

THE LANCASHIRE COLLIER GIRL, 1795

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IN MAY 1795, a pamphlet was published bearing the title *The Lancashire Collier Girl: a true story*. The pamphlet was one of the earlier numbers of a series of over one hundred Cheap Repository Tracts published between 1795 and 1798.¹ The author of many of these tracts was Miss Hannah More, the Evangelical writer and social reformer, who was also the director of the enterprise; and most of the remainder were written by Miss More's sisters or by Evangelical friends.² Up to March 1796, over two million of the tracts had been dispersed, and several of the titles were ultimately printed in hundreds of thousands of copies. The business records relating to the publishing side of the Tracts are unfortunately not extant, and therefore exactly how many copies of *The Lancashire Collier Girl* were printed is not known; but it is unlikely to have been less than many tens of thousands. The most successful Tracts might be termed 'best-sellers' of the age were it not that a large proportion of the copies was not sold to the reading public, but was instead distributed *gratis*. The recipients were literate members of the lower classes, the distributors concerned members of the

¹ For bibliographical details, see G. H. Spinney, 'Cheap Repository Tracts', *The Library*, 20 (1940) pp. 295-340. Apart from the original editions between 1795 and 1798 listed by Spinney, there were later reprints, authorised and unauthorised, of many of the Tracts. *The Lancashire Collier Girl* was also reprinted as part of a tract entitled *The extraordinary death of a Collier. A true story. To which is added, The Collier's Dutiful Daughter. A narrative founded on fact*. London, printed by W. Nicholson, Warner Street, for Williams and Smith, no date (? c1800), pp. 12 (a copy in Wigan Public Library). The first part consists of a prose anecdote and a version in verse by 'Mr W. Cooper' (i.e. Cowper: the verse is his 'A tale founded on fact . . .'): the second part is the story of the Lancashire Collier Girl. The text of the original tract is slightly altered (by omissions and additions, e.g. a new final sentence), and the original title is not quoted: it is therefore probably a pirated edition.

² An excellent account of the Cheap Repository Tracts is given in M. G. Jones, *Hannah More* (1952) pp. 132-50.

respectable classes, who purchased the Tracts for this purpose by the gross.

The moralising content of the Tracts, aimed at the lower classes and enjoining them to remain faithful to the social order of eighteenth century Britain, was naturally what recommended the Tracts to the respectable. We find, for instance, a Lancashire squire writing to a correspondent in 1798

I send you the annual statements of the Institution for promoting the sales of Mrs Hannah More's Moral and Religious Tracts. So extensive a sale . . . shows that they must have been read with good effects and will prove that the task of reforming morals is not so impossible and visionary as some people imagine.

Writing to a local clergyman, the same squire commented on the political situation of the later 1790s in ultra-conservative terms, typical of the upper class attitudes of the times:

The cause we are engaged in is not whether Pitt or Fox or Lord Lansdown is to be Minister, but whether we are to have any Constitution, any King or any Government. May that Providence befriend us which has protected us so long.³

The squire was William Bankes of Winstanley, near Wigan, and his letter-books show that he ordered some of the Tracts from his bookseller in London as soon as they appeared (though in what quantities the extant letters do not say). However, as we shall see, Squire Bankes had also a special reason for his interest in the Tracts.

I AUTHORSHIP

Generally the Tracts were published without an author's name, but those written by Hannah More herself were usually indicated by the end-signature 'Z'. There is no signature on *The Lancashire Collier Girl*. The reason for this is clear: though Hannah More certainly directed the preparation of the tract for publication, it was based on, and closely followed in many respects, a story which had already appeared in print, under exactly the same title, in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for March of the same year, 1795.⁴ The editing of the story which was carried through in the More circle included rewriting virtually every sentence, yet added nothing to the story-line. But the moralising

³ Both quotations are from the letter-book of W. Bankes of Winstanley for March 1798, extracts from which have been kindly communicated by Mrs Joyce H. M. Bankes of Winstanley Hall.

⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 65, part 1 (March, 1795) pp. 197-9.

commentary of the original was reshaped and augmented, and the editors removed from the text the details of the location in Lancashire, presumably lest these should distract from the presentation of the story as one of nation-wide concern. To identify the person of *The Lancashire Collier Girl*, we must therefore turn from the tract to the text in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

The text begins with a detailed location. 'Four miles on the gradually rising road, between Wigan and Ormskirk, the little village of Upholland rears its stony head.' A little later, we are told that 'our heroine was the second daughter of an industrious couple, with six children, living at Upholland'. The eventual patron of the heroine, a local square, is presented in the original under the pseudonym of 'Benevolus of Hospitality Hall', but after an inquiry from a correspondent in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the author obligingly supplied his name—William Bankes of Winstanley, the squire we met earlier.⁵ Finally, the Lancashire Collier Girl herself is identified in the original as 'Betty H . . . n' (for reasons unknown, the editors of the tract altered the heroine's name to Mary); and when in 1797 the contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* published his piece in a separate print (together with another of his writings), he gave the name in full, Betty Hodson.⁶ Thus, Betty Hodson of Upholland, a protégée of William Bankes of nearby Winstanley Hall, was the original Lancashire Collier Girl.

What had Betty Hodson done, to be commemorated in print nationally, first in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and then in the widely-dispersed tract? Briefly, when her family was distressed, Betty had worked hard, exceptionally hard, to support them: she thus provided an example of 'honest labour' for the imitation of the working classes of the period. In more detail, her story was this. The colliery family of Upholland was originally supported by the labour of the father who worked underground in a neighbouring mine, by the labour of the mother and eldest girl who in the day looked after a few cows and in the evening spun, and by the labour of the next oldest children, Betty aged nine and a brother of seven, who drew coals in the mine for their father. One day, the father was killed when a stone fell down the mine-shaft, and soon afterwards, in grief, the mother became mentally deranged. The fatherless family was thrown on the

⁵ *ibid.* 65, part 1 (April, 1795) p. 336: (June) p. 486.

⁶ *A view of the village of Hampton, from Moulsey Hurst, with the original Lancashire collier girl. By the same author*, London, printed in the year 1797; and sold at the Library, Hampton, price six pence. 'The original Lancashire Collier Girl, a true story' begins on p. 15 and is signed 'A Rambler'.

parish, with the exception of the eldest daughter who soon married, and of Betty who continued to work underground. Several years later, Betty was still working in the mine, and by sometimes undertaking a double shift (that is, by working overtime and spending probably about fifteen hours underground in one spell) which earned her 'no less than three shillings and sixpence', she was able to bring her mother 'home'—'home' presumably from the parish workhouse, and to the family cottage which Betty had continued to occupy and pay rent for. Moreover, a little later, Betty was similarly able to relieve the parish of the support of two of her younger brothers. It was for this feat of cumulative social responsibility, commenced while she was still in her teens, that Betty earned her fame. However, after a time, the mother and both brothers died (materially, they can have been little better off than in the workhouse), and Betty, worn out by 'grief, poor food and excessive fatigue', began to suffer from a nervous ailment which compelled her to leave the mine and seek lighter work elsewhere. Her case was represented to the benevolent local squire, William Bankes, and he eventually found her employment in his household—where, six years later, the contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* claimed to have met her. Betty continued to work for Bankes and in 1798 was promoted to cook: the information was conveyed to readers of the *Gentleman's Magazine* by the same contributor who added a long postscript to his earlier story.⁷ This told mainly of another meeting with Betty but, in post-postscript, quoted a letter from Squire Bankes 'received this morning' announcing the promotion. Such was the story, as narrated in print contemporaneously, of Betty Hodson the Lancashire Collier Girl.

The contributions to the *Gentleman's Magazine* relating to the Lancashire Collier Girl were signed 'A Rambler', the pseudonym of a retired army officer and minor writer, Joseph Budworth.⁸ Budworth wrote poetry and prose, all published in the 1790s. His poem on 'The Siege of Gibraltar' referred to his military career: his other work in verse, 'Windermere: a poem', is of some literary and general interest in its choice of subject matter at its date of publication, 1798. Budworth had already expressed enthusiasm for the scenery of the Lake District in a

⁷ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 68, part 2 (December, 1798) pp. 1030–1.

⁸ On Joseph Budworth (later Palmer) 1756–1815, see *Dictionary of National Biography* and *Gentleman's Magazine*, 85, part 2 (November, 1815) pp. 388–91. The latter says of Budworth's 'Lancashire Collier Girl': 'This production has been allowed, by some judges, to be little inferior to any thing of the kind written in our language' (p. 389), a suitably ambiguous judgement.

prose work, his book of 1792 entitled *A fortnight's ramble to the lakes in Westmorland, Cumberland and Lancashire*, a work which has earned him an early chapter in the standard study of the growth of aesthetic and popular appreciation of the Lake District.⁹ In his postscript note in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, Budworth boasted that he was Lancashire born, and possibly this had something to do with his pioneering interest in the lakes, as well as with his publicising of a Lancashire girl. Between Budworth's book of 1792 and his article of 1795 there is a further connection. In the former, the author included a purple passage on the charms and rustic simplicity of a particular Lakeland girl whom he had met on his rambles and whom he proceeded, foolishly, to name, thus causing her and her family the extreme embarrassment of being sought out, stared at, and cross-examined by scores of later travellers. Budworth had the grace to apologise for this folly in later editions of his book. Nevertheless it is clear that one feature of his character was a yearning to discover and publicise simple rural maidens of edifying virtue.

Budworth's home was at Moulsey in Surrey, but he appears to have been a fairly frequent guest at Winstanley Hall. This at least is the impression deliberately given in the 'Lancashire Collier Girl'; although the very full praise of Bankes, whose character is extolled at almost as great a length as that of the heroine, might alternatively suggest that the author was a casual guest buttering up his host in print in the hope of more frequent invitations to a mansion so conveniently placed for a Surrey-based Laker. Whether Budworth's praise of the squire of Winstanley Hall was sincere or not, he was somewhat peeved to find that most of this part of the original text had been dropped by the editors of the tract, who preferred to concentrate attention on the heroine.

It is easy to see why Hannah More became interested in Budworth's story. First, there was the attraction of a working class character whose conduct so exactly conformed to the social virtues expounded in the Cheap Repository Tracts: indeed, without Budworth's evidence, it might reasonably be supposed that the Lancashire Collier Girl was as much a figment of Miss More's imagination as was Will Chip the Carpenter, or Jack Anvil the Blacksmith, or Black Giles the Poacher, or Mr Fantom the new-fashioned Philosopher (all characters from her tracts), or at the very least was as highly fictionalised a version of a real person as was The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain, hero of the most

⁹ Norman Nicholson, *The Lakers* (1955), chapter 6.

popular tract of the series. Miss More was no doubt further attracted by a Hero of Labour of her own sex: the author of a work on female education, she had once written—'the morals of my own sex are the great object of my regard'.¹⁰ Thirdly, it is very likely that Betty's occupation drew Miss More's attention. Throughout the eighteenth century, miners were notorious as a wild and godless set of men (this had arisen partly because mining hamlets tended to be established some distance away from the traditional agricultural village and its parish church), and hence, for instance, John Wesley had spent much of his preaching time among the miners around Bristol, Dudley and Newcastle.¹¹ In the early 1790s, Hannah More devoted considerable energy to schemes of educational and social welfare in a dozen Mendip villages, and among the most 'savage and depraved' of the populace were the colliers of Nailsea and the calamine miners of Shipham and Rowberrow. In the very year of the publication of *The Lancashire Collier Girl*, Miss More and her sisters were discussing in their correspondence and journals the appointment of a 'poor collier' as master of Nailsea Sunday School.¹² With a growing reputation as an improver of underground-labouring savages, it is hardly surprising that Miss More included among her early tracts *The Lancashire Collier Girl* of May 1795 and *Patient Joe the Newcastle Collier* of July 1795.¹³

In the original 'Collier Girl', Budworth wrote modestly of his own narrative that

Could our collier girl have had the advantage of a Sterne [i.e. of being commemorated in print by Lawrence Sterne the novelist], or a Hannah More, who takes the poor under her protection, she would justly appear in the first line of characters actuated by those natural best of gifts, filial duty and tenderness.

(Budworth's clumsy and none too lucid style of writing partly

¹⁰ Jones, *op. cit.* p. 157.

¹¹ Cf. 'We have heard much of the good effects of Whitfield's and Wesley's preaching on these worse than savages [the colliers of Kingswood, near Bristol]. *Gentleman's Magazine*, 67, part 2 (October, 1797) p. 842.

¹² Jones, *op. cit.* pp. 151-71, especially pp. 154, 163, 166.

¹³ 'I have written a new ballad called the "Newcastle Collier" with which the Bishop of Durham is much pleased. Newcastle is in his diocese . . . 'a formidable riot among the colliers in the neighbourhood of Bath, was happily prevented by the ballad of "The Riot". The plan was thoroughly settled, they were resolved to work no more, but to attack first the mills and then the gentry. A gentleman of large fortune got into their confidence and a few hundreds were distributed and sung with the effect, as they say, mentioned above' (from letters written in 1795 by Hannah More), W. Roberts, *Memoirs of Mrs Hannah More* (1834), vol. 2, p. 430.

explains why the editors of the tract found it necessary to rewrite almost every line.) This particular sentence was virtually an invitation to Miss More to borrow the story, and borrow it she did, without a single reference to the original author. We may suspect that she did not even seek Budworth's formal permission to publish a revised version, since at first he seemed none too pleased at the honour done his tale. In late 1795 he told readers of the *Gentleman's Magazine* that 'Miss Hannah More has published it as one of her cheap publications, but with considerable alterations, and I think it an omission, in leaving out the home of Benevolus'.¹⁴ In 1797 he complained more pointedly—'Miss Hannah More hath improved this artless tale, to answer the purposes of her Cheap Repository, for which many parts are left out: and though doubtless with the purest intention, she hath overtintured others with too much Religion.'¹⁵ However, in 1798 Budworth changed his tune, perhaps being won over by the national popularity of the adaptation of his tale. Remarking loftily that he agreed 'with the benevolent Hannah More that it is dangerous to launch out in praise of living characters, especially when [these are] not shielded by education', he footnoted that the agreeing with Miss More had been—'In a conversation previous to the first insertion in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.'¹⁶ This was surely meant to imply that he had told Miss More about the Collier Girl before publishing his own text, and perhaps even to imply that Miss More had encouraged him to write it. Budworth does not appear in the usual list of Hannah More's circle of friends and correspondents, so on this evidence alone it would be difficult to decide to what extent these afterthoughts on Budworth's part claiming close contact with the eminent Miss More were justified.

We know that the transformation of Budworth's story into a tract was initiated by Miss More herself, thanks to references in the unpublished papers of Henry Thornton (part of which are copied in a letter book preserved, coincidentally, at Wigan).¹⁷

¹⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 65, part 2 (December, 1795) p. 993.

¹⁵ *A view of the village of Hampton*, p. 22.

¹⁶ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 68, part 2 (December, 1798) p. 1030.

¹⁷ The Thornton Papers, formerly in the possession of Mr E. M. Forster, are now in Cambridge University Library. The quotations from this source that follow in the text are from a letter-book which contains a copy of Thornton's journal for 1795: the journal is also copied in a letter-book in Wigan Public Library (Edward Hall MS Collection, M.786). The two copies of the journal appear to be identical. The Thornton Papers have only been quoted substantially in two works, E. M. Forster, *Marianne Thornton* (1956), the papers being listed on pp. 7-8, and Standish Meacham, *Henry Thornton of Clapham 1760-1815* (1964). The latter work gives the fullest account to date of Henry Thornton's life, and

Thornton, a rich young banker of soul-searching Evangelical seriousness, was a close friend of Miss More, and his journal records frequent visits to her London house and regular correspondence throughout 1795. In the early days of February, Thornton began writing some material on 'a plan received from Mrs Hannah More', and was already worrying lest anyone should suspect the work was his—'I am very zealous and eager *secretly* in any work of a religious kind'. A month later, he called on Miss More and 'talked long about her new Repository', and immediately thereafter 'was pressed to write secretly for it'. By 17 March, he felt that he was 'in danger of giving no small share of time to this work'. A week later he received some further papers from Miss More, and noted that on the 27th he had read 'some of Mrs M.'s work and corrected freely (I hope not too freely) her story of the Lan[cashire] Coll[iery.] Girl'. On the morning of the 31st, he 'remained at home, diligently and eagerly correcting Mrs H.M.'s work of the Lan. Coll. Girl—I thought it so good a subject that it well deserved all the pains I gave it'. He spent 'a great deal' of the next day 'correcting' and continued on the next again, Good Friday. Finally, a week later he 'wrote till near 12' at the same task. Since there is no further mention of the Lancashire Colliery Girl in his journal, we may assume that he sent a revised text back to Miss More about 11 April. It appears that he had had the manuscript in his hands for two weeks and that he spent several hours in each of five days 'correcting' it. This would seem to indicate that his alterations were extensive, and raised the possibility that the text of the tract owed more to his editing than to Hannah More's. Why this was not generally known is explained by a later entry in his journal—'I am in danger of not owning what I write for the Repository and prevaricating in consequence'.

But what precisely did Thornton receive from Miss More? The evidence of the journal would suggest that he worked on a manuscript which he associated only with Hannah More ('her story of the Lancashire Colliery Girl'). It cannot have been the printed article from the *Gentleman's Magazine*, since the March issue in which it appeared contained items dated up to the end of the month, and must therefore have been printed in early April; while Thornton received his material before 27 March. If it was

contains a reference (on p. 133) to Thornton's work on *The Lancashire Collier Girl*. F. A. v. Hayek had already noted this briefly, in his valuable introduction to the 1939 reprint of Thornton's *Paper Credit* (on p. 23), which was based on a partial examination of the Papers. I am indebted to the two libraries for permission to quote from the Thornton material, and to Mr A. G. Newell of the University of Liverpool Library for drawing my attention to the reference in Meacham. Thornton was treasurer of the Tracts enterprise.

another copy of the manuscript from which the printer worked, how then did it reach Hannah More? And why did Thornton always refer to it as 'her story'? There would seem to be only one likely explanation, and that a rather complex one. During Budworth's 'conversation' with Hannah More 'previous to the first insertion in the *Gentleman's Magazine*', he must have shown her the manuscript of his forthcoming article, and allowed her to copy it, while asking her to preserve the secret of his pseudonymity. This copy, possibly in her own hand, Miss More must have passed to Thornton, perhaps after some alterations of her own. It would be quaint if Thornton, who was so anxious to keep secret his own contribution to the text of the tract, was deceived by Hannah More's secrecy about the authorship of the original version into believing that it was entirely her work. (That he was not himself a reader of the *Gentleman's Magazine* is quite likely). However, it was common knowledge that in writing her tracts she made use of anecdotes passed on to her by acquaintances: without giving away Budworth's name, she may have told Thornton that 'The Lancashire Colliery Girl' was such an anecdote, and he may have evinced no great interest in the original authorship.

Whether Miss More contributed much to the revision of the text will now probably never be known. But it is unlikely that, after Thornton had spent so much time 'correcting', she rejected or altered what he had done. It is probable therefore that the wording of the final text owed more to Thornton than to Miss More, though the general direction of the alterations may have been arranged between them. From what we know of these two persons at this period, we would expect them to have very similar views on the social and moral points raised by the story and affirmed in the tract, and in fact there is nothing in the alterations which could not have come from the pen of Miss More. We shall therefore treat them as joint editors, referring to them in compound as Thornton-More.

II BETTY HODSON, THE COLLIER GIRL

From this discussion of the several authors, we can now return to Lancashire and to their heroine. Research in the county has confirmed the historicity of Betty Hodson. Mrs Joyce Bankes of Winstanley Hall and the Lancashire County Archivist have kindly allowed us to inspect the servants' wages book of William Bankes' household, and this indicates that, from 16 December 1788, when she was engaged, until 1800 when the book ends,

Betty was paid half-yearly wages, under the up-graded appellation of 'Elizabeth Hodson'. She began as 'Under Kook' at 4 guineas a year, was given £5 in her second year, and by 1797 was earning 6 guineas. Her promotion to full cook reported by Budworth in 1798 is not specifically indicated in the accounts, but her wages in this year were doubled, to 12 guineas. In 1800, William Bankes died, and Budworth's description of him as 'Benevolus' was justified in this instance, inasmuch as the squire left the former colliery girl—now called 'my servant, Betty Hodson'—the sum of £50 in his will.¹⁸

While she was still a collier girl, Betty's life was punctuated by demographic events in her family—the deaths of her father, mother, and two brothers, and the marriage of an elder sister, are explicitly recorded in the story, though unfortunately not exactly dated. Further, from the recorded ages of the various brothers and sisters, we can work out approximately when they were born. We have attempted to trace these events in the parochial registers of Upholland chapelry.¹⁹ Though the registers record the existence in this period of several collier families bearing the name Hodson, the attempt has achieved only limited success. In the decade of the Lancashire Collier Girl's birth, two girls were christened Betty Hodson at Upholland, both in 1769. This date, on a slightly forced interpretation, fits our narrative; but close examination of the details of the two families concerned shows that, by defect in some essential particular, neither could be the family of our Betty Hodson. But the recorded burials of Esther Hodson 'widow and pauper' in 1788, and of two sons in 1782, fit very well the deaths of those members of the family rescued from the workhouse by the Collier Girl. This was as far as the Upholland registers could take us, working purely from internal evidence: their further use depended on the acquisition of an essential clue from another set of registers. (Since this attempt to trace a known family in the registers of a single parish provides a test case of the validity of the currently advocated programme of 'family reconstitution' from the parish registers, it is reported in more detail in Appendix A.)

¹⁸ 'Account book—Winstanley Hall servants wages, 5th Jan. 1781—March 1800', Bankes Papers, Lancashire County Record Office. I am indebted to Mrs Joyce H. M. Bankes for information about this book and about William Bankes' will. I am also much indebted to Mr J. J. Bagley who guided me in the consultation of local history material relating to the Upholland area and collaborated in the search for local records.

¹⁹ Though nominally part of the parish of Wigan, Upholland kept its own parish registers from the seventeenth century. I am indebted to the incumbent, the Rev. Michael Wolfe, for permission to search these registers.

The collier Hodsons of Upholland often worked and lived at Orrell, on the boundary between Upholland chapelry and the effective parish of Wigan. Examination of the registers of Wigan has disclosed relatively few Hodsons, but among the entries relating to persons from Orrell is one of the baptism of a child whose parents were John and Esther Hodson (the father's occupation unstated). This information enabled us to return to the Upholland registers, where among several recorded John Hodsons was one described as 'of Orrell, collier'; and the christenings of four children of this Hodson were at dates compatible with the ages of four of the Hodson children in our narrative. The matter was clinched when the coroners' inquests for the Wigan district showed that the death of John Hodson of Orrell in 1777 recorded in the Upholland register was due to an accident. Thus, we have traced in the Upholland registers the deaths of Betty's father, mother, and three brothers, and the births of four children: we have not found record in either the Upholland or the Wigan register of the births of at least two more children, including the birth of Betty herself in late 1765.

When Budworth first met Betty, she was in her late twenties. He described her as 'well-looking, tall, and slender in person, grey eyes and a bold countenance; but it is the boldness of honesty—when spoken to, she answers with good natural sense and openness. Nothing fatigues her: work seems to slip through her fingers:—and we may think she still retains that fearless character of a miner—no dangers could possibly daunt'. Budworth also depicted her, a few years later, in her kitchen. 'Her master took me into the kitchen, on pretence of showing me the extent of it. She heard me come and *sided* out: but on being called, came, and without the least confusion, gave me an account of the utility of the kitchen utensils. It is really astonishing, a young creature of so slender a make could have borne such excessive labour.' According to William Bankes' account book, Betty was still unmarried in 1800, though by now in her mid thirties: perhaps she felt she had had her fill, at an early age, of the cares of family life. She may however have changed her mind five years later, when the marriage of a Betty Hodson (of undeclared age) is recorded in the Upholland parish register.²⁰

In his postscript note of 1798, Budworth supplied two anecdotes about Betty the under-cook. These include a number of

²⁰ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 68, part 2 (December, 1795) p. 993. A Betty Hodson was married at Upholland 14.1.1805. But another Betty Hodson 'late of Upholland, spinster' died 29.9.1807. According to the letter of administration (at Preston), her next of kin was a nephew Thomas Pennington; none of the Hodson girls marrying 1780-2—see Appendix A—married a Pennington, but our Betty's sister may have married twice.

speeches, supposedly in her own words, and hence written in a form purporting to represent the contemporary Lancashire dialect. The most striking sentence reported was one in keeping both with Budworth's profession and with the exigencies of the time—'When th'French doa cum, if weemen ma feight, I'll feight as ard as I con'. The anecdotes are similarly patriotic, and since they show Betty as simple almost to the point of simple-mindedness, we may hope that, despite Budworth's avowal that 'not one point laid before my readers is the offspring of the Brain', they to some extent misrepresent and underestimate Betty's character. One anecdote asserts that when a local nobleman raised a regiment of Fencible Infantry and Squire Bankes 'liberally subscribed', his domestic servants 'following the example spontaneously' added their contributions, and Betty, penniless but unwilling to be left out, borrowed from the housekeeper five shillings—a substantial sum for one of her slight annual income. In the second anecdote, we find Betty persuading her only surviving brother ('the only male remains of her wasted family, who was a supernumerary husbandman upon the estate') to enlist in the same regiment, for the following reasons: first, because the French are coming; second, because if he fails to go 'wi the nebor lads, theyle caw thee kewear'; third, and more shrewdly, because 'tha know, lad, work's neaw a das skearse'. According to Captain Budworth, 'by such language she at last persuaded her brother to enlist . . . and when he went to join his regiment, she was almost heart-broken'.

III SOCIAL MORALISING

From the historical character of the Lancashire Collier Girl, we now turn again to the narrative about her, and to the feature of it which the modern reader finds strangest and which he may therefore consider its principal historical significance. We refer to the social moralising, with which the tract in particular is replete. The extent and direction of the moralising are not of course unique to this tract: they are found in most of the Cheap Repository Tracts, and indeed in much of the literature of the period intended for the edification of the poor. This is not the place to examine the fundamental assumptions of this moralising, and it will be sufficient to provide brief textual illustrations of the main lines of argument and exhortation. Also, since Budworth complained about the Thornton-More alterations to his 'artless tale', it will be profitable to compare at the same time the treatment of moralising themes by the two authors.

Let us begin with Budworth's main complaint. He had been reticent in making references to the Christian religion: in his terminology, Betty had been supported in her trials 'by the invisible Being', and filial duty had been 'instinctively implanted' in her by 'the Father of Mercies'. We need not however suspect him of being in any way hostile to Christianity: his complaint of 'too much Religion' in the Thornton-More version was only the normal protest of eighteenth century sobersides against the enthusiasm of expression on religious matters which the Evangelicals favoured. Thornton-More did not hesitate to use the term 'God' when they meant God, and they used it half a dozen times in their tract. Moreover, they felt called upon to explain the vicissitudes which befell the heroine in terms of Christian teaching, which Budworth did not. Discussing why 'sincere Christians . . . [are not] free from pain, poverty or sickness, or other worldly ills', their explanation was orthodox and trite, but it was simply expressed and clearly worded, and it was not altogether lacking in compassion or a recognition of the spiritual equality of the collier girl on the one hand and the literary lady and rich banker on the other. Budworth rounded off his tale with a secular moral, Thornton-More added and finished with a religious moral:

This story may also encourage the afflicted to serve and trust God in every extremity; and finally, it may teach all descriptions of persons, who have to pass through dangerous and trying circumstances, that they may expect the divine protection and blessing, provided they are . . . endeavouring, like Mary [i.e. Betty] 'to learn and labour truly to get their own living, and to do their duty in that state of life, into which it hath pleased God to call them'.

The quotation from the Catechism of the Church of England, with its far-ranging social implications, does however demonstrate the secular intent of much of the Thornton-More moralising: they and Budworth were divided more by language than by purpose. Before leaving the religious 'overtincturing', we may note an amusing minor emendation. Budworth, writing of the Hodson family before disaster struck, remarked that 'the spinning-wheel is a cheerful attendant to a good ditty'; Thornton-More altered this to—'She sometimes accompanied her work with a cheerful hymn, or a good moral song'.

The tract is almost half as long again as the original tale, and the additional one thousand words are nearly all of moralising commentary. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suppose that Thornton-More converted a simple narrative into a moral tale. Budworth's text certainly contains less explicit moralising than the tract, but it still contains a great deal by modern stan-

dards. Budworth intended a moral tale, and he was doubtless delighted by the response of a correspondent in the *Gentleman's Magazine* who remarked—'I wish your pages were crowded with similar anecdotes: nor would the girl's portrait be unworthy a niche in them. The name of Benevolus deserves notice, as it may incite example.'²¹ A large part of the additional Thornton–More material merely underlined and elaborated on what was already present in Budworth's text, partly in the interests of clarity. The remainder was the result of a shift of emphasis: while Budworth, writing in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, stressed the duty of the rich to be benevolent, Thornton–More, addressing the tract to the working classes, stressed the duty of the poor to be hard-working and content. The duties were complementary, and the two writers held much the same views regarding the national society of their day, its values and obligations.

Hannah More began the Cheap Repository Tracts in order to combat the spread of what she, in line with the Establishment of the time, considered to be subversive political and social principles emanating from revolutionary France. Copies of Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man* had been found 'lurking at the bottom of mines and coalpits':²² and a pseudonymous correspondent in the *Gentleman's Magazine* who may very well have been Miss More herself, reported, aghast, that, after reading the same author's *Age of Reason*, several Kingswood colliers—the colliers who had received Wesley's special attention—had sold their Bibles for 6d.²³ Against these subversive doctrines, the Tracts argued that the distresses of the lower classes were the consequences of the natural order, not of a particular social order. They could be relieved, on a material level, if at all, only by the hard work of the poor and the benevolence of the rich, and on a psychological level, only by the comforts of religion. Budworth too had no sympathy for social revolution: in 1798 he observed that

Lancashire teems with a hardy race, ever amongst the foremost to come forwards in person and money, that sterling way of putting expressions of loyalty to proof. The disaffected of them are a very little sett indeed; but like others of the same principles . . . endeavoured by rough clamour to make it believed they were a multitude; or, by secret machinations (now happily unravelled) [to hide] the smallness of their numbers.²⁴

²¹ *ibid.* 65, part 2 (November, 1795) p. 922.

²² Jones, *op. cit.* p. 133.

²³ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 67, part 2 (September, 1797) p. 756, in a letter signed 'Z.Z.'

²⁴ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 68, part 2 (December, 1798) p. 1030.

Both Budworth and Thornton–More conceived that the story of the Lancashire Collier Girl contained lessons for rich and poor. Thornton–More hoped that their tract might

instruct the rich not to turn the poor from their door, merely on account of first appearances, but rather to examine into their character, expecting sometimes to find peculiar modesty and merit, even in the most exposed situations.

This was a variant of a sentence in Budworth's text addressed to 'ye men of affluence and pride'. Thornton–More inserted in their version the following observations:

How lamentable is it, that while so many people in the world are idle, and are contracting diseases both of body and mind, from the want of some wholesome and useful exercise, there should be any bending, like Mary, under their work, hidden in coalpits . . . ! what a pity it is, I say, that the former should not employ a little of their time and money in endeavouring to find those distressed objects!

Budworth also disapproved of the callousness of the rich, and he commended Squire Bankes for his care of his servants:

the coachman has lived in the family *forty* years, the game-keeper *thirty*, the groom *nineteen*, . . . the laundry-maid *twelve*, our cook [ten] . . . What an example to those men of fortune who would wish to keep the same faces about them, but are much too absorbed in the great world to pursue the right way! Benevolus lives upon the estate as his father did before him; and happy would it be if it were as much the fashion for the opulent, as it is undoubtedly in their interest to do so, both on moral and political reasons!²⁵

But such comments were very mild criticism of the rich, and when Budworth's enthusiasm for the Collier Girl's behaviour led him to express a vaguely radical sentiment—'Actions like these prove who possess the *noblest* blood of the children of Adam'³—Thornton–More played it safe by omitting the sentence.

Budworth's praise of Squire Bankes was so excessive as to be ludicrous:

The kindness of Benevolus spreads like the dew of heaven; and like it too, cheers the sickly. His tenants never see him without endeavouring to converse with him, which he never fails encouraging; and they always fix their eyes upon him as long as he is in sight. Often have I lingered behind to overhear *whispers of blessing* showered down upon him, and his house.

In an egalitarian age we are tempted to dismiss this as mere sycophantic twaddle; but it is only fair to William Bankes to note that there is some evidence that he was an unusually generous employer. We have seen that he left Betty Hodson £50, worth probably at least £500 today. He left the same sum to

²⁵ *ibid.* p. 1031 (the original erroneously counts 'twelve' years for the cook).

his postilion and several other servants, and to his footman he left the very large sum of £400.

So much for the duties of the rich. The duties of the poor were more exacting. The Collier Girl was lauded as a model worker. Wrote Budworth

Is there an instance under the canopy of heaven of any human being having paid more reverence to the fifth commandment? Good from example and unassisted by education, she followed the wish of her father and was long buried in the bowels of the earth.

Thornton-More paraphrased this but missed out the clause 'unassisted by education': Budworth's comment was ambiguous and might suggest that education was unnecessary for the poor, whereas Miss More advocated a measure of schooling, enough at least to enable them to read the Bible and the Tracts. Having noted that the heroine was earning a full two shillings a day by her underground labour, Thornton-More (or surely, in this case, Miss More alone) inserted the comment:

And now I would ask my young female readers, what they think was the manner in which she employed all this fruit of her industry? Do you imagine that she laid it out in vanity of dress, in nice eating and drinking, or other needless expense? or do you suppose that she would not indulge herself in idleness on one or two days of the week, because she had got enough for herself to live upon during the four or five working days? no, I trust you will have formed no such expectations . . .

The dangers of idleness and the virtues of hard work have always been points which the rich have felt it necessary to impress on the poor: if these sentiments are somewhat muted within Britain today, it is noticeable that the British as a whole are not averse to explaining them to the underdeveloped countries.

Betty used the money she earned by very hard work in the mine to support her mother and brothers. Both Budworth and Thornton-More approved of this conduct, as an instance of family responsibility; but the latter explicitly put forward another reason for approval, that Betty saved the parish the expense of supporting her relatives. And it was strongly implied that Betty recognised this consideration. To the modern reader this is perhaps the most unforgivable part of the tract. It is fairly easy to put our latter-day egalitarianism aside and to see that, in the historical context of Britain in the 1790s, there was at least something to be said for the conservative, anti-democratic viewpoint. But it is difficult to understand how a perceptive litteratrice could allow herself to present an act of family devotion as even in part an acknowledgement by a wretchedly poor adolescent that it was her duty to reduce the Poor Rates

paid by her affluent betters. (Nor will it wholly exonerate Hannah More to lay the blame for this section on Henry Thornton, banker and politician.) It is conceivable that Betty thought, as many others have been persuaded to think, before and since, that to be 'on the parish' was a disgrace; but her prime consideration was surely to rescue her family from the inefficiency and miserliness of the national Poor Law system, the conditions of the workhouse in which her mother was kept, and the conditions of parish apprenticeship under which her brothers would otherwise have worked. Betty's conduct was more rational, if no less virtuous, than the tract would have us believe. Thornton-More did not comment on the inadequacies of the Poor Law: they only regretted 'that this wise and merciful provision of our laws should ever be abused'. The moral drawn from Betty's conduct was comforting to supporters of the social order: 'I think that it may teach the poor, that they can seldom be in any condition of life so low, as to prevent their rising to some degree of independence if they chuse to exert themselves'. The lesson was a smug one.

It is a pleasure to pass on from this lecturing of the poor to an unexpected feature of both texts, the commendation of a group of workers. Budworth wrote that Betty was 'for long buried in the bowels of the earth, amongst a rough but invaluable race of men, a race known to those acquainted with them for their honesty, bravery and hardy-hood'. On the miners, this was an unusually generous judgement for the period, and Thornton-More added—'they have given moreover some striking instances of their readiness to receive religious instruction when offered to them'. Budworth continued—'Amongst such she could not be polished, but they did not disturb her principles . . . [and] they would occasionally lend a hand to lessen her fatigue'.

The coalminers of Britain (there were perhaps 40,000 of them by the 1790s) do not appear to have received popular notice in print before the tract of 1795. Thereafter, they did not receive it again for nearly half a century. On the later occasion, the notice was not in literature, not even in an improving tract, but in a parliamentary paper (the 1842 *Report on Children in Mines*²⁶) and in the press comment that resulted. The 1795 tract and the 1842 report each dealt with child and female labour underground, and the latter contained a lengthy section on conditions in Lancashire. (Had we attempted to depict the techniques and working conditions of a Lancashire coalmine in the 1780s, we could have drawn on no detailed source nearer in time than the

²⁶ *First Report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Employment and Condition of Children in Mines and Manufactories*, PP 1842 XV-XVII.

1842 report). However, the attitudes to child and female labour underground displayed in these two works are vastly different. Highly critical attitudes to child and female labour which pervade the later work are conspicuous by their absence in the earlier one, and this can be taken to indicate an important development in the social attitudes of the respectable classes between 1795 and 1842.

Let us quote the tract once again:

The second daughter is the chief subject of the present story: when this girl was nine years old, the honest collier finding that he had but little employment for her above ground, took her to work with him down the coal pit, together with one of his boys, who was then no more than seven years old. These two children readily put their strength to the basket, dragging the coals from the workmen to the mouth of the pit and by their joint labours they did the duty of those men, who are commonly called 'drawers', clearing thereby no less than seven shillings a week for their parents.²⁷

Up to this point, the editors were following Budworth closely. To their credit, they now inserted the following thought:

It must be owned that they may have sometimes exerted themselves even beyond their strength, which is now and then the case with little children, through the fault of those who exact the work from them; but since in this case the father had an eye to them during the hours of labour, while they had a prudent and tender mother also, to look after them at home, there is no particular reason to suppose, that at the time of which we are now speaking, they were ever much over-worked.

The 1842 commissioners found that a large proportion of the young children in mines worked for or with their father; and the fathers almost unanimously gave evidence that, like the trusting editors (neither of whom was a parent), they had no reason to suppose that their children were 'ever much over-worked'. Moreover, there can be no doubt that the generality of working class opinion as late as 1842 saw things much as Thornton-More did when they added—'Mary and her brother, so far from being a burthen, were bringing a little fortune to their parents, even when they were eight and ten years old'. Nevertheless, in 1842 children under the age of ten were excluded from underground labour in mines. Parliament which passed the law, the commissioners who recommended it, the press which almost unanimously supported the measure, the respectable classes who displayed an abnormal and highly vocal interest in this aspect of

²⁷ It is unlikely that the children were paid separately for their labour: the father's contract probably covered both cutting the coal and delivering it to the shaft, and the children's assistance increased his earnings. It was normal for families to work as gangs in this way, though not every family needed to make use of such young children. Children of these ages were, however, regularly found employed at this date in surface industries, *e.g.* in agriculture.

working class conditions, in sum, early Victorian bourgeois opinion, firmly held that the labour of young children underground was cruel and unnecessary; and a stern judgement was therefore passed on the collier fathers who had permitted it and benefited from it.

Another part of the same act forbade the labour of females of any age underground, a sweeping veto. Discussion on this point, by the commissioners, by Parliament and by the press, was, in extent and in heat of expression, quite disproportionate to the small number of females employed, and, in our view, to the abuses of female employment. It is not difficult to see that rational discussion was overborne by verbal hysteria arising out of Victorian fascination with the issue of sexual morality. To quote a witness before a later Royal Commission, 'the great ground of the passing of the [1842] act was not the hardness of the labour but the immorality which prevailed from the exposure of the persons of the women and the indecency of it'.²⁸ In view of the intense reaction in 1842 to the mere thought of men and women working side by side, lightly clad, in the dark underground, it is significant that in 1795 the subject of a popular tract could be a collier girl, and that Miss More, herself a delicate but not uninformed lady of Puritan tendencies, could be associated with a casual dismissal of the prospect that horrified the Victorians. Budworth, for his part, had concluded his story with a nice observation:

We likewise learn that a useful order of men . . . muscular from labour and rough among themselves, not only allow the helpless female to sleep her hour in rest and safety, but return *unsullied* to the world.

Both Budworth and Thornton-More included in their texts the reply of the 'master of the pit' when the squire made inquiries from him about Betty's character:

Sir, she is a poor girl that has overworked herself . . . ; she is one of the best girls that ever I knew, and is respected by all the colliers; and though I cannot deny that now and then my men take a cup too much, which is apt to make them sometimes quarrelsome, yet they never suffer a bad word to be spoken, or an affront to be offered to a girl in the pit, without punishing the fellow who may be guilty, and making him heartily ashamed of himself.

Thornton-More accepted this statement unquestioningly, since they commented:

This rule of decency and propriety towards young women, established by a set of coarse miners, is here recorded to their praise, and for the benefit of some of those persons, who are pleased to call themselves their betters.

²⁸ *Report of the Select Committee on . . . Mines*, PP 1866 XIV, p. 365 (the quotation a question to which the witness replies affirmatively).

In 1842, when female labour underground was forbidden, about 1,000 women and girls were employed in the Lancashire coalfield, most of them in mines around Wigan.²⁹ (There is good reason to suppose that large numbers of females had been employed in Lancashire coalpits in earlier centuries but since ancillary workers were often not recorded in colliery wages-books, their activities are poorly documented.³⁰) The 1842 report had much to say about the morals of collier girls in Lancashire and elsewhere which can now be compared with the comments of the 1795 tract. To the commissioners in 1841 a Lancashire collier gave this evidence: 'Did you make a sweetheart of your drawer?—Yes, folks said so. Was it usual for colliers to do so?—Some did, some did not. Are you married to her now?—Yes, I have been married to her six months. Was she in the family way before you married her, and while she was in the pits?—Yes, she was.'³¹ This was not necessarily a confession of underground misconduct, only of conformity to a widespread courting convention.³² Though the report of 1842

²⁹ In 1841 about 150,000 men and boys and 5,000 women and girls were employed in British coalmines: figures from the 1841 Census, adjusted for various deficiencies. The females, most of whom worked underground, were found only in a minority of coalfields, the less advanced ones technically. The number of females in Lancashire is obtained partly from the Census, partly from the 1842 report. No females were employed in eastern Lancashire, partly because the mills there attracted the female labour from mining communities.

³⁰ The standard histories of coal mining deny, explicitly or implicitly, the extensive or regular employment of females underground in Lancashire before the nineteenth century: J. U. Nef, *The rise of the British coal industry* (1932), vol. 2, p. 167, T. S. Ashton and J. Sykes, *The coal industry of the eighteenth century* (1929), p. 172. But their views are based on negative evidence only. Ashton and Sykes found no evidence of female employment in the Bradshaigh of Wigan papers; but examination of the records of the Winstanley and Orrell collieries—probably the very mines in which Betty Hodson worked in the 1770s—also produced no evidence of females employment before 1817 (Joyce H. M. Bankes, 'Records of mining in Winstanley and Orrell, near Wigan, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 54 (1939), pp. 31–64, on p. 60). As Ashton and Sykes themselves admit, female workers, employed on ancillary tasks, were generally not listed in wages accounts. However, when the Haigh colliers were required in 1636 to sign (with a mark) their consent to a new set of colliery rules, the drawers were included, and of the twelve names, seven were female: Haigh Colliery Orders 1635–1690, unpublished MS, Wigan Public Library (a source not seen by Nef). Eighteenth century instances of girls working underground have been noted in F. A. Bailey, 'Coroners' inquests held in the manor of Prescott 1746–89', *Trans. Hist. Soc. Lancs. Ches.* 86 (1934), pp. 21–39, on p. 23 (a girl in 1784), and in D. Anderson, 'Blundell's Collieries: wages, disputes and conditions of work', *ibid.* 117 (1966), pp. 109–41, on p. 109 (1776).

³¹ *PP 1842 XVII*, report on Lancashire by J. L. Kennedy, item 28.

³² Cf. 'Among the peasantry, fornication is the way to marriage', *Report on Children in Trade and Manufactures*, 1843 XV, p. 756; and see the statistical evidence in P. E. H. Hair, 'Bridal pregnancy in rural England in earlier centuries', *Population Studies* 20 (1966), pp. 233–43.

tended to seek for condemnatory evidence and interpretations, witnesses before the commissioners testified to the 'respectability' of many female colliers. In one Lancashire village, the neatest and cleanest house belonged to a collier woman, a middle-aged widow. A Presbyterian minister in Scotland stated that in his parish there were 'not a few very respectable and some decidedly pious women underground'. Said a Yorkshire girl—'The boys never dare *touch* us. If they did, my brother would plump them' (it has to be remembered that the majority of females worked alongside male relatives).³³ Years later, one Scottish miner deplored 'the old, old story that everyone [in mines where females were employed] was steeped in immorality'; instead, he had witnessed 'the faithful loving devotedness of wives to their husbands, the self-denying actions of the mothers to their children, and the utter avoidance of all impure talk between the young men and maidens'. He added—'I have seen men tried and punished for the least infringement of a law of right between men and women'.³⁴

Thus, the 1795 view of the moral behaviour of females underground may well have been nearer the truth than the sensational impression given by the 1842 report. The social moralising of one age is often distasteful to another: much of the social moralising in the Thornton-More tract is distasteful to us today. But, in contrast, its charity towards the social mores of the coalmining community in the matters of child and female labour, as compared with the outright and virulent condemnation by the Victorian bourgeoisie, must be accounted nearer the spirit of our own age.

The last Lancashire Collier Girl did not leave her work underground until some years after 1842. The colliers around Wigan smuggled their wives and daughters underground, until the mine owners called in the police.³⁵ In 1845 a Lancashire woman who was still working underground, but because this

³³ *PP 1842 XVII*, report on Lancashire by J. L. Kennedy, item 24; report on Yorkshire by S. S. Scriven, item 79; P. Chalmers, *Dunfermline* (1844) vol. 1, p. 18.

³⁴ P. McNeill, *Blawearie, or Mining Life on the Lothians forty years ago* (1887), pp. 113-4.

³⁵ 'That the Chairman be deputed to call upon Mr Martin, Captain of the Police, to go round every Colliery in the District, for the purpose of seeing that Lord Ashley's Act be fully carried out respecting the non-employment of Females in the Pits and that any expenses he may be at, attending thereby, to be paid out of the funds provided by the Coal Proprietors', from *Resolutions passed at the meetings of the Coal Proprietors of the Wigan District 1843*, pamphlet in Wigan Public Library. See also *PP 1842 XVII*, report on Lancashire by J. Fletcher, item 7.

was now illegal could only work odd days 'on the sly,' said to an interviewer:

I cannot see that I am not as well employed there as anywhere else. I have an old woman at home to support. I wish those chaps that got the women taken out of the pits would pay me the 3/- a week less wages which I get now.³⁶

This is the last Lancashire female working underground we know about, and it is curious that her social circumstances should have resembled those of the *original Collier Girl*.

Though driven out of the underground workings, Lancashire women and girls continued to work on the surface at the collieries, especially in the Wigan area. In the 1880s and later decades, up to the First World War, unsuccessful attempts were made to exclude females, by law, from even this labour. The male miners, converted by now to Victorian ideas of respectability, conducted through their union a particularly ferocious campaign against the 'pit-brow lasses'. The women and girls fought hard to retain their traditional connection with the industry. One of the causes of offence was that the women and girls wore unconventional dress at work, in particular, trousers. In 1887 a deputation of females made their way to London and paraded before Whitehall officials in an attempt to convince the Home Secretary that their working dress was decent.³⁷ At home, they had sympathisers: as a hostile source reported, 'we find the reverend vicar of Pemberton presiding at a meeting of pit-girls held for the purpose of getting up a petition protesting against the proposed stoppage of their work'.³⁸ It is likely that this Wigan clergyman had read 'The Lancashire Collier Girl'; and it is conceivable that it had helped him to see the pit-brow lasses of the Wigan district in much the same light as, a century earlier, Hannah More and Henry Thornton had seen Betty Hodson.

³⁶ *Transactions of the Manchester Geological Society*, 10, p. 60.

³⁷ Frank Hird, *Lancashire Stories*, no date, vol. 1, p. 415. For confirmation of the deputation, see the parliamentary debate on the pit-brow lasses, in *Hansard* for 23.6.1887. The working women found themselves supported by the emergent and strident feminist movement, which condemned all sex-differentiating legislation, a support whose upper-class weight infuriated the male union leaders but may have been decisive in preventing a legislative veto.

³⁸ R. Nelson Boyd, *Coal pits and pitmen* (1895), pp. 239-40 (with a drawing of a pit girl on p. 241: cf. Hird *op. cit.* p. 414).

APPENDIX A

AN ATTEMPT AT FAMILY RECONSTITUTION FROM PARISH REGISTERS

Betty Hodson entered service on 16.12.1788. Her mother died some time, probably a short time, before. The death of Esther Hodson 'widow and pauper', buried 19.5.1788 (Upholland register) would fit. If Esther was Betty's mother, then 'John, son of Esther Hodson, widow' and 'Thomas, son of Hesther Hodson, widow', who were buried on 29.4.1782 and 18.10.1782, were most likely her brothers. Of the four brothers living when her father died, one was still alive in the late 1790s, and three had therefore died: hence, of the two who died in 1782, at least one was one of the pair rescued by Betty. According to the text, one of this pair died after being maintained 'half a year', the other after a sixteen week illness: therefore Betty rescued one brother in late 1781 or during the first half of 1782. The mother died 'at the end of seven years'. If this means seven years after being rescued by Betty, then she was rescued in 1781, which agrees with the statement that Betty rescued first her mother, then her brothers. Betty rescued her mother 'as soon as she arrived at the age of sixteen', so if the mother was rescued in 1781, Betty was born in 1765. Her father, who died when she was 'between eleven and twelve' must have died in 1776 or 1777. But no baptism of a Betty (or Elizabeth) Hodson is recorded in either the Upholland or the Wigan registers in the years 1765 or 1766.

Two Betty Hodsons were baptised at Upholland in 1769. If one of these was our Betty Hodson, then her father must have died, not in 1776/1777, but in 1780/1781. The later date is not absolutely incompatible with the text, if we suppose that 'at the end of seven years' means seven years after the father's accident (not after Betty's rescue), in which case the mother lived with Betty only two years (seven, less five in the workhouse), and the father died in 1781. One of the Bettys baptised in 1769 was a child of Joshua Hodson, who appears regularly in the Upholland register and is described invariably as a collier, either of Upholland or of neighbouring Orrell. Born 1736, Joshua married in 1758, and of his eleven children born between 1759 and 1779, six were alive in 1781. No other family of Hodsons of this period is as comprehensively recorded in the Upholland registers, and the numbers and ages of Joshua's children closely resemble those in the Collier Girl's family. But Joshua's Betty died in infancy (and he himself not until 1789). The surviving Betty (at least her death is not recorded in the Upholland registers) was the daughter of Thomas Hodson, who at various times was a weaver, husbandman, delfman and 'collier at Orrell'. Of his seven recorded children (1764-1777), six survived in 1777 and 1781, as in the Collier Girl's family. But the record of the burial in 1788 of 'Hannah, wife of Thomas' (assuming that this is our Thomas: unfortunately, the mother's name is not given in the baptism entries in the Upholland register) shows that Thomas was still alive at this date.

No other Betty Hodson was recorded during the 1760s in the Upholland or the Wigan registers (the latter were inspected in the bishop's transcripts, at the Lancashire Record Office). We return to Esther, earlier supposed to be Betty's mother. The name of her husband is given in a baptism entry (6.8.1767) in the Wigan registers (assuming that the only Esther Hodson at this date in the Wigan registers is the same as the only Esther/Hesther Hodson in the Upholland registers). This makes it highly likely that John Hodson was the father of the

Collier Girl, and we further learn from the Upholland registers that a John Hodson of Orrell was buried on 16.8.1777—the correct year for the death of Betty's father according to the calculation of our first paragraph. Was this death the result of a mining accident? The detailed records of the eighteenth century Wigan coroners have not been traced (*cf.* the records of the Prescot coroners, examined in F. A. Bailey 'Coroners' inquests held in the manor of Prescot 1746–89', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 86 (1934), pp. 21–39), but the expenses claims of the two local coroners, presented to the Quarter Sessions, and listing inquests, have been located (at the Lancashire Record Office, among the unindexed bundles of multifarious 'petitions'). A coroner, John Jackson, held an inquest at Orrell on 15.8.1777 on the body of John Hodson, 'accidentally killed'. It seems almost certain that this was the Collier Girl's father. John Hodson's family can be partly reconstituted from the registers of Upholland and Wigan. He was married at Wigan (–.12.1760, to Esther Meakinson, *i.e.* Makinson) and one child was baptised there (6.8.1767 John: apparently this child died in infancy, and the name was used again—a not uncommon happening). Four other children were baptised at Upholland (2.8.1761 Jane, 27.5.1770 John, 13.3.1773 Daniel, 8.9.1776 Thomas). Betty who was born in late 1765—by our calculation—was not baptised either at Upholland or at Wigan, nor was a brother who must have been born in 1768, since he was aged nine in 1777: these untraced births help to fill the gap in the pattern of traced births. In 1761 John Hodson was described in the registers as a collier at Pembrerton (between Orrell and Wigan), and thereafter as a collier at Orrell. When he was killed in 1777, his daughter Jane was just sixteen (in the text, the elder sister's age is not given, but she married 'some time' after the father's death), Betty was nearly twelve ('between eleven and twelve'), John was seven (as was a brother in the text), Daniel was four (the next brother in the text was three), and Thomas was almost one ('an infant'). The mother lived in the workhouse from some unstated time after the father's death up to late 1781 when Betty had her sixteenth birthday, that is, for not more than four years and a few months (called 'five years' in the text). Betty kept her mother seven years (1781–1788), as in the text. The brother she kept for 'half a year' was probably Thomas (buried 18.10.1782, aged six), and the brother she kept during a sixteen week illness may have been John (buried 29.4.1782, aged twelve), who had presumably been a parish apprentice. We have not traced a marriage c1778 for sister Jane, but supposing that she died in infancy and that her place was taken by another girl born c1763 whose baptism is untraced, then Betty's elder sister may have been one of three Hodson girls who were married at Wigan between 1780 and 1782 (Nancy in August 1780, Ann in May 1782, Mary in August 1782: a fourth Hodson married in November 1779, but this was a Betty—who cannot even have been the surviving 1769 Betty).

It will have been noted that this reconstitution of the Hodson family is based on probabilities rather than certainties. Since there is no register entry for our Betty, there is no recorded connection between herself on the one hand and Esther and John Hodson on the other. In Upholland at this period there were at least two John Hodsons, contemporaries, and it cannot be proved absolutely from the registers that the family we have assigned to John Hodson the collier was either wholly the family of one man, or the whole family of one man—indeed, we have argued that it was not the latter. While the probabilities that the reconstitution is correct are high, the necessary chain of evidence could not have been drawn from a single set of registers. The connection between Esther and John is not recorded in the Upholland registers, owing to the failure to record mother's name at baptism, and the fact that the couple were married elsewhere. During the mid 1760s, John and Esther must either have moved out of Upholland and Wigan parishes, or else have neglected to have some of their children baptised. While living at Orrell later, they apparently made use of both neighbouring churches and their two separate sets of registers. These points indicate some of the limitations inherent in the method of 'family reconstitution' from a single set of registers.