the Countess of Warwick recites the names of house guests that she and the Earl welcomed to Easton Lodge, Lady Warwick's family seat, in the 1890s. These afford a telling indication of Society's characteristic associations in this period. Lady Warwick writes;

> Among others...Henry and Violet Manners, the late Duke of Rutland and the present Dowger Duchess, Lord Rowten...Lord and Lady Carmarthen (afterwards the late Duke and Duchess of Leeds)...Lady Dorothy Nevill wrote

> her name often in our visitor's book from 1889 onwards...Queen Mary's brothers, Prince Adolphus and Prince Francis of Teck, were often at Easton. The latter, a constant visitor until his death, was godfather to my youngest daughter Mercy...The late Sir George Holford, the last owner of beautiful Dorchester House, came with the Prince of Wales several times. Another always welcome Equerry was the Honourable Seymour Fortescue....[6]

In this period, Easton Lodge was among the most celebrated country-houses in England, invitations to which as well as to Warwick Castle having being much desired. In an ambiance of well-bred comfort and privileged associations, country-house visits and entertaining formed a typical and avid feature of Society life in the closing years of the nineteenth century and early years of the new century. The luxury of arrangements on these occasions naturally differed with regard to house and setting, but an often halcyon memory of unhurried pleasure and civilised ease invariably flavours the memoir reflection of this distinctive form of social communion. In Romantic Adventure (1937) Elinor Glyn assigns a chapter to a eulogising description of a typical Easton visit in the 1890s with an accent on the charm of setting, perfection of hospitality and re-assuring familiarity among guests.[7]

The manifestation of Society within the context of the London Season with its spring-summertime round of time honoured fetes and communal activities, further illustrate an aristocratic sense of community that characterised Society for its participants at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Historically, Society in London was connected to the composition of the Houses of the Lords and the Commons, so that when Parliament sat, the merging of these

elements inevitably fostered a focused social forum. Although the Season culminated in the summer months, its duration was affected by the time-table of the Parliamentary year and with it a virtual migration habit for its membership. When Parliament was convened, usually in the second week of February by the Queen 'calling together her Lords and Gentlemen', the fashionable world was said to have begun. In her memoirs Lady Randolph Churchill recalls a season in the late 1870s writing, "The winter session which usually assembled in February as it does now, and sat for six weeks brought to London the legislators and their families; but from October to February the town was a desert. Religiously however, on the first of May, Belgravia...would throw open the doors of its freshly painted and flower bedecked mansions. Dinners, balls, and parties succeeded one another without intermission till the end of July."[8] Allowing for the periodic novelty of fashion and fad, the observances of the season were all-enduring and in and of themselves, changeless from one generation to the next.

As with any Season that had gone before, enjoyment was the object of pursuit and as with any generation, the hectic if athletic demands of the season were taken up by the young with enthusiasm. A typical, if timeless appraisal of one such evening from the late 1880s may be glimpsed in All The Way (1949) by Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, "I did not much like the lateness of the hour at which balls then began....I enjoyed dancing, except for one difficulty. I could never remember what was the appearance of my proposed partner. They were mainly dressed in white ball gowns, very like one another."[9]

The American diplomat Adam Badeau, in his survey Aristocracy in England (1886) describes a typical London season of the latter phase of the nineteenth century. He effectively illustrates not only Society's atmosphere of rarefied privilege but also something of the ritualisation given to its protracted functions.

> After Easter the full tide sets in....The great houses are all open; the park is full in the afternoon; the Row is crowded every morning with horsewomen....Forty people often sit at one sumptuous board, and the overflow sometimes reaches the side tables; clever people if not of too high rank, contend for these cozy corners, where they can choose their partners. Balls now begin....The Queen's Drawing-Rooms are crowded. Politics is everywhere discussed....
>
> You must be in town in June if you are in the world. You must breathe the hot atmosphere of Parliament....You must be clad in the stiff garments that etiquette prescribes for every hour; you must devote yourself to a round of visits and entertainments....An Emperor, or a Shah, or a Czar is sure to arrive whom some very grand personage must entertain....But the Lords, and the Commons too, begin to get restive as August approaches; for on the twelfth, grouse-shooting begins. Arrangements are made for Scotland and the North....There are no more carriages in the Ring, not so many riders in the Row....The London Season is at an end.[10]

These allusions evoke the sense of a world complete on to itself playing out its role on a public stage yet reserving for itself as well, the privilege of its own exclusivity. The majesty of visiting Emperors or Shahs hosted by some 'very grand personage' is matched by the anonymity of 'cosy corners' at dinner parties, where those of 'not too high rank' are free to be informal. Badeau's depiction of the Society culture of his own witness, affords a composite picture of aristocratic London in full bloom. The Season constituted a form of social theatre in which, as already suggested, the omnipresent

ingredients of pleasure, comfort and ritual had already been features in several generations of Society life, as indeed, they would continue to be into the twentieth century.

However, despite the context of privilege and pleasure associated with the Season, the characteristic memoir reflection of the late Victorian-Edwardian period testifies to an identification of a sense of quality and discernment, usually linked to the dignity of a salon culture of intelligent men and women. Insomuch as Society embodied the atmosphere and leadership of aristocratic personalities and tradition, the salon culture of the capital's political and intellectual life thrived under the patronage of its great ladies.

The hostesses were for the most part able to wield vast resources and had been brought up virtually from birth, in the art of entertaining. In town and country, they provided a rendez-vous for men of political influence and opinion, as well as certain distinguished men of learning. Their receptions were a social forum in which the young were not excluded and in which the cultivation of good talk and fine manners were as much art as necessity, and as much vocation as discipline. As the Countess of Warwick writes in Discretions (1931), "Entertaining among the elite was undoubtedly an art. The enchantment lay in setting us at ease in a luxury that was exquisite...there, in an atmosphere of beauty, men and women reposed; even statesmen lost their stateliness and surrendered to delicate suggestion."[11] As one of the young men who had benefited from this forum, John Buchan echoes Lady Warwick's words remembering in Memory Hold the Door (1940) that he had

made his entry into the Society of his elders.

> Youth and age were not segregated then as they tend to be to-day, and a young man had the chance of meeting his seniors and betters - an excellent thing....For a minnow like myself there was the chance of meeting new and agreeable minnows, and the pleasure of gazing with awe up the table where at the hostess's side was some veritable triton.[12]

At the turn of the century, Society's hostesses could still be divided into two categories of either political or social complexion. Among the Conservative camp, memoirs cite such names as Theresa Lady Londonderry, the Duchess of Devonshire, the Marchioness of Salisbury, Lady Lansdowne and the Duchess of Buccleugh. Among the politically Liberal hostesses are included Lady Spencer and Lady Fanny Marjoribanks, while non-partisan or merely social hostesses included Millicent, Dowager Duchess of Sutherland and Gladys Lady de Grey, Marchioness of Ripon. In her memoirs, Lady Randolph Churchill recalls that, "At a particularly pleasant luncheon-party, given by Lady de Grey, I remember once meeting among others, M. Jules Claretie of the Francais, Mlle. Bartet the gifted actress, Lord Ribblesdale and Mr. Oscar Wilde than whom a more brilliant talker did not exist."[13] In her Reminiscences (1922) Lady Battersea, formerly Constance de Rothschild, recounts a characteristic dinner-party given by the Dowager Lady Barrington, writing, "of that party the central figure was Madame Norman Neruda...the attractive and talented violinist...Augusta Barrington, the then unmarried daughter of Lady Barrington, seated herself at the piano and proceeded to play the accompaniment to Madame Neruda's solo on the violin. We were an appreciative audience; one of the most appreciative was Mr. Balfour....He was lying back

luxuriously in his chair, giving himself up to the charm of a favourite piece of music."[14]

The distinguished atmosphere of the political and musical salon of the 1880s and 1890s owed something of its character to the survival into these years of certain great figures of the Victorian age. Lady Dorothy Nevill, a prolific memoir author and herself a celebrated Society figure, recalls that she discovered in her papers a guest list of a typical dinner-party enlivened by the discriminating company, "Amongst them were three Gladstones, including of course, the Grand Old Man, the Duchess of St. Albans, the Tavistocks, the William Harcourts, Matthew Arnold, Bright, and Herbert Spencer...."[15] However, whether or not the entertaining conducted by Society's ladies involved great occasions or intimate gatherings, memoir authors invariably attribute to these activities a characteristic grace and discernment so often at the basis of Society recollections. One among many typical allusions of this familial kind is evidenced in Memories of Sixty Years (1917) in which the Earl of Warwick pays tribute to Lady Dorothy Nevill writing, "One of my good friends who has gone before was old Lady Dorothy Nevill, whose luncheon table was for many years the gathering-place of the wittiest company in London. She was a great entertainer and was very widely entertained, for a brighter, kindlier, or cleverer woman never took up so strong a position in the social world."[16] In another appreciative instance, Sir Seymour Fortescue, naval equerry to King Edward VII as Prince of Wales in the 1890s remembers too, a quality of intimacy and charm in the London Society of these years. In Looking Back (1920) the author writes

affectionately of the convivial closeness of Society as if it were a haven for dependable friendship, "The very pleasantest dinners I can remember, were then given in a corner house of Great Cumberland Place by one of my kindest friends, Consuelo Duchess of Manchester. She had not only a passion for entertaining, but was a wonderfully successful entertainer....The usual London dinner party generally breaks up about 11. Hers often lasted till the small hours, for when the early birds amongst her guests had taken their flight...the rest of us gravitated towards the piano...her friends still miss her...."[17]

Another characteristic identification of a sense of community in the form and character of London Society life in this period, may be encapsulated in keynote references to public behaviour manifest in etiquette. Allusions to the appreciation of discriminating and graceful entertaining have already been cited, their indication in memoir discussion confirm the existence of circles of aristocratic intimacy in an environment of familial recognition and social ease. The charm and quality attributed to this urban culture was based largely on, and implicitly expressed in the rule of order and 'good taste'. In the illustrative example of etiquette, the late Victorian-Edwardian Society world is given its final 'brush stroke' of memoir depiction. The recollection of disciplined formality with regard to, specifically dress and smoking, dominate the relevant references. In Ten Years at the Court of St. James' (1921) Baron Von Eckardstein writes of the late 1880s, after he became First Secretary at the German Embassy; "At this time London life was still that of the old-fashioned easy-going highly coloured "old England"....Manners and

customs were still Victorian; and this was especially evident in dress. What "gentleman" would have ventured into a West End street otherwise than in single-breasted morning coat, striped trousers and top hat?....Moreover, it was positively rude to smoke in the company of ladies, and unpardonable to smell of tobacco."[18] In The Days Before Yesterday (1920) the diplomat Lord Frederic Hamilton echoes this memory writing, "...in my young days the possibility of appearing in Piccadilly in anything but a high hat and a tail coat was unthinkable, as was the idea of sitting down to dinner in anything but a white tie."[19] Such references are legion and relate as well, to various other nuances of behaviour and custom. They suggest Society's communal sensibility to degrees of order, precedence and propriety, the manifestation and acceptance of, a system of collective regulation and control. It remained however, by and large a not unpleasant regulation for its subjects, and one that was so endemic to the structure of their lives and so akin to the character of their prestige as to have been virtually unquestioned. The season may have existed as a context for a privileged separateness and pleasure but Society as a whole continued to embody the traditions of authority and therefore of implicit responsibility. Inasmuch as Society's world reflected the landed elements of the aristocracy this culture was tied by the functioning practices of generations to the land and its inhabitants. As Lady Warwick writes in Discretions, "Although there was plenty of gaiety of a sort, we obeyed our parents, respected our elders, and kept our promises..."[20]

In characteristic memoir references to London Society in the

late Victorian-Edwardian period, the consensus of memory evokes the apparent leadership of a definable aristocratic community, intimate in scale and familial in character. References suggest an appreciative sense that with this scale and familiarity of association, an aesthetically pleasing, civilised and ordered environment pertained for its participants. It is useful to clarify and confirm that this recorded sense of London Society's distinctive features and character had effectively taken root with the mid-nineteenth century's social experience. The recollection in Society memoirs, of the mid-Victorian period, and usually with particular reference to the decade of the 1860s, establish comparable themes and features.

Memoir allusions to Society's participating figures as well as to its group activities are entirely contained within an aristocratic context of landed wealth and consequent influence. Apparent in these references is the seeming timelessness and legitimacy of an authoritative prestige associated with assured position. The familiarity of aristocratic London gave its members a sense of mutual recognition and focus. In The Reminiscences of Lady Dorothy Nevill (1907), recalling the 1860s, the author writes; "Many years ago when I first knew London Society, it was more like a large family than anything else. Everyone knew exactly who everybody else was."[21] In Bygone Years (1905) Frederick Leveson Gower, a nephew of a Duke of Devonshire, offers the instance of a famous rivalry between Harriet, Duchess of Sutherland and Julia, Countess of Jersey. The author attributes the acknowledged triumph of the former to her great wealth and rank. She was known to have been a favourite of the Queen and

was generally popular at Court. The author adds; "She had a sound understanding, and in social matters, as well as in politics, always took the generous side."[22] This allusion also indicates the mid-Victorian political arena in which the hostesses espoused varying allegiances and dispensed patronage - directing the 'artillery' of their social influence in the promotion of either Whig or Tory associations. The example of Lady Palmerston the wife of the Prime Minister is often cited in memoirs as the familiar illustration of the relationship of Society to politics. In her Recollections of 1909, in a chapter entitled "London in the Sixties", Lady St. Helier describes some of the people and gatherings she remembers from these years. A selection of random references give a convincing impression of the intimate and convivial character of Society's political associations;

> Lady Palmerston was then the great political hostess. Her Saturday evenings were exclusively Whig, and she was served by an able staff of aides-de-camp. Mr. Abraham Hayward, chief of the staff, kept her informed of everybody who came to London and ought to be invited to her house....I used to see a great many foreigners at the house of my aunt, Lady Ely, who was then Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen....The first time I really made Lord Beaconsfield's acquaintance was after my first marriage at Lady Stanhope's, when I sat next to him at dinner....The mantle of Lady Palmerston, as the social head of the Whig party, devolved after death on Lady Waldegrave, who had just married Mr. Chichester Fortescue, Chief Secretary for Ireland....It was at Lady Waldegrave's that the members of the Irish Parliamentary Party got their introduction into English social life....Lady Margaret was a sympathetic, kind hearted woman. Her dinner-parties were always agreeable, and her house on Sundays was a great 'rendez-vous' for politicians.[23]

It is with the mid-Victorian Society memoir as well, that an atmosphere of discriminating intelligence and appreciation of

intelligence is identified. Lady Dorothy Nevill, herself a celebrated hostess to the social and political luminaries of her day, is a tireless chronicler of the salon culture of the period. In her Reminiscences of 1907 she writes, "The old leisured aristocracy of the past delighted in gathering together people of conversational power...and a very brilliant circle it was too."[24] In another passage the author continues, "In the old days, good talkers - men and women of brilliant conversational powers - were people whose presence at country-house or dinner parties was the most sought for; they were, indeed, the dictators of the dinner table, where they ruled with almost undisputed sway."[25] In her Reminiscences of 1909, Lady Randolph Churchill links this quality of social intercourse specifically to the salon culture of the period. The author, recalling the salons' heyday remembers that none were possible without selection, and that this naturally led to the exclusion of all who did not possess wit and talent.[26] Lady Dorothy Nevill echoes these remarks arguing that, however homogeneous the composition of an aristocratic Society world, it was nonetheless generous in the invitations extended to the clever and accomplished who helped to animate its social gatherings. In her Reminiscences, Lady Dorothy continues, "...certain individuals whose sole credentials were their wit and mental cultivation were accorded a place in Society. There were several such men, of whose origin nothing was known or asked, whose claim to social consideration lay in cultivated and well-stored brains - these were welcomed without demur."[27]

In the mid-Victorian period the question finally, of propriety

and order found its formal expression in Society's concern with etiquette and correct form. In 1907, Lady Dorothy Nevill states that, "the laws of etiquette...were severe in the extreme, for instance, it would have been considered a dreadful thing for a lady of birth to go out walking without a man-servant behind her. I remember that the old Duchess of Cleveland was the last lady who when she went out was always followed by a footman bearing a cane. Cabs were not considered at all proper vehicles for ladies to go in, whilst omnibuses were absolutely tabooed."[28] Even by the early 1870s, as Lady Randolph Churchill recalls, a lady would never travel alone in a railway carriage without taking her maid with her. She adds that; "to go by oneself in a hansom was thought very "fast" - not to speak of walking...as for young girls driving anywhere by themselves, such a thing was unheard of."[29] Although having been brought up in France and accustomed to the restrictions and chaperonage 'to which young girls had to submit', Lady Randolph playfully confesses that even with her marriage, she felt less than truly emancipated, admitting that; "in matters of propriety...London was much more strict and conventional....Etiquette and the amenities of social life were religiously maintained....The writing of ceremonious notes, the leaving of cards, not to speak of 'visits de digestion' which even young men were supposed to pay, took up most afternoons."[30] Indeed, in the compilation of his mother's papers in 1919 Ralph Nevill concurs, that by subsequent standards, "social conventions were more rigorous. Laxness about keeping appointments would not have been tolerated, while being late for lunch or dinner was considered a real social

crime."[31]

In reference to concerns of propriety and etiquette, memoir examples record the conventional application of these forms in instances of daily and common practice. The Victorian experience of Society had essentially taken form in the aftermath of the Hanovarian excesses of eighteenth-century life. The near absolute authority of aristocratic culture in the eighteenth-century illicted a self-confidence of behaviour that was answerable to few. The life of the Prince Regent, later George IV and many of his 'patrician' companions are familiar in evoking the ribald informalities of certain circles in Society life, as well as the negative publicity that often daunted the Prince throughout his career. However after 1837, Queen Victoria quickly asserted a decorous and religious tone to the crown's leadership of Society that gradually came to influence the public processes of the aristocracy at large. The nineteenth century evolution of the national life imposed, a self-consciousness of increasingly united 'class' on an aristocratic culture in an age of social and democratic development. As Donald Read has written in England 1868-1914, " 'Class' had grown out of the Industrial Revolution. Landed society had been based upon 'rank', 'degree', 'order'. These assumed the existence of a God-given hierarchy; but one in which a chain of connection ran through society, thereby allowing the fulfilment of obligations both upwards and downwards. Industrial society, by contrast, began to separate individuals instead of linking them."[32]

Insomuch as a sensitivity to questions of propriety is a

significant ingredient in the public discipline of class in Victorian Society, memoir references to the negation of such concerns are understandably rare. In two infamous late-Victorian incidents, the Tranby Croft and Beresford-Brooke affairs, one may more fully appreciate aristocratic Society's sense of self-regulating and self-preserving privacy. In memoir literature both these intriguing dramas are mute but are historically highly illustrative and are thoroughly discussed in King Edward the Seventh by Philip Magnus.[33] The first involved a case of card cheating in which Lieut. Colonel Sir William Gordon-Cumming of the Scots Guards was discovered and confronted as having cheated at baccarat at a country house party at Tranby Croft in September of 1890. The Prince of Wales was a fellow guest and witnessed the solemn signing of a note in which Gordon-Cumming agreed never to play cards again on the understanding that the event would naturally not be made public, or that Gordon-Cumming would have to quit his regiment. However, Gordon-Cumming subsequently attempted to attain a more generous settlement in open court to the disgust of the Prince of Wales and many of his class, as in the process Gordon-Cumming although guilty, was nonetheless prepared to reap the negative notoriety for all concerned.

In the Beresford-Brooke affair, the Prince of Wales again, interceded to retrieve from Lady Charles Beresford an indiscreet letter that Lady Brooke (afterwards Countess of Warwick) had written to Lord Charles Beresford in January 1890 and which Lady Charles had intercepted. In order to ensure the compliance of both her husband and Lady Brooke, Lady Charles retained the letter. She soon

perceived that she was being boycotted by the Marlborough House Set, friends of Lady Brooke, and Lady Charles threatened to publish the letter should she be further humiliated. In this, Lord Charles came to his wife's defence, suggesting in addition that he would make public certain aspects of the Prince's private life. Much of this crisis was fuelled by anxiety under pressure but before it was played out, its feverish negotiation was nervously monitored by both Queen Victoria and the Prime Minister Lord Salisbury. The Prime Minister himself, reluctantly but earnestly interceded to mediate between the emotional parties. By December 1890 a solution was found in a formal exchange of letters of apology between the Prince of Wales and Lord Charles that had been drafted by the Prime Minister. Lady Brooke was also obliged to undergo a temporary exclusion from court. In March 1892 the offending letter was returned to its author and duly destroyed.

In the main, for chroniclers of London Society life at the close of the nineteenth century - and supported by a comparable experience in the mid-Victorian era, as evidenced above - the delight and virtue of this world lay in the seeming perfectibility of its charm and in the social example of its order. In summation, perhaps the most succinct allusion to this platonic ideal of life and self-assured attitude of authority, is offered by Lady Frances Balfour, a sister-in-law of the Conservative Prime Minister appraising Society as it was constituted in the 1880s. Lady Frances writes in Ne Obliviscaris (1932);

> It was a circle intimately interwoven....There was great ease, and some riches as wealth was then counted.

> There was little display, large houses and establishments, elaborate gardens and policies, gave employment to those who...formed part of the responsibilities of ownership....
>
> Privacy and intimacy were the keynotes of a beautiful hospitality....The old were established facts, and over all was the grace and beauty of the best manners and the ease which accompanies people who are sure of themselves, and need no advertisement.[34]

It is invariably with this quality of assured position and air of legitimate authority that the characteristic memoir appraisal of Society's late-Victorian world, is both perceived and expressed. Representative authors among its participants identify a mutual sense of identification based on an aristocratic landed social tradition. It is, by way of conclusion, ultimately in the memoir treatment of designated qualities of character and gentility, that this community environment reveals both the primary characteristic of its insularity as well as the seed for potential and subsequent change.

The memoir allusion to qualities of character and gentility in the late Victorian-Edwardian period complement the functioning authority and insularity of aristocratic Society. However potentially abstract the historical appraisal of such concepts, their treatment by aristocratic authors evokes, often nostalgically, the theme of unassailable dignity and character distinct from the chaos of a surrounding world. These qualities are implicitly seen to have been formed by an aristocratic culture historically accustomed to rule, which in turn facilitated their continuity.

Among the typical examples of gentility, authors cite candidates with an appreciative sense of their seeming completeness of self. They appear the finely tuned products of a regulated and

cohesive social system in which their role would seem as artfully cast as that of any player on a stage. In Melton Mowbray and Other Memories (1924) Moreton Frewen affectionately cites the wit, composure, and general 'elan' of Lord Rosslyn, one among the most familiar figures of his time. In representing Queen Victoria at the marriage of the King of Spain, the author writes, "He made an immense impression on Madrid, filling the good city with his footmen and state carriages, which the ill-natured declared he sold at fabulous prices to Spain's grandees. He may have left his carriages and horses behind him, but he could not leave behind him his grand manner. With him went just another, Seymour Wynne-Finch of the "Blues", and the wit and splendid insolence of the two Englishmen have, it is said, given quite a new direction to the modern literature of Spain."[35] In her Recollections (1909) the Countess of Cardigan and Lancastre reveals a similar regard in her memory of the old Regency noble the Marquis of Hertford. Lady Cardigan writes, "There is, of course, no doubt that he was a 'roué'. The Society he lived in, his great wealth his epicurean tendencies all combined to make him exceptional in his passions and unscrupulous in his mode of gratifying them. But after all he only wore his rue with a difference, and he always looked a great nobleman, never forgetting his manners, how ever much he neglected his morals...."[36] In her Reminiscences (1907) Lady Dorothy Nevill, among a number of figures, particularly cites Lord Ellenborough, the former Governor-General of India. Lady Dorothy writes, "I hardly remember anyone who looked so thoroughly well-bred; the noble to his finger-tips, he had the grand manner and dignified

bearing which distinguished the gentlemen of the old school."[37] Lady Dorothy concludes, "Handsome even when an old man, he was the type of the English aristocrat of another age, who combined keen appreciation of the world's pleasures and intellectual culture with dignified bearing and exquisite manners; 'Born to command and conscious of his sway, a courtly noble of another day'."[38] In the 1922 publication of her Reminiscences, Lady Battersea offers her own gentlemanly example in the person of Sir Algernon West. Sir Algernon was a descendant of Sir Robert Walpole, had married a grand-daughter of the prime minister Lord Grey, and for much of his career, was private secretary to William Gladstone. Lady Battersea links him to an age 'distinguished not alone for talent and learning, but also for fine manners and gracious bearing' adding, "indeed, for these last Sir Algernon West might well have served as model. "Sir Algy", as he was affectionately called by his friends, had always been a strict observer of proper and dignified etiquette. He was scrupulous in his dress and speech....He had a striking face and figure, and was a noble representative of the English gentleman."[39]

In allusions such as these the principal features suggest the dependability of a consistent social type nurtured by an environment in which in turn, the subject is completely at ease. The particular reference to instances of the 'grand manner' and of a 'splendid insolence' in a certain theatrical self-assurance significantly remind one of the Olympian gods of mythology. Although human-like in their foibles and capricious in their motivations the gods nonetheless constitute a certainty of law as fixtures of permanence in their

social landscape around which the affairs of life may be seen to revolve.

In Victorian society life the authority and prestige of aristocratic culture produce in memoir retrospection a nostalgic memory of gentility as indicative of this theme of certainty as well as off-hand self-assurance. The allusion to Lords Rosslyn and Hertford are typical cases in point. In his article "The Twilight of Gentility: Class and Character in the Palliser Novels" (Europa. A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies. Vol. 1, No. I. November 1977) Alan H. Adamson explores comparable themes in the Anthony Trollope novels of aristocratic and high political life in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this source a semi-fictional character such as the Duke of Omnium is seen to have been fashioned by Trollope to typify the English patrician as social deity and yet as a wholly inactive one. In terms of the practical utility of the aristocracy's social and political influence, the figure of the Duke of St. Bungay is correspondingly evoked to represent the 'working peer' analogous on the national level to the functional responsibility of the gentry squire at the regional level. And yet the aged Duke of Omnium, despite his 'uselessness' in his indifference to work retains a degree of respect and mystique not enjoyed by his ducal colleague. As Trollope explains, while "men and women thought but little of the Duke of St. Bungay...the other Duke was regarded with an almost reverential awe. I think the secret lay in the simple fact that the Duke of Omnium had not been common in the eyes of the people. He had contrived to envelope himself in the ancient mystery of wealth and

rank." There was..."about him a dignity of demeanour, a majesty of person."[40] Even Madame Max Goesler, with her democratic European origins, who is initially critical of the old Duke, later concedes and with humility, that "there is something glorious in the dignity of a man too high to do anything."[41]

In the statement of this paternalistic if romantic appeal as in the tacit acceptance of its social foundations, impressions and allusions to gentlemen of the ilk of the Duke of Omnium or the Marquis of Hertford acknowledge their seeming omnipotence over their social culture. As pervasive as towering oaks in an ordered landscape, they reflect the hierarchy and order as well as the certainty of a Society dominated by the atmosphere and processes of a landed aristocratic tradition.

Although memoirs of Society life glimpse the gentleman most frequently in his urban setting, typical references ingest as well the broader criteria of manly gentility. In this too, Trollope offers a composite statement of the nineteenth century ideal of the gentleman as leader.

> He should be feared...and yet good humoured, serene...and yet forebearing; truculent and pleasant in the same moment....Friends he must have, but not favourites....He must be strong in health, strong in heart, strong in purpose....And he should do it all in accordance with a code of unwritten laws, which cannot be learnt...[42]

To whatever extent the 'average' gentleman might have universally fulfilled such attributes, this criteria nonetheless confirms the role of the aristocrat as social leader and therefore as a figure of singular privilege and implicit responsibility.

The necessity of preparing the gentleman for a world he must learn to command and yet not in turn, be wholly assimilated by, is apparent in these criteria of desired attributes. They underscore the nineteenth century aristocratic culture's broader concern with questions of order, hierarchy, and social legitimacy. These concerns had been intensified by the experiences of the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars. However, in comparison to her European neighbours, British aristocratic culture had historically proven more fluid in adapting to change and absorbing new elements into its otherwise exclusive environment. The late Victorian concept of gentility correspondingly reflects this adaptibility with the germ of a democratic acceptance of 'anyone' who might prove worthy and malleable in temperament, character and sufficient self-assurance. In his history England in the Age of the American Revolution L.B. Namier affords a brilliantly concise statement of this capacity for social elevation as well as the interpretation of appropriate temperament in those so rewarded.

> A man's status in English society has always depended primarily upon his self-consciousness; for the English...perceive and accept facts without anxiously inquiring into their reasons or meaning. whatever is apt to raise a man's self-consciousness - be it birth, rank, wealth, intellect, daring or achievements - will add to his stature; but it has to be translated into the truest expression of a man's subconscious self-valuation, uncontending ease, the unbought grace of life.
>
> Classes are more sharply marked in England because there is no single test for them, except the final incontestable result; and there is more snobbery than in any other country, because the gate can be entered by anyone, and yet remains, for those bent on entering it, a mysterious, awe-inspiring gate.[13]

The genius of this flexibility could ensure that no likely

candidate for social elevation need be regarded as an anomaly, however tiny or exotic a minority he might then constitute. His 'acceptability' would largely erase all such hindrances necessarily allowing for further passage and absorption. It would however also seem clear that this 'germ' of adaptability manifest in appropriate temperament or character attainment, depended on a gradualism in Society's social operations. The confidence possible with the unhurried and unthreatened agenda of the landed classes' facility for assimilation, could afford to thus evolve an expansive interpretation of value and merit. In this sense the historic rationale of gentility could be expressed in the 'fait-accompli' of manner, bearing and of modes of character autonomy, and not, in terms of the European experience of rigid pedigree requirements strictly defined and segregated. In their wise and witty anthology The Essential Englishman (1989) Duncan Steen and Nicolas Soames have drawn the picture of the seemingly eternal gentleman in this final, realised and 'arrived' form. "All you need to set yourself up as one is a bit of land, a large house, a few horses, a collection of assorted dogs and servants, clothes of indeterminate age, shape or colour, a hip flask, a gun and an air of breezy assurance."[44]

CHAPTER TWO

In the characteristic memoir allusion to London Society life in the late Victorian-Edwardian period, the consensus of memory among representative authors evokes the theme of an aristocratic and self-contained culture. The attendant sense of an identifiable and homogenous circle emerges, its members being the product of a landed social tradition of authority and prestige, on intimate and convivial terms with one another and appreciative of Society's inherent order. However, present also in the memoir reflection of this period is a corresponding recognition of significant forms of adaptation and change, duly interpreted as altering the fabric of London Society's form, character and community. At varying degrees of either positive or negative appraisal the characteristic memoir discussion on the theme of change, acknowledges the 'encroaching' influences of an increasingly influential external world.

In the memoir reflection of Society life in the late Victorian-Edwardian period, perhaps the most tangible indication of change may be evidenced in the entry permitted to members of the theatrical profession. The aristocratic salon culture of the Victorian era had been familiar to various distinguished men of science and learning, but until the 1880s and 1890s this setting had been closed to actors whose lives were at best, associated with trade, and at worse, with the 'demi-monde' immorality of near gypsies. In By The Clock of St. James's (1927) Percy Armytage recalls that before these years, "one never met actors socially" and continues; "The only actors invited to

great houses were the Kendals, the Bancrofts and Irving."[1] In her own memoirs Lady St. Helier is able to only slightly add to this list, writing; "Every door was closed against the dramatic profession though Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Wigan and Miss Helen Faucit (Lady Martin) were exceptions to the universal rule as regards the stage."[2]

The opening of Society's doors to these hitherto alien elements was as seemingly sudden as it was ultimately complete. Percy Armytage recalls; "It is difficult to realize today how recent is the social welcome given to actors....Constance, wife of the First Duke of Westminster, did much to break down a stupid convention and it was at Grosvenor House that I first met actors in Society. As she was a Leveson Gower, a daughter of the Duke of Sutherland, lesser hostesses were quick to follow her excellent example."[3] Others among the instrumental agents for this new responsiveness were the Countess of Waldegrave, Lady Dorothy Nevill and Lady St. Helier. The willingness on the part of Society to acknowledge and welcome the theatrical community corresponded to a broader acceptance from the nation at large as the middle-classes began to patronise the theatre as a respectable art. This confirmed an inevitable adaptation of view as the theatre came, less and less, to typify the immoral demi-monde of eighteenth-century associations.[4] Despite an initial suspicion and caution on the part of some elements in Society, the old barriers were effectively dismantled. In the evidence of characteristic memoir references, recollections to happy evenings in the theatre and music hall are now augmented by the memory of socially more intimate encounters made possible with the 1880s. In Society memories that

evoke the mid-Victorian period, there are virtually no references to distinguished actors encountered in a Society setting. However, with regard to the period that corresponds to the 1880s and 1890s, this absence is replaced by allusions to appreciative friendship and character admiring qualities. In connection to thespian relationships, allusions to various personalities, who are lauded for their grace and charm, include the 'elevated prefixes' that, by the close of the century, suggested the extent to which the theatrical world had become 'respectable'. Society's leading lights among representatives of the 'legitimate stage' included the like of Sir Henry Irving, Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft, Dame Madge Kendal and Sir Charles Wyndham. In a particular memoir passage, the sense may be discerned whereby such social figures as those cited, had by the 1890s become socially credible and worthy of honour. In Irish and Other Memoires (1922) the Duke de Stacpoole recalls a dinner conversation between a young patrician and the great actress Mrs. Patrick Campbell.

> One of the finest actresses I have ever known, and a most serious artist, is Mrs. Patrick Campbell.
>
> She made good immediately at her first appearance on a London stage, and was much sought after. A young man of my acquaintance was particularly anxious to be introduced to her, so I arranged a little supper-party for the purpose. But he was rather a foolish fellow, and at once started paying very marked attention to the lady in question, whereupon he received a well-merited repulse. "You do not seem accustomed to the society of actresses", said Mrs. Campbell quietly. The young man indignantly remonstrated. "Oh no", answered Mrs. Campbell, "you are thinking of Gaiety girls".[5]

It is perhaps as justifiable as it is certainly tempting to discern in this exchange the confirmation of the new 'rapprochement' between the profession of the stage and Society. The Duke de

Stacpoole clearly acknowledges this adaptation in his taking, as it were, Mrs. Patrick Campbell's side in this light-hearted 'contretemps'. The stage and its leading figures had now the potential for being regarded as worthy of respect and recognition, its actresses no longer merely 'fair game' for the amorous exploits of young 'footloose' gentlemen about town.

In The Rise of Respectable Society F.M.L. Thompson presents statistics that demonstrate an apparent atmosphere of adaptation in aristocratic processes and with regard to the theatrical milieu in particular. In the treatment of marriage initiatives among the landed classes, Thompson cites T.H. Hollingsworth's 1964 analysis in The Demography of the British Peerage noting the drop to 20 per cent in the 1880's of endogamous marriages among the landed aristocracy.[6] Thompson expands on this theme recording that, for the years 1870-1914 among the aristocracy's core leadership in the peerage, 104 marriages by peers and their eldest and younger sons, were to American brides and heiresses and also to fourteen British actresses. These figures include seven American 'showgirls' who may however, be socially categorised with the actresses.[7] Although these figures are significant from the perspective of Society's inclusion of nonaristocratic or gentry elements in Society at large, not in itself an innovative process, these figures are not otherwise remarkable in terms of scale. Between 1870-1914 two thirds of the marriages in the titled aristocracy were contained within the aristocracy and gentry. The remaining third included alliances to the daughters of families closely tied to the army, navy, public service and the Church.[8] It is

nonetheless true that a noticeable margin of 'theatrical' marriages had not been seen in Society since the notorious couplings of the eighteenth century and Regency.

In the characteristic memoir literature of the late Victorian-Edwardian period another frequently cited allusion to change, may be seen in reference to an element of 'publicity' in Society. As early as the 1840s Society 'gossip columns' reported, in absorbed and ultimately innocuous prose, the 'goings and comings' of fashionable figures in town and country. They resembled, if anything, the reports of the Court Circular as it had long existed and continues to exist, essentially as an itinerary of public events, activities, and accompanying officials and guests. With the proliferation, by the close of the century, of mass literacy and the expansion generally, of the press, such material became a standard feature in the reading options of the public. In the 1890s, "Belle" of the 'World' was among the familiar Society columns. In illustrating the typical subjects of Belle's interest, the Countess of Warwick, in a bemused reproach of her younger self, refers to rapturous descriptions of her own gowns at various functions throughout the early 1890s.[9] These references emphasize the elegance and intimacy of Society's Olympian separateness. The following evokes a typical entry; "May 6, 1891. At the opera the Prince of Wales with his two younger daughters. Lady Brook [Lady Warwick before her husband's succession to the Earldom] was in the pit tier, and the writer craned her neck to catch a glimpse of the goddess....Her profile was turned away from an inquisitive world, but I made out a rounded figure, diaphanously draped, and a brilliant,

haughty, beautiful countenance."[10] This almost cult-like adoration of feminine beauty echoed in the popular press a comparable sensibility in Society itself. This theme had been an appreciative feature in the life of the mid-Victorian as well but reached its apotheosis in the closing phase of the century. As Lady Warwick writes, "I was a "beauty", and only those who were alive then know the magic that word held for the period."[11]

However, in the press musings of the late 1870s into the early 1880s this theme of socially and aesthetically pleasing ladies in Society had asserted itself with a new and different intensity. Photographs of certain celebrated and attractive ladies appeared in shop windows - ostensibly for sale but certainly also to draw the public to the establishments themselves. The press named these ladies "professional beauties" and included in the phrase all and any figures observed to have newly appeared among Society's ranks and who appealed to , or caught the imagination of its members. There are in effect, two varieties of response to this development in the relevant memoir literature recalling the period. One appraisal acknowledges the vulgarity of the practice and admits to bafflement in accounting for its origins. This view evokes the sensibility of aristocratic insularity that is naturally resistant to any connotation of self-advertisement, professionalism, or of the commonplace. Lady Randolph Churchill recalls being censured by her friends when her picture appeared in shops and being advised to prosecute the photographer.[12] In his own allusion to this topic Lord Frederic Hamilton merely suggests that the "professional beauties" were indeed lovely but

"rather cruelly named."[13] The Duke of Portland writes that he cannot understand why such ladies as Lady Randolph, Mrs. Langtry or Mrs. Wheeler should have been called "P.B.'s"; "For they were all of good family and were of course received everywhere in Society like any other ladies. The Society papers however chose to call them "P.B.'s" either as what is known as a 'newspaper stunt' or possibly because their photographs appeared in many of the shop windows....Though I quickly put a stop to it - with regard to my own wife."[14] In her history Edward VII and His Circle (1956) Virginia Cowles concurs that a large section of Society disapproved of the "professional beauties"; "They regarded publicity as exceedingly vulgar and were shocked that 'ladies' could lend themselves to such a disgraceful fad."[15]

However, in a parallel form of memoir reference, it is also apparent that while some, if indeed leading elements in Society disapproved of the publicity associations of the "professional beauties" other authors do not negatively comment upon it. Indeed, discussion of the "P.B.'s" can occasionally be inter-changeable with general and customary eulogies to Society's distinctive ladies, avoiding any controversy or innovation of which the authors may or may not be otherwise aware. In his memoir of Society and Court life Percy Armytage recalls that the "professional beauties", especially in cases where they were relatively new and unknown, were good-naturedly sponsored by established Society figures as Lady Cork, Mrs. Cavendish Bentinck and others.[16] Memoir references to Lily Langtry and the classical perfection of her features and alluring personality dominate allusions to "professional beauties" in this period. They

suggest the extent to which the fad engaged Society's attention. The Duke of Portland recalls his surprise at seeing the fashionable world in Hyde Park stand on chairs and clamour to catch a glimpse of a small party's approach. "They did this in order to have a better view of Mrs. Langtry, the Jersey Lily; and well they were repaid, for she was one of the most beautiful women I have ever seen."[17] This incident and its euphoric appraisal, are echoed in numerous examples of Society recollections.

In the example of Lily Langtry, rapturous memoir allusions amounting to a sensational cult of feminine beauty - reached its peak in the early 1880s. In it may be seen Society's dual responses to the publicity element of the "professional beauties." Society had always been susceptible to fashion and fad, and although it is true that people stood on their chairs to watch the Jersey Lily pass by, it was not a scene entirely without precedent. Sir Arthur Paget in A Septuagenarian's Scrap Book (1933) reminds the reader that; "it is equally true that the same compliment was paid to the famous Miss Gunnings in the eighteenth century and to the less famed but no less lovely daughters of Lord Aberdeen in the mid-nineteenth."[18] However, these earlier instances among Society's distractions and diversions may be understood to have been self-contained and self-motivating. The external world might have looked on and read, or even reported its doings with varying degrees of accuracy but Society had remained undeniably separate and complete onto itself. It is difficult not to perceive, reflected in characteristic allusions to the "professional beauties" a sense that the fad was engendered and perhaps

manipulated by external impulses such as public interest and consequent press exploitation. It is ultimately immaterial as to which 'had come first' the 'newspaper stunt' cultivating the theme of the "P.B.'s"; or Society's familiar predilection towards celebrating the charm and various qualities of its ladies, which in turn might have encouraged the ensuing publicity. In either case, to acknowledge that these factors co-existed in such a way as to make their separation unclear, is recognition enough that Society, knowingly or otherwise, was exposing itself, or being exposed to an unprecedented public view.

In England 1868-1914 Donald Read suggests that an effective incentive in the expansion of the Victorian press could be appreciated in the mid-century removal of previous restrictions such as the taxes on advertisement, stamp and paper duties. Furthermore in 1869, the security system was ended wherein newspaper proprietors had been obliged to enter into a bond to cover the costs of any fines imposed for blasphemous or seditious libels.[19] Among the relevant secondary source material, A.J. Lee's The Origins of the Popular Press 1855-1914 (1976) remains a key work in outlining the development, character and influence of British journalism. There also exists a variety of studies of specific newspapers including D. Ayerst's Guardian. Biography of a Newspaper (1971) or M. Milne's The Newspapers of Northumberland and Durham (1971). Although the particular cult of the "professional beauties" and the phenomenon of advertising photographs in shop windows did not long survive the 1870s, the pattern of an elaborate and intimate press interest in Society remained and

intensified. As already illustrated in the example of "Belle" of the "World", this development was commensurate with an expanding public readership and interest that was amply fed in popular print publications. It is perhaps Lady Randolph Churchill who, by way of explanation, effectively comments; "A curious phase had come over Society. Publicity became the fashion....People live much more before the public than they did. Privacy seems a luxury no one is allowed to indulge in - even the most uninteresting must be interviewed; their houses, their tastes, their habits, photographs of themselves in their sanctum, all are given to the "man in the street."[28]

In characteristic memoir references to late Victorian-Edwardian Society life, the discussion that alludes to change has thus far been seen to relate to the social acknowledgment of the theatrical profession and the controversial phenomenon of the "professional beauties". The first of these was wholly voluntary in nature, reflecting merely an evolving development manifest in widely held attitude. The second instance of change however, suggests, both a more ambivalent experience and reaction for memoir authors. They would appear, for the first time, to no longer speak as if with a single voice, indicative of a self-consciously intimate and homogeneous social group.

It is noteworthy in this regard to cite as well, characteristic memoir discussion of the 'Souls', the group of intellectual and independently minded patricians who formed an intimate circle in the later Victorian period. The Souls were a noted segment of Society during their lives as later were a number of their children known as

the 'Coterie'. The Souls have benefited from much scholarly attention notably in such works as Angela Lambert's Unquiet Souls: The Indian Summer of the British Aristocracy 1880-1918 (1984), The Souls by Jane Abdy and Charlotte Gere (1984) and Jeanne MacKenzie's The Children of the Souls (1986). From the vantage point of a democratic age, interest in the Souls is understandable as their alleged liberalism and intellectualism would seem to differentiate them from their class culture. The Souls also included several brilliant women who have supplied feminist research with a unique and colourful vehicle. It is however interesting to note, in contrast to this developed perspective something less than its confirmation in memoir reflection, be it sympathetic or negative. While the mental enthusiasms of the Souls are unquestioned, recollections do not entirely argue for the cult-like separateness of the group. The Duke of Portland, himself an intelligent man, obviously speaks for many when he writes that the Souls moved freely in Society's 'everyday life' and were admittedly 'particularly clever and agreeable people...who rejoiced in one another's sympathetic company'. The Duke adds; "By way of amusing retort they nick-named the members of other sets the Bodies....For my part, I saw little difference between them. Both Souls and Bodies were out to enjoy life as much as possible; and I hope and believe they succeeded."[21] Moreton Frewen, as at home with the conversational gymnastics of the salon as he was ranching on the American frontier amusedly spoofs the Souls' reputation and lampoons their apparent superiority; "You silly physicals...now look at us just take our trail to ultimate causes. Lo! we are the souls....See how we have emerged

to grace and garland the dead shrines of the nineteenth century."[22] Playfully apparent in these and other references is the understanding that the Souls did not possess a monopoly on cultivation and intellect.

In Unquiet Souls Angela Lambert stresses the intelligence of these friends in contrast to the hedonism in particular, of the Marlborough House Set of the Prince of Wales. This point however is arguably overstated and is perhaps less characteristic than their shared participation in the discreet but sexually relaxed system of relationships common to the privilege and security of their ruling class environment. The extent to which Society was becoming affected by external pressures of influence and change, may be further evidenced in the discussion of 'new wealth', its emergence in Society coupled with an accompanying and excessive pleasure principle.

In the case of those elements in Society which shunned the fad and hysteria of the "P.B's", many attributed the phenomenon to the 'insidious decay that was undermining Society' by the sudden appearance of the parvenu City man, millionaire American and certain ethnic elements.[23] To whatever extent such a claim may or may not be true, it is nonetheless the case that the most recurrent allusion to the consequences of change, appraised at the turn of the century, is with regard to the rise and proliferation of 'new wealth' in Society. This is perceived as the agent for both the enlargement and altered tone of Society's life in the closing phase of the Victorian era and in the early years of the twentieth century.

In his article "Wealth Elites and Class Structure in Modern

Britain" David Rubinstein outlines the emergence of the growing upper middle class culture on the Victorian national scene. This study identifies two commanding centers in the history and development of bourgeois influence. One, London based, was commercial, metropolitan and Anglican, and the other, industrial, manufacturing, non-conformist and rooted in the north, geographically and culturally.[24] The first was, so to speak, in place to be influenced by, and itself to influence the character and processes of the capital, while the second, isolated by its comparative remoteness and association with industry and trade tended to evolve in self-conscious separateness. The wealth of London's 'high Finance' was focused in the City personified in the Medici-like names of Rothschild, Barring, Sassoon and Montefiore.[25] The proximity to and melding with the economic and social life of the capital assured in part, the pre-eminence of the London based upper middle class. The financial forces of the City were ultimately not snubbed or isolated owing to the material authority these were undeniably attaining, as well as the willingness of the landed classes to absorb the leading figures of this authority. It is against this seemingly adaptive background that memoir testimony records the apparent effects and consequences of this cultural absorption on a hitherto non-commercial, landed and essentially homogeneous urban experience.

Lady Dorothy Nevill, perhaps the most articulately prolific chronicler of aristocratic Society for much of the Victorian era, is both expansive and acerbic in outlining the emergence of a plutocratic influence. In her Reminiscences of 1907 under such chapter titles as

'Wealth takes the place of birth' and 'The Stock Exchange invades Mayfair', Lady Dorothy recalls the time when Society knew only aristocratic days when the 'future conquerors of Society were still without the gate'...."There were rumours of Hudson, the railway king, and his wife, but they were never in Society, which however, was amused by reports of their doings which reached it....Very soon the old social privileges of birth and breeding were swept aside by the mob of plebian wealth which surged into the drawing rooms, the portals of which had up till then been so jealously guarded."[26] Insomuch as there is an historical impulse to account for the circumstances that engendered this development, memoir references attribute them to certain political and economic factors. In Memories of Fifty Years Lady St. Helier suggests that; "The democratization of English politics by the passing of Mr. Disraeli's Reform Bill, the rise of the Irish National Party, and the more general interest which was then taken in political affairs, in part accounted for the change." The author then elaborates on this observation with reference to the time-frame of the mid-Victorian period; "Many people even in those early days realized the problems and difficulties of the situation and were beginning to awaken to the importance of the great changes the extension of the franchise must entail. The increased power of the press and the multiplication of newspapers caused a reaction which forced them to recognize that the elements introduced in the social structure confirmed the views of those who realized that the old order was passing away."[27] Lady Dorothy does not argue with this sense that the old order was disappearing, concurring that;

"everything must change and pass away and there was no reason why 'Society', a relic of aristocratic days should have proven an exception to this rule."[28] As with Lady St. Helier one may presuppose that Lady Dorothy recognised and accepted - as so their readers must have done - that a political evolution in part accounted for this social change in Society. However in her own appraisal Lady Dorothy outlines in particular, the monetary or material nature of this change, coupled with an indication of its alleged consequences. She attributes the rapid and expanded entry of 'nouveau riche' into Society as commensurate with a rapid and increased standard of wealth. She alludes to the title of Samuel Warren's novel Ten Thousand a Year as being associated with a time when such an income would have been considered princely and its possessor rich beyond the dreams of avarice.[29] Lady Dorothy explains;

> What is it today? Why, your modern millionaire gives as much for a single picture, whilst up-to-date entertaining on such a sum is hardly possible. Ten thousand a year is still of course, a snug fortune, sufficient to have a little shooting, some hunting, a modest house in the country, and a small 'pied-a-terre' in town; but it is not riches, nor, according to latter-day ideas....
>
> Half a century ago a rich man - let us say a landed proprietor - was quite content to live the greater part of the year on his estate....If he had not a house in town, he hired one for three months or so, when he would bring up his wife and daughters for the season. Entertainments were certainly given - entertainments the comparative modesty of which to-day provoke a contemptuous smile - and the season over, the family would once more return to the country, there to remain until the following year.[30]

In the development of a century of technological and commercial advance, the new authority and growing prestige of

business interest in society at large, clearly produced a plutocratic element in Society. Although this could entail the social rise of some individuals of intelligence and taste, as Lady Dorothy is otherwise willing to acknowledge, a more characteristic appraisal is in the negative recognition of a materialistic impact on Society. "What is the life of the rich man of to-day?....His expenses are in all probability enormous - a wife whose extravagance he is too indolent to check, children who also spend largely, houses, hotels, motors, pictures, and other works of art, and very likely in addition to all of these, most costly of all, a yacht....Such individuals have changed the whole standard of living, and imported the bustle of the Stock Exchange into the drawing rooms of Mayfair."[31] In Under Five Reigns (1910) Lady Dorothy elaborates;

> The conquest of the West End by the City has brought about a complete change in tone, for whereas in former days little was heard of stocks and shares, money making...has become an ordinary subject of conversation....Many of the old school regarded anything but serous investments with extreme suspicion....All this however, is now ancient history, and a large part of so-called Society - women as much as men - spend their time eagerly watching for what they hope may prove to be a good thing.[32]

In the seeming maelstrom of these changes in practice and tone, the intimacy and sense of material proportion in the Society of Lady Dorothy's experience, has been seemingly replaced by a swollen entity increasingly indiscriminate in form. In her Reminiscences, Lady Dorothy remembering the club-like familiarity of London Society in recent years, suggests "Everyone knew exactly who everybody else was, and its was extremely difficult - nay, almost impossible - for a

stranger to obtain a place until credentials had been carefully examined and discussed. Mere Wealth was no passport."[33] Inasmuch as late Victorian Society had been characterised by the leadership of a cultivated salon culture, Lady Dorothy accounts for its constituting ingredient, in contrast to Edwardian circumstances, in the following form, "In the old days Society was...for the most part fairly, though not extravagantly, dowered with the good things of the world, it had no ulterior object beyond intelligent, cultured, and dignified enjoyment, money making being left to another class which from time to time supplied a selected recruit to this 'corps d'élite'."[34]

Although as a representative of her generation Lady Dorothy Nevill is usually among the most vocal in considering these 'negative' consequences of change perceived at the turn of the century - Lady Dorothy's sensibilities are echoed, if more restrainedly, in comparable sources. Lady St. Helier, in reference to the accelerating signs of change in the 1870s writes, "The plutocratic element which was beginning to assert itself by marriage and other channels in Society, while adding to its wealth, had certainly not made it more agreeable or more entertaining."[35] In her Reminiscences of 1909, the Countess of Cardigan and Lancastre laments the apparent transformation this Society, and its setting had undergone. In a chapter on racing recollections, Lady Cardigan complains that;

> After my marriage, Lord Cardigan and I always went to the different meetings, and generally met all our friends; among others, Lord and Lady Westmorland, Lord and Lady Hastings, The Duchess of Beaufort...and Prince Batthyany. Newmarket was quite a charming rendezvous of Society then, so different from the mixed crowd that goes there nowadays.[36]

In the 'L'envoi conclusion to her Recollections, the author adds;

> What strikes me most forcibly I think, is the vanishing London of the present day, and the total disappearance of its once familiar landmarks. The Society I knew is also vanishing. The day of the salon, political and literary, is over, and the mixed gatherings now called great receptions are very unlike the real thing that I can remember...they lack the exclusiveness of the Victorian era. Nowadays money shouts, and birth and breeding whisper.[37]

In her Reminiscences of 1909 Lady Randolph Churchill, evoking the great salon culture of eighteenth century Paris, which earlier, had had its equivalent in English public life, then decries; "How remote seem these brilliant 'causeries' from the caravansaries of the "Mrs. Leo Hunters" of to-day, where crowds jostle each other on the staircase, often not getting any further, and where bridge replaces conversation."[38] In Memories of Sixty Years (1917) the Earl of Warwick, suggesting the proportional comforts of his youth and in the lives of his parents, plaintively recalls; "In my day it sufficed to be an agreeable young man, well-mannered, equipped with a modest independence and real skill at some sport, to have the very best of times."[39] In 1924, recalling his own youth and clearly mindful of social changes brought about by, and consolidated with the Edwardian era, Lord Ernest Hamilton writes in Forty Years On:

> Society of course was very small and very clearly defined. Everyone knew everyone else in that exclusive circle, and as well might the Pope of Rome have tried to enter Mecca, as the self-made millionaire to find a footing in that sacred throng. Although many within the guarded gates were very rich, there was no glaring parade of wealth. Tastes were very simple.[40]

In the volume Cruel Month (1945) of his autobiography Left Hand, Right

Hand, Sir Osbert Sitwell confirms the development of Society's more expansive appreciation of materialism. In describing the appeal of the great Society portraitist John Singer Sargent, Sir Osbert suggests that the artist suited the Edwardian age to a nicety in portraying the material manifestation of outward and superficial effects. His concern with tilted top hats, cravats and fur coats of the men and flashing tiaras and jewels of the ladies did not however, compromise his appeal for his sitters. The author writes; "To the whole age which he interpreted, these values were true values, and so could not be resented; sables, ermine, jewels, bath-salts, rich food....Sargent remains the painter of Peche Melba, the artist who exalted this dish to the rank of an ideal."[41]

It might well be thought that an impossible contradiction presents itself in the example of seemingly varying views. Above cited references have already established the characterising presence of an aristocratic culture on London's Society scene in the late Victorian-Edwardian period. In her discussion for example, of the great political and social hostesses, the Countess of Warwick refers to their lively leadership and duration until the period of the First World War. In the first volume of her autobiography (1920) as well as in More or Less About Myself (1933), the Countess of Oxford and Asquith, the wife of the Liberal prime minister, marries the Victorian and Edwardian ages to the general attributes of public decorum, graceful behaviour, talented men and women, and the proportional virtues of an intimate less hectic social life. However in the Edwardian phase, authors also identify the pronounced effects of

Society's 'parvenu' infiltration. Conflicting references to the discernible character and tone of Society indicate the extent to which its discernible features were themselves becoming diversified. This may be seen to largely explain the equivocal reaction of Society toward the publicity factor of the "professional beauties", reflected in subsequent memoir references. The expansion of Society into a numerically larger entity had brought with it the increasing inability of its members to react or operate knowingly or otherwise, with the same coherence that would have been known to the 'select circle' of the 1860s. Memoir recollections therefore reflect an experience in the process of adaptation. At any time in its urban history, London Society could be defined in one of two connected ways; firstly, as a caste-like membership performing certain group activities or, secondly; as a set of certain activities performed by participants, whatever their association. In the Victorian epoch, Society was governed by an essentially caste association giving simultaneous expression to both defining forms. The phenomenon of the parvenu had always been known to Society but his adaptation and assimilation had, in the past been a comparatively gradual process. The enlargement of Society in the closing phase of the nineteenth century proved exceptional for its accelerated pace. Society had begun to embody the 'mix' of its aristocratic core increasingly set in a growing sea of socially broadening associations. In this context of relative experience and subjectivity of memory, such changes as those relating to the emergence of new wealth, may perhaps be likened to stray paint drops on a large historical canvas; depending on the perspective of the

viewer, they might be all but invisible barely disrupting the rich setting of pattern and design; or conversely, once recognised, glaring scars that ruin the purity of what once was whole.

This is not to say, that the evaluating recognition of change where evident, is always necessarily negative. The regretting view of the generation of the mid-Victorians, exemplified in such audible voices as Lady Dorothy Nevill, was the view of those necessarily near the close of life and very aware of changes in Society's composition and tone that appeared to mock the experience of their own example. The generations of their children and grandchildren however, were in part, necessarily the product of the late Victorian setting in which - having taken up the reins of life - they were still capable of being influenced and formed. They could therefore be that much more accepting of Society's climate of adaptation to which they felt little emotional need to compare an earlier time and its necessarily different circumstances of life. A typical example of this may be seen in Forty Years On in which Lord Ernest Hamilton welcomes the democratising expansion of Society as an agent which had helped liberate it from the once exaggerated formalities and insular etiquette of its members.[42] However, even in this, Lord Ernest can not entirely deny the legacy of his inheritance adding; "Of course, in certain directions, there have been irreparable losses...losses of the sacred customs and traditions which moulded the lives of preceding generations....For all these vanished glories and joys we shed the sad tear...."[43] A note such as this, of poignant reflection, articulates positive as well as negative aspects of the phenomenon and effects

of change. It represents a common feature in memoir allusions and illustrates first and foremost, the extent to which memoir authors admittedly acknowledge the passing of a distinctive era of experience.

With the close of the Edwardian period, Society had come to no longer embody simply, the small community of a landed aristocratic homogeneity. It had begun to reflect a wider, less easily defined membership, including the upper echelons of a forceful middle class culture. A comparable 'sign-post' indicative of change, as well as of Society's ability to adapt, may be seen in the 'careers' of two Society figures and memoir authors, the sisters Lady Duff Gordon and Elinor Glyn.

Lucy and Elinor Sutherland were born into a somewhat itinerant but self-consciously old family tradition. Their father was the last descendant of the Lord Duffus who had been a follower of the 'Old Pretender' Prince James Stuart, while their mother was the daughter of one Col. Thomas Saunders and Fanny Wilcocks, daughter of Sir John Wilcocks of Dublin. Lucy and Elinor's parents had both been raised in the colonial Ontario of the 1850s to which their parents had emigrated, and where their families had preserved a community of relatively cultivated and aristocratic associations. As a civil engineer Douglas Sutherland travelled with his bride and hoped of amassing a fortune - with which he had planned to re-claim an old family title and in which he proved unsuccessful. Lucy was born in London and Elinor a year later in Jersey on dates unspecified in their memoirs but at a point in the late 1860s or early 1870s. After the premature death of their father, the sisters and their mother

returned to Canada and to the 'ranch' of their maternal grandparents. There they imbibed the values of an aristocratic sense of self-regard, social discipline and community duty which were arguably, all the more sharpened by the comparative hardships of the setting. The widow Sutherland re-married one Mr. Kennedy and returned to the British Isles with her daughters. Mrs. Kennedy's marriage proved to be unsuccessful and after her husband's thankful death in 1869, settled in London with Elinor who in turn was married in 1892. Lucy had married a few years earlier in the later 1880s. Both marriages, if not spectacular were wholly desirable by way of being appropriate and conventional. The husbands were of 'good family' and afforded for their brides, as only marriage so often could, the means for a young lady to achieve broadened social experience and a place in Society.

In these social origins and circumstances of marriage, the Sutherland sisters may, thus far, be regarded as unexceptional. Although marriage was the prescribed norm for virtually all women of every social strata, Lucy and Elinor's experience was typical of many 'gentle-women' particularly in the more anonymous corners of Society's life. In instances where penury difficulties might have existed, marriage was the recognised and familiar solution with Society as a 'reward' or 'compensation' if, and when such marriages were otherwise not wholly welcomed or successful in themselves. In the context of the nineteenth century's rigid codes with reference to the proprieties of social discipline and 'observable' niceties of public morality - the usual fate of female individuals without private means could often involve the following scenario. These figures might leave

but not divorce their husbands, accept the charity of some senior relation, be regarded as a tragic figure in an atmosphere of tastefully retiring reticence and forever compensate for the social embarrassment of a failed marriage. The marriage vows themselves would remain insoluble, both in terms of the dictates of the Church of England, but also, perhaps more meaningfully, as a foundation in the class discipline and coherence of the social system. Divorces in Society remained a rarity into the 1930s and were difficult and costly to attain. In the late nineteenth century divorced persons could not be presented at Court or gain entry to the Royal Enclosure of Ascot. Ladies who were divorced were considered to be "not quite nice."[44] It was however in the deviation from these established patterns of convention and practice that the Sutherland sisters became unique and ultimately indicative of Society's increasing susceptibility to changes of influence and attitude. To this, they contributed in the pursuit of 'professional careers' in dress-making and novel-writing that, in the earlier social context of the mid-nineteenth century would have been as inconceivable as it would have seemed repugnant.

Lucy's marriage failed after five years, a victim of her husband's chronic alcoholism. In electing to divorce him and left alone with a baby daughter, Lucy and her mother were financially very compromised in the expensive divorce proceedings. As of the early 1890s, having always made her own dresses including one or two as a kindness for friends, Lucy began to do so professionally. What was perhaps more remarkable than even her subsequent meteoric success

was the precedent such an innovation entailed. In her memoirs of 1932 Lucy, by then Lady Duff Gordon and professionally known as "Lucille", writes;

> I shall never forget the wall of prejudice which I had to storm. To begin with I was one of the first women, if not actually the very first of my class, to go into the business world, and I lost caste terribly in doing it at the start of my venture. Old family friends came and solemnly warned me and my mother of the utter impossibility of my going into "trade"...the very word was spoken with baited breath, as though it was only one shade better than going in for crime. I was told that nobody would know me if I "kept a shop"; it would be bad enough for a man but for a woman it would mean social ruin.[45]

Insomuch as Lady Duff Gordon herself, can account for her subsequent success and fame in both social as well as professional terms, her memoirs narrate the theme of a 'rags to riches' ascent accredited to ability and fortitude of character. She recalls the initial drudgery of designing and making dresses for the occasional women who employed her, and her anticipation that, by word of mouth, other clients might follow. She initially had no advertisement beyond the gossip of such women who spread, as the author describes it, 'the pathetic story of a young mother trying to earn a living for herself and her daughter'.[46] Her credibility among satisfied customers established itself. One or two ladies who had admired her clothes in the past commissioned tea gowns and were delighted with the result. Her first public professional success was achieved in an amateur charity performance organised by Lord Rosslyn, the Countess of Warwick's stepfather. The dresses were much admired and were attributed to her in the programme.[47] Lady Duff Gordon subsequently

designed her sister's wedding dress eliciting favourable comment and further orders ensued, including the dress for the wedding of Sir Ernest Cassel's daughter Maud to Wilfred Ashley in 1901.[48] There were also the seasonal rush orders for presentation dresses at Court. Despite her class origins, her professional career was soon assured. The extent to which she transcended even this to become once again, not only 'known to Society' but indeed feted as one of its stars is suggested in a memoir passage. As Lady Duff Gordon writes; "Gradually the new venture which had been regarded by so many of mother's friends as a lamentable eccentricity on my part came to be accepted as an established fact, and the women whom I had fitted in my workrooms in the morning were eager to have me as a guest in their homes at night...."[49] In the early Edwardian period feminine Society appeared 'en masse' at the sumptuous show room of 17 Hanover Square for what became the first fashion show, complete with beautiful models, a parading 'runway' and mood or theme-names for the various dresses. Among the excited audience were Princess Alice Countess of Athlone, Lily Langtry, the Duchess of Westminster and Margot Asquith. The afternoon proved a brilliant success and was regarded as something of a phenomenon.

Lady Duff Gordon and her 'venture' were a social success because she had become fashionable and this in turn had been engendered by the patronage of certain ladies among Society's leadership. These had come to include Adeline, Duchess of Bedford, Mrs. Freeman Thomas, (afterwards Lady Willingdon), Mrs. Willie James, Lily Langtry, and perhaps most loyally, Margot Asquith. It was

however in this simple fact of her fashionability that Lady Duff Gordon's experience was indicative of subtle climate changes in social influences and perception. Forty years earlier it would not have been imaginable that a quality of sophistication, elegance or fashion could be associated with the public act of either buying, or viewing dresses presented for sale. These qualities could have been associated with the presentation of a dress in its intended setting as a visual "fait accompli' but the act of purchase was a functional procedure, perhaps enjoyable, but nontheless contained within a functional context - both physically as well as socially. As Lady Duff Gordon writes; "nobody had thought of developing the social side of choosing clothes, of serving tea and imitating the setting of a drawing room. Trying on, or selecting clothes, was a thing of as much secrecy as fitting a wooden leg might be expected to be."[50]

In a sibling parallel, Lady Duff Gordon's sister Elinor Glyn shared a comparable passage of experience. The latter's novel writing, which had begun as a recreation during a period of illness and convalescence became, with subsequent publication a 'success de scandal' in Society. In her memoir Romantic Adventure Elinor Glyn's references to her undertaking a literary career echo her sister's earlier predicament. In order to contest financial pressures in paying her husband's debts and effectively helping to provide for her family, the author decided to write professionally but not without a certain Society censure. Mrs. Glyn writes; "In the first place, I was almost the first Society woman to become a novelist, and this was an innovation not well looked upon...."[51] Her novels furthermore, involved

plot scenarios of an amorous nature based on and reflective of Society settings. This was inevitably regarded, particularly, by senior elements in Society, as being all too suggestive of publicity and indiscretion, as well as of immorality.

Elinor Glyn's first novel The Visits of Elizabeth first published in serial form in the "World" in the late 1890s and then as a book, dealt with the theme of a young woman's thoughts and perceptions of Society written in a diary format. With reference to its public reception Mrs. Glyn writes; "One or two old ladies wrote to the papers and said it was shockingly immoral, but they were answered superbly by a wit who signed himself "Toby Belch" and my friends were all delighted with it."[52] In the "World", The Visits of Elizabeth had been published anonymously and could therefore be subsequently regarded as a playful exercise. Society was intrigued as to the identity of the author, as he or she obviously was intimate with the material. As Elinor Glyn explains, her decision to make subsequent use of her own name was first carefully considered and advice was solicited from friends and supporters, including the Countess of Warwick.[53] Although her moral adoption of a professional stance met with a correspondingly more censorious approach on the part of elements in Society - the meaningfulness of any damaging or lasting penalty can not be discerned.

The extent to which Lady Duff Gordon and Elinor Glyn ultimately were not 'socially ruined' by their descent into professionalism and trade are indicative of the changing of tone and character in Society life. Their significance was not in setting an

example followed immediately by hundreds of Society ladies nor in their conquering social resistance and winning Society's unqualified and total approbation. These factors are in any event, arguable beyond the accurate measurement of confirmation or denial. The tone of their respective memoirs very much suggest the 'memory of the battle won', the breaking down of initial and ultimately inconsequential resistance and prejudice on the road to triumph. One may confidently imagine that even while earnest friends of her mother's generation had warned Lucy Duff Gordon of the social disaster that would be visited upon her, the social scene was already prepared, knowingly or otherwise, for a different reaction. The socially more informal sense of ease with which Edwardian Society evidently embraced the innovations of fashion and attitudinal approach typified in the career of Lady Duff Gordon; suggest that Society was adapting its convention-bound earlier Victorian character to an atmosphere of change and experimentation. As Lady Duff Gordon writes; "The coronation dresses for the Edwardian beauties hearlded a more lavish, less restricted era. People relaxed...women began to spend more and think more about their clothes."[54] Although certain senior elements were apt to be disapproving, Society was clearly beginning to speak with a diversified voice and one in which the senior influence of aging Dowagers could evidently not impose nor represent a collective unity of response. When Lady Duff Gordon introduced a new generation of silken, uncorsetted underclothes, many were shocked at what they regarded as an almost licentious luxury, but such a legitimate figure as Adeline, Duchess of Bedford was among the first to celebrate this

more comfortable and humanly natural development; the author adding, "I never heard that her virtue suffered in any way through this departure from Victorianism."[55]

It is true however, that one consequence of explicit censure was made manifest in the inability to appear at Court (although 'before her career' Elinor Glyn was presented in 1898). Throughout the nineteenth century people eligible for acceptance in society were eligible for presentation at Court. Indeed this presentation was both the privilege if not the actual definition of membership in Society - although in the homogeneous and aristocratic environment of the mid-century, this nicety was regarded as an 'understood thing'. The practice was, that outside of the dominating presence of the aristocracy, upper gentry and senior clergy, people in the theatre, trade, or business were not permitted.[56] In the 1860s, bankers such as Child, Coutts, Cocks and Drummond were the only exceptions. Among the law, barristers of good family were received, but not solicitors.[57] In the memoir allusions of Lady Duff Gordon and Elinor Glyn the exclusion from Court is however, significantly not seen as indicative of either the spirit or consequence of meaningful social censure. All her career, Lady Duff Gordon enjoyed the affectionate patronage of several members of the Royal Family. One may conclude that the handicap of non-eligibility at Court had begun to cease to correspond to a legitimate majority sense of moral conviction or social disapproval. In any event, the case examples of Lady Duff Gordon and Elinor Glyn confirm that their 'place in Society' was only marginally affected. Beyond the patronage and admittedly formidable resistance

of Society's dowager ladies, memoir references testify to the continuity of the sister's Society associations and practices. They still retained any number of aristocratic friends; were still invited to dine at their dinner-tables and join their country-house parties; they still travelled abroad and continued to cultivate aristocratic and royal relationships. Their references to daughters 'now grown up', note in parenthesis, the titled prefixes that denote, intentionally, or otherwise, the 'good marriages' they later secured....'my dear little Esme' (now Lady Halsbury)....My daughter Margot (now Lady Davson)...my son when he was at Eton', and so forth.

CHAPTER THREE

It is useful to clarify that this chapter is concerned with some among the more evident aspects of Society's continuity in the inter-war period. It was in response to the spiritual and material privations of the First War World that Society attempted to 'return to' a pre-war precedent of material comfort and unrestricted enjoyment, resurrected in the structure of the Season and its ritual round of activities. The social consequences of the war are specifically considered in the context of the Fourth chapter, however something of these aspects must inevitably be alluded to, or be implied, in this chapter's concern with the modes of continuity in Society's inter-war practices and processes.

The consideration of these social and psychological processes can sometimes be difficult to differentiate from the often more familiar instances of departure and change that have historically come to characterise the period. For example, an enthusiasm for dancing and other forms of revelry while initially operating within a largely traditional Society framework nonetheless may be seen as having come to demonstrate a spirit of innovation in their character and tone. In this sense the argumentative concerns of chapter three may be appreciated on the one hand, as an introduction to the more commanding theme of change in the inter-war phase; but on the other hand also as a means of observing Society's capacity to absorb and adapt while it still could, instances of innovation and disharmony into convention and consensus.

It is in the echo of both certain attitudinal responses to experience as well as in the traditional structure and ritualised context of London Society life, that a theme of community may be identified in characteristic memoir references to the 1920s and 1930s.

Memoir allusions that suggest a sense of continuity in a shared Society experience, are almost entirely focused in the memory of a club-like comraderie and playfulness, with London and the Season still recalled as an intimate stage for seemingly exclusive association. Within the context of this urban environment a particular awareness of certain aristocratic fixtures and figures, including Society's hostesses, largely characterise memoir references, as well as an appreciation for the politesse, social subtlety and leadership their presence on the scene entailed. Present as well, in relevant memoir allusion is the indication that certain former aspects of change in Society's Victorian context, have now been absorbed and adapted into the evolving social climate.

The social experience of London Society in the period following the end of the 1914-1918 war, despite whatever degree of innovation and change with which it might otherwise be associated, nonetheless produced modes of continuity and community. At its structural or organisational level, Society re-established its pre-war character. Memoir allusions clearly identify the return of the London season and with it, the universal desire that the material restrictions and emotional hardships of the war be gladly cast off. The first seasons after the war proved a sumptuous effort to resurrect pre-war standards in Society entertainment and functions. It is perhaps

appropriate to first note this spirit of revival with regard to the monarchy. As titular Head of State, King George V, having ascended the throne in 1910, continued to reign as the fountain-head of honour and at the apex of Society with the charismatic young Prince of Wales as its tacit leader - the role his grandfather, Edward VII had enjoyed in the Victorian epoch. The personal sobriety and modest appetites of George V did not prevent his acceptance of a stately munificence in court ceremonial, and in this, he was of like-mind with the social impulses of Society, if not the nation at large. In the diaries of Sir Henry "Chips" Channon, an invaluable document to the social and political eddies of London life in the inter-war years, the author describes an early manifestation of this effort to return to the grandeur of pre-war days in references to the state visit of the King and Queen of Belgium to London in 1921; "...the highlight of the State Visit of the King and Queen of the Belgians was the Court Ball at Buckingham Palace, where it seemed that the French Court of Louis XIV had been revived when the King and Queen danced a quadrille with their royal guests. A dancing master had been engaged the week before to rehearse the Dukes of Northumberland and Abercorn for their parts in the dance."[1] A subsequent Court Ball during the visit of the King and Queen of Rumania was equally as grand; "...the Foreign Office people and courtiers were in white and green and gold. At about ten, the royalties entered and bowed to the Corps Diplomatique, whose bench is on the right of the throne."[2] Even Sir Henry's reference to a 1923 Court Levee, a comparatively prosaic function, intended in the main, for junior officers with new promotions, suggests the thankful appeal

of the Court's social revival:

> It is a gorgeous male sight a levee...much preening and red and plumes and pomp and tightly fitting tunics and splendid English faces....Suddenly I heard Lord Cromer call out 'Mr. Channon to be presented'. I advanced a few paces with as much dignity as possible and, in front of me, on a dais surrounded by the Court and the Diplomatic Corps, was the King. He seemed to have something oriental about him, something almost of a Siamese potentate, and I bowed very low. He dropped his head, as if to grunt, and I backed two paces, and then turned and walked away.[3]

In his memoirs A King's Story (1951) the Duke of Windsor suggests as well, something of the palatial decorum of comparable gatherings with reference to a Diplomatic reception as "an impressive spectacle, this stately procession of ambassadors, ministers, councillors, secretaries, and attaches of embassies in Court dress or uniform, with their wives with trains and feathers, the men making their bows before the Queen, the women their curtsies."[4]

Just as the Court again resumed its pre-war role, so too as memoir references indicate, did Society itself. Not only were royal receptions, balls, garden parties and presentations revived, but the season itself soon re-established its ritual calendar. The first Derby after the war was followed by a festive Ascot, both of which broke all attendance records. There was polo at the London clubs while yachts were refitted for Cowes week. Tennis at Wimbledon and professional cricket again became fashionable as well as sporting attractions. Hunting lodges in the north of England and Scotland were readied for their absentee landlords. Hound packs, depleted or disbanded during the war, were re-formed.[5] The opera and ballet seasons returned, with Dame Nellie Melba at Covent Garden and the

Russian Imperial Ballet released for continental tours after the Revolution, albeit now without its Imperial patronage and prefix.[6]

In the early 1920s, London society represented a return to an almost Edwardian assertion of comfortable ease and material display. The satellite system of London's great houses despite the hardships that had affected many of their noble families, threw off the dust-sheets and re-opened to all their pre-war splendour. Their imposing locations continued to create the same stately stage setting for gracious entertaining that they had afforded in the Victorian era, and continued to be indeed legendary for their various charms and features. The gardens of Devonshire House and Landsdowne House together stretched from Piccadilly to Berkeley Square; Crewe House, off Curzon Street, was famous for its particularly fine ballroom; Spencer House and Bridgewater House, overlooked Green Park and were prized for their exquisite furniture. In Park Lane, overlooking Hyde Park, a constellation of houses included, Brook House, left to Lady Louis Mountbatten by her grandfather Sir Ernest Cassel; Dudly House and Grosvenor House, home of the Duke of Westminster; there was as well, Dorchester House and Londonderry House. The eleventh Duke of Bedford maintained two houses in Belgrave Square and kept both fully staffed, but only stayed there twice a year when he visited the Zoological Society.[7] In frequent instances, memoir allusions cite the understandable appeal of the social life that these aristocratic settings could dispense to their visitors, however grand or anonymous. In the spring of 1921, as Prince of Wales, the Duke of Windsor later recalled;

> I went to parties at many of these fine houses, where formal dinners were still served on gold and silver plates by footmen in the family livery with knee breeches, white stockings, buckled shoes, and powdered hair. One of the most striking of these parties was given by Lady Wimborne at Wimborne House in Arlington Street, where several hundred guests, including King Alfonso XIII of Spain, danced under the romantic light shed by thousand of candles in massive bronze dore chandeliers.[8]

In a letter to Evelyn Waugh, Lady Pansy Lamb, remembering her 'coming out' as a debutante in 1922 writes that; "though neither smart nor rich I went to three dances in historic houses, Norfolk House, Dorchester House, Grosvenor House...."[9] In Society, certainly among those who could be recognised as undeniably 'smart and rich', entertaining could remain as luxurious as it was carefully considered and executed. In the Diaries of Sir Henry Channon, the author's refined and somewhat Proustian sensibilities unapologetically assert his delight with Society's restored world of epicurean pleasure, privilege and rank. In his own Diaries, the erstwhile diplomat and parliamentarian Harold Nicholson playfully depicts the image of Channon in the early 1930s, Hanoverian in splendid self-assurance and cocooned in material beauty.

> Oh my God how rich and powerful Lord Channon has become! There is his house in Belgrave Square next door to Prince George, Duke of Kent....The house is all Regency upstairs with very carefully draped curtains and Madame Recamier sofas and wall-paintings. Then the dining-room is entered through an orange lobby and discloses itself suddenly as a copy of the blue room of the Amalienburg near Munich - baroque and rococo and what-ho and oh-no-no and all that. Very fine indeed.[10]

This was Channon's verdict as well on an evening in which he played host to both King Edward VIII and Prince Paul of Yugoslavia, Channon

pronounced that his dining room "looked a cascade of beauty, for the table seemed literally to swim with Dresden."[11]

These memoir glimpses of certain enduring features in the structure and substance of London's Society life in the 1920s, indicate an apparent continuity in both practice and decorum. The revival of Court ceremonial at the close of the war re-established it once again as an integral, if formal ingredient in the long established routine of Society and public life in London. The public role of the monarchy did not of course embody the total experience, nor even always engage the interest of Society as a whole, but the Crown's perennial presence on the social scene represented a fixed point in the order of things. Memoir allusions to the very existence of the Court, and the seeming timelessness of its functions, can suggest in and of themselves, the continuity in both structure and decorum of this formal aspect of Society life. Sir Henry Channon's impressed references to the deliberate ceremonial of King George V's first courts after the war echo a long legacy of comparable descriptions in the canon of English letters, including such comparatively recent authors as Henry Greville and Sir Almeric Fitzroy. These correspond to the Victorian period in which the purely constitutional, moral, and ceremonial aspect of the monarchy was consolidated. As suggested, these allusions can often evoke an appreciative sense of the inherent order and dignity the Crown made manifest, and which in turn, it could be thought to promote and foster. Similarly, the Duke of Windsor's allusion to the particularly aristocratic ingredient of London's great territorial houses is also a theme, richly cited in the histories of

Society's life.

In further evidence of a quality of continuity and community, memoir references to the 1920s can also suggest an intimate and familial aspect in Society's shared experience. In describing London during these years, the celebrated fashion arbiter and social figure Diana Vreeland writes in her memoirs D.V. (1984) "In 1926, before we lived in London, we'd come over to England for a visit. Now London in 1926 was a big, good-natured town - it ran the world don't forget. There wasn't the mixture of blood and nationalities that London has today and which I find terribly exciting. In those days, you were either Cockney or you were a West Ender - period."[12] In an equally breezy tone, the American stage and screen actress Tallulah Bankhead, in her own recollections (1952) also describes London in terms of having been a 'big good-natured town'. The reader is left with a sense of manageable scale, proportion, and of mutual recognition among participants. As with Victorian Society memory, titled personalities dominate the author's recollections while interesting, humorous and occasionally provocative anecdotes of human encounter and consequence, evoke the appreciative sense of English politesse, 'sang-froid' and social cohesion. Miss Bankhead writes; "The English were great ones for throwing charity balls, garden parties, costume charades. At a drop of a Homburg all of London's 'jeunesse doree' would tog themselves out in masquerade. At these routs I might be Jean Borotra, Cleopatra, [or] one of the Medicis."[13] In celebration of herself, the author continues;

> Remember Kimbolton....It is the ancestral home of the Duke of Manchester. What was I doing there? I was the house

> guest of Lord Mandeville, son of the Duke....My name was readily identifiable from Soho to the Strand, from Limehouse to Chequers. Beaverbrook used to say that there were only two people in the realm who could be identified by any costermonger on hearing their given name - Steve and Tallulah. Steve was Donoghue - great English jockey. In headlines and on sandwich signs, the newspapers found "Tallulah" a satisfying and sufficient tag. Anything said or done by the Prince of Wales, Bernard Shaw or Tallulah rated page one, continued Max [Beaverbrook].[11]

These images of London life in the 1920s do indeed imply evident qualities of continuity and community. They include the continued presence on the scene of titled participants engaged in familiar activities of group association. London itself has clearly retained an identifiable atmosphere of 'well-bred' friendliness that might easily be likened to an earlier time. However, present as well in these references is the indication of the adaptability that had effectively evolved yesteryear's instances of change into subsequent standards of accepted, or at least, tolerated normality. The advent, in the Victorian-Edwardian era of leading elements in the theatrical profession, as well as the phenomenon of publicity associated with the press, may now be seen as established features. In the period before the 1880s, the social notoriety of an actress might have been familiar to Society but Society would not, as a rule, have been the province in which she could have asserted herself. A 'bohemian' community of artists, thinkers and social originals, invariably expressive of a lack of conventionality, had always existed on the London scene, but this and Society's worlds had remained distinctly apart. In the eighties this had begun to change - Lily Langtry's gesture of going on the stage; the patronage of this effort by the Prince of Wales; the

gradual realisation on Society's part that such an innovation might be interpreted as merely a new exercise in feminine competitiveness and fashionable assertion; all these had helped produce the consequent fusion with society, of artistic London. The social experience and 'professional' careers of Lucy Duff Gordon and Elinor Glynn further confirmed the social changes that were taking place in the Edwardian scene. In this sense a figure such as Tallulah Bankhead might easily be regarded as a postwar benefactor of a more socially relaxed informality in Society's practices.

This is easily confirmed in Steps in Time (1959), the reminiscences of Fred Astaire, the great stage and screen dancer. Astaire and his sister Adele, like Bankhead and Vreeland found London, for all its enjoyment and adventure, to be ordered, genteel and polite. However, more significantly, they too were easily accepted, feted and welcomed into a casually democratic environment of country-house parties, night-club suppers and formal dinners. The brilliant success of the Astaire's London show "Stop Flirting" brought with it not only the patronage of an adoring public but in particular, the friendship of, among others, the Prince of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of York and Prince George, later Duke of Kent, who became a boon companion.[15] Indeed, the theatrical world's attachment to Society was realised in the potential for more formal 'rapprochement'. Whereas Tallulah Bankhead had 'played hard' but apparently refused those peers who had offered her marriage, Adele retired from the stage in 1931 to marry Lord Charles Cavendish, a younger son of the Duke of Devonshire. The Duchess did not entirely welcome this union and expressed little

confidence in it, for which reason she declined to sponsor her daughter-in-law at her first presentation at Court in June of 1932.[16] Although indeed Adele was soon accepted as a suitable if unique addition to the family, it remains in any event noteworthy that in the evolving if relaxed institutional relationships of the post-war setting, three somewhat unlikely people could claim a family bond to one another; Adele Astaire, Harold Macmillan and Kathleen Kennedy, a daughter of the American ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy - the first two having married children of the ninth Duke of Devonshire, while Kathleen married the heir to the tenth Duke.

In a comparable adaptation to change the phenomenon of publicity, which many among the Victorians had regarded as the intrusion of an encroaching bourgeois public - by the 1920s had become an indelible feature of life. By the 1920s a contending profusion of illustrated social and human interest magazines kept its readership apace with the fashionable activity of London's restored social high life. The "Tatler", the "Sporting and Dramatic", "The Graphic", and "The Sphere", supplied pictures of titled men and women at meets of the Quorn or the Pytchley, at Goodwood or Ascot, at the Eton and Harrow match, and at Cannes or Biarritz.[17] The increasingly personalised publicity interest in Society that had first asserted itself in the "professional beauties" was now an integral aspect of Society activity. In another above cited reference from her recollections, Miss Bankhead's celebration of her fame is largely associated with her being 'front page news' as someone who was known to all London and formally confirmed in the press to having known all London. Lord

Beaverbrook's echo of this remark is immediately familiar to the contemporary ear, suggestive of the extent to which attention by the press has become not merely an accepted, but sought after forum.

Inasmuch as one can measure Society's evolving character and form in the 1920's, adapting and incorporating observable features of evolution into a continuity of practice, the biographer Hugo Vickers has effectively evoked a sense and quality of the times in his life of Cecil Beaton. As the artistic and sensitive son of inartistic and suburban parents, Beaton's youthful anxieties vis-a-vis concerns of career, friendship, social status, and the allure of Society's world of seeming glamour, distinction and opportunity, furnish, in the study of this man, a means of appraising London social life in the inter-war period. Beaton's efforts to realise his social ambitions expressed themselves in a tireless and resourceful cultivation of publicity.[18] The objective in particular of advancing his mother's social position, transforming her from conventional housewife into aspiring hostess, as well as the orchestration of his sisters' appearances on the social scene, were the principle concerns of his interest. In a chapter entitled 'Anything for the Uprise', Vickers outlines Beaton's post-adolescent application to these tasks involving essentially the photographing of his mother and sisters and the sending of the results to such Society picture magazines as "The Tatler", the "Bystander" and "The Sketch". Beaton and his mother also participated in varieties of local charity and community committees in order to meet new people and broaden, in the well worn path of the social climber, the opportunity for further advancement.

The description of these and other stratagems convincingly suggest the restless image of anonymous middle-class matrons competing for the 'uprise' amidst the would-be 'drawing rooms' and 'evening receptions' of Hampstead or Bayswater. In its most disciplined and artfully successful manifestation Society remained for the aristocracy and upper middle class an ornamental vehicle, demonstrating the niceties of domestic civilisation and the 'fait accompli' of assured position. However at its 'fringes' Society's processes could now incorporate a wider, more diffused and less coherently focused 'group' experience and yet still come within the on-going designation of the increasingly questionable term 'Society'.

The adaptive shape of Society, reflecting its evolving ingredients is succinctly described by Sir George Arthur in A Septuagenarian's Scrap Book writing in 1933,

> It is not necessary to go back to a recorded Drawing-Room at Buckingham Palace when the company numbered forty, to recognise that Society...is to-day a system of concentric circles, the outer rings of which extend themselves round the whole circumference of Suburbia, while the innermost core is a little group of intimates immediately surrounding the Sovereign and his Consort.[19]

As has already been suggested, a discernible theme in memoir allusions to London Society life in the 1920s frequently evokes the continuity of an aristocratic ingredient. The historic adaptability of British society at large in successfully incorporating forces of either social or economic transformation, suggests that Society's apparatus to do the same - even under pressure- could not easily be rendered inadequate. London Society life had undergone the influences of innovation and change in a period bounded by the 1890s and the post-

war period of the 1920s. The generational regret of Victorians of the ilk of Lady Dorothy Nevill and the Countess of Cardigan identify what they understandably regarded as the disintegration of certain patrician standards of behaviour, discipline, and social tone. Yet these were features of life that may inevitably be attributed to a particular time and place. Society itself as an entity reflective of the nation's social and economic leadership, continued to endure, whatever its climatic alterations. The processes of assimilation and absorbtion, however taxed, had continued to operate. The undoubtedly apparent, if faceless swarms of new monied millionaires that Lady Dorothy Nevill had identified on the Edwardian scene, were in time themselves incorporated into the expanded social tapestry. The growing numbers of their families were peopled by children who could benefit from public school educations. This classical education in the time-honoured production of the 'English gentleman' had been expanded in the course of the nineteenth century to accommodate and incorporate the growing influence of an emergent 'upper middle class' culture. As one memoir describes the process in its Edwardian context; "Middle-class millionaires and struggling gentlefolk put their sons' names down for Eton soon after they are born, and send them on to Christ Church to acquire the Oxford manner and an acquaintance with the young peers, regarding the double acquisition and its entree into London drawing-rooms as the ultimate heritage of good fortune and parental care."[20] To whatever degree Society might have ceased to embody the specific authority of aristocratic landed wealth, once associated with various sensibilities of custom and practice, this

above cited memoir reference is indicative of the sense with which Society's aristocratic context had retained a powerful allure and prestige. In allowing, as always, for the subjective view-point and relative experience of memoir authors, Society references to the 1920s as evidenced, can echo the apparent continuity of a perceived sense of homogeneous friendliness and unique charm of shared experience. It is thus the case that an adept and alert observer like Diana Vreeland, can describe London in the 'twenties' in terms that echo the late Victorian scene of Lady Dorothy Nevill or the Countess of Warwick's experience. In the interlude, what may be regarded as having been transferred from the one social period to the next, is the survival of certain native concerns with concepts of continuity, tradition and legitimacy in subtleties of designation and definition. The adaptation of Society from a socially and homogeneous aristocracy to an expanded upper middle class composition was achieved with the conscious preservation and emulation of established forms and traditions.

By the 1920s, the extent to which Society had established its 'new' consensus, may be seen as expressed in a significant late-Edwardian or more specifically Georgian memoir allusion. In the reminiscences Intimacies of Court and Society by The Widow of a Diplomat (1912), the author effectively suggests an aristocratic quality of English uniqueness and familial ease that Society had preserved. The advent of new money is regarded as having been successfully absorbed into the over-riding qualities of Society's perceived prestige and charm. The author writes;

> London society to-day is undeniably affected by the democracy of riches, as is every society of Europe; but it is still a something pre-eminently worth while by men and women of brains and achievement, of charm and beauty, of wealth and lineage. And in spite of the fact that the state and splendour of the court of King Edward...were much in the hands of hosts and hostesses who came from the great Jewish banking houses of the Continent, from the United States, South Africa...yet London remained even then the one capital where it was aristocratic to be poor and equally fashionable to be respectable.[21]

In another passage the author continues that; "The oldest and most famous families of the unimpeachable record of lineage, the Almanach de Gotha, found London just as much to their liking, although success there had to be won individually; an ambassador or a foreign prince was sometimes less of a social figure than a diplomatic secretary or a captain in the Guards. Mere millionaires did not "arrive"...a Rothschild was a 'grand seigneur' perfected in the social graces before he became an intimate of the King."[22] However socially diffident or vulgar other millionaires may, or may not have been, such defects were, as already suggested, smoothed over with the passage of time and experience and existed not at all for their assimilated children and heirs.

For the social observer, both native and foreign, memoir allusions to the 1920s would seem to offer a delighted recognition of the English 'gentleman' as an immediately identifiable "type". Whether or not he now be a baronet or banker, he has retained for the observer certain attributes of social polish and self-assured ease. Authors such as Diana Vreeland and Tallulah Bankhead either admiringly or amusedly record the idiosyncrasies of the 'upper class' Englishman

in his environment. In the latter's case, various young noblemen are cited as socially self-possessed and complacent, as comfortably 'at home' in their urban setting as their grandfathers might well have been. With reference to the General Strike of 1926, Diana Vreeland writes:

> I've known the English. I've known their hearts and courage and their fascination and their conversation and their ways and means - the whole bit....What I remember best about the General Strike was motoring down to Maidenhead one day. We were in an open Bentley and I was sitting in front with the driver when a man jumped on the running board. "Don't be frightened madam," the man said. "It's quite all right. But may I suggest that perhaps you might...you see, we're just turning a bus over down the road, I thought you might be more comfortable if you made a slight detour." I've never forgotten it....I think that thoughtfulness and manners are everything.[23]

Perhaps the most prevalent indication of a theme of continuity and community in Society's form and character is evidenced in the memoir allusion to Society's hostesses. In characteristic memoir references to the hostesses of the inter-war period authors evoke an appreciative sense of both the leadership and social subtlety their calling necessitated. Their field of battle continued to be the candle-lit dinner table and the drawing room encounter, and in these graceful settings men and women of intelligence, talent and ambition could find a forum of either kindred spirit or stimulating opposition. Insomuch as perhaps any other subject of analysis, the hostesses of the 1920s and 1930s typify the inheritance and continuity of Society's form and character. They may now have come to reflect the legacy of mercantile wealth as much as of territorial aristocracy but nonetheless with Laura Corrigan filled the void left with the

departure of their patrician predecessors. In this, they represented a new substance, but poured into an old mould, with the result, producing a subtle blend or renewal as well as of continuity.

The often political association of the Victorian hostesses and their salon culture had effectively died with the first world war. The Marchioness of Londonderry was almost the sole exception. She was wife to the seventh Marquis and inherited the social mantle of the family on her mother-in-law's death in 1919. Londonderry House again became a center for the political luminaries of the day and where as many as fifteen hundred guests would gather on the eve of each Parliamentary session. Others among the aristocracy's great ladies in the twenties, the Duchesses of Portland, Beaufort Rutland, Devonshire, Buccleuch, Somerset or Richmond also entertained but not so readily as in the pre-war fashion. The mounting pressures of financial factors, increasingly a concern for the landed classes, as well as of indifference, opened the way to the inevitable rise of a socially more representative force in Society. This was realised in the dominance of a group of ladies who achieved their position not merely through unlimited funds but also with certain social qualities that had always been required by the Society hostess. In his autobiography, John Lehmann describes the necessary criteria;

> A great hostess and creator of a salon needs an unflagging curiosity about other people, a flair for making them feel at home, or at least stimulated in her circle, almost unlimited time to organise her entertainments and to devote herself to the pursuit and domestication of those rising celebrities her shrewdly selective eye has marked down....[24]

Among the most familiar of the inter-war hostesses was Mrs.

Ronald Greville, the illegitimate daughter of a Scottish brewer who had married a courtier friend of Edward VII, the Hon. Ronald Greville. Throughout her career Mrs. Greville was subject to 'mixed reviews' in which even the affectionate verdict acknowledged her obvious snobbery. Among the less than affectionate, Harold Nicolson referred to her as "nothing more than a fat slug filled with venom...."[25] The photographer and stage designer Cecil Beaton described her as "a galumphing, greedy snobbish old toad...who did nothing for anybody except the rich."[26] It eventually transpired that this was not entirely the case, for despite her acerbic temperament, which was often spiteful as well as highly and baldly competitive, she was frequently and anonymously generous to deserving charities. Memoir allusions can also attest to the forcefulness of her personality as its own charismatic agent for many of those who were drawn to her. Not unlike the Ladies Waldegrave and Molesworth before her, both of whom had been born into lower middle-class families, Mrs. Greville was not hindered by her origins. She kept two houses, one on Charles Street, Mayfair, and the other, Polesden Lacy.[27] Mrs. Greville's social 'speciality' was thought to be royalty and beneath gilt encrusted ceilings she entertained various members of the Royal family as well as the monarchs of Spain, Greece, and Egypt. Her hospitality was famed for its opulence and comfort. As with the hostesses of old, memoir allusion to their characters, abilities, vanities and proclivities, often suggest the wonder of worlds artfully complete onto themselves. Such a culture could inevitably furnish its participants and observers with a wealth in usually affectionate but

always attentive analysis. The 'milieu' of the hostesses was at once both privileged and rarefied as well as intimately human and universal - the human comedy in miniature, however lush the setting. In his memoirs Osbert Sitwell recalls an evening that was like "jazz night at the Palladium....All the butlers were drunk - since Maggie was ill - bobbing up every minute during dinner to offer the Duchess of York whisky."[28] Mrs. Greville continued to entertain until the second world war. During these years her Charles Street parties might number from ten to sixty guests at dinner with any number of these titled and with her beloved royalty the usual 'piece de resistance'.[29] Mrs. Greville once remarked to Beverley Nichols, the Society columnist that "one uses up 'so' many red carpets in a season!"[30]

In almost legendary rivalry with Mrs. Greville were the other most prominent of the hostesses, Emerald Cunard and Laura Corrigan. Lady Cunard came to specialise in a socially more relaxed but no less discriminating entertainment, with a particular accent on guests of intellectual and artistic distinction. Her stately house in Grosvenor Square provided an almost magical setting for her salons. Sir Henry Channon expansively describes something of its allure, being where;

> ...the great met the gay, that statesmen consorted with Society, and writers with the rich - and where, for a year [1936] the drama of Edward VIII was enacted. It had a rococo atmosphere - conversation in the candle-light, the elegance, the bibliots and the books; more, it was a rallying point for most of London society; only those who were too stupid to amuse the hostess, and so were not invited, were disdainful....Everyone else flocked, if they had a chance. To some it was the most consummate bliss even to cross her threshold. She is as kind as she is witty, and her curious mind, and the lilt of wonder in her voice when she says something calculatedly absurd, are quite unique.[31]

In the friendly chaos of Lady Cunard's gatherings, her guests were encouraged to give voice to their varying talents and charms, with the art of conversation a subtle and much enjoyed choreography of rhetorical skill and playfulness. Memoir allusions and diary entries confirm Sir Henry's delighted reference to the brilliant frivolity of Lady Cunard's conversation as the emblem of this hostess' mastery over her luncheon and dinner tables. In these settings, a self-consciously exquisite sense of personality play and inter-action was cherished by her guests, many of whom, like the musician and conductor, Thomas Beecham, enjoyed her life-long patronage. In his own recollection Sir Harold Acton recalled;

> When nothing mattered but the purist art, whose essence was all round us like the fragrance of cassia...Lady Cunard had created an ideal setting for a synthesis of the arts. One could abandon oneself joyfully, inhaling the luxuriance of sight and soul until one was lapped into silence. The pretentiousness that invaded the other 'literary' houses was absent; there was never a false note....Life at Grosvenor Square was thoroughly spent, not economised.[32]

The Society columnist Beverley Nichols suggests simply that Grosvenor Square had been not so much a home as a stage set for talk 'swift, bird-like, inconsequential and totally impossible to reproduce'. The author recalls that "it was all talk, talk, talk....Such gossamer stuff cannot be recaptured. And yet for those who heard it, Emerald's talk was unforgettable, a fabulous sort of cabaret act."[33] The author is careful to remind however that although it was gossamer, there was sometimes a tougher substance to it. In a diary entry Cecil Beaton confided that;

> Emerald's frivolities are so entertaining that her audience is apt to ignore the scholarly mind which is her

> raison d'etre. In effect, the play-acting with friends during the evenings is only a preliminary for her real life of the mind.[34]

At the time of her death in 1948 Beaton again wrote that Lady Cunard lived 'dans le vrai' and had been more than a mere social figure. "She had a keen eye for spotting the merits of people in most unknown places; she was a true patron and pioneer.[35]

There is in such characteristic eulogy a convincing sense of the quintessential aristocrat. The casually achieved air of high flippancy, social self-confidence and service and a general ease and authority of assertion were qualities readily appreciated and embraced by London Society in this American born original. It is not difficult consequently to see in Lady Cunard a legitimate successor to the great territorial Ladies of the Victorian epoch. Indeed she somewhat shared their same social and financial foundation being the estranged wife of a prosperous English baronet Sir Bache Cunard, even if his was not a particularly old baronetcy. Queen Victoria had conferred the title on Sir Bache's grandfather Samuel in 1859 in recognition of his energetic commercialism in founding the celebrated shipping company.[36]

Beverley Nichols has conceded that for the utilitarian and practical minded, Lady Cunard and the other noted hostesses of the Twenties, when in the full flower of their showmanship could perhaps seem a little ridiculous.[37] Their competitiveness and vanities lent themselves to caricature as is perhaps ideally suggested in the exquisitely executed contre-temps of Mapp and Lucia in E.F. Benson's novels of satirical affection.

And yet, however ridiculous or exotic these rare birds of social plumage, one may nonetheless see ably represented in the inter-war hostesses, Society's process of continuity and renewal manifest in adaptation. In no one is this process more evident than with Laura Corrigan. If Lady Cunard seemed a not inappropriate addition to the history of London's salon lionesses, Laura Corrigan's success as a hostess arguably recommends her as the more truly characteristic product of the 1920's.

In the previous century Mrs. Corrigan's progress would not have been assured or even likely, although it would also not have been impossible. The careers of the Ladies Waldegrave and Molesworth indicated the historic flexibility of English Society. However these Ladies, as with all recruits to Society's ranks, were inevitably prepared and duly assimilated to Society's modes and manners. Newcomers were thus effectively equipped to mask any betrayal of their former selves that might otherwise have been regarded as problematic or at least, requiring a cosmetic veneer of adequate polish. In this, Mrs. Corrigan may be seen as somewhat unique. The daughter of a lumberjack she had married Jimmy Corrigan, the playboy heir to the Cleveland based steel fortune.[38] Mrs. Corrigan first arrived in London in 1921 a refugee from her unsuccessful bids to enter Cleveland and New York Society circles where she had been rejected as an upstart, being thought as socially unpresentable as she was intellectually undistinguished. By the mid 1920s she was nonetheless a heroine of London's social life, a position she maintained until her death in 1946 when her memorial service was

attended, as Brian Masters writes in The Hostesses, by "Royalty, ambassadors, peers and peeresses of the highest rank, a churchful of people who had been fond of her and amused by her."[39]

In advance of this ascendancy Mrs. Corrigan benefited, in a combination of luck and design, from a careful stratagem. She bought from Alice Keppel, King Edward VII's great friend, her house at 16 Grosvenor Street inheriting not only a first-rate staff but also Mrs. Keppel's 'visitor's book'.[40] Mrs. Corrigan further employed the services of Charlie Sterling, Lady Londonderry's ex-private secretary who (for a charitable financial contribution) arranged that his employer be invited to dine with Lady Londonderry. In having been taken in hand for a schooling in social survival, not unlike Shaw's Eliza Doolittle, by the time the Londonderry's accepted Mrs. Corrigan's return invitation her acceptance by Society was assured and at an unusually high level of entry.

Whereas Shaw's Eliza, borrowed by Lerner and Lowe for "My Fair Lady," upsets the genteel guests of Mrs. Higgins' box at Ascot when the former cheers on her favourite horse with unselfconscious Cockney obscenity - Mrs. Corrigan's unselfconscious 'Americanese' and notorious malapropisms became in her, the delighting attraction. Insomuch as Mrs. Corrigan undoubtedly perceived her own appeal there must on occasion, have been as much performance as naturalness in her public personality but such a distinction is less meaningful than the freedom and reception that allowed her an influential place in Society at all.

At one level it is easily possible to see in the case of Laura

Corrigan the application of Society's established facility to envelop new elements into its ranks. She was of course extremely wealthy and so suffered no material restraint in pursuing her social ambitions. And although she was undoubtedly a snob her nerve and uniqueness made her endearing as well as refreshing to those she hoped to befriend. In this, Mrs. Corrigan was able to benefit from something of L.B. Namier's criteria for social elevation and acceptance at the level of character recognition, a formula as intangible to define as it was difficult to contrive.

In practical terms Nicholas Courtney has suggested that "unlike the starchy New York Society, London Society has always had enough confidence to welcome into its ranks anyone who is thought to be entertaining, provided they behaved properly and follow the rules."[41] This confidence had been bred historically,by a homogenous atmosphere of assimilation, uniting all elements in the coherence of a tribe association of self-recognition and preservation. This tradition of gradualism as opposed to disintegration could enable a seeming generosity of leadership possible when the 'game' is comfortably under control. However, while Society's capacity to accommodate evolving forces may be recognised as the continuity of a historical machinery of process, this does not answer the issue of any particular generation's contribution and interpretation with regard to the sensitivities of change itself. In this respect, as hitherto suggested, the older Victorians had been critical of certain features in Edwardian Society, the 'unqualified' entry of undignified recruits, not the least among them. They would have regarded the application of

L.B. Namier's criteria for social elevation to have been abused at best. It is almost alarming to imagine what Lady Dorothy Nevill might have thought of Laura Corrigan in the position of a Society hostess.

Insomuch as these issues as such, have already been addressed the understandable regret and resentment of one generation giving way to that of its successor must be duly considered, consequently the litany of complaint can vary or indeed, be absent from comment. It can also be reiterated that in historical terms of inquiry, the application of Society's assimilating process continued to operate throughout the late-Victorian-Edwardian phase.

During these years this process was admittedly taxed to a greater degree than at any time in recent memory and the transition for some among the 'old guard' as well as the new, was on occasion, inevitably less than smooth. However, until the period after the First World War the umbrella influence of older modes and manners were still thought to have been largely preserved or at least, remained the unifying role-model for emulation. Laura Corrigan undoubtedly did learn how to 'behave properly and follow the rules'. Despite the back-slapping familiarity of her Annie Oakly manner, she knew where to place a Duke at dinner and generally how to navigate Society's subtle and intricate personality relationships. Her legendary 'faux-pas' were strictly of the amusing variety.

In the main, the hostesses typified the continuity of a traditional context of order and process in Society's workings. Just as camps of political allegiance had once formed around the social leadership of the great Victorian ladies - so too in the inter-war

period, did Society divide itself among its new breed of hostess practitioners. Memoir recollections, as evidenced, evoke a largely appreciative sense of the discriminating subtlety and artful entertaining in which these ladies displayed both the material ability and emotional vocation.

It is impossible however not to see in the example of Laura Corrigan the 'journey' thus far traversed in both the composition and tone of London Society life. The collective desire of society to return to its pre-war order of ritualised leisure pursuit served to consolidate and confirm, but also to extend the pleasure seeking values of the Edwardians. Mrs. Corrigan had successfully cultivated her opportunities and had been rewarded with the acceptance and encouragement of leading elements in London Society. By her fourth Season she had become a leading hostess of a glittering if unintellectual section of that Society.[42] Her wealth and generosity assured that she could satisfy the material standards of her guests as well as their appetite for amusement. The coterie of the unintellectual was hardly an anomaly in Society's extended family, nor was that of its interest primarily, in amusement. However, in the carefree hilarity of Mrs. Corrigan's entertainments can be recognised at once that particular theme of wide-eyed merriment and theatrical chaos so closely associated with the 1920s. It was not as if Mrs. Corrigan deployed vast sums of money to realise an artfully subtle effect but rather to stage-manage semi-circus' of elaborate and varied carnival. Her gardens were on occasion, transformed into a sylvan set for dancing with singers dressed as statues. At these

'surprise parties' Mrs. Corrigan might decorate the house into a sail boat fantasy or spray her curtains with powdered glass to make them shimmer in the light.[13] A demimonde atmosphere was usually created at her parties by the presence, and for the first time, of cabaret performers, with guests often participating in the levity. Nicholas Courtney has recorded that at the close of one such evening in July of 1926,

> The finale...was provided by the hostess herself who, with enormous verve, danced the Charleston in a top hat and red shoes. She then demonstrated her penchant for standing on her head, first taking the precaution of tying a scarf round her skirt.[14]

Such frivolity, however inspired, would prove a departure for Society in the 1920s and temperamentally a far cry from the sedate Courts of King George V or the mere continuity of Society's seasonal time-table. In this sense Laura Corrigan may be seen to indicate a climatic change in a Society setting, yet again proving susceptible to external influence and transformation.

CHAPTER FOUR

In this concluding chapter the discussion is concerned with the identification of discernible modes of innovation and change recorded in memoir reflection and with regard to the inter-war period of the 1920s and 1930s. These may be seen to confirm the ultimate challenge to, and effective collapse of, Society as a social organism hitherto either dominated or influenced by the values of a landed aristocracy.

In its Victorian context, the participants in Society's world had reflected both the hegemony and attitudinal consensus of an aristocratic and landed social culture. The seeming permanence and order of this environment had permitted its inhabitants the cultivation of long evolved practices and attitudes of legitimacy of authority, sense of superiority and the appreciation of graceful and discerning behaviour emblematic of order and proportion. This world was a social stage that illustrated the marriage of economic, political and social prestige tied to the rhythms of land and government for generations. Insomuch as Society's Victorian participants could identify and appraise aspects of innovation and change, corresponding memoir references can also indicate themes of continuity as much as of departure in Society's character and practices. The challenges of yesteryear's social processes had come to be adapted or absorbed into the fabric of Society's continuing role as the stage-set for social authority.

In the late Victorian context, however regretting the memoir appraisal may have been of either subtle or dramatic changes in

custom, tone and practice - Society nonetheless may be seen as having retained the atmosphere of both its insularity and sense of community. The social apparatus for elevation and absorption continued, as it had done historically, to harmonise divergent elements in the association of the group that had never been averse to occasional democratic infusions from below. The preceding chapters have in part, demonstrated the extent to which the accelerated pace of those infusions toward the close of the nineteenth century had arguably begun to alter the intimacy, group coherence and apparent manners of Society as a hitherto aristocratic entity. Indeed, had it not been for the advent of war in 1914 and the 'pandora's box' of innovation that would subsequently be attributed to its wake, perhaps the materialism and tensions of the Edwardian interlude, would subsequently have been interpreted as 'the' definitive point when Society 'collapsed' as a self-regulating expression of aristocratic culture and influence.

In any event, with regard to the period of the 1920s and 1930s, retrospective themes of innovation and change do in fact correspond historically to an increasingly tenuous cohesion of community. In the previous chapter, indications of continuity in Society's form and character largely relate to certain formal ingredients cited in the revival of the Court and the continued presence of the aristocracy. Memoir allusions still evoke a seemingly intimate environment and one that had become infused with features of life introduced with the late Victorians; the advent of a bohemian element in the form of theatre people and also of publicity being two among the salient factors. With regard to manners and whether or not

these suffered either temporary or permanent damage, a pervasive sense of unique if triumphant 'Englishness' and of the idiosyncratic qualities associated with the English gentleman are non-the-less characteristic of typical memoir references. These would seem to confirm the emergence and re-assertion of an expanded idea of the gentleman now absorbing the upper echelons of the public school educated middle class. In certain circles of social intercourse, further memoir allusions appreciatively evoke what is perhaps the most significant aspect of continuity - Society's tradition of discerning and artful hospitality in settings of beauty and repose.

However, beyond the formal structure of Society as a setting for established activities and familiar players, these allusions represent only one, if partially glimpsed view, of its subject. They may only be fully appreciated if seen in tandem with the more dominant drama of innovation, change and departure which by the close of the inter-war years would signal the end of Society's aristocratic 'raison d'etre' of social experience and system of values. In the characteristic memoir reflection of Society in the inter-war years the consideration of such re-emergent themes as an excess in the pursuit of pleasure and of publicity, expanded Society composition and membership, vulgarity of behaviour and attitude, the accelerated pace of 'modern' life, and the phenomenon of the 'Bright Young Things' all endorse a general evaluation of change, re-arrangement, decline and disintegration. It might prove instructive first to consider a denial of this historic if universally held view of the inter-war period.

In the first volume of his memoirs The Winds of Change 1914-

1939 (1966), Harold Macmillan addresses the idea of London Society's alleged spirit of upheaval in the 1920s, fully aware of the appeal that this association had acquired in the public mind. The author debunks, somewhat professorially the 'myth' of this world and its players, cautioning that younger critics and historians would be unwise to take such characters as the frantic young people of say, Evelyn Waugh's novels as typical, 'if indeed any of them ever existed'.[1] Society, with a capital "S" is still described by the author as having been constituted by a variety of identifiable groups, cliques that patronised either the theatre or the turf, politics and brains or land and pedigree. He concludes, "These groups often intermingled; yet broadly, the social life of twenties did not differ very substantially from the pre-war structure."[2] As a statement of broad analysis, the author's appraisal is unrefutable and indeed, as such, concurs with the argumentative theme of the preceding chapter. The structure of Society had survived the war with the observable theatre of its personalities and functions remaining largely unchanged, once they had if necessary, been resurrected. There is however a utilitarian bias present in Macmillan's approach. His expressed doubt for example as to whether or not one can even acknowledge that the 'Bright Young Things' as a type existed, implies that they, and their reflection of Society's mores is a question relative to majority and minority positions. The social behaviour of certain young people, even if arguably unique, was necessarily not the active experience of Society as a whole. In a comparable if theoretical example one might similarly accept an instance of a lady electing to ignore the less than ideal

manners of a guest at her dinner table if the other guests present demonstrated no such affront. In this instance as well, a majority reality is seemingly unaffected. However it is precisely in the concern of such examples of difference or departure from habit and sensibility to which one may reasonably be sensitive, just as indeed the majority of social witnesses to Society's life have proven invariably to be. In any event a minority experience may indeed be thought to potentially affect a majority 'reality' if it can affect ways in which the majority perceives and characterises itself. In this instance one can perhaps more easily anticipate the consternation of an offended hostess, sensitive to the phenomenon of a guest either not knowing how to behave, or feeling free to behave badly. This will subsequently be seen to have been the case where the 'Bright Young Things' are involved in the Society drama of the 1920s. It can furthermore be clarified that the concern of this inquiry is expressive of niceties of an aristocratic self-perception recorded by those who participated in specific phases of London Society life. The authors in question have necessarily looked beyond broad sociological realities of which they be either all too, or too little, aware. In any event, the allure of obvious nostalgia aside, memoir retrospection acknowledges the passing of a distinct social context of order and government, of a means and process of civilisation, increasingly exposed - for better or worse - to an environment of change and adaptation. Such authors are therefore inevitably conscious of the consequences of transition inasmuch as they displaced practices and customs which in any age, may be thought akin to the ways in which one

can interpret and value life.

The above cited reference to Harold Macmillan is both useful and illustrative. It affords a means of re-affirming the otherwise aristocratic perspective and concerns of memoir authors so prevalent in this inquiry. It also suggests the extent to which comparatively new and self confident values in Society's composition and associations had begun to assert their influence. These values may be related to the emergence and consolidation of an upper middle class culture and its effective absorption into the social, political, and economic leadership of the nation. During the period treated in this inquiry, Society had increasingly ceased to be merely the expression of landed authority and prestige. Harold Macmillan was a typical if particularly successful product of this social adaptation - born into a prosperous Anglo-Scottish family of the intellectual upper middle class, educated at Eton and Oxford, served in the field as an officer in the First World War, married a Duke's daughter and acquired a 'family' seat as a conservative, in Parliament. His absorption into this metropolitan world of traditional associations was as natural and complete as his entry was welcomed and unquestioned. And yet significantly, his outlook does not embody the patrician solidarity and sense of declining standards evoked by the ilk of a Lady Dorothy Nevill, but necessarily reflects the assertion of new values and implicit priorities suggestive of the democratic changes in Society's complexion. It is with a certain disdain and independence of perspective that Macmillan refers to the continuity of 'Society' into the 1920s as a term employed in "the old language of snobs".[3]

In other instances of memoir discussion, middle class voices confirm the entry of this social constituency into Society's world and surroundings, but also similarly suggest a sense of self confident identity and independence from it. Toward the close of the First World War and into the 1920s the historical essayist Lytton Strachey enjoyed both literary and social success. He was first 'taken up' by Society following the reception of his history Eminent Victorians in 1918. In letters to friends Strachey's musings, while evoking a certain titillation at this attention, also confirm the established identity of his own intellectual middle class origins and civilised proclivities. In one letter he writes (7 July 1918); "I go next Saturday to the Duchess of Marlboroughs'...is it the beginning of the end? Personally I don't think you or Tolstoy need be alarmed. In the first place, they won't like me; in the second place I won't like them."[4] In a letter of June 26, 1918 he writes of Margot Asquith; "Her 'mauvais ton' is remarkable there she sits in her box thinks she's the very tip-top, the grande dame par excellence, and all the rest of it - and every other moment behaving like a kitchen-maid...."[5] On having met the Duchess of Marlborough at a luncheon on an earlier occasion, Strachey had pronounced her "more distinguished than the rest" and describes Lady Randolph Churchill as " an old war horse, sniffing the battle from afar."[6] In Downhill All the Way (1961) in a complementary if more diplomatic vein the socialist Leonard Woolf, husband to Virginia Woolf and co-editor of the Hogarth Press, similarly describes certain Society people, with a cool if bemused detachment. In references to such Society hostesses as Lady Cunard or Lady Colefax at whose

luncheon parties the Woolfs were occasionally among the 'stars' the reader is left with the sense that hostess as much as guest had become an oddity of social observation and amusement.[7] As Lytton Strachey wrote of one of his own Society forays, "...I am not altogether uncritical! Curiosity is what chiefly moves me. I want to see for myself."[8] In a few of the above cited references, something of Strachey's discovery and appraisal have been suggested. As intimated, they imply the cultural independence and self-confidence of the upper middle class as a group self-consciously distinct from Society and aware of its importance and contribution. In some of these references there is also the sense that the aristocracy itself has changed, that is to say, been reduced in authoritative dignity and impressiveness, its Society world not the socially or politically unified expression of former experience. According to his biographer Michael Holroyd, the Society Strachey analysed could seem more hallucination than substance, so affected was it by adaption and influence;

> From a distance, it stood out as clear and well defined, formidable or absurd according to one's angle of vision. One read about it in the newspapers, and even on its fringes mesmerized by the whirl of self-flattery, the illusion of its reality persisted. But penetrate into its glittering vortex and it melted away.[9]

To whatever degree such an appraisal may or may not be accurate, it nonetheless expresses the often recurrent theme of change and disintegration. To confirm or clarify its observations with reference to the inter-war years it is necessary to turn to the more specific memoir reflection of Society's players in this concluding phase of

analysis.

It is not possible to explore the theme of innovation and change without first considering some among the most salient consequences effecting Society and its traditional context of landed culture caused by the war that had engulfed the European continent between 1914-1918. These consequences, more than anything else altered both the social and psychological basis of Society, largely shaping the form and character of its London life in the 1920s and 1930s.

With regard to the historical and popular memory of the First World War, the attendant and familiar image is one of heroic if needless sacrifice, the wholesale annihilation of the 'flower' of a generation. This was doubtless the first most apparent, and perhaps most graphic impact of the war, the burgeoning extent of its casualties. The holocaust was universal but was perhaps most clearly identifiable in the virtual destruction of the junior officer class. The casualties among these 'good family - public school - university men' from which front line officers were recruited, were proportionally higher than in other ranks, 15.2 per cent of officers to 12.8 per cent among the ranks. Of the 13,403 students from Oxford who served in the war, 2,569, almost one in five, were killed. Casualties among Cambridge recruits demonstrate similar figures; of 13,126 who served, 2,364 were killed. Among other universities the figures also suggest higher than average casualty lists although the proportion of those killed were usually lower than Oxbridge. The leading Public Schools suffered similarly high casualties; among the 4,852 Etonians who served

overseas during the war, 1,157 were killed, just over 20 per cent, a rate comparable with other Public Schools casualty figures.[10] In British Society 1914-45 (1984) John Stevenson writes with reference to such figures; "that these casualties were disproportionally carried by the higher social classes has also been confirmed by studies of the death rate amongst the peerage, of whom one in five of those who served died, according to C.F.G. Masterman, a death toll by violent death greater than at any time since the Wars of the Roses."[11] In this sense the war might be seen as having proven a test of the artistocracy's sensibility and ideal of community leadership and service. Indeed in England After War (1923) C.F.G. Masterman suggests that an aristocracy may ultimately exist for no other reason than to fulfill its ancient task of waging war on the public behalf.[12] The author continues that, in the British instance the aristocracy met this lugubrious challenge, "...it would seem to have possessed all the required attributes, courage, devotion, and care for the men under its charge...and had justified itself in the ultimate hour."[13]

The immediate post-war price of the conflagration took its toll in landed property the vast sales of which followed the pressures of ballooning income tax and death duties. The combination of these two factors, effectively decimated the lesser gentry who were largely without the economic resources to withstand the impact, as well as affecting the titled aristocracy itself. The need to sell, particularly among the gentry was especially felt in cases where death duties were aggravated by an owner's death soon after that of his heir, killed in action.[14] It has been estimated that, in land sales, in a four year

period between 1918 and 1921, one quarter of the farming land of England acquired new ownership by way of purchase as opposed to inheritance.[15] In 1922, a "London Times" article entitled 'England Changing Hands', a real estate firm was cited announcing that 79,000 acres had been put up for sale, including the 7,650 acres of the Suffolk holdings of Lord Manton and 31,000 acres of the Duke of Hamilton.[16] In 1918, the estate agents of Knight Frank and Rutley, handled 454,972 acres including 250,000 acres for the Duke of Sutherland. Whereas in 1918, 305 peers had owned 10 million acres, by 1929, 210 peers owned 5.5 million acres.[17] In many cases of course, among the great families, the central prosperity of an estate, usually the spacious parkland surrounding the house, could be retained while large outlying tracts could otherwise be lucratively sold. However for the first time as a general experience, the possession of a country seat could become as much a source of burden as prestige. During the war itself, many country-houses had been turned into hospitals or billets for troops, their sylvan parks ploughed in order to grow crops. At the war's close, for many houses, restoration was an impossibility. In 1921, "The Spectator" published articles on 'How to Save the Country Houses of England'. It was recorded in the 1922 and 1934 editions of Kelly's Directory of Shropshire that, out of 173 principal county seats, 53 had changed hands in the intervening decade.[18] Among these some were converted into Public Schools, hospitals or rest homes, while others were left simply unoccupied. In his own treatment of this theme C.F.G. Masterman wonders whether or not these once stately symbols of social prestige would not one day,

become the roman-like ruins of future generations.[19] In a tragic-comic image of decline, Evelyn Waugh in his novel Vile Bodies (1930) portrays Colonel Blount complaining of rising bus fares and budgeting his dwindling finances, never happier than when deposited in a seat at the local movie-house. He has somehow become a less than heroic anachronism, lost to an age of egalitarian change, a vaguely ridiculous, if no less dignified 'Lord of the Manor'.

In the post-war years land sales tapered off, largely induced by the agricultural depression of 1921 and the subsequent drop in prices. Estates were partitioned and broken up and their farms sold often among resident tenants or cross country immigrants from the West Country and Wales.[20] The sale of Country seats sometimes went to magnates in business and industry including the 'war profiteer'.

The twin casualties of the war in life and property - one form in the trenches, the other on the auction block - influenced, not only the economic base of landed wealth and position but also aspects of the culture and way of life that had gone with it. The forty per cent rise in war taxation in 1915, and again in 1916; food and petrol rationing, and a rising cost in living including a nine to thirty per cent rise in estate taxes, all served to compromise the sense of simplicity in rustic comfort which had, until the war, still been characteristic of country life.[21] Among the gentry, owing to the prohibitive costs of breeding and maintaining hounds, fox hunting was generally abandoned by 1918. Varying forms of game hunting, including deer stalking and grouse shooting were rather less affected, but could also be compromised insofar as they could require the services of a

game keeper. Insomuch as he was able, the squire continued to exercise the traditional obligations of his class, overseeing the needs of his tenants and administering justice at petty sessions. However, the inevitable difficulties of adapting to change were only aggravated by the lack of economic manoeuvre often available to the greater aristocracy benefiting from the proceeds of country and town property sales and in some cases augmented by the legacy of shrewd investments in business and industry in the later nineteenth century. The psychological impact of change could be as disquieting as those in the social or economic spheres. The advent for example of conscription and indeed, of a national life increasingly regulated by state intervention, had appeared to negate the qualities of patriotic self-sacrifice and voluntary service. During the war, conscription had been imposed, then in effect, made to work by a series of negotiations with the trade unions and Labour Party, and sustained by propaganda, and ultimately coercion. As Keith Middlemas writes in The Pursuit of Pleasure (1977); "the old guard of liberal England was broken metaphorically by the war, but so also was an image held by many of the upper class; of a tolerant patriotic, self-regulating and hierarchical society."[22]

In 'town' as well as 'country' fundamental change affected or aggravated by the war, soon characterised the London Society of the inter-war period in themes of social innovation and upheaval. Economic hardship soon compromised previous features of metropolitan life as property was sold, great houses split up and converted into apartment flats or hotels. Other than in a few notable exceptions,

with the disappearance of these houses the physical setting from which landed Society had dominated social and political life in the nineteenth century, effectively vanished from the scene.

A post-war shortage in domestic servants also affected a once endemic and assured standard of social position. Domestic service had always been a ready form of employment for impoverished women making them the largest single occupational group after agriculture.[23] During the war, many women went into factory or munitions work, broadening their experience of life and usually attaining with it, higher wages.[24] In London, the number of resident servants per one hundred families in the West End declined between 1911 and 1921 from 57.4 to 41.3 per cent.[25]

The presence of the 'parvenu', arguably a perennial figure in any generation, nonetheless re-asserted himself with conspicuous force in the 1920s. He was duly recognised in 'the profiteers', those who had acquired wealth in business and industry helping administer or fed the material needs of the war. With scruples little better than their manners many were thought to have 'bought' their sudden elevation to social distinction in a post-war 'honours scandal' of reward for party support. In 1922 the Duke of Northumberland claimed that between government and 'client' a knighthood cost 10,000 pounds and a baronetcy 40,000 pounds.[26] In 1923, of the seven hundred and eight lay peers then alive and elevated in effect, on the 'recommendation' of the government, one hundred and eight owed their titles to creation by Queen Victoria, forty-six to creation by Edward VII and since 1910, one hundred and six to creation by George V.[27]

During the Lloyd George Premiership of 1916-1922, no fewer than four marquisates, eight earldoms, twenty-two vicountcies, and sixty-four baronies were created.[28] By 1922, the House of Lords contained as many peers from industry and business as it did from established landowning families.[29]

In government, positions of authority virtually confirmed that the primacy of influence had effectively shifted from landed to business interest. The war had given the opportunity of power to men of ability who in an earlier time could not have anticipated so complete an ascendancy. The new social 'make-up' was evident in the Lloyd George coalition of 1918, the so-called 'businessman's government'. The contrast in the social origins of cabinet ministers in the period of 1916 to 1935 with that of 1886 to 1916 demonstrates the dramatic and accelerated change. Cabinet members drawn from the landed class declined from forty-nine to twenty-five, members from the middle class rose from forty-nine to sixty-two, while working class members climbed from a token three to twenty-one.[30]

As indicated in the preceding chapter the structure and context of Society, certainly as an organisation of established activities, survived the war. The revival of the Season enjoyed a material munificence the equal of any by pre-war standards. And yet the above cited references contains a few among the fundamental effects illicited by the war that would help foster the psychology of change so familiar with the characterisation of the 1920s. In the typical memoir reflection of the inter-war years, specific references of concern are toward the altering characteristics and temper of

Society's pleasure pursuits. This allusion to change among the generation of the late Victorian initially suggest the on-going lament at the seemingly disordered agenda of a new age expressive in the departure from established modes of order and tradition. Although the pattern of this social regret had become increasingly familiar throughout the final phase of the nineteenth century, one may detect in the consideration of the 1920s, the emergence of that decade's own unique flavour.

In More or Less About Myself the acerbic Margot Asquith speaks for most of her generation just as Lady Dorothy Nevill had earlier done for her own, when she addresses the chapter theme 'Then and Now'. She impatiently asks where have gone the distinguished and recognised leaders both in politics and fashion who once foregathered in such urban palaces as Devonshire House, Grosvenor House, Dorchester House or Lansdowne House. Lady Asquith writes;

> People will say; "Oh! These houses are sold and their owners too poor to entertain." But it is not the houses but the 'individuals' that you go to see. Where are the fine manners and originality of men like the old Dukes of Westminster, Beaufort, Devonshire and Sutherland, the Lords Granville, Ribblesdale, Spencer, Pembroke and Cowper....[31]

Lady Asquith recalls the dignity and decorum of great occasions particularly those under a royal auspices as having been a disciplining agent in Society's sense of propriety and self-recognition; "...the Royal entertainments...enforced social scruples, encouraged fine manners, and bred a kind of enterprise, elegance and distinction which is lacking in Society to-day.[32]

On the pleasures of youth observable in the Society of the

inter-war years Lady Asquith continues;

> When I made my debut, a London ballroom was a beautiful sight, and neither the movements nor the faces of those who dance the "Charleston" and the "Black Bottom" are as joyous or refined as those that one watched when dancing to the perfect rhythm and lively music of a Strauss valse.[33]

In Men, Women and Things the Duke of Portland echoes this sentiment in recalling the Court balls of the pre-war era. Of the loveliness of the ladies present, the author adds;

> It should be remembered, too, that in exceedingly few cases did their appearance owe anything to art, except that of their dressmaker and coiffeur - never, thank goodness, to the manicurist; for I think nothing is more hideous or spoiling to a well-shaped hand than red nails, which remind one of the gory fingers of a Scotch Ghillie after he has gralloched a dead stag, or the unwashed hands of a butcher fresh from the slaughter-house.[34]

The Duke goes on to admonish that the use of cosmetics in the painting of one's lips and face was a form of strident decoration once "left to ladies of the stage and the demimonde."[35] The post-war proliferation of the cigarette as a leisure pursuit among women as well as men is also something regrettingly noted, bearing little resemblance to the strict etiquette of former years. The Duke wonders that; "surely it is neither becoming nor attractive for an otherwise pretty and charming young woman to appear with a half smoked cigarette hanging from vividly painted lips and with henna-coloured nails at the end of yellow nicotine-stained fingers."[36]

In references such as these, as suggested, a tone of impatience and exasperation is not without precedent. A distinctive regret at the accelerating change of 'modern' conditions affecting Society was apparent to observers throughout the final quarter of

the nineteenth century. However a quality of departure in the memoir literature published in the post-war setting is often expressed in a sometimes conflicting forum of opinion touching on such issues as morality, gentility and the alleged loss of the 'grand manner'. Attitudes toward these themes are often revealed in discussions that treat the memory of the past but which effectively expose the 'current' state of affairs at the time of publication.

Throughout the late Victorian period extramarital relationships in Society abounded, secure within the disciplined regulation and discretion of a ruling class code of ethics and propriety. This system essentially assured that the parties involved were protected both from social injury and embarrassment as well as from any undue degree of emotional vulnerability. Insomuch as affairs were managed with taste and tact the emotional life of married couples toward their lovers were considered their own individual concern providing as well, that the public obligations of marriage were sustained and that no scandal expose individuals or the integrity of their class prestige to notoriety and ridicule.

In memoir allusion to Victorian life, references to this privileged and silken facility for manoeuvre are understandably very rare. Among the few noteworthy instances may be cited an incident of public conflict. In the 1910 volume of her memoirs Under Five Reigns Lady Dorothy Nevill reprimands her contemporary the Countess of Cardigan for including in her own reminiscences a number of titillating allusions to certain, albeit unidentified extramarital relationships, the revelation of which, caused a popular sensation.[37] Lady Dorothy

accuses Lady Cardigan of imaginative zeal coupled with unreliable memory and assures her readers that 'sin' in this form did not in the main, characterise the Victorian epoch. The controversy as such, may undoubtedly be clarified by recognising the particular constituencies of the two ladies noting that the Countess generally moved in the 'fast' rather rakish racing set as opposed to Lady Dorothy's urban and intellectually more serious salon environment. In any event the delicacy and unfamiliarity of the topic as published material, may easily be appreciated.

In memoirs published in the 1920s and 1930s however, the depth and tone given this subject had greatly developed. It had by this period become a theme of common knowledge, an open secret to be recalled and analysed like the past experience of vanished youth. There can surely be no more acute example of this frankness than in the memoirs Romantic Adventure by Elinor Glyn. In two succeeding chapters 'The Naughty Nineties' and 'Looking Back Upon The Naughty Nineties' the author offers what is virtually an essay on social morality in a detailed picture of a typical country house visit to Easton Lodge, the Countess of Warwick's family seat. In her own memoirs Lady Warwick too, writes openly of both the emotional and physical love affairs of the recent past associated with the intimate and aristocratic community of the pre-war period.[38] With regard to the youthful charm of love intrigues Lady Warwick confesses; "From the beginning of our life together my husband seemed to accept the inevitability of my having a train of admirers. I could not help it. There they were. It was all a great game." Lady Warwick goes on to

suggest; "in my circle there was a kind of freemasonry of conduct. We could be and do as we liked according to the code. The unforgivable sin was to give away any member of our group. That was class loyalty I suppose, but we had no name for it."[39]

It was precisely an adherence to the code and to the self-preservation and solidarity of class loyalty that Lady Dorothy Nevill may have imagined to have been offended in Lady Cardigan's entertaining anecdotes of sentiment and sin. And yet by the post-war years the rapid changes in social, economic and psychological positions once characteristic of the pre-war environment had been effectively overtaken in the maelstrom of shifting perspectives. The once sacred forms inherent to Victorian-Edwardian patrician life, however expedient, had represented a disciplined order expressive of community and social authority. In the post-war setting, that Society community proved more susceptible to external influence and cultural assault than at any point in its recent history. Memoir allusions that highlight a contrast in reality and attitude such as that above cited, offer a significant indication of the 'levelling' atmosphere of the post-war period together with an inevitable tone of swan song poignance or stimulated anticipation.

Another memoir topic articulate of these social pressures and analytical responses touches on the devolving concept of gentility. As already indicated pre-war images of gentility invariably characterise their subjects in an atmosphere of self-reliant ease and confidence. Numerous instances of 'gentlemen of the old school' are appreciatively recalled as 'flag-ships' of social authority and

commanding personality or grace. A perfection of manners is matched by a quality of effortlessness born of the relatively secured environment in which such types could be nurtured. This social sense of the gentleman's appeal and origin is evident in typical reminiscence as well as a certain nostalgia and regret that 'modern conditions' do not breed these colourful and charming characters as they once did. However beyond this wistfulness, memoir discussion written in the inter-war years reveals as well a new and democratic sensibility to the implications of gentility as a broader more human and not exclusively social or class consideration.

The extent to which such an approach was unusual by Victorian-Edwardian standards is borne out in My Memoirs (1904) by the Countess of Munster a granddaughter of King William IV. In chapters entitled 'True Refinement', 'The Servant Question' and 'A Noble Life' Lady Munster, evoking Christian doctrine as her shield, tentatively suggests that people of 'all classes' are capable of sensitivity of feeling and of nobility of mind and heart and that these are not the potential property of the well-born alone. Lady Munster prefaces her views with the hope that; "although I may be laying myself open to the ridicule of those who disagree with me, I beg them to have a little patience with me and my opinions, and not condemn me and them unheard."[40]

Whatever the Countess' response among her peers, within a quarter century the theme had become one of open, if indeed uncontested discussion. In dialogue with her 'friendly catechist' Lady Warwick draws the difference between surface charm and breeding and

the sincerity and fundamental decency that, in whatever social forum, must in the end define true gentility. Instances of gentility manifest in courage, consideration to others, and delicacy of feeling are eloquent of aristocratic life and relationship but are matched as well, by memories of devoted servants or 'noble' tenants. Following one example of 'patrician breeding' displaying sensitivity at a trying moment Lady Warwick nonetheless adds; "I am sure you could get as good an example of breeding in a Deptford slum. I have heard wonderful slum stories from Margaret Macmillan."[41] Perhaps more easily definable by way of offence are recorded instances of bad breeding or behaviour among the well born. In allusion almost certainly to Lord Curzon, Lady Warwick recalls the story of his indifferent, almost theatrical insolence in receiving a governess applying for the post. The Countess of Asquith echoes this chagrin in an openly attributed reference to Lord Curzon regretting his rudeness to one of her servants. Lady Asquith recalls her reprimand; "It's dreadful to be rude even to your own servants, but quite unpardonable to be rude to other people's....I tried to explain to him that a difference in class was one of opportunity and education, and that if he would cultivate imaginative insight, or even more, observation, he would find as much fundamental vulgarity in people of birth as he would in the middle and poorer classes."[42]

The allusion to change in the Society of the inter-war years recorded by the generation of the late-Victorian is often an effective means of glimpsing this celebrated period in London's social history. With comparative reference to their own youth in the late-Victorian-

Edwardian period, authors exclaim alarm and, or disappointment at the intrusion of the new and unexpected. Language like 'lipstick', 'cocktail' or 'black bottom' produce a tuneless music which would seem their own most damning characteristic. Those surface observations, evident enough in themselves are an obvious harbinger of change, supported as well, by a probing and democratic dialogue on hitherto reclusive issues of landed privileges such as morality and gentility. However, to appreciate Society's reeling ride through the London life of the inter-war years and of the 1920s in particular, it is necessary to turn to its more representative voices. These identify those who were themselves young in the period and who were therefore, whatever their debt to the past or anticipation of the future, free to observe, enjoy, and record the temper of their own time and place.

It is perhaps at the very least, an awkward task to characterise the hilarity or carnival spontaneity of the 1920s as it doubtless was expressive of psychological inclinations with which Western culture is still familiar. It is enough to suggest that those like the Countess of Asquith or the Duke of Portland who regretted the vulgarity of ladies publicly smoking, or of their nails stained with paint, or of the dance-hall obscenities of the 'black bottom', displayed outrage at the very elements that were both the attraction and aesthetic for their cynical, or would be cynical practitioners. The keynote in this sense was precisely one of iconoclasm and artful degeneracy, affected or otherwise. The rationalism and moderation inherent in Lady Asquith's preference for the exquisite melodies of Strauss over 'Negro rhythms' of the jungle was a rationalism and

moderation discredited for many, by the war and perhaps less consciously, by the very concept of change as a theme of insecurity in contemporary life.

Among the participants and chroniclers of London Society life in the inter-war period were Beverly Nichols and Cecil Beaton, two among an extended circle of artistic young men who came to enjoy a unique celebrity in the London of the day. The presence in Society of men of charm and conversational talent, as well as of certain literary figures, had been a familiar feature of Victorian life. Their role could often be that of jester, dependent on the largesse of an aristocratic and occasionally condescending patronage. However, Nichols and Beaton were essentially figures of independent status and as such both may be seen as social heirs to the developed opportunities of middle class culture and prestige. Both men were the product of public school and Oxbridge educations and therefore could enjoy a certain 'entree' that, as 'mere' gossip columnist and Society photographer, neither could have anticipated say, half a century earlier. In this sense, apart from their professional success their very presence on the social scene is evocative of the open, sometimes turbulent dynamics of the decade, a climate to which both were highly aware and sensitive.

The outline of the Society life of which Nichols and Beaton became particularly effective chroniclers is familiar to posterity. The images are of brittle sophistication, these parties, the nocturnal antics of the 'Bright Young Things', frenzied pleasure pursuit, night-clubs, jazz, masculine affectations by women and feminine affectations

by men. It is however in the tone of Nichols's and Beaton's depiction of this playful environment that characterise memoir allusion and interest to the inter-war period. Their writing fully appreciates the atmosphere of stress and strain in age-old forms tested on the social battlefield of ballroom and drawing-room, a conflict that would finally sever Society's organic ties to an aristocratic culture of landed associations and disciplined self-regulation. As a consequence, their writing mirrors the ensuing atmosphere in a breezy, glib analysis of affable bedlam, rhetorically appropriate to the age.

As sociological phenomenon the panoply of change associated with the 1920s involved challenges that had been recognised by many of the Victorian-Edwardian; the assertion of parvenu wealth, excess of publicity, Society's expanding composition, and the riot of youth. In reference however to the 1920s and 1930s is the sense that these elements attained a voice hitherto unknown, for now they interacted with the remnant of an old-guard Society in the process of disintegration. In the Sweet and Twenties (1958) Beverley Nichols suggests something of the role the Ritz Bar played as a 'stage set' in Society's new drama of the absurd.

> I adored the Ritz Bar. Think of it...champagne cocktails at a bob apiece! And the scent of Gaulois cigarettes and the echo of Madame Chanel's laughter and the back view of Charles B. Cockran's neck...and the sudden flurry of Mistinguette, wrapped in monkey fur, stepping over the sacred masculine threshold in pursuit of her latest young man, who is drinking behind a pillar with a rather dubious Jamaican.[43]

In Society's late Victorian-Edwardian context the more presentable elements among the bohemian and theatrical milieu had

gained entry to Society under its aristocratic auspices. In the inter-war period the more formal question as to what group played host to whom, became blurred in a plutocratic atmosphere of glamour and wealth. The niceties and expenses of private entertainment were supplanted by the restaurant, dinner-dance and night club. The biographer Frances Donaldson, a daughter of the playwright Frederick Lonsdale, elaborates on Society's 'mix' in a description of the Embassy Club, the most famous of the London night clubs;

> To this room night after night for years came dukes and earls and princes and their wives and the women they loved, writers, actors, Press-Lords, politicians, all the self-made men from the war...all the riff-raff and the hangers on....Early in the evening, when the whole room could be seen with a relatively unimpeded vision, it would have been possible for an acute observer to watch the rules of an older society gradually being broken down. For the first time...the British upper classes were opening their ranks and allowing wholesale ingress to rich men, famous men or women, notorieties, anyone who could add a scrap to their entertainment.[4]

The rakish elegance, material comfort and trans-Atlantic informality of the night clubs made them an apt symbol for the period. As indicated, they came to represent a succeeding forum for social inter-change in marked contrast to the sedate and comparatively official dignity of receptions in great houses. Even in the experience of the Prince of Wales, an undisputed role-model for post-war youth, the night club and particularly The Embassy, became, as Donaldson recalls, the more characteristically personal of his preferences in company and social climate. "The Prince attended the balls at the great London houses, but later in the evening, or on nights when he had no other engagements, he could almost always be seen at The

Embassy Club...more than anywhere else it reflected the mood of the day."[45]

This is not to suggest that the cigarette-fumed and jazz-tuned environment of the night club necessarily became the whole experience of Society, but its appeal among the young and eagerly fashionable was as widespread as its characteristics were socially symptomatic of the times. In the new 'social swim' the options in pleasure pursuit, grafting as it were, new modes of conduct onto old, were noticeable expanded. In an essay for Vogue magazine Cecil Beaton describes the London Season of 1928 as involving three or four different varieties of parties, and wonders; "will cocktails pull one through to the end of the season? One has a sneaking dread that they will not, for this year those who indulge in a London Season are being 'put through it' harder than ever."[46] Added to the traditional, conservative 'coming out' balls, the elegantly artistic parties of Mrs. Somerset Maugham or Lady Mendl, the entertainment also embraced 'informal' parties, those often associated with the 'Bright Young Things', sailor parties, pyjama, end-of-the-world, Judgement-Day 1880, Bottle parties. As Beaton continues;

> To feed and to dance always to be moving, that is the thing....We must miss nothing....Has a restaurant lost its vogue or gained a new one and we not know of it for a whole day? Unthinkable. We hate the blocks of traffic all down Piccadilly and Bond Street, all down Regent Street and Haymarket, because while we are held in them something may have happened, so quickly does popularity pass.[47]

The inner circle exclusivity of Society, once so familiar to its Victorian expression would seem to have vanished in this maelstrom of

sensation. Before the war, instances of change could be interpreted as either decline or renewal and there was usually little contradiction. In the post-war setting it had become increasingly problematic to even identify the old Society of historic dimension or to draw demarcations between its participating elements. In 1931, again for Vogue, Cecil Beaton surveyed the scene in mock dismay;

> Well, it seems that the market for elegance has been ruined....The elegantes of London...who paved the paths of distinction have ruined them by running after the humble fun of hoi-polloi....In London nowadays, the activities of our friends are not confined within the small radius of Mayfair. Beyond the squalors of Euston, picking up bargains at the Caledonian Market...you will see Lady Diana Cooper eating chestnuts freshly roasted on a wheel cart. Chauffeurs are no longer amazed to be told to drive to the lowest music-halls over the river at Lambeth or to the Elephant and Castle. And, at Charlie's Bar in Limehouse, you will see a group of bright young people and Lady Elinor Smith dancing to the music of a penny-in-the-slot mechanical piano. The Boxing in Whitefriars on a Sunday Afternoon is as fashionable as church parade used to be before the war, and Mrs. Baillie-Hamilton shrieks with the throng, 'Go to it Ginger - sock him hard!'.[4]

In this revolt from formality traditional elements in Society may be seen to have come to crave the sensation of sensation, renouncing any undue demands of propriety and dignity once endemic of social prestige and self-preservation. In his novel Brideshead Revisited (1944) Evelyn Waugh reflects something of this levelling atmosphere in Society's inclination and experience in describing the 'glamour' that Rex Mottram held for Lady Julia Flyte, despite the objections of her family.

> Rex, indeed was neither starched nor wrinkled; his seniors thought him a pushful young cad, but Julia recognized the unmistakable chic - the flavour of "Max" and "F.E." and the Prince of Wales, of the big table in the Sporting Club, the second magnum and the fourth cigar,

> of the chauffeur kept waiting hour after hour without compunction - which her friends would envy.[49]

In the phenomenon of the Bright Young People one may see Society's character in the latter 1920s ably represented and seemingly expressive of unleashed hilarity, social chaos and publicity opportunism. In their initial appearance the instigators of what the Press dubbed the "Society of the Bright Young People' were largely just that, a select circle of friends of imaginative and independent nature. Their amusements demonstrated a creative capacity for enjoyment and satire as impromptu attack on the dullness and conventionality of a public life rendered inadequate or ridiculous in the psychological aftermath of war and social change. However, as Nicholas Courtney observes in his lively chronicle of society in the inter-war years;

> When their numbers grew and their escapades were copied without the originality or style of the founders, those founders dropped out and left the field to the exhibitionists whose parties 'always seemed to be held where there were photographers and where they would create the maximum disturbance'.[50]

It was in the manifestation of these latter circumstances that Society became its own victim. The well-born or near-do-well celebrants of nocturnal antics courted press coverage with which in turn, Society became familiar to the public in a wholly unprecedented form.

As intimated, the pleasure pursuit included scavenger hunts, theme parties where fashionable guests dressed in costume, or no costume at all, and 'bottle parties'. The success of bottle parties was due to their immunity from police censure, so long as the organiser of such parties played 'host' and if he had ordered the

liquor during licensing hours.[51] The guests in turn were encouraged to contribute toward costs, so that a host could hope to finance such evenings at the rate of 25 shillings for a bottle of whisky, 35 to 55s. for inferior champagne, and for stragglers at dawn, 5s. for bacon and eggs.[52]

These and other parties also became a forum for early American jazz and dance music. In her memoirs How We Lived Then (1922) the journalist Mrs. C.S. Peel remembers that dancing had enjoyed an almost manic craze, with chaperons soon absent or present in name only.[53] A telling description of the ensuing night-life culture with youthful high-jinks in the 1920s is given by Robert Graves and Alan Hodge in The Long Week-end (1940); "Since the Lord Chamberlain could exercise no authority over 'private' entertainment, the semi-nude cabaret appeared, accompanied by the frankly lewd song. Some parties gave free invitations to Soho blacks; for, well-to-do roisters would pay huge sums for the excitement of sharing a dance band with these simply sensual people."

In The Deluge (1965) Arthur Marwick notes that the 'empty leisure' pursuits of the 1920s had their actual origin in the fevered atmosphere of wartime London. With reference to the early initiation of a 'night-club psychology' the author writes; "wartime hedonism, wartime darkness and dullness and wartime liquor restrictions created the appetite; young officers on leave provided the material upon which it could feed and multiply."[54] There had emerged therefore, a surreptitious form of leisure escape kindled by a wartime mentality.

The record of a single event may well serve as an instance of

the social turmoil visited on the established context of London Society in this period. In it one may observe the vortex of shifting attitudes and social norms. In this conflict of generations the victim would prove both the symbolic and practical community coherence of Society.

Late in the 1920s, the phenomenon of 'gate-crashing' became a familiar feature in Society entertainments as individuals would appear uninvited at social functions or, if invited themselves, would attend with others who were not. On the evening of July 9, 1928 the Countess of Ellesmere, a daughter of the Earl of Durham, took exception to what she claimed was an instance of this offense under her roof. The ensuing debate, covered extensively in the press for weeks, became known as the 'Ellesmere Ball Row'. Cecil Beaton's biographer Hugo Vickers describes the affair in some detail as it intimately involved a sister of Beaton, then enjoying her first London Season.[55]

Lady Ellesmere held her ball at her family's London home Bridgewater House in honour of her daughters, the Ladies Anne and Jane Egerton. Among the guests were included Princess Andrew of Greece, her daughter Princess Cecilie, Princess Aspasia of Greece, the widow of King Alexander, the Earl of Lonsdale and the Duchess of Roxburghe. Lady Ellesmere had stopped receiving her guests when two of them, Mr. Stephan Tennant and Mr. David Plunket-Greene only then arrived. Both these men were familiar and fashionable figures on the social stage of the 1920s being two among the Bright Young People's original players. They had come to the ball from a performance of Diaghilev's Ballet Russe, itself a 'cause-celebre' for the progressive

young of the period, and were accompanied by their partners Nancy Beaton and Elizabeth Lowndes. The foursome later claimed not to have been at all aware of any irregularity in their presence but Prince George of Greece noticed the girls and casually expressed surprise to his hostess that she knew 'Miss Beaton' at which point Lady Ellesmere confronted her and demanded she leave. In his discussion of the incident Hugo Vickers suggests that Lady Ellesmere had particular cause to be alert to gate-crashing. During the previous Season an American debutante Charlotte Brown of New York had been brought to one of Lady Ellesmere's functions by Lady Muriel Paget. Lady Ellesmere had complained and had even requested that Queen Mary intervene and duly canvassed her Lady of the Bedchamber the Countess of Minto. Lady Minto had replied that although both she and the Queen were 'so behind the times' that neither had even heard of Miss Brown she nonetheless added "Anyway it is unpardonable anyone inviting people to houses that don't belong to them and you are quite right to make a fuss."[56]

The incident of July 9, 1928 might not have been publicly circulated but the scene was reported in the following day's newspapers having been witnessed by a social columnist at the ball.

In defense of his sister, Cecil Beaton wrote to Lady Ellesmere explaining that as she was Mr. Tennant's partner for the evening, he was therefore naturally completely responsible for her evening. "It is most unfortunate that through him my sister should find herself in the dreadful predicament of being named 'an uninvited guest'."[57] Even though he also requested that his sister's name not be cited in any

further press coverage, with this, Lady Ellesmere did not comply. The "Daily Express" printed Lady Ellesmere's variation of the incident with her comment;

> I wish the fullest publicity to be given to the name of my uninvited guests as I consider this the only way of dealing with a nuisance which I understand many hostesses have suffered from this season.[58]

In a subsequent assault Beaton added,

> I cannot see why Lady Ellesmere should have singled out my sister as an uninvited guest, as she had previously told a friend of mine that there were at least 300 people at her ball she did not know by sight.[59]

Messrs. Tennant and Plunket Greene also played out their own role duly apologising to Lady Ellesmere. Nancy Beaton also wrote declaring herself to be 'extremely hurt' and added that she reserved the right to send a copy of her letter to the press (The Daily Express printed it on July 13).

Before this drama played itself out the issue was debated in the press as Society took sides in support of one or other of two 'wounded' parties. Many among the aristocracy rallied behind Lady Ellesmere with declarations of indignant support. The Duchess of Roxburghe; "What intolerable impertinence bringing guests unasked and uninvited through your portals - I should certainly punish them soundly." The Duke of Northumberland wrote; "The principle culprit is a youth whose strange behaviour has caused considerable comment in Northumberland." Lord Lambourne a former Coldstream Guards colonel referred to such youth as 'howling cads'. And Lady Ellesmere's father the Earl of Durham wrote in support;

> I think in the next honours list you should receive the OM or VC....At the balls here when looking about guests

> I have often hoped some of them were uninvited. Of course you did the right thing and I admire you for it.[60]

The editorial views of the newspapers themselves tended to voice the side of youth or at least to lampoon the less than graceful implications of foyer defences against hapless interlopers. The "Morning Post" criticised the vulgarity that guests might be reduced to presenting invitation cards at the door. In his "Sunday Express" column the aristocrat-gossip writer Lord Castlerosse wrote of 'the unwanted hostess' rather than of unwanted guests.

However entertaining its distractions, what remains significant about the 'Ellesmere Ball Row' was the precedent it set of open recourse to the press as a presumedly legitimate forum of public arbitration and debate. In this recourse its participants abandoned, consciously or otherwise, the niceties of an earlier mentality and process of conduct, as well as the self-governing exclusivity of its own Society circle. The domestic cultivation of a patrician form of civilisation as much as of mere self-preservation had been endemic to this exclusivity. Much of both the ideal and practice of this privilege was realised in the art and order of private entertainment. The innovation for example of the restaurant for Edwardian Society had dismayed some senior voices even though it might have exhilarated Queen Alexandra when she dined 'out' in Paris with King Edward VII thereby becoming the first reigning monarch, regnant or consort ever to dine 'in public'. By 1909 the Countess of Cardigan and Lancastre had entoned that, "a hostess ought always to show up to the best advantage in her own house. It is her proper setting - not the smart

restaurant where she now entertains her friends at so much a head."[61] By the 1930s Lady Frances Balfour would respectfully recall a social life "centered on the home and its interests" where privacy and delicacy were the keynotes of a beautiful hospitality.[62] In the 'Ellesmere Ball Row' one may see conveniently focused the break-point of innovation, change and stress in Society's post-war evolution. In it, not only could the public marvel at scenes of Society disunity, publicly vaunted with the collaboration of all concerned, but in so doing, witness the demise of an aristocratic authority in Society's self-regulation and purpose.

CONCLUSION

In the opening remarks of her autobiography Romantic Adventure Elinor Glyn offers the following suggestion of both the usefulness and appeal of memoir writing and its theme of retrospection and reflection.

> The principal interest in Memoirs has always seemed to me to lie in the comparisons which they make possible between the "then" and "now", and the reflections they provide of people, manners and customs which have passed away, or greatly changed with time. To read a book of reminiscences is like stepping back for a moment while painting some detail of a picture, to obtain an impression of the recent work in its relation to the whole.[1]

Inasmuch as it may be possible to attain this sense of revelation with regard to a single work of retrospection, such a perspective can be manifoldly true of several, affording the reader a composite view - as if before, not merely a painting, but an intricate historical tapestry - lifting the scales on a whole era of social experience and challenge.

Elinor Glyn's reminiscences are one among many that have alluded to London Society life and aristocratic culture, in a period of social evolution and adaptation. This thesis has been concerned with the considerations of this evolution for the period including the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the nineteen thirties. In the presentation of memoir and analogous sources the preoccupation with such themes as continuity, change, transition, progress, decline, and of standards of behaviour and example, ably demonstrate Society's sensitivity to those forces of challenge that for many, characterised

the restless years at the turn of the century.

The time-frame of this inquiry corresponds to a clear recognition of the change and transition in Society's composition and practices and beyond them, of the broader realities of a 'ruling class' culture, hitherto dominated by the landed classes. The adaptive processes and the shifting relationships of Society both in relation to itself and to its external environment may effectively be seen in the comparative instances of recognisable continuity and change appraised both before and after the dividing point of the First World War.

Into this mold, as in part demonstrated, may be poured a Niagara of retrospection and analytical comment. In the final appraisal of the character and essence of this commentary, one must first acknowledge that although this commentary is invariably direct enough, much of the retrospective consideration of London Society's part and present, can as willingly mask as it can also choose to reveal. In reference particularly to Society's Victorian participants this factor might however, seem less interesting than the collective willingness to write and publish at all. Indeed, with the close of the nineteenth century memoir production touching on themes of change and alleged decline became an ample literary genre. The intimate practice that had characterised an earlier time, whereby an author of some form of personal recollection or current attitude would publish privately for distribution among a circle of friends, may be seen to have given way to exercises in soul-sharing introspection, as unabashedly public in their address as they were often nostalgic and

plaintive in their concern. For many of these authors this publishing climate was largely influenced by a collective realisation that a way of life was being effectively, and perhaps more to the point, unavoidably altered by forces of social and economic evolution.

However, beyond the general application of this openness of concern there is nonetheless a sometimes exasperating lack of controversy present in the whole range of the memoir consideration of Society's life. The structure of the writing is almost always anecdotal. The reader follows a wandering but progressive path in which one recalled incident or example of experience naturally produces another. It is a simple but discreetly redeeming approach that often serves to fashion a form of cohesive narrative protecting the author from the controversy that might arise from an unwarranted sophistication of analysis.

It is true that occasionally a breeze will stir the otherwise placid surface of memory so that, by such a means one may note Moreton Frewen's boredom with the Souls or the Countess of Cardigan's coy allusions to Society's illicit pleasures. And yet, regardless of such passing moments, a more typical pattern in retrospective testimony carefully avoids over-extension. Lady Dorothy Nevill is eloquent in her aesthetic criticism of the alleged consequences of new wealth on the late-Victorian scene but among her explanations for it she does not cite the instrumental role of the Prince of Wales who encouraged and facilitated a consciously democratic acceptance of change, welcoming into Society's social and economic processes such men as Maurice de Hirsch and Ernest Cassel.[2] In memoirs, instances of

course of outright scandal are understandably absent, or masked to a point of invisibility so that consequently there is little to breathe anything even like life, into otherwise highly significant chapters as the Tranby Croft or Beresford Brooke affairs of the early nineties.

These restraints in the form and character of memoir writing arguably reveal less concern with libel laws than they perhaps do with the natural reserve and social discipline of English people generally and of a certain solidarity among an upper class environment in particular. The relatively few examples of a freer and therefore perhaps more stimulating memoir production have, as a consequence, been published privately if at all, or on a date long after their content could cause alarm. In this way, after a veiling of fifty years has Osbert Sitwell's apposite poem Rat Week been printed (1986), exposing the indignities and commenting frankly on those players who enlivened the drama of the abdication of Kind Edward VIII in December 1936.[3] Harold Nicolson's shrewd variation on the memoir genre in Some People (1927) is as much a literary experiment as it is a historical document, placing actual persons in imaginary circumstances and populating actual circumstances with imaginary persons - an approach that does not effortlessly lend itself to historical categorisation.[4]

However, regardless of the form or structure deployed by authors, and regardless as well of whatever degree they may or may not be reticent or selective in their appraisal of identified themes, these in no way undermine their value as a historical source. The subjectivity of agenda and expression in the Society memoir need be no more problematic for the student of their concerns than would be

the use of any document shaped by thought, opinion and inevitable bias. It is indeed the very subjectivity of allusion and attitude in personal experience which is, in this context, the object of study - gauging the temper of a social elite, its 'raison d'etre' and sense of self at key moments in its modern history. For this reason it may also be said that although many of these authors constitute in their number, necessarily a minority among their class and as such, tend toward a reflectiveness or intelligence which has not always been thought characteristic of their brethren - this too does not compromise their representativeness. Society life has always been composed by an animated leadership which set the standards and embodied the tone emulated by the surrounding 'cast of players'. An endemic law in any organisation is the two part relationship of leader and follower, or at least, of senior and junior partner. The same is equally true historically of the culture of Society's life, with the admitted qualification that its members were, at least theoretically, on a social par with one another. A celebrated figure such as Frances, Countess of Warwick may easily be appreciated in this regard, as having been a leader, whereas the provincial image of the county squire harangued, let one imagine by his wife and daughters into the undertaking of a London Season, would clearly have been a follower, a kind of 'spear carrier' in Society's fashionable drama.

In appraising and evaluating the legacy of Society's retrospection and self-analysis it is necessary finally to acknowledge two fundamental factors in its expression. The first of these indicates, in comparatively concrete and quantifiable terms, the

historical environment to which the period in this inquiry and its treatment in memoir writing corresponds. The second in turn, must relate to somewhat intangible influences of sensibility and tradition not so easy in themselves always to define but no less vital in the processes of Society and the mentality of its participants.

It is a truism to state that at no given point or period in historical experience are the affairs of life static or absolute in and of themselves. Perpetual motion is itself the only practical law as a forever changing present 'peels off' a forever arriving future, depositing it in a forever accumulating past. And yet the character, durability and consistency of perceived patterns and long established formulas in the government of communities nonetheless justify the recognition of definable experience. In examining the form and character of London Society life from the late nineteenth century until the period of the 1930s one may chronicle the shifting balances of continuity and change, of the status quo and its adjustments whether they be subtle or dramatic. To a large extent it is a period that reveals what could be justly termed 'the decline' of an aristocratic and landed social culture. That is to say, it is a period that witnesses the decline of its once comparatively insular and near, if never quite actual, caste-like self-recognition. The late-Victorian phase in particular exposes in the retrospection of its experiences, the seeming contradictions of continuity and change effected by both the voluntary and involuntary adjustments to social evolution. The Society memoir in this period is an almost entirely aristocratic genre of expression, typifying in its personalities, a long association with

land, government and social prestige. In the context of often full and active lives, participants see Society's culture as an integral feature, a 'community meeting point', not merely of class authority but also of its realisation in both practical and idealised terms. The consistency of time-honoured customs of practice can foster for the reader an inevitable impression of order, process and propriety. However, regardless of this, in the specific treatment of change on the late-Victorian scene, memoir authors also acknowledge that Society's climate was undeniably being altered. The authorship continues to correspond to an aristocratic and landed social foundation but the discussion suggests the broadening influences, to varying degrees of accommodation, of a surrounding 'external environment'.

The almost overwhelming impact of the First World War on the national community at large, reflects in memoir consideration of London Society itself, not only an accelerating of established themes but also an expanded authorship. Although an aristocratic core experience endures, it is augmented, if not dominated, by a cast of players representative of the emergence of bourgeois influence in the increasingly complex social and economic life of the nation. In this defused environment, Society life may be seen to have become less important as the embodiment of once landed political power and as having become more specifically social, plutocratic and merely decorative in nature. Thus, characteristic images of inter-war Society activities and associations become possible in the reminiscences for example of artists and entertainers whose social

and professional foundations are invariably independent of a Society patronage as such. Such memoir discussion possible in the reminiscences of people like Tallulah Bankhead or Fred Astaire, are presented in the context of autobiographies in which Society's world, is more-or-less an ornamental element and not a dominant or defining theme.

For the sake of narrative and linguistic convenience the use of the term 'Society' has been justified throughout the duration of this inquires. However its application to increasing charge in 'upper class' London life in the inter-war period understandably leaves its validity problematic or obsolete. Such authors as Harold Macmillan and Sir George Arthur find the term democratically offensive with the latter only tolerating its continuity into the 1930s on account of its expanded 'spaciousness'. In his highly illustrative work As We Were (1930) E.F. Benson comments more sympathetically that in contrast to Victorian Society and its patrician lace-work of inter-connecting relationships, responsibilities and conscientious custom, London's modern-day resemblance to this remembered world had become a tenuous one.

> "Society" (in the sense of inverted commas) has so broadened out that, becoming quite flat in the process, there is not the semblance of a peak left. To suggest that anybody matters now, or wields any social power, would imply as complete a misunderstanding of modern conditions as would the failure to grasp the fact that in the eighties and the nineties there were in existence these great ladies who mattered very much indeed.[5]

E.F. Benson's remarks are useful in serving finally to assert that the aristocratic ingredient had been at the core of Society's

broader social context and traditions. The effectiveness of As We Were is not merely to outline a text book recitation of political and economic fluctuations in the modern life of the upper classes but also to capture the sense and quality of their culture. This 'feeling' for the material is often realised, as it is in so much first person memoir literature, in the predominance of what could be termed the 'idiosyncratic moment'. This can take the form of an anecdote but also just as effectively in a single sentence or phrase. Such observations are significant in conveying the truth or spirit of an author's effort to explain or illustrate. They will often reveal the essence of social relationships and attitudes of finely evolved customs and vanities or the operating rule in social processes without this rule being necessarily defined. For example, by such a means one may glimpse revealed in miniature, the personality of King Edward VIII and the socially relaxed and restless tenor of his times in Chips Channon's remark on the occasion of a dinner party in 1936, "...and we marched into dinner, the ladies leading. The King will never precede the ladies, and dislikes being asked to do so."[6] In another instance from the vantage point of a democratic age one might find self-conscious and rather 'arched', the otherwise unselfconscious rebuke of Margot Asquith to George Curzon, "It's dreadful to be rude even to your own servants, but quite unpardonable to be rude to other people's".[7] One may easily imagine how 'period' and quaint any number of such observations can be as if exhuming the scent of the air itself, when a tomb is unearthed.

It is however important finally to allude to this manner of

expressed ideas not simply to acknowledge the unavoidable, but often to also recognise in it, the concern and sensibilities of an aristocratic culture during stages of its dissolution. It is otherwise sometimes difficult to justify the validity of references to enjoyable dinners, gracious hostesses or discerning manners. To relate Society's interest and concern with these themes can be a little like trying to pin down a butterfly with carpenter nails or split a diamond with a hammer. It is often, as Beverley Nichols describes the conversational essence of Emerald Cunard - 'gossamer'.

It is not difficult to understand hostility or indifference to London Society's contemporary history. Whatever worth may be attributed to its political and social processes in the nineteenth century, its inter-war devolution is more suggestive of disintegration than dignity - cocktail stained, frivolous, seemingly irrelevant or arcane, a glittering but not golden addendum to the frantic twenties and hungry thirties in a country yet again, on the verge of Armageddon. However, just as the progress of an aristocratic tradition and its reflection in Society may be thought to have become an anomaly in the contemporary age, so to does it contain the seed of its own appeal. This appeal also goes beyond mere nostalgia or costume drama. Its interest, as demonstrated in so many Society chroniclers is with the example of a seemingly perfected order and repose. This is of course ultimately mythic and thrives certainly on nostalgia, but in the functional reality of Victorian aristocratic culture there nonetheless existed a comparatively disciplined web of community. This is a characteristic historically associated with

landed or aristocratic processes in general. The concepts of community and order in crudely political terms have, in a sense been discredited in the tragic example of mid-twentieth century fascism. However the concept of order in less ideological terms, associated with the human ideal of organic society uniting its members in bonds of mutual responsibility, has nonetheless endured as an alluring if romantic idea in modern thought. It may be easy to dismiss the quaint musings of old women such as Lady Dorothy Nevill treating specific topics that, for the contemporary reader are as dead as the Dodo bird, but rather less easy to dismiss the values of others who have shared her fundamental outlook or rather, who have expressed a kindred sympathy with the nature of her concerns. In the canon of modern literature the aristocratic sensibility, displaced and poignantly vulnerable, has evoked a tragic, almost sacrificial foil to the chaos, cruelty, and materialism of our modern world. Through such an agency have the following representative creations been evoked - Blanche DuBois' sacrifice on the altar of the 'new South' in Tennessee Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire (1947); the resigned dignity of the Prince in accepting that 'political progress' will not alter human nature in Guiseppi di Lampedusa's The Leopard (1958); the helpless despair and wounded sensibility of Olga in Anton Chekhov's Three Sisters (1905) at the cruelty of her sister-in-law to an old family retainer; and the hybrid eccentricity and somewhat tragi-comic self destruction of the Flytes in Evelyn Waugh's emotional elegy to the past, Brideshead Revisited (1945).

A sensitivity to the past as well as to the values and the

example of community are often expressed in the context of what an author perceives to be an alien or antagonistic culture. Thus, such a sensitivity can reflect a response to a 'current' state of affairs as much as it might understand the nature as such of past experience. In this sense the memoir literature and comment on London Society's recent history, form and character resembles all historical literature, conditioned by the effort to interpret and resolve the challenge of human experience in the forever creative debate of the past.

In the legacy of London Society's modern history one may glimpse this drama played out in a 'vanity fair' of human experience, evoking virtue and vice, conviction and expediency, distinction and mediocrity - the human comedy in miniature. It is a passage that has perhaps been eloquent of an English predilection to adapt and evolve, mindful of the processes and certainties of established example and tradition. In this, as with any other community of the human family, had London Society hoped to understand and dignify the unrelenting tide of time.

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