Preface and Acknowledgement

I ventured into this work without full realisation of the vastness of the subject. Earlier, I had started my work on Mrs. Gaskell. But after going through the works of Kathleen Tillotson, Catherine Gallaghar, Raymond Williams and Louis Cazamian on the social and industrial novels of the period under my review, I thought, the subject of the industrial novels or the novels of the 1840s needed further extension. An article written by Prof. D. K. Barua, my supervisor, on Frederick Denison Maurice, first instilled in me a desire to explore the Christian Socialist Movement, started by Maurice.

I read Elie Halevy’s History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, where Halevy emphasized the importance of the nineteenth century social thinkers in guiding the course of English history into a different direction from the trends of development set in France. Halevy affirmed in his chapter on “Social Reforms and Demise of Chartistism” that Christian Socialists were a force to reckon with. He wrote:

It was a powerful influence. They had created a new type of Socialism calculated to attract, by reassuring them, those who had been alarmed by some extreme doctrines preached by Owen. In the first place, of course, there was no hostility to Christianity. ... The Christian Socialists had little liking for the militant Trade Unions. They wanted
to establish their Socialism by reconciling the classes, not by class war. Obedient to the spirit of the times and disagreeing on this point fundamentally with Carlyle and approaching Mill, whose chapter on the 'futurity of the labouring class' was their breviary, they sought by co-operation to reconcile, not only Christianity and Socialism, but Socialism and freedom.3 (emphasis added).

This statement gave me the seed for my hypothesis that the writings of the early nineteenth century thinkers, mostly Coleridgeans, started an alternative discourse against the dominant utilitarian discourse of the time and also against the newly developing continental discourse of class-struggle embodied in the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels, published in 1848. I have tried to establish connections among these thinkers, whom I have called ‘the articulators’ of the ‘early nineteenth century critical discourse’ and have analysed their impact on the principal novelists of the period, who were trying to respond to what had been called ‘the condition of England question’. My selection of the Rev. F.D. Maurice as one of the principal articulators of the discourse is corroborated by Halevy’s assertion of the importance of the Christian Socialist Movement in the mid-nineteenth century social discourse.

As a research scholar as well as a teacher of English literature in a college of an Indian University, I feel my inadequacy in understanding theological issues. Our study of literature in India is very eclectic. We hardly have the scope to penetrate into the hinterland of
thought beyond what is available in a couple of survey books. So I approached Maurice with fear and hesitation. Besides, Maurice is difficult to read. He seems to be so conscientious about writing that he wants to clear all doubts through the interposition of an interlocutor. As a result, he becomes obscure at times and one needs to read him several times to understand him fully. I cannot claim to have reached such an understanding as yet. But I have realised his immense importance in the mid-nineteenth century critical discourse.

My first introduction to John Stuart Mill came through his essay, 'On Bentham and Coleridge', edited by F.R. Leavis. I was specially struck by Leavis's assertion: "A serious study of literature inevitably leads outwards into other studies". This justifies my efforts in trying to read Maurice and Mill. Mill considered himself as a bridge-builder and he sought to establish connections between various streams of thoughts, current in the nineteenth century, hence his influence was immense. He had intimate friendship with Carlyle and was an avid reader of Maurice. Novelists of the period, notably Mrs. Gaskell, might have been influenced by Mill's ideas on the organisation of labour and wage-negotiations and the broader aspects of labour-capital conflicts.

In the selection of the novelists, I have kept in mind their consanguinity with the articulators of this discourse and also the centrality of the 'condition of England question' in their narratives and of course, the dates of publications, to qualify them broadly as the novelists of the 1840s. I have not included Dickens and George Eliot, as the class-reconciliation
theme is not paramount in their fiction of this period. Kingsley comes in, as he was one of the staunchest supporters of the Christian Socialist Movement. Disraeli, because of his engagement with the 'condition of England question', as well as with the class-reconciliation hypothesis.

It might be felt that in my analysis of the early nineteenth century critical discourse, I have paid little attention to the formal analysis of the novels included in my study. My emphasis has been on the content of the discourse and the attitudinal changes it brought about in the fictional narratives and in the structure of their plots leading to class-reconciliation. The principal texts of my discourse are so varied that a rhetorical analysis would not have been possible within the specified time at my disposal. The parameter of my study being too wide, I have been constantly under the apprehension of the work getting diffuse. So I should like to admit at the outset, the limitations of the work I have been able to accomplish.

I would like to close this prefatory note by acknowledging the help I have received in doing this work. My debt is immense to Prof D. K. Barua, my supervisor, who initiated me to this work and guided me with utmost patience. He has been a strict taskmaster to keep me moving to complete the work.

I am grateful to Mr. Sunil Chatterjee, the scholarly Librarian of the Baptist Mission Library, Serampore, for providing me with the necessary materials on Maurice and specially the Xeroxed copies of *The Kingdom of Christ*. The books of Maurice stored in the National Library are getting brittle and the new reprints are difficult to find in India. So this study
would not have been possible without the help from the Baptist Mission Library and the National Library. I extend my thanks to the staff of these two Libraries as well as to those of British Council, Bethune College and Presidency College, Calcutta. My special thanks are due to Dr. Basanti Debnath, the Librarian of Presidency College, who provided me with many books on her own responsibility.

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