The English Landed Estate in the Nineteenth Century

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CHAPTER II

THE LANDOWNER

This chapter will attempt to provide some insight into the workings of a landowner's mind. As Dr. Kitson Clark once wrote, "we have all been content to describe far too much of the history of the nineteenth century in terms of the play of a few principal actors posturing before a back-cloth painted with conventional figures." 1 The landowner is one of these conventional figures—to all of which we are often ready to attach a neat, briefly inscribed, emotive label. It may therefore profit us to see in some detail how a landowner coped with the business of his estate.

I

Francis, seventh Duke of Bedford (1788–1861), belonged to a formidable generation in the history of the English landed aristocracy; the generation of the fifth Earl Fitzwilliam, the fifth Duke of Richmond, Lord Althorp of the Reform Bill, and Sir James Graham; the generation which made a valiant attempt to protract aristocratic leadership into a new and increasingly unaristocratic age. On the political side of that

effort, the Duke of Bedford played no great part in public. During the two decades after the Napoleonic Wars he made some stir as Marquis of Tavistock, and at times there had been talk of his becoming Whig leader in the House of Commons. But nothing came of it. The reasons are not altogether clear, but perhaps ill-health and a retiring disposition were among the main ones; it was on grounds of health that he refused Lord Melbourne's offer of the Indian Viceroyalty in 1839. In that year his father, the sixth Duke, died, and the responsibilities of great wealth, together with those of a large family of brothers and sisters, weighed heavily upon him. His retirement from public view became so complete that he never spoke in the House of Lords. But privately he was a power behind the scenes, an indefatigable negotiator and a member of the highest Whig councils: brother to Lord John Russell, he made Woburn the headquarters of aristocratic Whiggism. Charles Greville found him one of his chief sources of political information; and believed that his correspondence, "whenever it sees the light, will be more interesting, and contribute more historical information than that of any other man who has been engaged in public life. The papers of Peel and of the Duke of Wellington may be more important, but I doubt their being more interesting, because the Duke of Bedford's will be of a more miscellaneous and comprehensive character."

The Duke's Whiggism, like his estate, was a family inheritance. The house of Russell had long stood for rational liberty and popular rights against an oppressive Crown. In the nineteenth century this creed was transformed into something potentially anti-aristocratic, as it took more and more to championing the cause of government by public opinion. Like

4 *Annual Register*, obituary, 1861.
his father and his brother, the Duke took an active part during the 1820’s in public agitation for a reform of Parliament. “I started in life a reformer,” he wrote in 1829, “and every year’s experience has confirmed me more and more in the opinion of my early days.” 6 He was all for emancipating the Catholics and purging the Irish Church; and he was all for putting down Tory boroughmongers like the Duke of Northumberland who (unlike Whig boroughmongers, it would seem) obstructed the free flow of public opinion. A monument to Byron won his ready support: “I paid my tribute,” he declared, “to his talents and public services in the cause of general liberty.” 7 So experienced an observer of aristocratic politics as Charles Greville was startled and puzzled by the passion which could on occasion inform the Duke’s Whig creed.8

But the Duke’s enthusiasm for liberty did not always shine brightly. Once at least—during the 1830’s—his mood darkened and his popular sympathies were strangely eclipsed.

A social phenomenon [was] at hand [he declared], that the history of the world had never yet seen. That there was a canker at the heart of European civilization. That there was a destructive principle at work, that would cause the fabric of modern society to crumble, as effectively as the Alps did with the fire and vigour of Hannibal. . . . I thought the millions of this country were rotten to the core, but still associated, strong and gigantic from the hatred and wish to destroy.9

By the 1830’s the Duke may have suffered disillusion. It may also be that what he once observed in himself—“my habit of mind is gloomy and exaggerates” 10—had taken deeper root.

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8 *The Greville Memoirs*, II, 207, where Greville remarks on the inflammatory nature of Macaulay’s speeches during the Reform Bill agitation of 1831; “but how the Miltons, Tavistocks, Althorps and all who have a great stake in the country can run the same course is more than I can conceive or comprehend.”
9 *Letters to Lord G. W. Russell*, I, 244–47.
It was to Christianity that the Duke turned as a barrier against the forces of social dissolution. "Christianity had built up the pile of modern civilization"—without it civilization would crumble. It is not altogether plain what the nature of the Duke's Christianity was. Perhaps somewhat more evangelical than his father's: there is a note of self-scrutiny and doubt of his personal worthiness in the Duke's reflections which suggests this. It may be that he was not as horrified by his brother, Lord Wriothesley Russell, as was their father. Lord Wriothesley had turned enthusiast, and the sixth Duke protested bitterly against harboring such a viper in his bosom: "that class of the over righteous," he exclaimed, "these are an increasing and dangerous sect." 

By his father's standards the seventh Duke was something of a Philistine. The father had much of the eighteenth-century connoisseur in him. He was an indefatigable collector: Roman statuary, Egyptian sarcophagi, Canaletto prints, even a menagerie, all were gathered up avidly and stuffed into Woburn or its park. He had hoped to inspire his son with a similar taste for the fine arts, "so that [as he once wrote to another son] when I am dead and gone, the interesting pursuit may not be lost sight of at Woburn. It is not incompatible with those of hunting, shooting or politics." The hope was vain. Although the seventh Duke's enthusiasm for hunting and racing declined, he never took up collecting. When he came into the estate, he observed drily "that in all those matters the chief pleasure consists in the collection," and he reduced the menagerie, added nothing to the marbles and prints, and turned his attention to estate administration. Of his father's collection of prints he said, "Very little use is made of it. Indeed, it is seldom seen by anybody." 

Father and son differed also as managers of estate affairs. The

\[11 Ibid.\]
\[12 Ibid., I, 107.\]
\[13 Ibid., I, 13.\]
\[14 Ibid., I, 350.\]
\[15 Ibid.\]
sixth Duke was an agriculturist of some renown. Under him Woburn was, for a time at any rate, one of the chief centers of experiment and stimulation in the farming world. But the son with some reason may have looked upon his father as a dilettante in agricultural affairs. In fact there was something of a literary flavor in the father's farming. His catalogue of Woburn marbles was matched by a treatise on grasses drawn up under his direction. Coming across a paper on manures published by the Société Économique de Berne, he thought he might translate it. More important, he blew hot and cold about agricultural improvements: in 1813 he brought the famous Woburn sheep shearings to an end, and in 1821 resigned from the Smithfield Club publicly declaring that there was nothing more to be done in animal husbandry. The seventh Duke, as we shall see, was less concerned to add to the literature of farming than to invest capital in its new techniques; and his enthusiasm for agricultural improvement never waned.

The father also spent more freely than the son—and this was sometimes especially distressing to the latter. When one of his daughters married, the sixth Duke presented her with a large gift for her trousseau. The son much resented this parental generosity: "I'll venture to say," he exploded, "that this is the first instance of the kind that ever occurred. However, it matters very little, for if my father goes on squandering and borrowing at the present rate there will be nothing left..."
soon for any of his family in a short time.” 21 This petulant outburst was largely, but not wholly, uncalled for. If the sixth Duke left a large debt, a good part of it was incurred for merely normal portions for his younger children; and it may be that he himself inherited a sizable debt. 22 But it would be true enough to say that the sixth Duke lived up to his great income: he denied himself very little (Greville called him a sensualist), 23 he saved nothing, and he was a careless housekeeper. And all these were for the son considerable sins.

The son was, as we shall see, a most careful housekeeper. His propensity to save came close to miserliness. Sometimes this had its amusing side, as when he made a habit of borrowing Emily Eden’s carriage while in London. As she observed, “It is a great thing to assist the struggles of virtuous poverty . . . if in any future state of existence, I become Duke of Bedford with £200,000 a year, I think I shall keep a one-horse fly of my own in London.” 24 Sometimes the Duke’s pennypinching seemed less amusing, as in his treatment of his brother, Lord John Russell. At least one of the latter’s biographers has charged the Duke with a “meanness [that] . . . was almost incredible.” 25 This may be too strong: the Duke did not fail to provide for Lord John, although it may be said that he failed to do so in a sufficiently generous fashion—in spite of his great attachment for him, and his pride in Lord John’s high place in the political world. 26

It should be added that if the Duke made demands on others,

23 The Greville Memoirs, IV, 209-10. Greville’s portrait of the 6th Duke was most unflattering: “a more uninteresting, weak-minded selfish character does not exist . . . a complete sensualist and thinks of nothing but his own personal enjoyments.”
he did not spare himself. There is a picture of him set down by Lord Clarendon that may give the flavor of the man. "[At breakfast] he is always in a very old dressing gown, scribbling the illegible letters that will be the death of him . . . he loves to think himself the centre to which information tends and from which advice radiates. . . . No man at his age, with a slender stock of health, can keep getting up through the winter at 4 or 5 in the morning, lighting his own fire and writing till 10 or 11 upon an empty stomach." 27 Some of these letters went to Charles Greville, some to the Queen and Prince Albert, some to Cabinet Ministers—and many went to Christopher Haedy, the auditor of his several estates.

II

In 1839, on coming into the estate, the Duke announced his strategy for the future management of the family properties.

You are aware [he wrote to a brother] that the debts and incumbrances, created by my uncle and my father, are very great. Lord Torrington, who knew much of this world and had great wisdom, always said that a large estate might bear two extravagant possessors but that the third must be prudent, in order to save it. I am that third, in this case, and it must be my part therefore to repair the breaches that have been made, or the family importance and influence in this Country will sink into ruin. It is very easy to be generous at the expense of posterity, and to acquire a great name by it. . . . I do not mean to speak harshly of those who have gone before me, or to complain of anything they did. God forbid. They were in many respects greater and better men than I can ever hope to be. So far superior indeed that in one thing only can I ever expect to surpass them, viz., in prudence and care of the family estates. 28

What did prudence dictate to the Duke? Many things, as this chapter will show; but some of them he particularly rel-

ished and these will be dealt with here. They were of varying importance: a better system of reporting estate business; the reduction of household expenditure and what went with it the reform of household accounts; and last the reduction of extraordinary expenditure.29

In 1842 the Duke proposed that Haedy keep a permanent record of the important decisions taken during his regime. "It would be very desirable," he explained, "that the Duke of Bedford should find in the office whenever you are removed from it (which God grant may be long distant) some record not only of what has been done by me, under your administration of the affairs, but also your opinions on any considerable questions that are likely to rise hereafter." 30 He likened such a document to Cabinet Minutes, implying that Haedy was a kind of ducal Prime Minister. Since the Russell estates constituted a kind of kingdom, this was not too far fetched.31

More important was the subject of household expenditure. It weighed heavily on the Duke's mind. He had several houses and one of them, Woburn, was among the greatest in the country. Lord Shaftesbury once noted in his diary, "It is not a palace, a house; it is a town, a municipal borough, a city." 32 Lord Broughton found a dinner at Woburn "pretty much in the Windsor Palace style; but, of the two, more formal." 33 And Prince Pückler-Muskau, that German nobleman who called himself a "parkomane" because he never had his fill of viewing English country houses and parks, sighed with envy at the sight of Woburn: that "accumulation of luxury and magnificence . . . far exceeding the powers of any private person in our country." 34

29 It will be seen that Haedy played a part in making up the Duke's mind on these matters.
30 Bedford MSS, 7th Duke to Haedy, March 21, 1842.
31 Greville likened the Bedfordshire estate to a kingdom; see Memoirs, V, 347.
33 Lord Broughton, Recollections of a Long Life, VI, 86.
The cost of Woburn at first intimidated a Duke intent on making economies—especially as his father had died leaving behind him an accumulation of unpaid bills and expensive and unfinished projects. When Haedy suggested that Woburn be closed down temporarily, the Duke was inclined to fall in with the proposal. As if in justification he wrote to his brother explaining, "you will recollect that I am only following the example of many others who have succeeded to great debts and family charges. Lord Bradford closed Weston for two or three years, the Duke of Richmond, Goodwood, Whitbread, Southhill, etc." Perhaps to his brother’s relief—for younger sons often relied on the hospitality afforded by their elder brothers—the Duke soon changed his mind; and he chose to meet the problems of household expenditure in less drastic fashion.

He sought advice: not only from Haedy but from his brother, Lord John Russell, and from fellow landowners. Lord John warned him that at Woburn “there has not been sufficient check on subordinates,” that “in the [government] departments everything is done on a far more economical plane than on a great nobleman’s estate.” In the country houses that he visited the Duke pursued his inquiries: at Lord Jersey’s, Lord Mount-Edgcumbe’s, and the Duke of Rutland’s. Country-house conversation, it would seem, was well able to accommodate so humdrum a subject. The Duke was told that Mr. Turner, a London solicitor, had reformed Lord Keith’s household and was at work on Lord Willoughby d’Eresby’s. And Lord Jersey told him that no household in England was better arranged than Belvoir, the Duke of Rutland’s great house.

On visiting Belvoir the Duke was much impressed by his fellow nobleman’s system of household statistics. The Duke of Rutland’s agent had quickly produced a return on the number of persons (including servants) who had dined at Belvoir in

29 Bedford MSS, 7th Duke to Haedy, Nov. 7, 1859.
30 Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, March 14, 1841.
the past year. The number was 18,000.\textsuperscript{38} He had also been able to calculate such matters as the average cost of feeding and lodging Belvoir's establishment and the average consumption of bread. The Duke thereupon set on foot his own statistics: the number of diners at his table in a year, at the steward's table, at the servants' table; the annual consumption of articles of food and drink—for example, the number of quarts of ale drunk in the servants' hall; the number of fires lit annually at Woburn; and the number of flues swept. He stopped short, regretfully it would seem, at keeping count of the fish in his ponds: "it must be very difficult, if not impossible," he concluded.\textsuperscript{39}

Before going to Belvoir the Duke had already sought to reform the system of auditing his household accounts. Under his father, owing to a want of ready money, bills were not paid regularly and punctually; they accumulated for as long as eight months, and a harassed house steward, busy with the ducal entertaining, failed to scrutinize them adequately for price and quantity.\textsuperscript{40} Haedy and the seventh Duke both insisted that "prompt payment and short accounts" was the best way to prevent exorbitant charges.\textsuperscript{41} At first the Duke asked for monthly payment and accounting. But the new house steward at Woburn, one Palfreyman, was not a good man with accounts. He complained that they confused him—made him "low and nervous."\textsuperscript{42} Moreover, the London office also found the monthly system too burdensome. Quarterly payments were therefore substituted for monthly payments; and the London office saw to it that the arithmetic of the tradesmen's bills was accurate, trusting to the Woburn steward to check on price and quantity.

The Duke accepted more readily than Haedy that there were limits to his surveillance. If Haedy had had his way, he

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, July 27, 1841.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., Haedy to 7th Duke, Dec. 18, 1839.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, Dec. 26, 1839.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, Aug. 8, 1842.
would have taken the further step of explicitly forbidding household servants to accept gifts from tradesmen: “which is,” as he put it, “allowing the watchman to receive bribes from those he is to watch.”

There was a good chance, according to Haedy, that such a regulation would work; the days were over “when perquisites and presents were looked upon by Servants so much their right as the wages they received.”

The Duke, however, was sceptical. “Many have tried it,” he said, “but few have succeeded in stopping it.” Both Lord Sefton (“a most accurate man in his household affairs”) and the Duke of Sutherland had failed. He for his part would not make the attempt.

One should not leave the impression that the Duke was cynical about his servants’ dishonesty. It was a subject that caused him distress, on moral as well as economic grounds. In this connection he and Haedy devoted voluminous letters to the matter of wax candles. It would seem that candles on being started in the drawing room were usually not burnt out, but were sent to the bedrooms, and the odds and ends remaining were supposed to go to the wax chandler.

But, as the Duke and Haedy knew, candles (or half burnt ones) never got that far. The servants stole them, and such a theft—small as it was—might lead to a deterioration of moral conduct: “in as far as they are perfectly acquainted—the Housekeeper and housemaids especially—with what is going on, and think not unnaturally that if one act of pilfering is connived at another might be.” The Duke felt it his duty “to check temptation to his servants as far as he can”; although in fact what was done about the wax candles remains a mystery.

Apart from the regulation and reduction of ordinary household expenditure, the Duke sought to reduce what he called his extraordinary expenditure. He resolved early to limit the menagerie: to give up the Corsican deer and to keep no more

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43 Ibid., Haedy to 7th Duke, March 10, 1843.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid., Haedy to 7th Duke, Jan. 6, 1841.
than a dozen swans. He ordered reductions in the gardens and in the forcing houses: “the Pines and the Grapes should be disposed of,” he wrote to Haedy, “except the few I may want at Oakley.” He also informed Haedy that no further additions need be made to the library: “As for Books, I am not likely to purchase any, as there would be no room for them, even if I were disposed to do so.” Bookbinding would therefore end, and he suggested dispensing with the services of a librarian whose salary was £200 a year. It becomes clear how at Woburn the age of aristocratic connoisseurship came to an end.

Expenditure on elections was also curtailed, for moral as well as for prudential reasons. The Duke maintained his electoral interest, and at a General Election might intervene in as many as five constituencies. If the evidence relating to the General Election of 1841 is typical, he was inclined to employ what he once called his “starvation system”: that is, he granted limited sums on condition that they be not used for corrupt purposes. “There is no money I regret so much,” he once declared, “as money spent [on electoral bribery] because it not only does no good, but inflicts a positive injury upon the community.” So far as it can be learned, his expenditure in the General Election of 1841 was between £3,000–£4,000—a relatively modest sum in the light of the ducal income and of what a nobleman still might spend on a General Election.

What was achieved by the Duke’s reforms and economies?

48 Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, Dec. 19, 1839.
49 Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, Dec. 21, 1839. Oakley was a small house on the Woburn estate.
50 Ibid.
51 Add. MSS, 47,223, folio 31, 7th Duke to Lord Broughton, Aug. 6, 1847: “My own personal triumphs have been very great—I undertook for 5 seats—3 Counties and 2 Boroughs—and I have succeeded in all.”
52 Letters to Lord G. W. Russell, I, 188.
53 Bedford MSS, 7th Duke to Haedy, Jan. 17, 1841.
54 Letters to Lord G. W. Russell, I, 341: “To please John I gave £1,000 to Howick and Ben Stanley for their elections and the same to the friends of Ellice to fight Derbyshire and Leicestershire.” To these sums one should add the financial provision for Lord John Russell: interest on £10,000.
For the year 1839, of which his father was responsible for at least ten months’ expenditure, total household costs amounted to £34,936. This sum covered the expense of four houses and their grounds: Endsleigh in Devon, Oakley in Bedfordshire, the London house in Belgrave Square, and Woburn—of which the last accounted for at least 80 per cent. Total household expenditure covered strictly household costs such as food, fuel, furniture, and servants, together with such items as taxes, game, gardens, park, stables, charities, pensions, and what was called “voluntary payments,” which comprised donations to agricultural and bible societies, the local Whig organization, and the Bedford races. Strictly household costs amounted to £20,010.55

Total household expenditure declined in 1840 from the sixth Duke’s £34,936 to his son’s £24,488. The chief saving appeared under strictly household costs, gardens, and voluntary payments—the first having been reduced from £20,010 to £9,545, the second from £3,371 to £2,364, and the third from £2,298 to £1,210.56 Expenditure on the park, however, increased, as the Duke, undertaking a program of general improvements, drained it and erected new fences. The Duke was in part pleased with what he saw in this year’s report of his affairs, declaring to his brother that “I am able to tell not only the amount of every branch of expenditure, but the increase or decrease.”57 It was less pleasing, however, that he had not reduced his expenditure as much as he had wished: indeed, as he pointed out, the expenditure of £24,488 did not include pocket money, personal expenditure, purchase of horses, or occasional charities. He therefore feared that in fact it would be difficult to keep his total expenditure within £30,000.58 It is not clear what the Duke meant by personal expenditure: possibly gifts to his family and friends, traveling expenses, clothes, etc.

55 Bedford MSS, Annual Reports, 1841; see also Appendix III.
56 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
Without including such things, the Duke's total household expenditure rose in the following year to £27,693. This increase came largely under the heads of strict household expenditure, park, and pensions, the first rising from £9,545 to £11,607, the second from £1,595 to £1,958, and the last from £1,119 to £1,544. The records are such for this year that it is possible to calculate what the annual expenditure on a great house like Woburn would be under a Duke given to prudence and economy, but mindful of the position of his family. Household bills for food, fuel, and furniture amounted to £6,207. Servants' wages amounted to £2,138. Stable bills amounted to £2,110. And taxes, game, gardens, park, charities, and pensions probably amounted to another £6,000—£7,000 at least. Woburn managed economically would appear to have cost something like £16,000—£17,000 a year. Greville, who was at Woburn in 1841 and again in 1842, found life there very pleasant: "a house abounding in every sort of luxury and comfort and with inexhaustible resources for every taste . . . everything that wealth and refined taste can supply." If the Duke brought "order [and] economy" to Woburn, these did not dispel its customary "grandeur, comfort and general content."

Although the Duke may have achieved less than he hoped for, he gave little sign of relaxing his vigilance as an economical manager. A devoted house steward could not have been more careful. The Duke complained, for example, about the consumption of food and meat at Woburn for the year 1843. "It appears to me," he wrote to Haedy, "that there has

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59 Bedford MSS, Annual Reports, 1841; see also Appendix IV.
60 See Thompson, "The End of a Great Estate," Ec. Hist. Rev., Aug., 1955, for figures of household expenditure in other landed families; Dr. Thompson does not, unfortunately, specify the several items of household expenditure.
62 Ibid., V, 39. Two decades earlier Greville had written: "The house, place, establishment and manner of living are the most magnificent I have seen. There is no place which gives so splendid an example of a Great English Lord as this." (Memoirs, I, 86).
been an improper consumption of ale especially when the family were not here. You will see that under the head of Post Boys there has been irregular consumption. I have always understood that ale is not allowed in families where Servants are on board wages.” 63 The consumption of meat was also excessive: “The Servants certainly eat a great deal of Meat, and I believe press strangers because they think it hospitable and for the credit of the House to do so—Lord William’s foreign servant told Mr. Hastings Russell last year that they had given him a surfeit in that way and that it was now well for his health that he was returning to Germany.” 64 And why, he wanted to know, had the consumption of coffee and sugar increased so much? 65

The Duke was no less vigilant about the prices he was charged. His coal merchant in 1842 had charged him thirty shillings a ton, and in 1843 offered him a reduction of sixpence a ton. The Duke found, however, “that other great Coal merchants have served families for 27 shillings per ton with the best Coals sent in September—the same people now charge twenty-eight shillings per ton or will contract for that price, and twenty-six shillings for the ‘seconds’ which they say burn quicker, but make quite as good a fire.” 66 He also brought it to Haedy’s attention that the blacksmith at Woburn charged one shilling and four pence each for a coach horse’s shoes, but the blacksmith at Oakley did an equally good job for only one shilling. 67

III

“I am surprised to see,” the Duke wrote to his brother, “how very strongly both the Adams [his father’s auditors] con-
continued, for more than thirty years, to remonstrate with my father (and in pretty strong terms too) on his annual excess of expenditure over income and his consequent increasing debt. It is very creditable to them." Haedy, of course, had no need for such remonstrances. From the start, he and the Duke saw eye to eye not only on the Duke's keeping within his income but also on the urgent need to reduce the indebtedness bequeathed to him by his father.

In 1839 the Duke's indebtedness amounted to £551,940. Of this sum, £482,970 comprised mortgages (many of which were family charges), £40,520 bonds, and £28,230 legacies bequeathed by his father. The Duke's creditors, apart from members of his family, included Arthur and Henry Craven (£60,000 at 4% interest), F. P. Delmé Radcliffe (£22,000 at 4½%), the Sun Fire Office (£40,000 at 4%), and the bankers Child and Co. (£55,000 at 4%) and Barclays (£22,000 at 4%). It is impossible to account for the history of the debt apart from the family charges. The longest standing of these charges was that of the Duke's uncle, Lord William Russell (1767–1840); most of them had come upon the estate by reason of the sixth Duke's large family, the product of two marriages. Previous Dukes of Bedford had not been prolific, and the Russell estates in the eighteenth century had been burdened with portions for but three daughters and one younger son, that son being Lord William.

Of the mortgage debt of £482,970, family charges amounted to £283,910. Of this sum, £88,910 is accounted for by the portion of Lord William (£45,000 at 5%) and that of his son, John, (£43,910 at 5%). It is difficult to explain why Lord William's son should have been so generously provided for, except that he married the Baroness de Clifford and there was a title to be considered. As to the remaining family charges, all are to be accounted for by the portions of the sixth Duke's children: £47,000 to Lord G. W. Russell, £40,000 to Lord John Russell, and £12,000 to each of nine children of the

*Letters to Lord G. W. Russell, I, 357.*
second marriage, all portions paying a rate of interest of 5 per cent. At least £17,650 of the bond debt was incurred for members of the Duke's family, and £21,000 of the legacies can be similarly accounted for.69

Interest payments on the ducal indebtedness amounted in 1840 to £26,553, of which £14,195 represented the annual cost of family portions. This last was quite apart from the cost of annuities, largely but not entirely paid to members of the Duke's family. The Dowager Duchess received a jointure of £5,000; the Duke's eldest son, Lord Tavistock, received £1,500; the Duke's wife, her pin money of £700; the Duke's many brothers and sisters an average of £300 each; his uncle Lord William and Lord William's children the same; to say nothing of a long train of family dependents and friends who were also provided for. Altogether the cost of annuities was something like £16,000. If the total household expenditure is put at £30,000 (the sum which the Duke thought was a minimum), and if the net income of the Russell estates (net after estate upkeep) is put at £100,000, it is clear that after all payments the Duke still had a surplus of something like £27,000–£28,000 annually. This may be what he had in mind when he wrote to his brother, "I expect to have about one third of the whole rental, or income after paying interest of debt etc. If I was to squander that portion I should have the estate bankrupt, and the next Duke of Bedford might in vain attempt to repair the extravagance of former generations." 70

If the Duke's financial condition is compared with that of other great landowners at the time, it does not appear grave. It may be compared, for example, with that of Earl Spencer. The Duke and Spencer were close friends, and when the Duke wrote to him about his financial perplexities Spencer replied as follows: "I fear you find yourself somewhat in a similar position to that in which I was (but I hope and trust not near so bad) viz., that your real income bears a small proportion to

69 See Appendix V.
your rent roll. This, even if your real income is sufficient, which mine by no means was, is a disagreeable and dangerous position to be in, for a very small percentage fall in rent, a rise in interest would bring a man so situated to a complete standstill."

Spencer had in fact been brought to a standstill when he succeeded to Althorp in 1834; but his financial predicament was much graver than the Duke’s. Interest and annuities on the Althorp estate accounted for about 79 per cent of Spencer’s net income, as compared to 42 per cent for the Duke. Indeed, as the Duke confessed to Haedy, “my case is certainly not near so bad as his.”

Nonetheless it would appear that the Duke—and Haedy—were alarmed. The Duke, as it has already been noted, spoke of himself as one of those landowners “who have succeeded to great debts and family charges.” Haedy also spoke of the estates being “heavily burdened”: “It will take more years than the Duke can be expected to live of prudent and restricted expenditure to bring down the Incumbrances to something like a moderate amount.” The Duke, however, was addressing himself to a brother, and Haedy to the Dowager Duchess; and both may have concluded that it was convenient to make extravagant claims to poverty, the better to fend off members of the family. Yet even between themselves, the Duke and Haedy, if using less dramatic language, gave voice to fears. What they feared was not a fall of income so much as a sudden stringency in the money market (there was a threat of war with France in 1839–40) which might bring about a disastrous rise in the rate of interest and would prompt “strangers” to call in their loans.

There was some discussion between Haedy and the Duke in the months immediately after the sixth Duke’s death about ob-

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71 Bedford MSS, 7th Duke to Haedy, Dec. 5, 1839.
72 Althorp MSS, Box 13, 3rd Earl’s Papers, Paper entitled “Private Income Account” in 3rd Earl’s hand, probably dated Jan., 1835.
73 Bedford MSS, 7th Duke to Haedy, Dec. 5, 1839.
74 Ibid., Haedy to Dowager Duchess of Bedford, March 10, 1840.
75 Ibid., Annual Reports, 1844.
taining a lower rate of interest on some of the mortgages. In his country-house visiting the Duke had heard of landowners who borrowed large sums at a lower rate of interest from the Bank of England and from insurance companies: the Duke of Rutland, he had heard, had borrowed £300,000 from the Bank of England at 3½ per cent and £100,000 from the Equitable Assurance at 3 per cent. In the end, however, the Duke and Haedy agreed that a consolidation of the debts, even for the purpose of reducing the interest payments, was not a prudent course: if the Bank called for its money it would be in a time of great pressure, and the money would be hard to come by elsewhere. Motivated by this fear, the Duke and Haedy soon resolved on the more drastic course of paying off the encumbrances.

At first some thought was given to paying them off by the sale of land. This was the course which Earl Spencer had taken—a course which in the long run proved most unprofitable for his family as the land he sold became extremely valuable suburban property. It is possible that if left to his own devices the Duke might have followed Spencer’s example and sold some part of his London estate. But fortunately Haedy advised him well: to sell only land that had little possibility of long-term capital appreciation, such as some of his outlying country estates. He also reminded the Duke that in the 1820’s the Adams had decided against selling land on the ground that “to sell to a sufficient extent materially to lessen the Incumbrances might reduce the family from the first to one of the second class of Proprietors in the public estimation.” No argument could have been better calculated to turn the Duke’s mind altogether away from selling land and fixing it on paying off the encumbrances out of income.

88 Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, Dec. 31, 1839. The Equitable did not lend at 3 per cent.
87 Ibid., Haedy to 7th Duke, Dec. 26, 1839.
86 Ibid., Haedy to 7th Duke, Dec. 6, 1839.
85 Ibid.
It would seem that a family dispute over his father's will suggested to the Duke the desirability of first paying off the younger children's portions, depending (as Haedy put it) on "what course Lord Wriothesley and his brothers and sisters take with respect to the codicil." But family harmony prevailed, and the Duke took to paying off the strangers' mortgages rather than inflicting retribution on his brothers and sisters; for they might not have obtained five per cent on their portions as readily somewhere else. It proved quicker work than either he or Haedy had ever contemplated, or for that matter than the surplus of 1840 might indicate. By 1844 Haedy was able to announce triumphantly that "for the first time for a very long period Your Grace's estates become free from Mortgages to Strangers, leaving them subject only to Family charges and to Miss Ansell's Bond debt . . . The accomplishment of this most important object, namely the freeing of the Estates from Mortgages to Strangers, and from the danger from them of foreclosure, to which, in times of great pecuniary difficulty, they were exposed, was long ardently desired, but, till recently, deemed almost hopeless."

The reduction of debt went steadily ahead, so that by the mid-1850's even the family portions were paid off and the Russell estates were entirely freed of debt. Careful management and living under his income did for the Duke of Bedford what sales of land or enhanced incomes did for other landowners. Haedy and the Duke were now in the pleasant position of having to think afresh of how to apply the surplus income. Further capital investment in permanent improvements seemed the preferable course. It was also suggested that a fund

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80 Ibid., Haedy to 7th Duke, Dec. 4, 1839.
81 Ibid., Annual Reports, 1844.
82 In F. M. L. Thompson, "English Great Estates in the 19th Century (1790-1914)," in Contributions to First International Conference of Economic History (Paris, 1960), p. 390, there is mention of a theory of "debt-driven developers." If Dr. Thompson attributes this theory to me, I should like to disavow it. Not all encumbered landowners, as he points out, took to developing their mines or town holdings.
be set apart to assist the Duke's successor on his coming into the estate when he might find himself temporarily in want of ready cash, and thus spare him "the necessity of borrowing by which a dangerous habit might be created." 83

This chronic alarm about borrowing and debt needs some scrutiny. The Duke was, of course, given to alarm, but landowners less anxious by nature commonly enough expressed themselves as he did on the subject of indebtedness. They were not, as a rule, given to precise measurements of debt, and it is therefore not surprising to find the Duke's financial condition described by contemporaries as "frightfully encumbered." 84 Neither the Duke nor most of his fellow landowners, however, can have meant by such words that they were on the verge of bankruptcy or that they were forced to contemplate the sale of the greater part of their estates. It was not this extremity that they had in mind so much as the prospect of declining wealth. Here their fright was not senseless. They were after all on the defensive. Not too long ago landowners had been unchallenged both politically and economically, and now in the 1830's they were confronted by the challenge of public opinion and by rich men of a new sort. It was not enough to be rich, one needed to be richer than other rich men. 85 Something of this sort may have been in their minds, and may be sensed in the Duke's declaration that "while we live under a Monarchy, and have an aristocracy, it should be at least an independent, if not a powerful, aristocracy." 86

83 Bedford MSS, Annual Reports, 1858.
84 The story is to be found in Sir D. Le Marchant, Lord Althorp (London, 1876), p. 258.
86 Letters to Lord G. W. Russell, I, 311.
IV

The business of scrutinizing household expenditure and reducing indebtedness claimed much of the Duke’s attention. He gave himself to these perhaps more readily than to other departments of estate business. The management and development of his property—its farms and woodlands, mines, and urban houses—may have claimed less of his attention, although like many of his generation of landowners he was an enthusiastic agriculturist.

The estate which provided him with the greater part of his income—the London estate—threw up little business that was to the Duke’s taste. This estate comprised 119 acres in the center of London—perhaps the most valuable land in the world. Of an average annual net remittance from all his estates for the years 1832-38, amounting to £104,760, the average net return from the London property amounted to £71,858, roughly 72 per cent.87 The property fell into three parts: Bloomsbury and St. Pancras, returning in 1838 a net rental of £34,500; Covent Garden, £24,100; and St. Martins, £8,700.88 These sums comprised several kinds of rent: ground rents, rack rents from houses and buildings, and tolls and rents in Covent Garden Market.

As Haedy once observed, “all the large Estates in London have come into existence, through letting land for building, and keeping the ground rents till the expiration of the building Leases.” 89 On the Russell estate in 1839 the most recently built-up areas (in and around Bedford, Woburn, Bloomsbury, and Tavistock squares) were still on building leases which would not begin to expire until the ’seventies.90 There were of

87 Bedfоrd MSS, Annual Reports, 1841; see also Appendix VI.
88 By the 1850’s there was a fourth part built on, in Bedford New Town, as it was called.
89 Bedford MSS, Haedy to 7th Duke, June 19, 1841.
90 These leases were roughly ninety-nine year leases. They would begin to expire on the Bedford Square area (begun about 1773) first.
course much older sections on the estate, such as Covent Gar­
den, where building leases had expired. When that happened,
the building became the property of the landowner who some­
times levied a fine before renewing the lease. Haedy abolished
the practice of taking fines, preferring instead to renew at an
improved rent—usually on a shorter lease conditional on the
tenant's making the necessary repairs. 91 On the oldest parts of
the estate, buildings beyond repair had been demolished and
new ones put up in their place, so that the course of things was
brought full circle, with a repairing lease giving way to a build­
ing lease and rack rents giving way to ground rents. The en­
tire process was thus described:

the old parts of the Estate sink into ground rents, thro’ the
houses upon them requiring to be rebuilt, the new parts will rise
by the falling in of the building Leases, from ground-rents to
house-rents, and this process will always be going on as the new
parts of the Estate become old and the old parts new. 92

On the London estate, since the landlord bore a limited re­
ponsibility for repairs and building, the burdens of estate ad­
ministration were naturally less than those on an agricultural
estate. The chief tasks of administration were looking to the
observance of covenants which were designed to prevent the
deterioration of the estate and managing Covent Garden Mar­
ket. With the growth of London the market had come to hold
a dominant position, being “the principal Sale place for London
and the standard for quotations throughout the country.” 93 By
1830 the sixth Duke had constructed permanent market build­
ings. A staff of about a dozen men managed the market—
letting stalls, collecting tolls on produce sold, and keeping the
peace. In 1840 the net return from Covent Garden Market
was £ 5,711.

As the correspondence between Haedy and the Duke tends

91 Bedford MSS, Haedy to 7th Duke, May 5, 1840.
92 Ibid., Annual Reports, 1851.
93 Ibid., London Reports, vol. 2.
to suggest, the details of administration on the London estate were pretty much left to Haedy. It was a rare occasion when the Duke reported a country-house conversation to Haedy in which mention was made of some aspect of managing urban property. The few instances of the Duke's discussing such matters with Haedy rather tend to underline his indifference. It has already been noted that the Duke raised the question whether it was not advantageous to sell ground rents which provoked the blunt reply, "exceedingly disadvantageous, even to the extent of being ruinous to do so." One would conclude that the main development on the London estate during the seventh Duke's regime—namely the laying out of Bedford New Town—was largely inspired and supervised by Haedy.

The Duke's indifference to the mining ventures on his estates was no less plain. The chief of these, Devon Great Consols, was situated on the Devon estate, near Tavistock and close to the river Tamar. It sprang up in the 1840's, and as if to prove that the Russells had the touch of Midas, became the richest copper and arsenic mine in the British Isles and one of the largest in the world. The Duke let the mine, but he built docks and tramways to assist in the mining operations. Again, his correspondence with Haedy rarely touched on these matters. It almost seemed as if the Duke accepted this unforeseen wealth with some reluctance; Greville noted that the Duke feared that his Devon mines would encroach on the farming of the neighborhood. Later, when ironstone was found on his Midland estates, the Duke refused to allow it to be mined because it would disfigure the countryside.

Agriculture, however, was another matter. The business of

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94 Ibid., Haedy to 7th Duke, June 19, 1841.
96 The Greville Memoirs, VI, 90. The Duke wrote to Haedy (Bedford MSS, April 13, 1845) that he had heard that "all classes at, and near Tavistock are mad about mines . . . neither Tradesmen nor Farmers think half so much of their own affairs as of these mining speculations."
97 Bedford MSS, Annual Reports, 1858.
the Woburn home farm, of the estate farms and woodlands in Bedfordshire, the West Country, and East Anglia, was congenial to him. It seemed as natural as his Whiggism. His view of the world and society was a countryman's view. It is likely that Manchester and Sheffield seemed remote, strange, and unnatural to him; that he never set foot in them, let alone thought much about them. Was it merely a momentary oversight that once when reviewing the classes of English society he mentioned only the aristocracy, gentry, farmers, and laborers? 98 Within the rural world, however, the Duke had his favorites: the upper and the lower classes, the landowners and the laborers. The farmers he disliked; for they were wanting in enlightenment, and showed "a grudging and grinding spirit towards those below them." 99 The Duke's conception of himself as an aristocratic landowner, paternal yet scientific, was offended.

Not unnaturally the country estates provided much business to the Duke's taste. He was often found deep in technical discussion with Haedy—usually about the cost of some agricultural operation. For example, on the Woburn estate, where the woodlands were extensive and remunerative, the question of how to fell timber most economically presented itself. The Duke objected to the frequent use of the axe: "the seller [meaning himself] loses much more than a foot, if the Tree is not felled as close as possible which can only be done with a saw." 100 Haedy explained that the workmen preferred the axe to the saw, "as they have to work harder and earn less money, when they use the latter than when they work the former." 101 At the same time he assured the Duke that the saw was being introduced throughout the estate.

The Duke also looked into the cost of sawing and preparing timber in the Woburn workyard. It appeared to him that a
saving might be effected by installing steam-driven machinery. In 1846 this was done at a cost of £12,800, with an estimated annual saving of £1,500.\textsuperscript{102} It was said that “with such Machinery the Duke as a Builder for himself has all the appliances and is quite on a par to do work with the most eminent Builders in London or any other large town.”\textsuperscript{103} On a visit to Woburn in 1849 Sir Robert Peel reported, “[I] am full of wonder at the extent of the Establishment—one portion of it—that in which materials for buildings are prepared is more like a Dock Yard than a domestic office.”\textsuperscript{104}

The cost of building on the Woburn estate—building farm houses and cottages—was also a subject which the Duke showed himself capable of taking up with gusto. Very soon after his coming into the estate he and Haedy were busily discussing it. Costs had been brought sharply to his attention by a summary of estate accounts prepared by Haedy for the years 1823–38: “the expenses appear to have been enormous,” the Duke exclaimed, “and for a longer period than I had imagined.”\textsuperscript{105} He proposed to reduce building costs by having such work done by contractors rather than by his agents and workmen on the ground that the latter were too idle and their labor correspondingly expensive. Haedy argued to the contrary: that the cost of materials was double the cost of labor, and that contractors skimmed on material which led in time to excessive repair bills.\textsuperscript{106} The Duke eventually yielded to Haedy—although not without hiring a surveyor and a surveyor’s clerk to supervise the Woburn workmen and uttering vague threats of trying out his ideas at Oakley.\textsuperscript{107}

This discussion between Haedy and the Duke ended on a curious if revealing note. After dutifully exploring a subject

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}, Annual Reports, 1846.
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ibid.}, Annual Reports, 1864.
\textsuperscript{104} Bedford MSS, 7th Duke to Haedy, Jan. 5, 1840.
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Ibid.}, Haedy to 7th Duke, April 30, 1840.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ibid.}, 7th Duke to Haedy, April 29, 1840.
which the Duke had himself broached, and pressing home his argument for a contrary policy but still a policy of economy, Haedy was met with the rebuke that “a Gentleman ought not to expect to make or to save by building what a Tradesman can realise.” Haedy must have asked himself whether the Duke’s lectures on economy were to be taken literally. He could not have helped being taken aback, since the Duke was at him so often about savings and profits.

For example, the Duke was much concerned about the profitability of the Woburn home farm. The Duke had warned Haedy from the start that he was not of the old school of wasteful landowners whose farming was an extravagant hobby. “Every money expended,” he declared, “which is not expected to produce a return is not money well laid out either by Tenant or Gentleman Farmer.” His farm bailiff, therefore, instead of losing money “ought not only to have paid rent, but to have produced me 5 per cent interest on my capital.” Such was the return obtained by Lord Albemarle in Norfolk, by Lord Hardwicke in Cambridgeshire, as these noblemen had themselves informed him. It would distress him, the Duke concluded, to have it known “to my Tenants that I have lost by farming as it w’d convey a reflection either on my Bailiff or myself or furnish argument to them that Farming is an unprofitable business.”

Yet in fact the Duke’s farming, either as cultivator or as landlord, was less profitable than such statements might suggest. There is no sign that the home farm was ever put on that footing which the Duke sought. And it is plain enough that his major investment in farming, namely the provision of

108 Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, May 27, 1840.
109 Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, Nov. 20, 1840.
110 Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, April 3, 1842.
111 Ibid.
112 In 1848 the Woburn agent reported that the home farm was still not paying interest on the Duke’s capital (Bedford MSS, Annual Reports, 1848).
landlord's capital for permanent improvements like building and draining, failed to bring the sort of return for which he yearned.

From the start the Duke and Haedy were impressed with the necessity for extensive improvements on the various estates. The West Country estate in particular was in a backward condition. The holdings were too small to be efficiently farmed; the lease for lives made for tenants' laxity in repairs (at any rate so the Duke and Haedy believed); and the tenants themselves needed elementary instruction. On the Bedfordshire estate the farm buildings had fallen into disrepair owing to the use of poor building materials under the fifth Duke as well as to failure to enforce covenants. The Bedfordshire estate was also in need of draining. And if the Fen estate had already been massively drained, literally snatched from the waters, this was but the preliminary to providing the dry land with the necessary buildings.

Not surprisingly these tasks were taken up vigorously. The Duke came of that generation of landowners which witnessed in the 1830's and '40's the advent of agricultural techniques consonant with the best agricultural knowledge. The draining pipe, artificial manures, cheap building materials, together with the railways—all these spelt a revival of agriculture after that postwar depression which reached its depths in the mid-1830's. Caught up in this revival, landowners showed a combination of enthusiasm and technical knowledge possibly unrivaled by any earlier generation.

In this the Duke shared. He was a devoted improver, "in the habit [he once said] of reading most of the best modern publications on rural subjects." His country-house visits rarely failed to provide a fruitful exchange of opinion or a valuable piece of information. Lord Salisbury put him on to a

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114 Bedford MSS, Haedy to 7th Duke, Sept. 16, 1842.
114 Ibid., Annual Reports, 1851.
114 Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, July 2, 1844.
cheap method of manufacturing draining tiles, cheaper at any rate than the Marquis of Tweeddale's.\textsuperscript{116} The Duke of Richmond brought to his notice the new farm buildings on Sir William Heathcote's estate and Sir William's use of steam-driven saws.\textsuperscript{117} The Duke seems to have acquired a good deal of useful knowledge, and there were times when he found himself in advance of his agents, as when he and Benson (the West Country agent) disagreed about "the treatment of Beasts in winter."\textsuperscript{118} It would seem that the Duke needed no urging from his agents to become an improver.\textsuperscript{119}

In consequence the Duke's expenditure on permanent improvements—especially on new farm buildings and draining—was large. On the Bedfordshire estates, for example, the aggregate sum expended on permanent improvements for the nineteen years between 1816 and 1835 amounted to £31,231. For the nineteen years between 1836 and 1855, however, the sum amounted to £194,652, or six times as much. On the Devonshire estate the cost of permanent improvements sprang from £60 in 1843 to £3,804 in 1844, and to an annual average of £7,400 for the next decade. On the Thorney estate from 1816 to 1835 there was no expenditure on permanent improvements; between 1836 and 1855 there was an expenditure of £46,478. In 1850 the Duke himself protested against the magnitude of his outlay.\textsuperscript{120} Presumably it was proved to his satisfaction that the outlay was justified, for its size increased rather than diminished during the 'fifties.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, Jan. 21, 1841.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, Aug. 1, 1844.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, July 2, 1844.
\textsuperscript{119} According to Dr. Thompson: "It was common for agents to urge and owners to agree that the way to meet agricultural distress was to undertake improvements"; see Thompson, "English Great Estates . . .," Contributions, p. 394.
\textsuperscript{120} Bedford MSS, Annual Reports, 1851.
\textsuperscript{121} For my figures I have relied mainly on the published accounts in Duke of Bedford, A Great Agricultural Estate, pp. 218–47. These accounts do not agree precisely year by year with the manuscript accounts in the Bedford Office, London, although the aggregate amounts over
If this expenditure—a very large part of which was laid out on new farm buildings—is set beside the rise in gross rental received, it is obvious that the Duke's return was considerably less than he had hoped for from his home farm. On the Bedfordshire estate between 1842 and 1861, gross rents received rose from £34,117 to £41,822, outlay on permanent improvements amounted to £275,799, and the Duke's return was thus 2.4 per cent. On the Devonshire estate during the same years, rents rose from £15,191 to something like £18,500, improvement outlay amounted to about £140,000, and the Duke's return was about 2.3 per cent. On the Thorney estate the return was more heartening: rents rose from £25,993 to £35,273, improvement outlay was £108,456, and the Duke's return was 8 per cent; but this included land recently brought into cultivation. Modest as these figures show profits to have been they still overstate them, for they make no allowance for depreciation.

It would seem, however, that the Duke's return on his agricultural investment was not unusual in the age of high farming, at any rate not unusual among the great improving landlords. It has been said of the fourth Duke of Northumberland's improvements on his Alnwick estate that "if all increase in rent was taken to be a return on [his] non-drainage improvement outlay, then £500,000 invested in [his] estate in this period [1847–65] yielded about 2½ %." In Wiltshire on the estates of the Marquis of Bath and of Lord Pembroke, as in periods of years are roughly similar. The published accounts refer only to the Bedfordshire and Thorney estates, and for information about the Devonshire estate I have relied mainly on the manuscript accounts. Appendix VII is derived from the published accounts.

120 The year, 1842, was a good starting point, since the purchase of the Ampthill estate was by then effected.

121 The Devonshire figures were in part obtained from B.P.P., Royal Commission on Agricultural Depression, 1896, Particulars of Expenditures and Outgoings on Certain Estates in Great Britain; and the amounts for improvement outlay were assessed arbitrarily for three years: 1858, 1860, and 1861.

124 Thompson, "English Great Estates . . .," Contributions, p. 394.
Cumberland on Sir James Graham's estate, returns were also modest.\textsuperscript{125} It has been suggested that this was in fact a general state of affairs among the great landowners—"that much of the landowner's investment in high farming never was an economic proposition."\textsuperscript{126}

From time to time the Duke showed uneasiness at the high level of capital outlay on his estates.\textsuperscript{127} He was plainly disappointed at not getting 5 per cent or more on his outlay—the more so, as he seems to have believed that it was common for other landowners to do much better than he did. The "most common practice with landlords," he once observed to Haedy, "is to charge 7 and \(\frac{1}{2}\) % on all new buildings and draining which is done entirely by them."\textsuperscript{128} Nevertheless, in face of doubts and anxieties, he persisted in spending lavishly on agricultural improvements.

Is there a paradox here? On the one hand, a close-fisted Duke anxiously scrutinizing his household accounts and admonishing his agents on their duty to economize; on the other, an open-handed Duke generously subsidizing his tenants' farming. It may be unwise to look for too much consistency in anyone's pattern of expenditure, still the Duke's may not be inexplicable. What appears a paradox on the surface may largely vanish on closer examination.

Either parsimonious or extravagant, the Duke was at bottom faithful to the traditional role of the Russell family. If he spent


\textsuperscript{127}Bedford MSS, Annual Reports, 1851.

\textsuperscript{128}Ibid., 7th Duke to Haedy, Dec 15, 1843. This was not, of course, common practice; what was often done was to charge 5 per cent on draining. Thompson, "English Great Estates \ldots ," \textit{Contributions}, p. 394, makes this point; see also B.P.P., \textit{Report of Select Committee (H. of L.) on the Improvement of Land} (1873, XVI), \textit{passim}; and chapter five below.
less on politics, the Russells still remained in the highest ranks of the political nation. And if he spent more than his father on agricultural improvements, he did so in large part because the Russells were still to be found in the vanguard of agricultural progress. Among those landed families who took it as their duty “to exercise a stewardship of the national patrimony in the fertility of the soil,” they had long been prominent. The seventh Duke may not have had his Woburn sheepshearings, but he had the beginnings of an experimental station conducted by Gilbert and Lawes. And he continued to exercise the landowner's traditional economic function of encouraging and assisting his tenants in their cultivation; by the mid-nineteenth century such encouragement and assistance cost more than it ever had before.

What, in short, helps to make the Duke's economic behavior explicable was his conception of the social leadership provided by a great landed family. In May, 1858, Lord Burlington who had just succeeded to the vast Cavendish estates sought advice from the Duke on their proper management. He was in the habit of doing so, for he considered the Duke "a first-rate man of business." The Duke's concluding words of advice bear repeating. "The duties and responsibilities of such an estate as yours or mine are very great—we must discharge them as best we can, and make a good amount to look back upon at the close of life—I am pleased to see you paying so much attention to yours—it will afford a fund of satisfaction to others as well as to yourself—and conduce to the well being of those who live upon them.”

There was something more than cant here. The idea of trusteeship—of maintaining his estate for the benefit of its

131 Chatsworth MSS, MSS Diary of 7th Duke of Devonshire, June 3, 1845.
future owners and its present and future occupiers—struck a responsive chord in the Duke. From the start of his regime he endeavored to hand on to posterity a greater fortune than had come to him; as he wrote to Haedy in 1842, “if you and I have a few years longer, we shall have done a great deal not only towards regenerating the Estate, but also to improve and reform the management in every department.” At the same time he was not singleminded in accumulating wealth for posterity. Conflicting considerations of compassion and personal attachment came to him more readily than to his agents—as when a tenant proved delinquent and the Duke hesitated to remove him on the ground of his being long resident on the estate, or when laborers were victimized by farmers and the Duke came to their aid.

These conflicting considerations showed themselves clearly in the Duke's policy on the letting and building of cottages. As a rule he tried to avoid letting cottages with farms, preferring to keep the control of them in his own hands. When he found in 1840 that the cottages on his Dorset farms were out of his control, he gave orders that the farmers be regulated in the cottage rents they took, and that the cottages be inspected periodically for overcrowding. The Duke had many cottages built on his estates—288 on the Devonshire estate and 374 on the Bedfordshire estate—and let them at uneconomic rents. If some people could persuade themselves that a landowner's outlay on draining and farm buildings was economic, no one could do so with respect to a landowner's expenditure on cottages. As one of the Duke's agents put it, cottage building "satisfies an obligation appertaining to the possession of large Estates, and tends to secure the goodwill of the peasantry, and it sets an example to other landlords the following of which could not fail to be greatly beneficial."

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132 Bedford MSS, 7th Duke to Haedy, March 21, 1842.
133 Bedford MSS, 7th Duke to Haedy, April 18, 1840.
134 Ibid., Annual Reports, 1862.
136 Bedford MSS, Annual Reports, 1849.
THE LANDOWNER

In such ways the Duke sought to give coherence to the landed society over which he presided. It was a society in which inequality and poverty were conspicuous; in which tenants and laborers were in some sense dependants, the former being generously provided with the means to farm, the latter being saved from the worst pangs of pauperism. The Duke as a man of business thus accommodated himself to a society so constructed.

V

John Stuart Mill would probably have denied that the Duke was typical of the great landowners in nineteenth-century England. It is impossible, of course, to be statistical and therefore certain about such matters. The most that one can do is to make a tentative judgment, relying on one's sense of the situation—that is, the sum of one's own observations and those of others. There is much evidence to suggest that, by the mid-nineteenth century, aristocracy in England had undergone something of a change in social type, a change not unlike that which had taken place in the course of two generations of the Russell family.138 Administrative and agricultural affairs probably took more of a landowner's time than they had ever before. As a far more reliable observer of Victorian England than John Stuart Mill put it, perhaps too confidently, "the country gentleman of the nineteenth century is an administrator and a scientific man." 139

If by science is meant the science of agriculture, this description fitted the Duke well enough. As an administrator and an agriculturist, moreover, his achievements won respect:

Greville's for example;¹⁴⁰ or that of fellow noblemen who came to him for advice about estate management; or that of Prince Albert who pressed him to take over the management of the Duchy of Lancaster's estates.¹⁴¹ One should not, however, forget Bagehot's words: that "an aristocracy is necessarily inferior in business to the classes nearer business."¹⁴² If this in a sense is unjust to the landowner who takes the responsibility for decisions, it should still remind us that the Duke's administrative success was in some degree dependant on the ability of his agents. Of these, the next chapter will deal with the lawyers.

¹⁴⁰ The Greville Memoirs, VI, 409.
¹⁴¹ Ibid., V, 358.