

Usury Moralized

by
Henry Swabey

Chapter 11 Usury and the Church of England

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May 2008

a cesc publication
edited by Peter Etherden

Chapter 11. Usury Moralized

At the opening of the seventeenth century, there were signs that the puritans were not going to have matters all their own way. There were men of integrity and learning like Wilson and Andrewes, whose opinions had weight. But the *Whig* current had set in, a stiff breeze was blowing from Geneva, and when in 1610 the people wanted Andrewes for their Primate, Abbot the 'bigoted Calvinist' was chosen to that high office by James I.

There were however still a few to protest and Bishop Sanderson in his sermon *A Populum on Callings* as late as 1621 remonstrated without compromise:

"It is with the usurer as with the drunkard. If he asked me against which of the Ten Commandments he offended, I could not really give him an answer, because he sinneth against so many."

Andrewes condemned usury under the prohibition of theft.

"He fleeceth many but clotheth none. He biteth and devoureth. The King, the Church, the poor are wronged by him."

"Can it possibly enter any reasonable man's head to think that a man should be born for nothing else but to tell out money and take in paper?"

It is most significant that Bishop Sanderson was Charles I's confessor. It has been held, that Charles I realized that he was fighting against a new money power which was enlarging the sphere of the old usurers. Against them he was protecting the people, as their guardian from these heartless monarchs. The struggle ahead was between *Sovereignty* and *Money Power*, not between *King* and *People*. The King opposed this new monarchy, and claimed to be protecting the freedom of the people.

At all events, the result of the protests of Sanderson and others was that a law was passed in 1624 which was called *Against Usury*. It is true that it legalized usury up to 8%, but traditional teaching was still held, for the permission was granted by the *State*,

"...provided no word herein contained shall be construed or expounded to allow the practice of usury in point of Religion or Conscience."

Usury was legal, but still not moral.

If the Church had maintained her strong stand against usury, the attention of all would have been turned on an inadequate financial system, which related currency and credit to bullion instead of to real or potential goods.

The spoils of the buccaneers and the silver of Potosi had been unable to supplement it, particularly when the treasure was drained away. But the black England of the industrial barons was to supplant the green England of Shakespeare, and the usury laws were under unremitting *Whig* pressure.

The tradition that condemned usury limped on until about 1640. Blaxton published *The English Usurer*, but he was an obscure country parson. One or two more vituperations were issued. In fact, the need for bullion had ended, for money was passing in England from its primitive phase.

For in 1640 the goldsmiths were beginning to issue notes in excess of the gold they held on deposit. A Nottingham paper reported that:

"The rise of banking in England has often been dated from the seizure by Charles I in 1640 of the bullion deposited in the *Tower of London* by the *City Merchants*. It was, in fact, returned to its rightful owners but for safety thereafter they deposited the bullion with the goldsmiths, whose 'side-line' as money changers developed greatly in the *Civil War*.

"They gave receipts for money lodged with them, which were the earliest form of bank notes in England, and circulated freely as coin."

Claude Goldring gives substantially the same account, adding that in Charles I's reign there was about £ 200,000 in the *Tower*, the *Mint* there being the only convenient place where one could deposit money.

"Charles seized the lot and called it a loan. The whole of the banking business was at this time handed over to the goldsmiths, and during the *Civil War* they hid their money as best they could.

"When it was certain that the King would be beaten, the citizens unearthed their cash and handed it over to the goldsmiths, who now gave interest for the money placed in their care. As might be expected, the goldsmiths grew rich. They introduced a little craft into their business. On the grounds of patriotism, they lent Cromwell money, but saw to it that they got good interest. Their

capital increased at such a rate that in a few years they had £ 1,300,000 deposited in the *Exchequer*.

“Charles II had a better haul than his father when he seized the lot. But the goldsmiths did not intend to take this sitting down. They raised such a clamour that Charles II had to give them 6% interest. This was tantamount to an admission that it had been a loan, and in the days of William III the goldsmiths were receiving 3% on the money.”

Two observations may be made. The first is that the tie between money - cash, circulating medium - and bullion was being loosened. A bold stroke might well have severed the connection and based money on the real wealth of the community. This would not have suited the goldsmiths and bankers who were growing rich and powerful on the usury they were receiving.

A generation earlier such terms as *Banker* and *City Merchant* would not have displaced the older term of *Usurer*: that was their business. In the second place, the impression is given by those who favour the bankers (usurers) that Charles I was a thief and a robber, and much history has been written from the cosmopolitan *Whig* point of view.

The falseness of this impression - at least a qualification - may be gathered from the scholar, patriot and *Christian Socialist* Thomas Hancock. He specialized in this period and reached a very different conclusion. In fact, the protection from extortionate enclosing landlords that *Church* and *King* gave the people is one of the themes of *The Pulpit and the Press, and other Sermons (1904)*.

He lists many clergy who protested against the *Nobility* who had not merely robbed the *Church* of her lands but:

“...partly by force, partly by fraud, had converted to their own use the pastures which formerly had been common.”

Hancock continues:

“The building up of huge landed estates and the formation of *New Nobilities* out of the robbery of the poor and the robbery of the **Church**, which is the peculiar heritage of the poor, marked each of the four great judicial epochs in the life of the *English Church* during the sixteenth and seventeenth century:

“The *Dissolution of the Monasteries* under Henry VIII; the *Spoliation of the Church* under Edward VI; the *Abolition of the National Episcopate* and the *Expulsion of all the Liberal and Catholic Clergy* by the tyrannical *Nonconformist Parliament* during the *Civil War*; and the imposition on the people of the so called *Commonwealth* by the military oligarchy of the sectaries in 1649, all alike ended in the 'estating' of a greedy landlordism out of the plunder.

“The *Fathers of Nonconformity* from the very first had the eager support and encouragement of the aristocracy and the plutocracy. These two terms indeed were not used then. The usual terms of the pulpit were *Landlords and Usurers*.”

Bancroft said,

“They do greatly urge in the ministry the *Apostolic Poverty*, that they obtain the prey.”

It was another prelate who reminded them that the saints had cast their treasurers at the Apostles' feet!. Bancroft also said:

“Covetousness hath thrust them into this schism.”

Hancock continued:

“The poor and their clergy fled to the *King* as their only possible champion ...the sympathies of the English democracy, of the anti-puritanical poor, remained throughout on the side of the *King*.”

And Laud was the unflinching opponent of the engrossers, though it is doubtful whether he maintained the Anglican onslaught against usury. He was the champion of:

“...the *Common Prayer Book*, of the common law of Christ, of the common man, which made those who thought they were - after the manner of the Jews - a chosen and superior people, detest and kill him. He also tried to insist on the ancient Christian duty of restitution, and was especially anxious to protect the common schools, as well as the common land and Church.”

Laud and Charles took vigorous measures against the new rich.

“Laud cited powerful landlords into the *High Commission Court* for seizing almshouses, common lands and the endowments of free schools portions of common churchyards, and even for 'walling up ancient ways'.”

He defended the poor against the embezzlement of the proud and against:

“...the inhumane *Calvinist* theology and puritanical non-conformity and separatism.”

Yet he had in him nothing of the selfish demagogue but had, as his biographer tells us:

“...a dislike to that popularity which was too much affected by his predecessor, Archbishop Abbot.”

But the ringing of the changes in the type of Archbishop - Whitgift, Bancroft, Abbot, Laud - had loosened the Church's hold on social ethics, and Laud seems to have lost the consciousness of the danger of usury which Andrewes, if he had preceded him, would most certainly have upheld.

It was for Milton, says Hancock, to prove:

“...how a handful of colonels, parliament men, great landlords, and fanatical preachers, who were hated by the people, could usurp to themselves any divine or human right to call themselves *The People*.”

Hancock even questions Milton's integrity. When showing that the profits of disendowment have seldom reached the poor but invariably gone to the rich and powerful, he says:

“It was so with that den of *Liberationist* robbers, the *Long Parliament*, whose members seized the Episcopal and cathedral lands.”

Such were the opponents of ‘bowling and other games’ on the Sabbath Day, the worshippers of the ‘lean goddess of Abstinence’. And this is the opinion of one learned historian of the true issues at stake between Cromwell and the King. In Milton's time, Salmasius was writing his three learned volumes on usury - a bibliophile's rarity.

Cromwell was no unintelligent dictator (monarch). He is said to have reintroduced lead tokens to expand the currency, such as had been used by Elizabeth.¹ And in the second place, he re-admitted the Jews.

In his days, it was not likely that usury would be interfered with, but Tawney in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* notes that:

“The classes - Puritan disciplinary body - of Bury in Lancashire decided in 1647 after considerable debate, that 'usury is a scandalous sin, deserving suspension upon obstinacy'.”

Cromwell was in fact the leader of the *Whig* cosmopolitan interest lauded by the historians ever since, and a letter from a continental Jew promised him a loan for which the price was King Charles I's head.

In 1660, Charles II was restored, but the old ways were passed, as is shown by an act of the same year ‘for restraining the taking of excessive usury’, which limited it to 6%. All previous acts had been ‘against Usury’, but by this time the ‘beast with a hundred legs’, (*Usuria* by *E. Pound, Canto XV*) was domesticated and allowed into the house on a string.

We may see also the vast change, amounting to a practical desertion of ethics in the question of money, in the works of Jeremy Taylor and Richard Baxter.

Bishop Taylor (1613-1667) has the reputation of having opposed usury, and doubtless he still thought it was wrong in itself. But the following passages (from his *Great Rule of Conscience*, Book 2, ch. II, 7, (1), *Cautions to be observed in civil permissions of an unlawful act or state*) shows the gap that separated his thought and time from that of Andrewes. It is, of course, true that many priests had spent some time on the galleys. He writes:

“That the thing so permitted be, in the present constitution of affairs, necessary; and yet will not be without the evil appendage. Thus it is necessary in all communities of men there be borrowing and lending; but if it cannot be without usury, the commonwealth might promise not to punish it; though of itself it were uncharitable and consequently unlawful.

“For it is either lawful or else it is unlawful, for being against justice or against charity. If it be against justice, the commonwealth, be permitting it, makes it just; for as it is in the economy of the world, the decree of God doth establish the vicissitudes of day and night forever; but the sun, by

¹ Vide M. Butchart's invaluable *Money*.

looking on a point, not only signifies, but also makes the little portions of time and divides them into hours, but men, coming with their little arts and instruments, make them to be understood, and so become the sun's interpreters.

“So it is in the matter of justice, whose great return and firm establishments are made by God, and some rules given for the great measures of it. And we, from his laws, know just and unjust, as we understand day and night.

“But the laws of princes and the contracts of men, like the sun, make the little measures and divide the great proportions into minutes of justice and fair intercourse; and the divines and the lawyers go they lower, and they become expounders of those measures, and set up dials and instruments of notice, by which we understand the proportion and obligations of the law and the lines of justice.

“Just and unjust we love or hate respectively by our warrant from God; and from him also we are taught to make the general lines of it: as, Do what you would be done to restore the pledge, hurt no man, rob not your neighbour of his rights, make no fraudulent contracts, no unjust bargains.

“But then what are his rights and what are not; what is fraudulent and what is fair; in what hath he power, in what hath he none; is to be determined by the laws of men.

“So that if a commonwealth permits an usurious exchange or contract, it is not unjust, because the laws are the particular measures of justice and contracts, and therefore, may well promise impunity, where she makes innocence, as to the matter of justice.

“But if usury be unlawful because it is uncharitable, then when it becomes necessary then it is also charitable comparatively; and as to charity, no man by the laws of God is to be compelled (because it is not charity if it be compelled; for God accepts not an unwilling giver, and it is not charity, but an act of obedience and political duty, when by laws, men are constrained to make levies for the poor); so much less can they be compelled to measures and degrees of charity.

“And if to lend upon usury be better than not to lend at all, it is, in some sense, a charity to do so: and if it be when it will not be otherwise, there is no question but *The Prince*, that allows indemnity, is not to be damnified himself.

“I instanced in this, but in all things where there is the same reason there is the same conclusion.”

This casuistry may be contrasted with that of the *Roman Catholics*. They never permitted usury - there was a division on the question of *montes profani* and *montes pietatis* - but elaborated their teaching on interest.

Andrewes had been at pains to show that legalized usury was unlawful according to the Law of God.

Richard Baxter, the non-conformist, goes lower, and in about 1670, enunciated the full Calvinistic attitude. In Part IV of the *Christian Directory* he asks:

“Is it lawful to lend upon usury, interest or increase, receiving any additional gains for money lent? There is some such gain or usury unlawful and a heinous sin: some usury is not a violation of *Natural Laws of Piety, Justice or Charity*; nor against the supernaturally revealed *Laws of Moses or Christ*.”

He asserts that the *Law of Nature* does not forbid all usury, and gives “notoriously charitable instances” when the taking of usury is justifiable. It is only evil “when against Justice or Charity”. In fact, he admits the Calvinistic point that usury is not evil in itself.

So within a century, indeed within little more than a generation, a few inferior minds had shuffled away the thought of sixteen centuries. As James Harvey asked in *Paper Money* (1877):

“Who has ever heard a sermon holding forth usury as a sin?”

The last was preached by David Jones at *St. Mary Woolnoth* in 1692. He considered it the

“...preacher's duty to protest against usury”

and quoted Bishop Sanderson, who deplored that:

“...men should be born for nothing else but to tell out money and take in paper.”

David Jones appears to have lost his parish for this breach of urbanity - in the year when the debt started too - and his outburst was hushed up by ‘a discourse upon usury or lending money for increase, proving the lawfulness thereof, published at the request of several judicious and sober Christians’.

A few hack phrases are canted out, while it is admitted “that the subject of late years has not been controverted on one side or the other”; and that ‘the dealings of usury are become universal’.

In 1694 the *Bank of England* was founded.

This was, in the *Church of England*, the end for over two centuries of the delicately elaborated Catholic teaching on the *Just Price, Partnership, and Usury*.

The stages are clear. Local mints were suppressed and usury was legalized. Then usury was moralized.

The pressure of finance had been too strong, and the age of *laissez faire* (often dated from 1688) began with the Church's blessing - or at least without any protest. The Non-Jurors showed that there was disinterested honesty left, but ignorance - under her cloak of emancipation and enlightenment - hid effectively Christian economic light.

There is a Church of unusual design, dedicated to Charles the Martyr² and there are four other churches of the same dedication in England, built about 1680. This would seem to indicate a revolt of a spiritual kind against Oliver Cromwell and the usurious puritans and *Whigs*.

But David Jones's experience made it clear that Abbot had done his work, and that usurers were less affected by the building of these churches than by the *Oxford Movement*. This should interest those who regard the mason's idealism with reverence. No question is possible but that the *Bank of England*, according to the standards of *Catholic Doctrine* - and there had been no other Christian teaching on money - was usurious.

Tawney remarks that in Elizabeth's reign

“There had been something like deposit banking in the hands of the scriveners.”

William Paterson is thought to have written of the blessings of this usurious system in 1624, under the initials of HM. It must be insisted that he, and nine tenths of the leading business men, were *Presbyterians* and *Non-Conformists* and that business was becoming their religion - not justice, charity, consumption, partnership, but harsh individualism, competition, the economic man.

Unfortunately the *Anglican Church* was too supine to challenge the new ‘morality’, let alone to call for a reversion to the older creed. Besides, most of the bishops and priests of integrity had refused to break their oath of allegiance to James II.

Those who have read Butler's *Hudibras* will have a fair idea of the canting type of the *Independents* and *Presbyterians* who were climbing into the saddle. HM describes the natural wealth of Great Britain - a strong argument, incidentally, against overseas trade, and says that Britain is ‘as capable of living within itself as any nation; having not only all things necessary for the life of Men, but Abundance, Materials and Stores’.

From this he argues for a ‘*Royal Bank of Credit*’.

It is true that Charles I and Charles II had considered it their right to issue coin. But this new venture was going to allow Paterson³ to take interest on ‘all monies created out of nothing’. The issue of money was, in fact, going to pass from royal into private hands, and at a time when the issue need no longer be restricted artificially by the amount of gold and silver that happened to be in the country.

Paterson, or his scribe continues:

“Now money is but a medium of Commerce, a Security which we part with, to enjoy the like in Value, and is the standard of all Commodities, and esteemed so by the world. And such is a Bank-Bill, it will obtain what we want, and satisfy where we are indebted, and may be turned into Money again when the possessor pleaseth, and will be the Standard of Trade at the last.”

He continues,

“There is created in this *Royal Bank* by *Act of Parliament* such a Fund as may give out *Bills of Exchange* or *Credit Carrant*, that such always be answered by Money on demand... We may make an estimate of the value of credit upon a good Fund, by the bills accepted upon the late Assessments instead of Money, whilst their credit was carrant, being no other security but the honesty of the man, and a Shadow of an Estate, both which may fail.

² At Tunbridge Wells.

³ Credit is due to Paterson for freeing goods from gold. He was dropped by his partners, possibly for some display of integrity. John Law, (1671 - 1729), was ruined by the French nobles who made him over-issue. He talked with Peter the Great in Paris in 1718.

“But I have heard of a gentleman that hath seen the same Money transmitted nine times in one morning, by writing off the Credit from one to another, and the money is specie left untouched at last. Much more may be done by this bank credit, their fund being such cannot fail, unless the Nation be destroyed: for that all men’s interests are secured by *Act of Parliament*.

“England’s Glory, or The Great Improvement in General of Trade by a Royal Bank or Office of Credit.”

As HM makes clear, the third stage in monetary science had been reached - the stage of credit. The bullion and paper note stages were left fifty years behind, and the machinery of credit could have been put to the service of the nation.

Instead, it was usurped, as the issue of money was usurped, by a private corporation, who extracted usury on ‘all monies created out of nothing’. They were literally trading on the credit of the nation; ethics in monetary matters had been discarded with its clean terminology, and the process of issuing money was to be confused for generations with that of lending.

Thomas Attwood, in *Observations on Currency, Population and Pauperism*, gives this information about tokens (1818).

“In the ‘golden days’ of Queen Elizabeth there were three thousand trades people and others who issued lead tokens⁴ which passed as coin of the realm, and no doubt contributed, in a great degree, to that burst of prosperity.”

“A mistaken policy destroyed the lead tokens of Elizabeth without providing an adequate substitute; and I have no doubt that this impolitic conduct contributed to the public distress and disturbances which soon after terminated in the death of Charles I.

“Oliver Cromwell knew better the principles of national prosperity, and under the *Protectorate* the leaden tokens were again issued by many thousands of tradesmen, and again a new energy was given to the productive powers of the country. These leaden tokens answered all the useful purposes of coins of the realm; and bank notes are but an improvement on them.”

Such tokens were issued by trades-people in the eighteenth century, and many survive. But by this time the penny had dropped in purchasing power, so that the halfpenny tokens - coins were copper then and remained so until the days of Victoria, and pennies were large and cumbersome - did little as rivals of the Bank-notes. The leaden tokens were the last useful survivals of the principle of local mints. Copper tokens were the last recorded survival of all.

Some people did see the danger. An anonymous *Discourse upon Money (1696)* says that:

“Great and Public Banks in a State are very pernicious for where the treasure is, there will be the power. If Monopolies of Little Things are declared unlawful, then *a fortiori* a Monopoly of Money (and it is plain such banks are no other) must be so with a witness.”

quoted in M. Butchart’s Money

He cites the Roman bankers who ‘became so rich and powerful’, mentioning their ‘Lucre and unjust gain’.

In 1700 another or perhaps the same writer says that the monopoly of money and credit ‘seems the most dangerous’ and will put the ‘Trade and Treasures of the nation entirely in their power’.

And he asks whether the Bank’s ‘admitting or refusing the Discounting Bills or Notes for Merchants and Traders’ will not then become the standard of every private person’s reputation, and ‘give great advantage to their Favourites and Discouragements to the Rest of the Traders’.

The following extracts from the statutes regulating the foundation of the *Bank of England* throw light on the matter from a political point of view. (*5 & 6 Wm. and Mary, 20, 1694*).

“XIX. And be it farther enacted by the authority aforesaid that it shall and may be lawful for their Majesties, by commission and under the great seal of England, to authorize and appoint any number of persons to take and receive all such voluntary subscriptions as shall be made on or before the first day of August, which shall be in the year of Our Lord one thousand six hundred ninety four, by any person or persons, natives or foreigners, bodies politic or corporate.

“XX. And be it further enacted that it shall be and may be lawful to and for their Majesties, by letters patents under the *Great Seal of England*, to limit, direct and appoint, how and in what

⁴ Carthage is said to have risen to eminence by means of similar tokens.

manner and proportions, the said sum of twelve hundred thousand pounds, part of the said sum of fifteen hundred thousand pounds, and the said yearly sum of one hundred thousand pounds, part of the said yearly sum of one hundred and forty thousand pounds, and every or any part or proportion thereof, may be assignable or transferable, assigned or transferred, to such person or persons only so shall freely and voluntarily accept of the same, and not otherwise; and to incorporate any and every such subscribers and contributors, their heirs, successors, or assigns, to be one body corporate and politic, by the name of the Governor and company of the *Bank of England*, and, by the same name of the governor and company of the *Bank of England*, to have perpetual succession and a common seal.

“XXVIII. Provided, and nothing herein contained shall any ways be construed to hinder the said corporation from dealing in bills of exchange or in buying and selling bullion, gold or silver, or in selling any wares, goods, or merchandise whatsoever, which shall really and bona fide be left or deposited with the said corporation for money lent and advanced thereon, and which shall not be redeemed at the time agreed on, or from selling such goods as shall or may be the produce of the lands purchased by the said corporation.”

Claude Goldring says:

“The financial genius behind the foundation of the *Bank of England* was William Paterson, born in 1658 of good family in Lochnabar, Dumfriesshire. He is said to have preached as a *Scottish Covenanter*, probably lived in Holland, was a merchant in New Providence in the Bahamas, and raised a Spanish galleon at enormous profit. He supported the 1688 Revolution and was connected with the foundation of the *Board of Trade*.”

A *Bank of England* was discussed in Cromwell's day and advocated after the restoration, but no proposition was made until 1691. The Government then wanted to borrow £1,200,000 at 8% and the lenders were, ‘by way of encouragement’, to be incorporated by the name of the *Governor and Company of the Bank of England*.

Paterson is of the type *par excellence* of the new merchant-financier, who had not, like his predecessors of a century before, to contend with the die-hards who supported the usury laws. The way was open for him.

But even then it is clear enough that the foreign intervention was resented in England.⁵ Queen Mary, on the strength of a letter from her husband in Flanders, pressed the scheme through after a six hour sitting against the *Government* and the *Opposition*.

“*Whigs* and *Tories*, goldsmiths and pawnbrokers, resolutely opposed the scheme. They declared that the whole wealth of the nation would be in the hands of the King. The governor and directors of the new company would have more power over the nation's purse than the *House of Commons*. Charles Montague, afterwards *First Lord of the Treasury*, carried the bill through the *House of Commons*.”

Macaulay said of the *Bank*:

“It is hardly too much to say that during many years the weight of the *Bank*, which was constantly in the scale of the *Whigs*, almost counterbalanced the weight of the *Church*, which was constantly in the scale of the *Tories*.”

Not seventy years earlier, Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, had remarked in *Essays Moral and Political* (1625),

“Above all things good policy is to be used, that the treasures and monies in a state be not gathered into few hands, for otherwise a state may have a good stock and yet starve; and money is like muck; no good except it be spread.”

Bacon understood the danger of eliminating the middle *Yeoman* class and of dividing the state into the extremes of poverty and wealth, and this is the first of many occasions on which the fact of poverty amid plenty is remarked on - or, in this case, noted as a danger.

William Paterson frankly admitted that he would have the profit on all monies created out of nothing. If this thesis is correct, and the old prohibition against usury had to be swept aside and forgotten before such a bank could be founded - we may note the collateral securities mentioned in the *Act* - then Paterson was the first in the line of the new usurers. They plied the old trade - as did the Croesus of the exchanges - but with the vastly more profitable material of the creation of credit. They lent the nation her own credit. Such financial credit bore not relation to the real credit of the nation, but the *Bank* had control of the nation's money for its own profit.

⁵ Disraeli in *Sybil* deplored ‘*Dutch Finance*’.

Such was the system that came over from Holland, against the wish of *Parliament* and against the good sense of the people. It was the direct result of the peculiar *Revolution of 1688*, which - dressed up as it may be in romantic colours borrowed from a cottage near Chesterfield⁶ or an island in Derwentwater - was baldly the triumph of the internationalist *Whig* elements and their new system of *laissez faire* economy.

Apparently the *Church's* opposition to usury was finally smothered and the last interest in the complicated system of *de facto* robbery now inaugurated, so favourable to the less desirable elements. This interest was, in fact, smothered for a quarter of a millennium, but we shall see that eventually and by devious ways it did again emerge, the final movement of our symphony.

It is worthwhile seeing what a 'modern' bishop of the time - he has even been suggested as the man who conceived the scheme - thought of this usurious arrangement. Bishop Gilbert Burnet, in the *History of His Own Times* (1734 - the same year as Bishop Berkeley was writing to a very different purpose in his *Querist*) wrote, under *AD1693*:

"Among other funds that were created, one was for constituting a *Bank*, which occasioned great debates. Some thought a *Bank* would grow to be a monopoly. All the honey of England would come into their hands: and they would in a few years become the Masters of the Stock and Wealth of the Nation.

"Others argued for it. That the credit it would have must increase Trade and the circulation of money, at least in *Bank Notes*. It was visible that all the enemies of the *Government* set themselves against it, with such vehemence and zeal, that this alone convinced all people that they saw the strength that our affairs would receive from it.

"I had heard the Dutch often reckon up the great advantages they had from their *Banks*; and they concluded that, as long as England continued jealous of the *Government*, a *Bank* could never be settled among us, nor gain credit enough to support itself. And upon that, they judged that the superiority in Trade must still lie on their side.

"This, with all the other remote funds that were created, had another good effect. It engaged all those, who were concerned in them, to be, on account of their own Interest, zealous for maintaining the *Government*; since it was not to be doubted but that a *Revolution* would have swept theses away.

"The advantages that the *King*, and all concerned in Tallies, had from the *Bank* was so sensibly felt, that all people saw into the secret reasons that made the Enemies of the Constitution set themselves with so much earnest against it."

Yet in spite of what Cobbett was to know as 'these vast improvements, ma'am,' the English labourer was still in a nearly desperate condition. His purchasing power rose slightly after the middle of the seventeenth century, but he was barely able to earn by a year's toil what 15 weeks work would have purchased him before the *Reformation*. It was indeed a revolution in reverse for him.

The Act of 1592 which had prescribed that each labourer's cottage should have four acres of land was continually broken, and there were new features to make life distasteful to him. The assessment of property for the poor rate in 1601 had a bad effect on the wage, while, in the words of Rogers, the law of parochial settlement of 1662 'consummated the degradation of the labourer'.

In 1697, the law authorized churchwardens or overseers to give the labourer a license to move, but he could be moved back if he became chargeable on his new parish. There was a growing brutality in legislation, and a landlord sometimes pulled down cottages so that he had no responsibility for labourers.

Instead of internal prosperity, the attention of Britain was now focussed on foreign conquest, war, all provoked by trade rivalry. More familiar features of the modern world arose.

There was nothing to take the place of the guilds, although the *Domestic System* at least kept work in the home and on the holding. The anti-combination laws of Edward VI were confirmed in 1683. Wheat that year was at the famine price of 100/- to 150/- a quarter.⁷

◀ Chapter 10

▶ Usury and the Church of England ◀

Chapter 12 ▶

⁶ Meeting places of leading revolutionaries, in Derbyshire and Cumberland, in the middle and north of England.

⁷ The labourer's wages were from 1/- to 1/6d a day. Bread alone would have been 6d a pound. In 1835 half a pound of bread was considered an average daily consumption for an individual.