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## 5. Facts Speak for Themselves

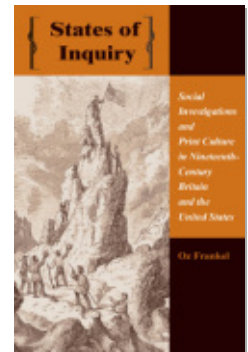
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## *Facts Speak for Themselves*

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Blue books constituted complex microcosms in which were assembled disparate types of information, taxonomies, ideas, and voices, cloaked in the formalities of bureaucratic traditions. The entire process of investigation was geared toward their preparation. These modular tomes ordinarily opened with a shorter compendium that summarized the course of investigation, categorized evidence, and prescribed policy measures. Accompanied by substantial appendices, major reports often provided historical overviews as well, thus welding, sometimes tenuously, background and foreground. In these constructions, historical survey led to a synoptic view of contemporary circumstances and then leaped to future policy. Reports were calculated to satisfy the demand for hard, “authentic” facts but were also produced with an eye to the reading habits and other cultural sensibilities of the potential recipient. Officials toiled to render blue books accessible to larger audiences beyond elected representatives and government officials. In several instances, royal commission reports, occasionally in abridged forms, became popular reading material. Other official accounts, spread over thousands of pages, were practically impossible to read in full, instead offering the interested few an index or the possibility of endless rummaging. Their sheer size and impenetrability could signify official authority or, conversely, governmental excess.

Examining blue books’ trajectory takes us from various scenes of writing and compilation into printing, dissemination, and consumption. Moving through these sequences in the large chain of inquiry, this survey complements the discussion about the conduct of investigative fieldwork. It addresses in particular the creation and meaning of the polyphony or heterogeneity that was a strong attribute of nineteenth-century social reporting. Diversity of style, evidence, and voices prevailed within and among specific documents. This was in part a product of blue books’ multiple functions as books, records, and especially archives. Another diversity-producing catalyst was the range of authors, personal and institutional, involved in the making of each document.

Social reports' heterogeneity also emanated from their representational assignments and their capacity to reproduce *voice*. First, the demand to represent "public opinion" presupposed a multiplicity of views, an approach that corresponded to the discursive rules of the hegemonic (in the Gramscian sense) "condition of England" debate, which was constructed as an exchange requiring many debaters. As significantly, detail and heterogeneity were primary techniques to depict (or to elicit) social reality in the text. The printed text verified the truthfulness and the representational efficacy of the evidence presented. The most important principle of confirmation was "authenticity," a yardstick that was applied, at least rhetorically, even when specific evidence (for instance, statistics) did not lend itself to simple authentication. A more complicated assignment was to demonstrate that beyond its veracity the knowledge procured was indeed representative, in other words, that it either encompassed the field of inquiry or portrayed, from a recognizably disinterested vantage, what was the most typical of the subject matter. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, social reporters provided as synoptic coverage of the field of inquiry as they could, in accordance with the wish to capture all opinions and vantage points. Conversely, there were representational tasks that demanded a modicum of homogeneity in the official report, for example, the ambition to portray a unified government approach or action. As we noticed earlier, beyond matters of content, the printing template of blue books and the appearance of a serial publishing project conveyed the uniformity and authority of the state.

In the Victorian empirical culture, facts were also endowed with voice, and their evidentiary might allowed them to "speak for themselves." Connecting facts with the power of articulation received many official and vernacular renditions. The following discussion explores environments that equipped facts with speaking capacity and the tactics the working poor employed to voice themselves through facts. This chapter argues that blue books' multivalency and the state's insistence on the validity of its findings produced an inherently fragile text that could be easily plundered and reused for purposes unintended by Parliament and government, confirming that print statism was a medium fraught with risks for the state.

### Scenes of Writing

The making of blue books was a process that took place in the field and in the metropolis, and featured many individuals and groups. The four factory inspec-

tors, Leonard Horner, James Stuart, Robert Saunders, and George Howell, furnished one example of such collective exertion. During their biannual meetings (beginning in 1836), they read aloud their accounts of their respective tours of inspection. They maintained that reading these documents in each other's company rather than trading manuscripts drew immediate reactions, enabled on-the-spot joint decisions, and assured the equal standing of the four senior officials (and probably also the cohesiveness of their common voice). This routine enabled them to craft a general report and sometimes inspired alterations in their individual reports as well.<sup>1</sup>

For royal commissions of inquiry, prepublication work was an expensive and protracted undertaking that added months if not years to the commission's labor. Just the proofs for the English Poor Law Commission's enormous report cost over a thousand pounds. It took André Bisset, an assistant secretary to the commission's central board, a full year to arrange a digest of the circulars that included no less than five thousand folio pages. By the beginning of 1834, the commission employed fourteen people "transcribing reports of the commissioners and appendix and correcting the press for the total sum of £390.3.10."<sup>2</sup> As was evident in early commissions' fieldwork, lack of institutional experience left much to individual initiative. Irish poor-law assistant commissioner F. J. Flood was busy for nine months with the legal segment of his account on Irish vagrancy, for which he performed extra work such as translating the Dutch poor law and arranging statistical tables.<sup>3</sup> Alas, his diligently compiled report did not conform to a new format decided upon by the central board. The document had to be severely "remodeled." The two-tier structure of royal commissions, with its own measure of friction and class animosity, affected the process of composing a report. At times, assistant commissioners had to cede control over their accounts or other written utterances to their seniors. In the case of the Factory Commission, for instance, the pressure to dispatch immediate accounts to London was so great that John Cowell, working in Lancashire, found to his surprise that early drafts of the commission's final report featured short comments he had scribbled on the margins of the transcribed evidence.

In 1840, two factory superintendents accused their supervisor Inspector Stuart of introducing misleading changes into their accounts. A former superintendent, William John Wood, testified before a select committee that entries in his weekly ledgers were altered or erased in the official "report book." In one incident, Stuart changed Wood's account on a mill inspection from "five children under 13 do not go to school" to "five children under 13 have not gone regularly to

school.” “Certificate of school wanting for children under the age of 13” was replaced by “Schools established by the company, and the certificates to be regularly produced.” “The master drunk, and incapable of showing me any books or certificates of age, and evidently has not attended to the Factory Act” was erased leaving only “a very small mill.”<sup>4</sup> One point of contention with Stuart was whether Wood’s inspection accounts should reflect the condition of the factory when he entered the premises or when he left. Stuart preferred the latter. Presumably, the inspection itself prompted mill owners to address minor offenses, and there was no need for further publicity. Stuart’s reports evidently prettified the reality of compliance with the Factory Act in Scotland, and yet they could, possibly, qualify as truthful. John Beal, another superintendent, claimed that instead of framing his accounts around evidence (e.g., certificates of age, certificates of school attendance), Stuart took for granted promises made by proprietors and their managers to rectify violations. Beal read aloud from his own visiting books, showing case after case of abuses, big and small. His was a rather gossipy journal, recording impressions outside the scope of the law—a drunken overseer, masters who tried to avoid inspection, rumors concerning violation, and other such triflings.<sup>5</sup>

Wood and Beal’s allegations so infuriated Stuart that he burst into such an indignant speech that the committee room was cleared and his words were stricken from the minutes. He later defended himself, asserting that the law did not compel him to follow his subordinates’ records to the letter. These were merely aides, private documents, for his review. He invoked another matter of privacy, a directive from the Home Office to distinguish between information that referred directly to the Factory Act and knowledge deemed private, such as exact work methods, number of employees, and other details of industrial intelligence. The inspector, he claimed, had full discretion in this regard. “To insert in my report all the information which I had received from the superintendents would have entirely frustrated all the objects for which they had been enjoined to secrecy.”<sup>6</sup>

This dispute demonstrated how routines of recording information employed during inspections ensnared proprietors and inspectors. As with other aspects of authorship under government patronage, confusion lingered over the status, indeed the very purpose, of particular texts. Because the lines separating private and public were ambiguous, a senior inspector could construe routine daily reports as private diaries. Interestingly, Ashley’s committee jettisoned (at least implicitly) Stuart’s distinction in its own publication. An appendix to the committee’s report included a facsimile reproduction of the handwritten superintendents’ abstracts and the alterations introduced by Stuart.

## Corporate Authorship

Authors of official documents had a stake in their publication and vast circulation (see chapter 1). Mine inspector Hugh Tremenheere kept a mailing list of between seven and eight hundred recipients (mostly proprietors and managers of collieries and iron works) but also asked for two hundred copies for unspecified personal distribution. Occasionally, he sent proofs of his reports to “the most intelligent persons in each district, to guard against the chance of any important errors.”<sup>7</sup> Edwin Chadwick also circulated early drafts and proofs in anticipation and solicitation of response. Officials vied for the publicity and the prestige that print culture bestowed on authors. Years after his bureaucratic prime, Chadwick asked Lord Russell to assist him with his promotion in the Order of the Bath and cited among his numerous achievements that his “published Reports have had, as shewn before a Committee of the House of Lords, an extent of sale and circulation unprecedented with that class of public documents.”<sup>8</sup> In the Home Office records, there are many letters from officials imploring government to publish their reports as soon as possible. For instance, in the summer of 1854, mine inspector Herbert Mackworth asked the Home Secretary to issue a special report he had prepared on mine safety. “If the Reports of the Inspectors of Coal Mines are to be published I beg to request that this Report may not be omitted, as it contains the particulars of the precautions which ought to be adopted in all coal mines and the coal proprietors in my district have frequently applied to me for it.”<sup>9</sup> It was important for Mackworth to show there was a local demand for his blue book.

As authors, commissioners did not stand to benefit materially from their literary products. However, as new types of personal expertise emerged, questions arose regarding their right to capitalize on the knowledge or skills they acquired in their formal capacity. Like Horner, several inspectors published unofficial tracts on social questions. However, the Home Office was less generous with lesser officials. In 1844, to give one example, factory subinspector R. Baker asked for permission to write the statistical chapter for a privately published book on the worsted trade. He requested that the unpublished statistical table he had submitted to the home secretary two years earlier be returned to him for use in the chapter, claiming the chart was prepared as voluntary extra work. The Home Office refused, saying that the secretary could not sanction the use of any information obtained through inspection. Such publication might foment distrust between proprietors and inspectors.<sup>10</sup>

Another aspect of authorship was the level of autonomy exercised by officials as writers. Senior members of royal commissions had remarkable discretion over the content of their reports, but the Home Office scrutinized and sometimes censored inspectors' blue books. A manuscript of an 1855 factory inspectors' account included a passage in which Horner defended his conduct against Manchester mill owners' accusations that he was vindictive. The factory inspectors also protested the masters' resistance to implementing an act that prescribed fencing off dangerous machines. Concerned about an open rift between his inspectors and mill owners, Secretary Sir George Grey preferred to eliminate this passage. It was essential for the value and authority of their report, he wrote the inspectors, "that they should be carefully and impartially written and should not contain anything approaching to personal disputes."<sup>11</sup> Horner was unwilling to yield his right of response. "I considered that in narrating events, which had occurred over the last half year, that had the most direct and important bearing upon my part and future official proceedings, I was acting in perfect conformity to the spirit and even to the letter of the section of the act under which the inspectors make their reports."<sup>12</sup>

The secretary eventually conceded that he could not enforce his will on inspectors but warned that if objections were raised in Parliament, he would not be able to defend the report. In another incident, Inspector Stuart was asked to eliminate an account of a discussion with the secretary of the Short Time Committee for the Eastern District about the fate of boy who had been dismissed from his factory job after giving evidence in an overwork case. Stuart expressed his hope that the committee would do its utmost to procure a position for the boy. The Home Secretary maintained that including the episode in the official document might imply that Stuart was too intimate with the laborers' organization.<sup>13</sup>

Factory inspectors' reports were sporadically criticized for their belligerent, partisan tone. The ministry also made recurrent demands for stylistic and content uniformity in the publications of the inspectorates. With only partial success, the Home Office endeavored to secure an enclosed system of information, delineating between what should appear in an internal exchange (the state's realm of privacy) and what was proper to present in a uniform public report. It also limited inspectors' access to the press in their local dealings and to politicians outside the department. In one case, the Home Office dismissed for "inexcusable breach of confidence" a superintendent who leaked a confidential letter from his superiors to an M.P. sympathetic to the short time cause who then read it in the Commons.<sup>14</sup>

## Cabinets of Curiosities

The early 1830s tug of war between the Factory Commission and Michael Thomas Sadler's parliamentary report over child-labor policy sharpened the contrast between two archetypes or genres of official texts. Select committee reports usually abided by a strict formula. They incorporated material obtained outside the committee room—official records, letters, and petitions—but mostly consisted of endless transcriptions of interviews in question-and-answer form. Interviews allowed parliamentarians to register their views in the official record, which they often did unabashedly and at great length. There was some attempt, chiefly by the printer Hansard, to make the information more accessible. He suggested adding annotations in the margin and appending indexes at the end. A reader would therefore scan the entire sequence of an exchange whose veracity was assured by the presence of a stenographer and the completeness of the transcript. (Typically, when M.P.s wished to criticize royal commissioner Hugh Tremenheere's report on the bleaching works, they charged that he neglected to incorporate the questions he addressed to his interviewees and thus failed to report fully on his field conversations.)<sup>15</sup>

If select committee reports reproduced the temporal continuum of the inquiry, the royal commissions' claim to represent the region, social institution, or population under investigation also rested on the reproduction or simulation of space. This was accomplished by transporting narratives, illustrations, commissioners' journals, and interviews from the sites of inquiry and inserting them into official texts. The print archive replicated the field as well as the process of the investigation. Large appendices of royal commission reports often accommodated reams of miscellaneous factual matter, congested cabinets of curiosities. The commissioners of the Scottish poor-law inquiry explained the size of their report as a matter of fairness. "The course, which we have followed, may perhaps appear to have extended the Evidence to an unreasonable bulk, but it has this advantage, that we cannot be accused of partiality or unfairness in having selected any particular parishes or individuals for examination; and upon a subject of such importance as the Scottish Poor Laws, the principles and administration of which have been so much canvassed, it was desirable to satisfy the public mind that we had taken the utmost pains to inform ourselves on the subject from every source from which information could be derived."<sup>16</sup>

Fulfilling the democratic credo to open the governing process to public ob-



ervation, official reports told the story of their own making. As political scientist Yaron Ezrahi recently argued, in a modern democracy, “seeing and witnessing . . . are inseparable from the attempts to define politics as a realm of plain observable facts which are accessible to all the citizens conceived as spectators.”<sup>17</sup> In state-sponsored research, in particular, the demand for rendering the political process transparent coalesced with common scientific and judicial practices. Importantly, the medium of witnessing was print culture and the citizen/spectator was, in fact, a reader. The public could not attend the Factory Commission’s interviewing room but was able to obtain the commission’s report. As a reader, the Victorian subject was thus expected to master unprocessed information and to “judge for himself.” The nineteenth-century discourse of public opinion rhetorically trivialized the division between readers and lawmakers to generate what an observer designated a “community of knowledge, as well as community of discussion.”<sup>18</sup> Ever since the Commons regulated the printing and selling of parliamentary documents, the public’s access to information was ostensibly equal to that of lawmakers.

It was not only the ethos of public opinion that likened citizens to legislatures. The chain of representation itself required that commissioned officials—government representatives—report back to legislative bodies, institutions that were by their own right representative and required to report back. At the end of the line of reporting stood the citizenry or the public (as well as, symbolically, the monarch), the ultimate recipient of these epistolary documents, which were, indeed, signed, sealed, and delivered.<sup>19</sup> The report as a genre was thus always implicitly incomplete and in search of addressees. Either walking the proverbial corridors of power in Whitehall, inhabiting committee rooms in Westminster, or reading in the comfort of their domestic spaces—officials as well as other implied readers of state reports were expected to make law, make a decision, or render judgment. The report was not produced for a reader but for an author of sorts, an author of opinion.

Ponderous appendices were ostensibly published to allow consumers to review the recommendations in conjunction with the evidence, in other words, to facilitate an unmediated encounter between facts that speak for themselves and readers who judge for themselves. Leaving facts to speak their own truth, to fend for themselves, evinced their power of persuasion. Paradoxically, it was also a symptom of the relative weakness of institutional science. There was no strong expert culture to mitigate between facts and (reading) publics as would emerge in the twentieth century. The national debate was intense precisely because of the absence of an accepted discursive authority.

Sometimes, the order of publication was reversed. Interim reports were circulated before any recommendation was made, an indication that generating knowledge was itself a cardinal purpose of these procedures. A few select committees never reached any decision and yet made public their evidence. The handloom-weavers commission presented the reports of the assistant commissioners to Parliament as they became available and issued its own report almost two years after the first of these accounts was made public. Similarly, when excerpts from field reports of the English poor-law assistant commissioners were published, one commentator questioned the legality of this practice. The document certainly publicized the limitations of the old poor-law apparatus, but its preparation only delayed the completion of the final report and thus seemed to defeat the commission's stated goal to provide evidence and recommendations for new legislation.<sup>20</sup>

### Cut and Paste

Documents that were prized for the unmediated access they allowed to the field experience—a quality that relied on the facelessness of their compilers and the transparency of the texts themselves—often had unique personal imprints. Government was communicating through individual authors. Few public figures understood as well as Chadwick did the importance of print culture to the political process. Chadwick distinguished himself early on in questioning witnesses for the poor-law inquiry, prompting the chief commissioner, Nassau Senior, to compare him to a French cook who can concoct a delicacy out of shoe laces. Chadwick contributed to the popularity of the commission's interim report by exhibiting the most interesting cases in a lucid manner. He famously never missed an opportunity to peddle his penmanship.<sup>21</sup> But even lesser officials left a modest trace on the documents they composed. During the Irish poor-law investigation, assistant commissioners were regarded simply as recording devices whose accounts were “to bring the reader more immediately in contact with the witness.”<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, each team of investigators contrived a slightly different tactic for imparting information or narrating stories. One technique was to recount discrete episodes or “case studies” in full. Another called for weaving short quotations into a general statement on the affairs of the parish.

Labourers marry earlier than farmers. John Walsh, tradesman, says, “The poorer they are the earlier they marry;” but the parish priest denies this. Others say that early marriages are discountenanced by the general feeling; “under 20 is a won-

der." There are few applications to the parish priest. The early marriages are to gratify passion and to serve themselves, and enable them to live better, as they thinking [*sic*] there will be more compassion for them if they are married.

Michael Millins says, "He knows men of 60 who never married, and they are not a halfpennyworth better off than those who have families. If that man is sick, who will attend to him without payment, or who will wash or cook for him?"<sup>23</sup>

This passage effectively recreates a speaking (not to say chattering) community. That there are clear disagreements about the details of everyday life does not detract from the impression that everybody speaks and everybody has been allowed a voice. In fact, the occasional dispute endows the text with a greater measure of realism because the speakers appear to be in dialogue with each other. This exchange simulated (or fabricated) daily local encounters, here generated by the investigative practices adopted by the Irish Poor Law Commission. In every parish, assistant commissioners conducted interviews with a group of locals who represented different rungs in the social ladder. Beyond recalling their own experience, the speakers peppered their conversation with stories about others. Investigators thus tapped into local discourse, whether comprised of opinion, memory, or sheer gossip. The priest who told the Irish poor-law assistant commissioners that forty women in his parish were seduced by men of a superior class might have had at his disposal reliable means to gather this bit of information. But the report also featured farmers talking about their neighbors, merchants telling stories regarding clients, and others who recalled rumors about destitute individuals and how the local poor grappled with deprivation. The anecdotal nature of such evidence did not preclude a systematic presentation in clear imitation of the aesthetics of statistics, with careful editing and, in some cases, tabular forms to arrange responses to written or oral questions. In early Victorian official reports, readers found statistical tables and testimonies, used side by side as competing or complementing tools to gauge society.

The editorial digressive process often meant breaking witnesses' responses and testimonials into short, incisive utterances or morselized narratives. When information had to be condensed for the purpose of a summary report or an abridged document, the job could be done simply with the help of scissors. Chadwick's personal files on the Factory Commission inquiry contain a few pages on which he pasted short clippings from previously printed material (an indication that the first phase of preparing a report was the printing of the handwritten evidence). He divided the cuttings into clusters under headings such as "Factory Women as Wives," "Morals—Bad," "Morals—Improved or Favourable," and "Diseases Pe-

cularly Favoured by Cotton Factory Labour.”<sup>24</sup> Garnering and registering knowledge in concise narratives commenced in the field. Inspector Horner’s record of a single infraction of the Factory Act, as taken from his inspection journal, was narrated as a story when initially entered in his report book.

In going through the mill with Mr. Platt, I saw a very young child piecing to Wm. Fielden. The child appeared to me about eight years old, certainly not more than nine; it had its jacket off, and there was cotton on its clothes, so that it had been working for some time. It was a boy, Bradshaw Fielden, the brother of the spinner; there was no certificate; Mr. Platt said that it was contrary to his knowledge and orders, he sent for Thomas Goddard, his messenger, who declared that it was not only contrary to his directions, but that he had turned that child several times out of the mill. I called the parties before me in the counting-house; swore Mr. Platt to his having given repeated orders to his people that the law was to be strictly obeyed; swore Thomas Goddard to the above statement made by him, and there-upon I adjudged Fielden to pay a fine of 20s.<sup>25</sup>

Attention to detail was closely related to the judicial nature of the procedure. (At the same time, as a model case, supposedly confirming the orderly day-to-day application of the Factory Act, the details call attention to what appears to be missing. Why didn’t he question the Fielden brothers? Did they offer any defense? Was the proprietor complicit in employing under-aged children after all?) In the retelling of such episodes, social reality is ingrained in the fine points of the story, dryly conveyed. Concreteness of scene, actors, and action endows anecdotes with a palpable, even tactile quality.

Another approach to the social anecdote’s power to engender reality highlights its structure rather than content. In literary critic Joel Fineman’s view, the anecdote, the minutest of narratives, has a complete, irreducible, or indigestible form. As such, it has the capacity to interrupt engulfing texts that are also framed as narratives (with beginning, middle, and end) by calling into question their flow and comprehensiveness. Anecdotes thus do not necessarily describe reality as much as point or gesture toward it, as they indicate that there is an “outside” or exteriority to the text. The particular miniature narrative that interests Fineman is the historical anecdote, the *petite histoire* that enables the telling of history but resists the totalizing (and ahistorical) ambition of the *grand recit*. “The anecdote produces the effect of the real, the occurrence of contingency, by establishing an event as an event within and yet without the framing context of historical successivity, i.e., it does so only in so far as its narration both comprises and refracts the narration it reports.”<sup>26</sup> Official reports were not arranged as

mammoth narratives but were schematized—similarly to the teleological historical master narratives of old—as substantial bodies of knowledge (some of which was historical) that lead to particular conclusions. Like the historical narrative, the anecdote allows the narration of society (as in a case history) but undermines society-as-narrative or, in other words, the understanding of social life as a single story. The capacity of vignettes to refuse or at least resist enclosure was enhanced in social reportage by their separation from the rest of the text by actual or implicit quotation marks. As we shall see, authors of social reports employed diverse methods to emphasize rather than to efface those textual stitches. A truncated page composed of short narratives was also characteristic of the daily newspaper.

Anecdotes were certainly not the only representational technique available to capture social reality. The emphasis on eye witnessing as the portal to the social real (coupled with the “environmentalist” drive in social reportage) encouraged social observers to evaluate individuals and groups by their immediate surroundings. As Joseph Childers noticed about the 1842 sanitary report, “Working metonymically, focusing on connections, [Chadwick] and his sub-commissioners fix on the artifacts of lower class life: attire, cottages, work-shops, dungheaps, cellars.”<sup>27</sup> Even if metonymy became the prevailing trope for realistic representation in social reportage and in Victorian fiction, the anecdotal narration of the experience of the poor and the investigative process strongly qualified that propensity (and the ocular emphasis in general) and introduced manifest temporality to social reporting. Metonymic displacements “flattened” the portrait of society by offering spatial instead of temporal associations. The poor could be conceived by and through their habitat and bodily extensions. In Horner’s mundane anecdote, the child—“it”—is recognized as an object of scrutiny by the cotton on his clothes. In contrast, the anecdote endows the text with a dimension of time. Besides, royal commissions and other state-sponsored inquiries were not devised merely to draw dense pictures by words or numbers of the unrepresented in their physical setting. Conversation, mostly by method of interviews, and the concomitant seldom-missed opportunity to narrate stories and to give testimony dominated government and parliamentary reports.

### Bureaucratic Poetics

The first report of the Employment of Children Commission (Mines) displays a panoply of composing and editing techniques. In the words of the *Spectator*, this account portrays horrifying human ordeals befitting “fictions of tales of dis-

tant lands.”<sup>28</sup> Its authors selected excerpts from field depositions and pasted a collage of quotations and observations classified according to the fourteen themes of the investigation. The result is a three-tiered text featuring the testimony of young miners and their families, presented in a smaller font and frequently in phonetic English (to generate voice and accent); observations and remarks made by individual subcommissioners; and the unified, anonymous, but commanding voice of the senior commissioners. Field notes are reproduced with all their jittery mishaps. For instance, Subcommissioner William Rayner Wood transcribed or paraphrased his conversation with a child laborer: “No. 71. Banniester Lund, 6 years old:—Does not like t’pit; had rather be at t’top; work is hard; is not ill tired; has not enough to eat; could eat more if he had it.”<sup>29</sup> Wood is not quoting as much as ventriloquizing the little miner. This utterance is short, shorthanded, and factual, yet endowed with a poetic pace derived from repeated *ts*—tired, top, pit, eat. It ends with the wonderfully suggestive “could eat more if he had it” and is peppered with mine talk. Wood retains his narrative voice even as he assumes his interlocutor’s voice. In doing so, he points to his own immersion in the field of inquiry and, concurrently, to his distance from it.

The text moves telescopically and rather swiftly from statements by fragile, overworked children to general overviews of entire regions. Squeezed in the middle, the subcommissioner is an observer and a witness. He delineates the scene of suffering or confesses his own impressions and feelings. The testimonials were too shocking even to gratify the Victorian taste for moral outrage. Such is the story of Betty Harris from a coal pit at Little Bolton: “I have a belt around my waist, and a chain passing between my legs, and I go on my hands and feet.” A sketch of a barely clad young woman harnessed to a trolley and pulling her load in a steep, dark tunnel accompanies the text. The female “drawer” continues: “I have drawn till I had the skin off me. The belt and chain is worse when we are in a family way. My feller (husband) has beaten me many a time for not being ready.” Subcommissioner Jelinger Symons depicts children attending door-traps in narrow tunnels, sitting alone for as long as twelve hours a day, waiting for the carriage to pass. One child begs the passersby for a bit of candle wax so as not to be left in the dark. “I found that the poor child had scooped out a hole in a great stone, and, having obtained a wick, had manufactured a rude sort of lamp; and that he kept it going as well as he could by begging contributions of melted tallow from the candles of any Samaritan passers by. To be in the dark, in fact, seemed to be the great grievance with all of them.”<sup>50</sup>

Symons’s colleague Scriven, who took a partially dressed young girl to a public house for an interview, also employs the dark/light opposition. He reports of be-

ing chased by her alarmed collier who “became evidently mortified that these deeds of darkness should be brought to light.” The girl testifies, “I run 24 corves a-day; I cannot come up till I have done them all. I had rather set cards or anything else than work in the pit.” The investigator then completes the scene: “She stood shivering before me from cold. The rag that hung about her waist was once called a shirt, which is as black as the coal she thrusts, and saturated with water, the drippings of the roof and shaft.”<sup>51</sup>

The mines report in its various guises perfected a particularly gory genre of social reporting that interjected charged language and sexual voyeurism in an effort to represent the physical and mental suffering of dependent populations. Government thus participated in the production of what might be termed Victorian pulp nonfiction. The report told provocative stories in a truncated way in which the rough seams between specific narratives were kept by employing different fonts, quotation marks, and faulty language. The rugged, seemingly uncontrolled form denoting the veracity of the evidence converged with poignant content—all packaged in the cheap blue paper cover supplied by cost-minded parliamentary printers. A certain crudeness of the text was mirrored in unprecedented sharp utterances by government officials. At one point, Symons exclaimed, “any sight more disgustingly indecent or revolting can scarcely be imagined than these girls at work—no brothel can beat it.”<sup>52</sup>

This report also derived its power from controversial illustrations, which commissioners reportedly inserted to catch the attention of “busy members of Parliament and learned lords who might not have waded through a lengthy ‘blue book’ to find the facts which these pictures showed at a glance.”<sup>53</sup> Assistant commissioner John L. Kennedy wrote: “I found reason to believe that no *words* I could use would convey to others, impressions, similar to those, which ocular inspection had given to myself. To aid the conception (for it can only be *aided* in endeavouring to convey the impressions received by the sense of smell as well as of sight in examining the place of work), I have had recourse to my friend Mr. Horner, to whose kindness I am indebted for the sketches which appear in the pages of this Report.”<sup>54</sup>

The text seems to gravitate toward these illustrations, to caption but ultimately supplant them, providing detail and movement that were absent in the rather schematic sketches.

No. 2 shows the position in which the colliers are obliged to work in the thin seams.

This sketch was taken from a collier at work in Mr. Roscoe’s mine near Rochdale.

He was quite naked, and had a broad scar on his shoulder, which he told me was

the mark of a kick he had received in a fight. It will be observed that the position is much more constrained than in the preceding case. Indeed, had I not seen it, I could not have believed that a man could have worked with so much effect in so little space. The mine in which this man was working was not more than from 18 to 20 inches in thickness. His chest was brought down so as almost to rest on the thigh, and the head bent down almost the knee; but even in this double-up position it was curious to see the precision and smartness with which he dealt his blows.<sup>35</sup>

Consistently exalting the significance of visual perception, Employment of Children investigators produced a text with a strong ocular property. The detailed (and, significantly, illustrated) narrative offered a receding gaze, which allowed the reader to peek into the field of inquiry within as well as between the lines. However, the textual simulation of the investigator's presence at the scene was predicated on the unbridgeable gap between field experience and its representation. The text might be translucent but not entirely transparent. The reader needed occasionally to be reminded of that, for instance, by calling attention to other sensorial experiences that could not be recreated in the text, or to the reporter's own sense of awe and amazement. If he had not been there, he would not have believed it himself. Estrangement functioned as a means of persuasion, and the suspenseful play between belief and disbelief sustained a hierarchy of experience and distance between the investigator and the reader. As importantly, it epitomized the lingering self-doubt concerning the limits of representation which haunted the Victorian culture of the social fact.

This "tunnel vision" was not the only way the text undermined its own ocular emphasis. The shock induced by the mine visit was not exclusively prompted by the sights that reached the eye in barely lit shafts but by what was harder to see in a subterranean world. The inability of the casual glance to identify the sex of miners was certainly a cause for concern. A caption to one illustration described a drawer of a heavy, tublike container. A woman (Subcommissioner Kennedy supplemented the picture) was dressed in flannel shirt and trousers and wore a small cap on her head, as did the male miners. Coal blackened everyone's faces. The best (perhaps the only) method to determine her sex was—metonymy again—the deteriorating necklace and earrings she wore.<sup>36</sup> Symons contended that while visiting a mine in Yorkshire he found a group naked to the waist and could distinguish the girls only by their breasts. Occasional difficulty in making this distinction "caused a good deal of laughing and joking."<sup>37</sup> (In another mine, he found clothed women working side by side with stark



and away they run with prodigious celerity to the shaft, pushing the load with their heads and hands. (Fig. 3.)

COAL MINES.  
—  
*Nature of  
Employment.*  
—  
Halifax.

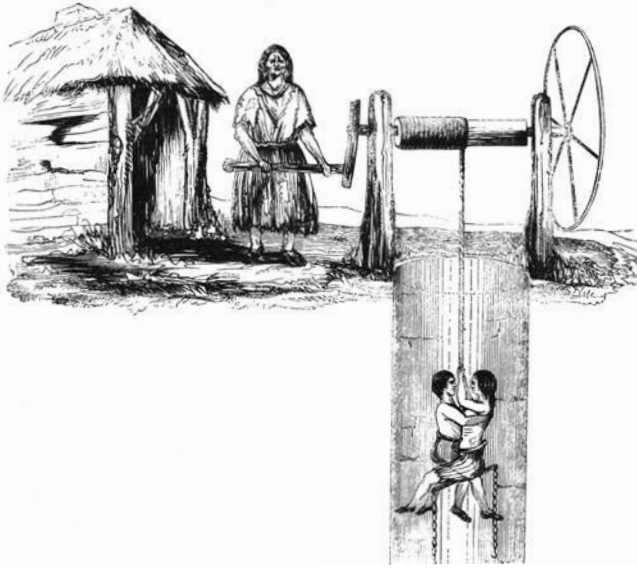
Fig. 3.



The command they hold over it at every curve and angle, considering the pace, the unevenness of the floors and rails, and the mud, water, and stones, is truly astonishing. The younger Children thrust in pairs" (S. S. Scriven, Esq., Report, §§ 49—52: App. Pt. II., p. 65, 66).

John Marsden, aged eight and a half, Wike-lane Pit: "I hurry a 'dozen and twelve' corves a day, [that is 20 to the dozen]; my brother Lawrence helps me, and we have to hurry the corves about 200 yards" (S. S. Scriven, Esq., Evidence, No. 42: App. Pt. II., p. 113, l. 14).—Joseph Hellewel, aged ten years, Weigh Pit: "I hurry about 40 corves a-day; they weigh each

Fig. 4.



The 1842 report of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children sensationalized child and female labor in the mines. The bottom illustration represents young miners Ann Ambler and Will Dyson drawn up from the pit partially clad and cross-lapped. The top sketch depicts another young "hurrier" harnessed to a loaded corf with a chain passing between his legs. The report alleged that these children were remarkably muscular but their height and genital development were "stunted and defective."

naked men.) Several accompanying illustrations of miners were likewise ambiguous about their subjects' gender, including the images that depicted barely clothed or even naked men and women at work.

In a few accounts, assistant commissioners elucidated their private opinion about policy issues. For the most part these views amounted to outright support for state intervention in the social field—for instance, Wood's enthusiastic call for a centralized educational system.<sup>58</sup> These junior officials could not resist stylistic embellishment, usually by way of a celebratory flourish. Thus James Mitchell described the pastoral scenery around the lead mines of Durham, Northumberland, and Cumberland. "Weardale will be held by many to be the most beautiful of them all. It gradually contracts into narrower spaces, and the hills become loftier on proceeding westward from the low country."<sup>59</sup> Although this prose also engaged an idiom of discovery, it was different from the shedding of metaphoric light on the darkness of mines in Wales or Lancashire. The author dwelled on the lead country's romantic seclusion from the forces of modernity. He was especially struck by the inhabitants' unique language, which, "away from the tide of human intercourse," still featured words that likely had never been spoken elsewhere.

The printed products of the Employment of Children investigation combined therefore a variety of literary genres and devices, including the sublime (as in the awe-striking danger of the mine shaft), the humanitarian language of bodily pain, metonymic associations, schoolbook didacticism, and provincial lyricism of origin and seclusion. As investigators digressed from their official purposes, randomly turning their gaze sideways, so did their reports. The mines report was, among other things, a textbook on the methods and machinery of mining and miners' lives. Its ethnographic subject matter was sometimes as incidental as a slip of the bureaucrat's pen. In one instance, Assistant Commissioner Scriven expressed concern about North Staffordshire miners' dangerous games. "By the way of amusement," he noted, "the men would sometimes inflate the mouth with a sufficient quantity [of oil] to produce a stream, by constricting the lips and setting fire to it as from a grand burner, to the great glee of others who looked on."<sup>40</sup>

A small item in Scriven's report from the Staffordshire potteries reveals the disposition to exhibit literal objects. Sarah Limer, a ten-year-old painter at an earthenware factory at Shelton, maintained that she attended a Catholic Sunday school and could read and write. The subcommissioner remarked, "This child, like many others, professes to write, but has no idea of holding a pen," a statement which he corroborated with a facsimile of her signature, a scribble that bore

no resemblance to her name.<sup>41</sup> It is not entirely clear why the assistant commissioner thought it proper to add ocular proof to demonstrate that a little girl's claim was groundless. The reproduced mock signature (therefore twice forged) testified to its own meaningless or, conversely, spoke—as facts indeed can sometimes speak for themselves—to the possibility that the subcommissioner's contention was erroneous—the child was illiterate, but she had a signature and could hold a pen. It was also ironic that the only signature that was faithfully replicated in this otherwise signature-congested document was that of a ten year old who could not write properly.

### Discourse in the Social Report

The Employment of Children Commission report was, in many respects, one of a kind, an exception among early Victorian blue books and yet a foundational document in the genre of social reporting. It certainly generated more stir than other state-authored social reports of its era, mostly because it violated conventions of public exchange by depicting female nudity. Curiously, the same state that was strongly challenged in the Stockdale versus Hansard case for its damnation of a book of anatomy as a lurid work of pornography published a document that provided readers similar forms of titillation. Several features of this particular document are reminiscent of the properties that Mikhail Bakhtin admired in the works of nineteenth-century novelists or, even more famously, in the writing of Rabelais. Among them are a concurrent unfolding of diverse literary styles, multivocality of utterances and accents (which in the Employment of Children report are sometimes offered in phonetic dialect), the emergence of unsettling characters, and the “grotesque realism” (whose most explicit renditions in the report are the descriptions of overworked laborers' deformed bodies and the image of miners spitting fire for their amusement). There is a particular dialogical character to the manner in which the writing subjects, the commissioners (as well as the commission), double themselves in the text by conjuring up a sedate official persona and another self, the self of an other who inhabits the “field” away from office or home. While Foucault asserted that “all discourses endowed with the author function possess . . . plurality of self,” the social report is remarkably fecund in generating authorial identities.<sup>42</sup> The field persona is an observer as well as a sufferer.

Subcommissioners sometimes employed a hybridized style, blending their voices with those of their interlocutors. (The tendency of social investigators—and later sociologists or anthropologists—to quote themselves, usually by refer-

ring to field notes, facilitates an inner dialogue that undermines the unity of the writing subject.) The report seems to exemplify the uncertain position (which was social but also discursive) of intermediaries, the investigator-authors who traveled between society and its outskirts. The notion of a multiplicity of languages, or heteroglossia, seems particularly pertinent for this discussion, for it corresponds to the multivalency of the initial field encounters between investigators and the investigated populations. Bakhtin associated the modern dialogic novel with the emergence of a new type of consciousness that enlisted the other to shape a complex, textured understanding of self.

In contrast, the emphasis on a single voice in the printed works of commissions, committees, and especially inspectorates points to the monological tendencies of official discourse. Moreover, the novelistic heteroglossia is often associated with a transgressive capacity that signified the decline of a single authoritative language, official genres, or central power. This aspect does not seem applicable to state-sanctioned social reportage. By issuing the Employment of Children Commission report government might have co-opted a multifaceted, risky, indeed heteroglotic form for its own purposes, but blue books were an aspect of a larger project to affirm the power of the central government. The official report signified asymmetrical power relations. Polyphony of the sort practiced in fact collectors' field notes may also be construed as a screen erected to occlude rather than to dialogue with others—to replace or speak for others. There was a hierarchy among the various speakers in the social report. Rather than dramatizing and accentuating social heterogeneity, the text may be rehearsing or simulating the shift from chaos to order, from moral outrage to rationality. It depicts a countersociety that should be exposed to the scrutiny and the regulatory power of the state.

One way of avoiding the difficulties inherent in any attempt to detect or theorize agency and voice in the text is to accept the text's fundamental muteness and to follow instead the ways historical readers *actualized* these documents to voice themselves. At the conclusion of this chapter, we therefore return to power relations outside the text where the exchange between lawmakers, government officials, mill owners, vicars, physicians, managers, miners, piecers, and handloom weavers took place.

## Blue Books Dispatched

A few documents that detail the dispersion of royal commissions' reports have survived in the Public Record Office. The abridged Irish poor-law report was

shipped to a bookseller in London, a Mr. Fellows on Ludgate Street, for its further allocation. Out of 2,600 copies of "selections," 650 were sold for less than a pound each, and 264 were given away according to the commissioners' requests. Among these, 148 were sent to country newspapers in England and Scotland, 32 went to London newspapers, 32 went to magazines for reviews, and most of the rest were given to the secretary of the English Poor Law Commission and to one of its commissioners, Nassau Senior, for distribution. Prime Minister Earl Grey received twelve copies. The king's copy was bound with Morocco joints and silk "insides." Another special copy, somewhat less ostentatious, was prepared for the king's sister-in-law, the Duchess of Kent (Queen Victoria's mother). Government placed nearly a hundred advertisements for the report in newspapers and periodicals at the cost of one hundred pounds.<sup>43</sup> Of the 3,280 copies of the Rural Constabulary Commission report (1839), most were sent to local authorities: petty commissions (1,392), watch committees (196), lords lieutenant (59), and Lancashire magistrates (35). Large numbers (1,105) were given to "individuals directed by the Commissioners," probably those who cooperated with the investigation or could assist in the cause of reform, and 140 copies were left for the personal use of the commissioners. Another 210 went to newspapers.<sup>44</sup> In both cases, the press was coaxed. Newspapers and review journals were the main vehicle for publicity, and commissioners did not wait for editors' requests.

Admittedly, the Irish poor-law and the constabulary reports had a rather modest circulation. Officials peddled other documents more vigorously. During one of the recurrent parliamentary debates on printing, the Comptroller McCulloch of the Stationery Office gave as an example of public waste the ten thousand gratuitous copies of the Committee of Privy Council on Education report, which included 680 pages on every school visited by an inspector. "Very many schoolmasters have their names blazoned abroad in I do not know how many different forms, and the names of hundreds of the children at school are printed also, with an endless mass of minute and trifling details."<sup>45</sup> The committee's secretary, Ralph R. W. Lingen, responded, "the persons who have promoted the various schools . . . are extremely anxious to see what is said of them by the Government inspectors."<sup>46</sup> The committee was established to allocate grants in aid to voluntary contributions for building schools. The only privilege government retained was that of inspection, and so reports were essential to that collaboration.

Despite the comptroller's sarcasm, the committee insisted on continuing the gratis circulation of its reports, emphasizing that it did not wish to advertise its activities to the public at large as much as to communicate with managers and teachers of the schools under inspection. Unlike Joseph Hume, who thought that

official documents would reach their proper readers if a fee was charged, Lingen, Chadwick, and other bureaucrats maintained that reports would reach their destination only if they were sent directly to a preselected group. Lingen argued that recipients did not pass on the documents to booksellers. Hundreds of applications for them arrived in his office each year, far exceeding the supply. Twenty-five hundred copies were sent to certified teachers and to other correspondents, mostly clergymen. All wanted to keep a copy in their homes rather than share it with others. Lingen claimed that if reports were shared, they would not be as carefully read, and he had indications that recipients actually read the documents in their entirety. Naturally, they were concerned with their specific districts, but from his daily correspondence, he found recurrent references to reports of other inspectors and remarks that indicated a broader interest.<sup>47</sup>

In the case of the Committee of Privy Council on Education report, a circular system of communication developed in which reports' addressees were the individuals who gave information in the first place. Even frugal Hume used to send free copies of select committees' blue books to all witnesses who came to Westminster. They were entitled, he believed, to a copy of their own evidence as well as to the report.<sup>48</sup> The Irish poor-law commissioners argued that there was a great interest among those who responded to their queries and questionnaires to see the commission's report in print. Through distribution of reports, officials sustained networks of informants and local interlocutors. Witnesses' desire to receive and read official reports to which they contributed, especially their own testimony, may seem self evident or even trivial, but it was symptomatic of the exchange relations between London and the provinces, between government, local authorities, proprietors, and the working populations. Official documents—concrete objects—permeated the exchange between government and its citizens. This gesture was meaningful not only because an object changed hands but also because the act of reporting itself implied acknowledgment, gratitude, and respect.

For the Board of Health, dispersion of information was justified primarily in terms of public instruction. Chadwick maintained that the Board was ordered by the "highest authorities" that it must "conciliate public opinion." Otherwise, it had very little direct power. In 1852 Chadwick claimed that a distribution of a paper on the removal of sewer manure to farmland had already persuaded five towns to espouse the proposed scheme. An additional five or six towns were getting closer to adopting new sewage systems, and several others ceased building "bad works." "If we get this system in complete operation in a few towns, it will be worth, I apprehend, not only the whole expense of the printing ten times over but the whole expense of the Commission."<sup>49</sup> Chadwick sent the material to the officers of the

local boards, some of whom were unpaid and otherwise would not purchase them. The local boards, in turn, lent copies to farmers. Chadwick asked the Stationery Office whether it would permit Charles Knight to print copies for commercial circulation as he had twenty years earlier for the poor-law report. The Board of Health, in particular, stubbornly circumvented printing regulations, but other commissioners and inspectors were often caught cutting bureaucratic corners to expedite the publication of their accounts. The secretary of the Commission on Municipal Corporations inserted into his official correspondence advertisements for the sale of the commission's report by, once again, publisher Knight. The Home Office ordered the secretary to provide a full explanation.<sup>50</sup>

### Blue Books Intercepted

For those who were neither close to particular investigations nor beneficiaries of commissioners' largesse or habitual purchasers of parliamentary reports, the press was the main source on official inquiries. Newspapers and journals functioned as large-pored filters for official discourse, publishing long unedited segments from (or furnishing numerous details about) government and parliamentary investigations, hearings, periodical reports, and returns. Like other informational genres, midcentury newspapers were often in the habit of reproducing rather than digesting authentic facts. In addition, periodicals such as the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*—Whig and Tory publications—offered extensive commentary on blue books, often in conjunction with other factual publications or even literary productions. Official literature was thus subjected to the comparative gaze or at least forced into a direct if fictitious exchange. For instance, the *Quarterly Review* examined the Factory Commission report together with seven other texts, including Sadler's report, John Fielden's pro-short-time *The Curse of the Factory System* (1836), Charles Wing's politically similar *The Evils of the Factory System* (1836), as well as James Phillips Kay's differently motivated *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester* (1832).<sup>51</sup>

Other documents fared worse, steered away from the intended destinations set by Chadwick and others. The Society for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions rearranged and republished the printed reports of two 1832 select committees—one in the Lords, the other in the Commons—that had deliberated over the fate of slavery. These committees issued bulky reports of their proceedings but did not append conclusions or recommendations. The Commons committee examined whether slaves could maintain themselves once emanci-

pated (see chapter 6 for the 1860s American rendition of the same theme) and whether the danger of rebellion was greater if freedom was granted or refused. The inquiry, led by members friendly to the cause of abolition, was limited mostly to the island of Jamaica. Published evidence occupied 655 pages and was made available to the public despite planters' protests.

In the *Analysis* (of the Commons report) and the *Abstract* (of the 1,400-page Lords report), the society's editors excerpted the evidence, eliminated the question-and-answer format, and provided a running critique and interpretation through extensive use of lengthy footnotes. A few remarks in the text itself evaluated witnesses' integrity, but the edited testimonies generally were left without explicit commentary. The footnotes extended the text by offering information from the society's publications (its own archive) to substantiate or refute details given in the testimony or to respond to M.P.s' queries when witnesses hesitated or claimed they did not know enough to answer. The footnotes were especially comprehensive in dealing with pro-planter testimony. They highlighted inconsistencies and demonstrated how the witnesses unwittingly imparted facts that confirmed pro-abolition witnesses' description of plantation life. The deployment of corrective remarks disguised the manipulation of the text and sustained a semblance of a debate between the information given during the hearings and the positions (or facts) expressed by the society in footnote form. The society ultimately completed the parliamentary volumes by answering the initial questions: once emancipated the slaves could maintain themselves, and the danger of a rebellion was much greater with slavery still in place.

Besides the *Abstract* and the *Analysis*, two other antislavery documents presented abridged versions of the Lords hearings, employing a distinct tone and different editing techniques. Published anonymously, these documents attacked not just the proslavery stance but also the committee of the Lords, exposing the personal interests its members had in slavery. "Legion," the signatory of these publications, closely interpreted the exchange in the committee room. Long passages quoted in full from the actual transcripts, rather than paraphrased testimonies decorated with scholarly styled footnotes, dominated these tracts. The analysis followed witnesses' and peers' rhetorical patterns. Witnesses' reactions to tough questions, their pauses, hesitations, evasions, and minute discrepancies, were as important to the determination of veracity as the information they offered. "Legion" judged specific testimonies by their bearers' access to actual plantations and claimed that the testimony of (mostly antislavery) clergymen should be preferred to that of casual visitors or state officials who lived on the island but did not frequent the sequestered plantation world. He thus stretched the



argument of the plantation as a different planet to bolster evidence close to his views. The plantation, as one witness asserted, was a “sealed book.”<sup>52</sup>

Strong anti-aristocratic and anti-High Church sentiments pervaded these documents. Witnesses were seemingly cross-examined by “Legion” or more precisely indicted by their own words. The analytical method deployed in this rendition of the official transcripts forcefully resembled courtroom tactics. Early on (and counterintuitively), he designated the planters as the plaintiffs on whose shoulders lay the burden of proof in what he constructed as a virtual civil case. The authority of the institution, the House of Lords, was cunningly employed to undermine it. These abolitionist “reports” of the Lords proceedings implicitly assumed the accuracy of the original text, down to its minutest details. It was the completeness of the initial record that allowed “Legion” to perform his elaborate maneuvers.<sup>53</sup>

The furor over the publication of the *Report on the State of Education in Wales* (1847) also exemplified the vulnerability of published official accounts to hostile scrutiny. Based on careful reading of the report, a contemporary observer maintained that a few assistant commissioners did not have full command of Welsh, even though the commission had hired these locals because of their supposed command of the language. One of them obviously mistranslated children’s responses to English, and another marked wrong the right answer in an arithmetic test. In a pamphlet *Artegall, or Remarks on the Reports of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the State of Education in Wales* (1848), Jane Williams attacked the chief commissioner’s mastery of English grammar. “Until Commissioner Symons attains a more creditable knowledge of etymology and syntax, we would earnestly recommend him to abstain from the use of metaphors and from all figures of speech.”<sup>54</sup> Such attention to trifling linguistic infelicities was a way to give the commission that denigrated the Welsh for their supposed ignorance of the English language a taste of their own venom. The report’s publication prompted an avalanche of counterdocuments. Many of the commission’s informants rose against the report, and some protested the representation of their views. The published minutia of the inquiry enhanced the possibilities of contestation about the commission’s modes of operation, the evidence garnered, and the commissioners’ speaking and writing skills.

## Misrepresentation

Were blue books accessible (or familiar) to those weaker segments of the population who were often the subject of investigation? Certainly the better informed

among the lower classes, once termed the working-class “aristocracy,” had such access, and trade-union leaders vigilantly scrutinized the outpouring of government publications. During the sanitary campaign of the 1840s, for example, laborers’ meetings organized by middle-class reformers featured lectures on topics of city hygiene. In such gatherings in the lower-class neighborhoods of London, the chair of the Metropolitan Improvement Society read excerpts from the government sanitary report. According to the *Morning Chronicle*, “the attention they gave to them was intense—not a person left the room until the discourse was concluded.”<sup>55</sup> Documents such as the Factory Commission’s report ultimately encouraged rather than deterred union leaders to partake in public adjudication of factual accounts and the debate over representation and misrepresentation of working-class subjects. Moreover, this particular report buttressed workers’ belief that ultimately facts did speak for them. It served as an illustration for the ostensible power of social reality to articulate itself through an official account regardless of its compilers’ intent. The commission prescribed policies that were evidently incongruent with the laborers’ aims. Nevertheless, the evidence presented on the plight of the factory children vindicated the veracity of Sadler’s report and supported the operatives’ depiction of the factory system. In the language of the *Quarterly Review*, “Though the scheme of the Commission had partial success, inasmuch as it gave ministers a temporary power to overwhelm the ten-hours bill, yet their huge folio contained within itself an anti-dote to the poison.”<sup>56</sup> It was true that the heart of the dispute between Sadler and the Whig ministry was not facts but policy. Yet, the “antidote” also could be found in other episodes when facts proved more elusive. It was a product of textual analysis and, as we shall see, textual thievery.

Mine inspector Tremenheere occasionally asked the Home Office for extra copies of his annual reports for dissemination among the workingmen. As M.P.s sought to improve the image of the legislature by giving away parliamentary papers, the inspector argued that leaders of the mining population (including the editor of the *Miners Advocate*) changed their views about the state’s role in their districts as a direct result of examining his reports.<sup>57</sup> There are other indications that miners were interested in blue books, including a November 1852 application from a Newcastle-on-Tyne colliery for a select committee report on explosions in mines.<sup>58</sup> In another telling incident, coal miners demanded that Tremenheere alter an erroneous account he had published in a periodic report about their strike. The Leeds District Branch of the Coal Miners’ Association declared that the inspector’s description of the circumstances that led to the strike and lockout contradicted the facts and confirmed, without examination, the masters’ version of the events. “We feel that we are misrepresented by the Commissioner

whose duty it is to give a fair and impartial report of all things he is set over to watch, he has seriously prejudiced our cause before the public.”<sup>59</sup>

Tremenheere countered that he based his account on “authentic documents” but promised to inquire into the alleged inaccuracies and to include corrections, if necessary, in his next periodic report. “I regret that the Miners . . . should see reason to state that my Report . . . is not fair and impartial. I beg that they may be assured that in this as in all my Reports, I have been guided both in what I have inserted and what I have omitted, by a desire to promote, according to the best of my judgment, the true and permanent interests of the working miners.”<sup>60</sup> The miners pointed to various publications they authorized during the strike as proof that they were not “the unreasoning and unreasonable people they are usually represented . . . That their case and the facts of the strike contentions should be correctly reported to Government (seeing that an official was ordered to be present at all public meetings) will be clear.”<sup>61</sup> This episode documents two chains of representation that involved, on the one hand, government and its commissioners and, on the other hand, miners and their delegations. Much of the dialogue between these two systems was conducted through an exchange of printed reports. The miners saw in the periodic report of the mine inspectors an essential part of their representation in Parliament and before the public and duly asked to rectify the alleged inaccuracies. This case also featured a state official who was convinced that he was representing miners by acting for them and by depicting their conditions in his published accounts.

Tremenheere was confident about the course of action he had taken in the mine districts and believed that his reports would either appease the restless minds of miners, among whom he found “ignorance on various subjects affecting their interest and society in general,” or move owners to introduce serious improvements. Urging the Home Office to institute an inspection of the ventilation modes in all mines, he explained that such initiative would “produce a greater sense of moral responsibility among the employers.”<sup>62</sup> Competition (or “jealousies”) prevented one owner from knowing about safety measures installed in mines next to his. As for the laborers, inspection would lead “them to feel that they were not as they have hitherto considered themselves, quite neglected by the Government.” The colliery population, he claimed, entered periodically into an “awkward state of mind.” During such cycles, the miners were under the grand delusion that they held the entire industry in their hands. He was utterly convinced that next to their education there was nothing better to shake their beliefs and instill “sounder opinion” among them than an inspection. In Tremenheere’s view, the interlocking function of inspection and reporting was to address

two local problems of vision that were psychological rather than retinal. Owners were blinded by their animosity toward each other. Seclusion and ignorance planted in the miners' minds dangerous notions of false power. The solution was to liberate the two sides from their respective isolation by allowing them a comprehensive view of their situation, a touch of the social real. The presence of inspectors and, significantly, their reports on the scene had a direct sobering and therapeutic effect.

To illustrate the success of his methods, Tremenhoe claimed he had received letters from "persons in the confidence of the working classes, expressing the satisfaction at my Reports, and anticipating good results from them to themselves and their children."<sup>63</sup> Chadwick also encouraged (albeit indirectly) working-class organizations to embrace his reports. In late 1843 and early 1844, he mailed dozens of his supplementary report on town burial to top clergymen, medical men, politicians, industrialists, writers, (e.g., Thomas Carlyle), and editors (e.g., Macvey Napier) and requested them to publicize his work further. More importantly, he asked individuals with good working-class contacts to encourage workers to petition both houses of Parliament and the queen in support of the measures proposed in the report. In this correspondence, Chadwick repeatedly claimed that his report represented the true view of the lower classes.<sup>64</sup>

### Telling Truth to Government

The short-time movement that opposed the factory commission in 1833 eventually used in its pamphlets, handbills, and broadsides evidence from the commission's reports. It was Richard Oastler's standard tactic. For example, he published a pamphlet entitled *Intemperance and Vice: The Effects of Long Hours and Bad System; from the Report of Dr. Francis Bisset Hawkins, One of the Medical Officers of the Factory Commission, 1833*.<sup>65</sup> In a similar fashion, he appropriated and then redirected the early 1830s treatises about the working classes in Manchester and the industrial system written by W. R. Greg, James Phillips Kay, and other ideological foes. Oastler capitalized on the supposed authenticity of the material reproduced in the official record. Its archival quality made it brittle. Breaking pieces of evidence and repositioning them outside their original context was premised on the printed text's inherent rigidity compared with the flexibility or fluidity of oral discourse. The interruptible property of printed texts was best illustrated, albeit in a different manner, by a nongovernment publication—the periodic reports of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity in London. As the society conceded, its annual accounts had two distinct readerships: first, mem-

bers of the organization and other interested citizens who read the front pages and, second, crooks, writers of bogus begging letters who were mainly interested in the list of potential victims appended to each report in the form of a roster of contributors.<sup>66</sup> Social investigations were a means to elicit, collect, and sometimes even pluck information from unsuspecting subjects. Voluminous printed accounts invited reciprocal behavior.

The 1833 clash between Oastler and the Factory Commission was rich with defiant, carnivalesque gestures. Workingmen lampooned official representatives (ostensibly of the king himself), celebrating their own potentate (King Richard) and engaging in a mock investigation of an investigation. Another clash between Oastler and a royal commission lacked perhaps this open-space theatricality but featured the same artful, eye-level maneuvering, this time over the record of Oastler's testimony. In late 1839, he sent two angry letters to Russell at the Home Office demanding that he be furnished with a copy of the evidence he had given to assistant commissioner Richard Muggeridge of the Handloom Weavers Commission.<sup>67</sup> Oastler wrote that in response to the official's solicitation, he agreed to testify in a public meeting of weavers and employers in Huddersfield. This was a rather subdued performance for the vociferous orator. Somewhat unexpectedly, he heeded the assistant commissioner's request not to excite the people. At the conclusion of his testimony, however, he suggested that he would be asked about other controversial issues, such as the poor law, the factory system, and, the most volatile topic, the right of the people to arm themselves. Muggeridge offered to interview him about these matters in private. Once again, Oastler consented on the condition that he would receive a precise and full copy of the entire conversation. Muggeridge accepted but stipulated that the transcript would not be published before the commission's report. The assistant commissioner had already been embarrassed publicly and had even found himself in trouble with his superiors when a copy of a testimony he had sent to another witness appeared in the *London Times*.

Talking to the government official in his hotel room, Oastler stated his blunt views on a number of points. To remove any future doubt, he read over Muggeridge's notes, initialed them, and later even sent a letter to the assistant commissioner confirming the transcript's veracity. Muggeridge, in fact, solicited the letter so as not to appear as a spy who clandestinely recorded private utterances. Oastler diffused his concerns, remarking that he "rejoiced at this opportunity of telling the Government all the truth."<sup>68</sup> In this narration Oastler was at his most shrewd self, informing the Home Secretary how tears came to Muggeridge's eyes when the official described a visit he had made to a weavers' village. The assistant commis-

sioner, Oastler claimed, thanked him profusely for his testimony, but despite recurrent requests, he had never received the coveted copy. Muggeridge shrugged him off by saying that he had already transferred the evidence to London.

Oastler's initial request was rejected, rather obliquely, "because no proceedings were taken, or are at present intended to be taken upon that evidence."<sup>69</sup> His second letter assumed his recognizable caustic style, accusing government of dishonesty, fraud, breach of contract, and robbing him of his own testimony. Evidently, the Home Office's reluctance was due to content of the testimony that verged on incitement to rebellion. Talking to Muggeridge, Oastler had challenged the new poor law, calling it "treason." It was the duty of every man to resist the orders of poor-law officials, he asserted, declaring that if someone would hold his wife hostage for parish relief, he would kill that man. He attacked the employment of the army and the police to suppress the people and, to add impetus to his words, showed Muggeridge a dagger of the kind sold in Huddersfield shops. Muggeridge proposed that Oastler send one such weapon to Lord Russell and even gave him money for that purpose. (Oastler probably recounted that episode to demonstrate that despite Muggeridge's desire not be seen as a spy, the assistant commissioner was a provocateur.) "Why withhold from me the words in which I have stated these things to the Government? Why refuse me that which is mine?"<sup>70</sup>

Why did Oastler need a copy of a testimony whose content he remembered quite well? His correspondence with the Home Office was clearly defiant. Did he wish to provoke government to put him on trial over what he said in a formal interview with a royal commissioner? Or, conversely, did he hope to protect himself from prosecution? After all, he was helping government conduct an investigation. One way or another, he certainly wanted to publish these words as coming directly from the official record, to have the opportunity to quote himself from a royal commission's transcript. Since Muggeridge told him explicitly that his testimony was very important, Oastler maintained that, "If any information which I could give were '*important*' to the Government, it must have been equally so to the people, and the reason was then strong why I should not be *cheated* out of the copy."<sup>71</sup> The request obviously confused the Home Office. An official scribbled on Oastler's letter that his words were indeed inciting and dangerous but that a greater harm might be incurred if Muggeridge would not follow through on his promise.

Of the several methods of appropriating state publications that we have examined, the first focused on reframing a report. Thus, the Society for the Aboli-

tion of Slavery republished both houses' accounts on the West Indies slavery in a heavily edited form surrounded by discursive footnotes that dragged the text in a different direction. Reviewing government documents in the context of different social reports, literary descriptions, and other texts—as was the practice in the periodical press—also reframed or recontextualized government documents, although often in a more politically benign manner. It was more common simply to chip off bits of authentic evidence and redeploy them. These takeovers are inherently different from tactics of direct contestation, such as criticism of investigative procedures, challenge of specific evidence (as well as other issues of accuracy and truthfulness), or attack on policy recommendations. Appropriation implies an agreement between the aggressor and the victim over the fundamental veracity of the print archive as a repository of facts—however defined.

A second form of appropriation was the attempt to commandeer reports (or particular evidence) for the purpose of self-representation, or in Oastler's case, by quoting oneself from the printed page and therefore speaking of one's own opinion as a "fact." (The social investigator also quotes himself from the handwritten page of his field journals and thus articulates himself as a fact.) We should also consider less aggressive acts of appropriation such as the miners' occasional embrace of Tremeneere's reports as their own. This particular gesture was politically ambiguous and could be emblematic of relinquished agency. Nevertheless, it allowed miners to select which documents represented them and which did not, and also to partake in making government reports more "representative." A call to remedy misrepresentation has a different resonance than a mere challenge to the truthfulness or accuracy of government-disseminated information. Such a demand presupposes that it is incumbent upon the state to facilitate this particular form of representation.

The same semantic and material properties of information in blue books that were guaranteed by the power of the state, the prestige of the monarch, and, as importantly, the conventions of committing authentic facts to print—also rendered the report an easier target for looting. Paradoxically, at the conclusion of the investigative sequence, when the scenes and the subjects of inquiry were finally objectified—captured in a book—the attributes of the report as a printed text sustained by the "order of books" resulted in a loss of control by the text's individual and institutional authors. Unlike de Certeau's idea of "reading as poaching," these particular acts of theft were decisive and preconceived. Admittedly, these were rather modest gestures of resistance or opposition. In Oastler's case—one steals what one already has (or steals from a thief) but of course quoting oneself from the royal commission's record endowed the individual with a

different voice. Quotation marks are a means to extract text out of context, to displace it and consequently to allow its continual movement, or in Jacques Derrida's words, "put between quotation marks [the iterable sign] can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable."<sup>72</sup> This perpetual movement was also an aspect of the nineteenth-century traffic in social facts. Most importantly, the authentic fact in the social report, separated by quotation marks of many kinds (in the Employment of Children Commission report these were different fonts) is already out of context and coexists in some friction with the rest of the text (as in the case of Sarah Limer's signature). Blue books' susceptibility to appropriation—as well as to the modes of interrogation and interpretation to which all texts are vulnerable—was an essential feature of print statism and the exchange relations between government and its reading subjects.