residential suburbs was moving ever sleepily forward, like all those I had so far seen; like the comfortable suburb where I live, where we smile at each other, allow our children to play with each other, where we count each other's cars, but where we don't really know one another. Even the suet puddings were still being steamed somewhere. The Gulf War was a diminishing memory. John Major would soon be safely ensconced back in number ten. The Labour Party would face another constitutional crisis. Mrs Thatcher would continue to ruffle feathers, having been stabbed in the back by her party in the meantime. Andrew Morton would be a notorious household name, showing us how easy it is to make money writing books if you can only lower yourself to becoming a skunk (that is, releasing an unpleasant smell into the air). Neil Kinnock would be a fading legend, and *The Sunday Telegraph* would have brought back Peregrine Worsthorne, thank God. And so sleepy old England would go.

It would also soon be spring. The economics of the madhouse would finally be upon us. It would be that time of year when we untangle the knot from the lawnmower cable and plan our holidays anew. I would be revisiting all the places described in this book at the screen of a word processor, the sequence already receding into memory and beginning to sparkle with the uneasy glow of nostalgia. When I arrived that afternoon in Hampshire after more than two months of travelling, however, it was still the depths of a particularly uneventful winter.

Meanwhile, Basingstoke and the rest of England, here I came.

HARDY TRAVELLING BRITAIN WEEK 5
(N-W).

J.G. RAMSAY

I

Greater Manchester and Merseyside

The Journey North

If you are an English person, if you can describe yourself seriously as such a thing these days without inviting a chorus of canned laughter from some of our more enlightened circles, you cannot avoid becoming aware of the north-south antithesis, of the regional snobberies peculiar to the atmosphere of England, as soon as you begin moving through it. It is perhaps symptomatic of the staid, backward-looking atmosphere of a country like ours that one should begin a journey round England by thinking thoughts so predictable as these at all.

They had been turning over in my mind throughout the morning, since I had climbed into the taxi outside my publisher's office and it had moved with the traffic through the early autumn sunshine across London and deposited me at Euston Station, and I'd tried to gear myself up mentally for the three months of travelling that lay ahead. Even the modern interior of Euston Station, with its low corrugated ceiling, its shiny platform surfaces, and its rows of fluorescent light tubes curving toward daylight somewhere beyond the approach lines, where I boarded the northbound express, raised questions. Somehow, it was not the likeliest of settings from which to begin a journey round modern England. For months I had contemplated the undertaking and assumed I should be starting out from a place resembling the kind of big old-fashioned railway terminus as it exists in the popular imagination. Preferably a cavernous interior held up by an embroidery of muscular Victorian cast-iron (as in Euston's neighbour Kings Cross), not something that resembles the functional interiors of those huge distribution warehouses that are gathering alongside the country's motorways. Naturally I was disappointed. But then, my assumptions and my disappointment are part of the problem, if indeed it is a problem, of being English. We are a tremendously preconceived people, something which is merely a reflection of the fact that we are a deeply conservative nation, as a number of our political commentators, and the odd party, realized after the result of the 1992 General Election. Consequently, a journey round modern England will almost certainly include, as a major part of its atmosphere, a contemplation of tradition, but more especially of the past. It hangs like a mill-stone round the country's neck. It is impossible to avoid getting caught up in it, in the great wave of nostalgia sweeping England at the present time, where we seem to be retreating into the safe romanticism of the past because of the uncertainty we feel about the future.

No sooner had the train left the north London suburbs behind, picked up the beginnings of the Home Counties, and roared through a section of countryside between Leighton Buzzard and Bletchley that was pure green and pleasant cliché, than I began thinking about this uncertainty more than ever. I also thought about those irritating prejudices that exist between north and south – more especially in my experience between south and north – prejudices that have shaped the attitude of a nation for generations, so many stubbornly ill-conceived and born of simple ignorance. Again, you see, if you are English you cannot help but be aware of them, and that morning I became enormously irritated with myself for becoming ensnared in the same old trap. I assume this happened because I was aware of the job I had to do and was absurdly conscious of a sort of detached perspective of myself, like a roving documentary camera, for the first few days of the journey, till the novelty began to wear off nearer the weekend. I was heading north at more than a hundred miles an hour, through a dripping dewy landscape glowing gold beneath the most brilliant of blue skies, to Manchester. North to a region that is the butt of an abundance of national stock jokes. North to a region that is host to a plethora of inaccurate social generalizations as well as a lot of Labour Party supporters. I had not been away long enough to develop the kind of jaundiced eye that might distort the perceptions of someone arriving for the first time who is shocked to find that the sun actually shines up there. The sun shone all the way from London to Manchester, and it is perhaps worth remembering it was the same sun hanging in the same sky in the same corner of the same universe.

But on that last day of September it so happened that I was also travelling north to my home. It was a home where I knew there lived a lot of people who were very poor, but also plenty who were very rich, particularly where the south Manchester suburbs blend into Cheshire, where they have long talked about the number of millionaires per square acre in an area that grew originally from the desire of the city's bourgeoisie to move upwind to escape the industrial smog. I was sitting inside a gleaming metal projectile slicing through much the same sort of English countryside and beneath the same fluffy white clouds scudding overhead all the way. All around me was a landscape punctuated with distant church steeples lost in the pearly ambience of an autumnal haze. All around me were the tiny hay bales, the farmhouses, the sheep, the cows, the velvety golf courses raked by the elongated blue-black shadows of poplar trees, the overgrown railway sidings, the gleaming branch lines suddenly sweeping away and blending with the hedgerows, the country church yards, the fans of sombre gravestones sulking beneath the elms, the distant undulating villages, the remaining red telephone boxes scattered far and wide, the great marching pylons, and the synthetic skyline of Milton Keynes. It was a landscape and an England from which John Schlesinger could have selected any number of images perfect for a Conservative Party Political Broadcast; symbolic snapshots which were to recur constantly throughout my travels, asserting themselves so frequently I gradually began to search for them and even found them superimposed over my dreams. That morning I saw it all, including the bypasses and the motorways, the distant blocks of flats, and a handful of derelict bottle kilns on the outskirts of the Potteries, an industrial area to which I would be returning a month or two afterwards. On the seat next to me was the premiere issue of *The Modern Review* and that day's edition of *The Guardian*, which I had picked up chiefly because it was running a profile describing the 'total selfishness of Auberon Waugh'. I had noted with interest, as Mr Waugh might well have noted with interest, that since last I had travelled inter-city, British Rail had become politically correct by prescribing second-class passengers to be 'standard-class' passengers, rather as those self-righteous equal opportunities simpletons who attempt to subvert plain language by designating people of ethnic origin as being of 'alternative skin colour', instead of simply being black. Perhaps one day I shall be bound on a train from London not to Manchester but to Personchester, standing confusedly outside the city's public toilets, looking this way and that, once I have arrived.

But heading north I was aware too of a creeping sense of apprehension. When the train eventually made its way through the outer- then the inner-urban ring of Manchester, and I saw numerous cobbled back alleys bisecting the embankment at right angles, and kids in garish-coloured shellsuits kicked balls about on filthy patches of grass before a backdrop of grey tower blocks when presumably they ought to have been at school, the same old generalizations began to surface. Huge billboard posters depicting a leather-clad Arnold Schwarzenegger sitting atop a chromed motorcycle wielding an oversized shotgun from *Terminator 2* came into view. His sunglassed features scowling over the city, the gleaming muzzle of the projecting gun-barrel, seemed a perfect allegory to the brutalized emotions increasingly permeating some of those wretched streets, where buses and traffic flashed intermittently between the buildings about as frequently as those shellsuited youngsters' chances of not getting a job. It put me into the appropriate mood. During its years of vigorous industrial expansion in the mid-nineteenth century, when the term *laissez-faire* was associated with this part of the world more than it was with anywhere else, Manchester was the only provincial city impudent enough to challenge the commercial supremacy of London, because its principle industry, cotton, was vital to the prosperity of the entire nation. In the process, however, the city developed something of a reputation for harbouring lawlessness and being not much more than a colossal industrial slum; one where the young Frederick Engels conducted the fieldwork among sulphuric fumes and smog that would lead him to socialism and inspire the writings of Karl Marx; one where the poor dug up the corpses of cholera victims to grind up the bones and sell them as fertilizer. Because it lacked adequate municipal administration – a throwback to it having retained the status of a village as recently as 1765 – in those days Manchester was a rough, frontier sort of place, swilling with putrid industrial effluent. It was considered as unsafe to walk the streets of the city after dark as it is today. Conditions in some sectors of the city were so desperate, in fact, they ruled out civilized living altogether. Today Manchester's brash nineteenth-century confidence and former cotton spinning supremacy might only be a memory celebrated in the city's Museum of Science and Industry and the name of a bar in one of its premier hotels, the industrial effluent long since drained away. But if my frequent perusals of the *Manchester Evening News* were anything to go by, I fear the wheel might be once again turning full circle. This is what is unnerving, for the brutality of those Dickensian slums *is* being recast in concrete and barbed-wire, with pump-action robbery and drugs-related violence taking on epidemic proportions, and as an awareness it overshadowed much that I saw and thought throughout this journey.

As the train ran into the city centre beneath a confusion of overhead wires, I thought about this as I looked down into the gloomy streets running adjacent to the viaduct that leads into Piccadilly Station, just as I used to think about it when I spent many an uneasy hour roaming them when I was a student at the city's polytechnic ten years ago. It used to strike me then, as it struck me again that morning, how unfortunate it is that people coming to Manchester from the south by train should arrive at Piccadilly Station and see that part of the city first. Though there are some good buildings remaining, and though the new tram system is being brought through and a huge marina development has begun that will transform the area, it is that bit too far from the main shopping area to avoid the fine coating of shabbiness that penetrates the outskirts of big city centres, once you are away from the hub of activity. Of course I would not wish to emphasise this aspect of Manchester and give an unfair impression of the place before I have arrived or begun talking about it. It is an illusion to believe that rows of boarded-up shops and the smearing of bill posters over large dusty windows can only be found in the north of England, for you find this big city decrepitude, this darkening of neglected architecture, colouring your vision wherever you go. I would not wish to emphasise it in Manchester because I think Manchester is the best city in the country, bearing in mind that in saying these things you need to keep a sensible perspective on the things you observe going on around you, and clearly remember, each time you feel that cosy tug of sentiment when you come upon a nice old town or building, that all English policemen are not a sort of everlasting squad of smiling Jack Warners populating a never-ending rerun of *The Blue Lamp*; that nothing, and nobody, is ever what it seems; and that coming to terms with the truth propping up reality is rather like waking up to discover your favourite childhood film star has been exposed as something rather unpleasant, despite his fictitious public persona being the role model of perfect family man.

As a consequence, I am here to describe what I believe will turn out to be not much more than a series of personal impressions; how one person's moods and responses were stimulated by seeing different parts of the country in a certain sequence or coming upon them in a particular way. And as I emerged from the station into the Manchester sunshine, and made my way past the pile of office blocks grouped around the green oasis called Piccadilly Gardens, observing with interest, as has been observed before, that the statue of Queen Victoria faces the opposite way, I can only assume my thoughts had adjusted themselves to take account of the fact that I was gathering material for a book. My senses were probably working overtime, I knew the north of England better than anywhere, but having spent the better part of the morning in Kensington, walking now into a city that seemed rather more threadbare just there than I remembered, for the first time in my life I was returning to the north wondering what on earth I was going to find.

Manchester

What I found in Manchester was a provincial city with the subtle air of modern English prosperity blowing comfortably along many of its pedestrianized thoroughfares. Whatever the compilers of those current affairs programmes continue to think when they persist in playing a tune by the Brighouse and Rastrick Brass Band when they cut to a report from Lancashire or Yorkshire, go to Manchester and you find a city moving confidently toward the beginning of the next century and virtually unrecognizable from the blackened north country stereotype of old. It is a far cry indeed from the city's position fifteen or twenty years ago, when, soot-blackened and neglected, it was still struggling to come to terms with itself and gain its commercial footing because the trade that built it had finally abandoned it between the wars, and was still on the receiving end of the kind of barbed comments uttered by A.J.P Taylor, who a few years previously had compared Manchester famously to a compost heap. Fortunately, Manchester has since discovered its rich architectural inheritance, even if not so very long ago, when flared trousers were just beginning to flap ridiculously in strong winds above feet perched atop the clumsiest platform heels, the City Planning Department could claim with seriousness that 'although the task of removing the physical legacy of the Industrial Revolution is immense, Manchester is able and determined to accept the challenge'. How quickly attitudes change.

It is true that you can find that air of prosperity coursing through almost any substantial city in modern England, even in central Liverpool, and if you were a foreigner who concentrated on this aspect of the country, and leafed through the odd copy of *Surrey Occasions Magazine* at the expense of everything else, you could come away with entirely the wrong impression. Manchester is still surrounded to the north and east by an almost unbroken ring of former industrial textile towns, which really form a vast sprawling suburb of red brick that appears as though it will go on forever. The huge silent mills float mournfully above the chimney pots like abandoned ships, often right alongside brand-new supermarkets and at the edge of ring roads or overshadowing shiny new industrial units, though many of them are now enormous distribution warehouses owned by mail order catalogue companies and are packed full of advanced technology. The closest mill towns are Rochdale and Oldham, both of which I spent some time exploring, on foot and from the windows of a train. I noted with interest that since I had made a meticulous, almost obsessive photographic study of Oldham six or seven years previously, still more of the old cotton mills had gone; yet more of the old rows of terraced houses and shops – some of which I used to get into when they were boarded up and remove old bakelite light switches and door handles – had been obliterated. I watched some steeplejacks demolishing a mill chimney and listened to the comments of a small crowd of spectators who despised the fact the enormous phallus had risen toward the heavens at all. I suppose their parents having worked in the mill beneath it, and the wages they drew having perhaps played a part in determining their entry into the world when that chimney was still belching black smoke, never really occurred to them. Habitual prejudice of this kind is hardly surprising, though. There can be no other place in England that has been as ashamed of its own image over recent years, and in particular of the quantity of mill chimneys striking from its skyline, than the town of Oldham in Greater Manchester, even if the younger generation living within its boundaries can become bundles of contradiction and turn into mini nationalists the moment comparisons are made between it and the old industrial slums.

Manchester does still have its inner city slums, albeit if the occupants these days tend not to be housed in squat Victorian terraces, have decent sanitation, and no longer share living quarters with livestock or pigs. One of the first things I did when I arrived in Manchester was to look at several of these inner city areas, rather warily at times I admit, because of the air of crime and violence to which they are permanently attached, causing you to feel continually uneasy when you are there. In particular I had another look at that vast run-down wasteland

constituting the bulk of Hulme – no visit to Manchester can be complete without it – where the huge and notorious Crescents, enormous horse-shoe shaped system-built deck tenements, form the city's most famous and embarrassing civic landmarks. I was genuinely startled at how much more derelict and overgrown the Crescents had become since I was a student at the nearby polytechnic ten years earlier. They were bad enough back then. One of them was now surrounded by so much vegetation and trees-in-all-the-wrong-places it was difficult to believe there were people actually living there. But there were. Among the blank pieces of chipboard covering hundreds of broken windows, some surrounded by scorch marks from arson attacks, there were sad little lines of washing suspended above the tiny balconies. Pathetic little footpaths meandered between the shrubs and saplings, along which a number of people were actually walking, mainly flat-capped old men in training shoes and Hilda Ogden lookalikes wrapped up in headscarves, and greying West Indians wearing pork-pie hats, all of whom seemed to be carrying well-worn supermarket carrier bags. The significant point to observe is that the grounds to the flats had been overgrown for so long the illicit footpaths had worn into grooves and bedded themselves in, making a mockery of the abandoned thoroughfares designated for pedestrian use by the middle class Utopianists that inspired these places. It is not enough to say, as numerous television and newspaper reports have said, that Hulme was a dismal failure socially and architecturally on a monumental scale: that it was the biggest concrete nuclear fallout shelter of its kind masquerading as human habitation built in Europe: that the whole place reeks of post-apocalyptic analogies and automatically suggests metaphors connected to the after-effects of nuclear war, when as a fate for the human race such a calamity was still considered fashionable. When J.B. Priestley travelled through England, he observed that the dole places reeked of stinking and defeated humanity, and indicated nothing but a shambling, dull-eyed poor imitation of life. The crucial factor today is that nothing much has changed, except the building materials and the failed architectural styles. The faces I encountered walking between those hideous tenements were certainly shambling and dull-eyed. The minor fact that some of the younger residents blast one another in the chest with shotguns to sort out occasional local difficulties, usually concerning the distribution of drugs, is now largely incidental. One man had been found murdered in Moss Side, across the road from the Hulme Crescents, when I was there; his skull and jaw smashed so violently he could not be identified from his dental records. Another was almost hacked to death by several men wielding machetes outside a pub. But then, this is part of the atmosphere and emerging pattern of modern English inner city life, busily turning itself into a sort of down market Soweto, and the more frequently we hear about it in the news, the more we slide over it and remain oblivious to the social changes that are slowly being worked deep within our civilization.

A man I spoke to on a street corner when I was in Hulme blamed the compulsive headbutting behaviour and shotgun delinquency of many modern inner city areas entirely on Margaret Thatcher. Something he did not mention and that suggested he did not actually live there, as we stared across empty car parks glittering with fragments of glass catching the rays of the rising sun, and countless stacks of municipal tenements materialized ghostlike through the early morning mist beyond, was that this anti-social behaviour is only the effect of a very small minority. There is a tendency also to assume that these places are not much more than havens of white working-class delinquency, whereas in fact – and rather surprisingly – in Hulme there are large numbers of students and single black people living in the Crescents. For years families with children have been either settled elsewhere or allocated housing on ground floors only. These places are probably now not just as bad as is commonly believed, at any rate not during the day. Hulme has some eight or nine tenant associations, all attempting to improve the quality of life in the area and liaising with the city council over projected improvements about which they have been promised continuous consultation, though it goes without saying that they remain supremely sceptical of that. There can be little doubt that if the whole of Hulme were refurbished and turned into a vast student hall of residence, rather as happened for the student world games fiasco in Sheffield, the social complexion of the area would change considerably, the air of deprivation and violence probably disappearing more or less overnight (and reappearing elsewhere). As it happens, only a few weeks after I was there at the beginning of this journey, the transformation of Hulme began anew. A two-hundred million pound redevelopment programme lasting five years got under way in November when one of the estate's oldest residents, seventy-six-year-old Marie Blinkhorn, sent a two-ton steel ball crashing into one of the blocks of tenements, so that by the time they are published, these words and my observations when I was in Manchester will already be receding into history.

Some of the problems associated with inner city deprivation seem to be connected to the bottom layer of the working class becoming victims of a welfare system that encourages them to have children to be eligible for council accommodation. The reasons behind the rising tide of violence that is emerging as a marked characteristic of the flavour of modern life are also, of course, many and varied. There have always been slums, just as there have always been a number of half-witted people populating slums and half-witted people in positions of authority. But the notion that modern slums are entirely a product of the renaissance of free market economics has always struck me as something of a nonsense; an easy scapegoat for socialists searching blindfolded for a socio-economic donkey upon which to pin the tail of blame. The subtly brutalizing, opportunistic nature of market forces has doubtless filtered through to influence the unpleasant bearing suspended over these inner urban places; but it is not the entire story by any means, and there is not the space or time to go into what the rest of that story might be just here. To select only the briefest of examples to make an important point, however, it is interesting to observe that some years back *The Economist* referred to modern corporate housing disasters such as Hulme, how they had encased in concrete the problems of social deprivation, alienation, crime, family breakdown, and moral delinquency. It referred to the sport known as 'bombing', whereby youngsters living in Hulme dropped dustbin lids from the upper walkways of deck tenements onto the heads of people passing beneath. This paragraph could have been taken from any newspaper over the past ten years. And yet it was written in 1978, when Margaret Thatcher was an opposition leader associated with clumsy hand-bags, old-fashioned pleated skirts, and with snatching away bottles of school milk, and Britain was being run by a Labour government – by a party that has since blamed social deprivation, crime, and family breakdown entirely on Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party, just as that elderly man did on a street corner in Hulme at the beginning of the 1990s.

But it is Manchester the changing city I am determined to concern myself with here, for to me it has the edge over virtually everywhere else, even if we are at the beginning of what will prove to be a lengthy period of austerity and a further commercial contraction due to our inexorable economic decline. Quite how the present changing pattern of trade and tightening of monetary belts and curtailing of public sector borrowing requirements *will* affect Manchester (and the future of Hulme) this time round is difficult to say. Mingling with the bustling crowds in the central part of the city a day or so after I arrived, the buckles on those monetary belts appeared still to be loosened. The deep streets of the banking quarter, crowned by Sir Edward Lutyens's magnificent Midland Bank, were great canyons of dusty shadow glistening with parked executive cars. Like the subtle veneer of opulence and expense-account embellished laughter circulating self-importantly across prestigious St Ann's Square and along Deansgate, they looked as far away from recession as ever. I ascended an escalator inside a large glass tube and ate a plate of fresh salad sitting by the window of the new food hall that has been opened above the Arndale Centre, a dominating structure that on a number of occasions I have heard described by Mancunians as the largest public lavatory in the world. Staring down at the crowds it was easy to be absorbed by the wholesomeness and vitality of the entire scene, basking as it was beneath crisp sunshine, even if it is worth remembering that the recession had yet to peak when I was there and Norman Lamont was still making feeble prophecies and being laughed at by *The Sunday Times*. All along the main piazzas and avenues the office workers and young dark-stockinged secretaries were emerging from the tower blocks and sitting eating sandwiches or baked potatoes, surrounded by modern herringbone-patterned brick paviour sets (if present trends are anything to go by, these seem destined to cover half the surface of England, if not the whole of Europe), and plenty of reproduction Victorian street furniture. With the leaves of early autumn chasing in circles round their ankles; with the salubrious peal of the town hall clock booming lazily in the background; with the sound of pop music blaring from the dashboard of the occasional Asian exhibitionist displaying himself in a bottom-of-the-range all-white Mercedes at the nearby traffic lights (he is probably a wholesaler of imported clothing from those backstreets of Piccadilly), much of what I saw felt uplifting and rather reassuring. If you kept one eye on the exclusive shops down King Street, and one ear open to the constant bustle and scrape and clacking of shoes, there could be little doubt that here was a city that was an important commercial and financial centre; one where money was being spent and where things of importance happened. Here was a city that had at last got rid of the beleaguered industrial image that tarnished the north of England for so long; a process which got under way in earnest when Castlefield was designated Britain's first Urban Heritage Park back in 1982, and surely culminated in Granada Television finally replacing the gloomy pictures shown over the credits to *Coronation Street* with shots taken in bright sunshine.

Perhaps that is another worthwhile reason to begin a journey such as this in a part of the country that has seen some of the biggest and most far-reaching changes. There has been a lot of noise generated about Manchester's economic changes, and words written about its long period of decline, manifested typically not so very long ago when a newspaper article that pandered to the blackened Mancunian city of old had to create a picture of modern urban-industrial desolation by assembling components from several different photographs into a single montage. I have at times been living in, and commuted to and from, London for the past fifteen years. Apart from a few superficial changes, the Docklands, and Canary Wharf, it does not seem much different to what it was when I first went there, except that in places there is probably a lot more rubbish and men as well as women are getting raped on the Underground. You cannot say the same thing about Manchester, for it has changed enormously. I am certain this impression is something to do with size. London is so vast it rambles and everything soon becomes lost in the blur. In a place the size of Manchester, you can walk from one end of the city centre to the other in less than half-an-hour, which enables its character and its sense of scale to surface more easily, though it maintains the presence of a real city. This also enables its changes to be more easily observed, though you would not think so from the comments that continue to be aimed in the direction of Manchester occasionally today. When Manchester was allocated a considerable amount of public money by central government to enable it to make its bid for the Olympic games not long ago, a number of sniggers could be discerned emanating softly from the all-knowing echelons of Fleet Street – sniggers that are stuck solid at about the year 1965, and based on nothing but secondhand information, grievous bodily reputation, and straightforward lousy prejudice.

It is, you see, almost impossible to find the authentic derelict, soot-blackened Manchester of old, and has been for some time now. The city has undergone a substantial face-lift over the ten or twelve years that I have known it, but what these changes have heralded has been given far less publicity and credence than what was left industrially behind. The city even has its own miniature Docklands – crisp post-Modernist office and apartment blocks, tubular-metal porticoes, trendily-painted chunks of nineteenth-century civil engineering turned into massive ornamental sculptures, multi-screen cinema, science park enshrouded in smoked-glass, and all – down at Salford Quays. There has been much talk and late-night laughter released over glasses of wine about London's Docklands, in particular about its light railway and its padlocked fences and gates, but not much reference to Manchester's Docklands, the biggest development of its kind outside London, forming an important part of the city's commercial renaissance and desire to rectify its shortage of office space. It is a far cry indeed from the scene down at Salford Quays ten years ago, which, as I well remember, was a huge wasteland of overgrown railway sidings and rotting brickwork. The transformation from a vast decaying legacy of Manchester's dockland past and former industrial prominence because of the ship canal has been remarkable, the one disconcerting aspect about it being that there is still a terrible silence hanging over the place. The only sounds breaking it the muggy morning I was there during this journey were those from a flock of seagulls being agitated by water bubbling from an outlet pipe in the centre of one of the dock basins, and the forlorn noise of authentic dockland activity way off down the canal at Trafford Park, as though it were muffled sound going on behind a huge closed door concealing Britain's heavy industrial past. Alongside your feet was the ever present sound of lapping water, one of the characteristic noises of post-industrial, service-oriented, marina-embracing England, and one of the most melancholy sounds I have yet heard. The fact that, like its big equivalent in the south of England, Salford Quays appears to be struggling to attract tenants and businesses, and that the environment could really be said to be a symptom of Britain's deep-rooted economic malaise, is, of course, another matter entirely. At least these places look like they are staring the future full in the face, if most of the rest of the country is not. That is a small consolation that offers hope if nothing else.

Is an image of Salford Quays generally associated with the Manchester of the post-industrial era? No, it probably is not. The north continues to be perceived largely as a flat-caps-and-ferrets stereotype, in the same way it is considered obligatory to joke about the region's industrial dereliction, which is a great pity, because economic transformations cannot be achieved overnight, and that is what is going on here. To me Manchester typifies the way major English provincial cities have been altering over the past eight or ten years; how there might at last be a real possibility that our cultural and commercial emphasis could be starting to shift away from London and be distributed more favourably among the regions. As with its redevelopment of Salford Quays, Manchester has been carried along by all the major trends of recent times, and has probably benefited from them more, and pulled them off more convincingly, than anywhere else. In no other provincial place I know does there appear to have been the scale of environmental changes carried out, from road improvements to urban clean-up programmes, to the renewed potential for traditional forms of public transport, than there has been in the city of Manchester. It has been a slow and at times painful process, but it is working. The city has more vitality and probably more going for it commercially and culturally, and is historically of much greater significance, than cities of similar size and importance such as Birmingham and Bristol, which both consider themselves to be rivals. Manchester was, after all, the world's first industrial region. It could arguably claim to be the place that generated the beginnings of the modern world much as we know it today, if one takes it for granted that without the Industrial Revolution everything that followed could not have happened. That to me makes the city vitally important. (Some would consider it not to be the most noteworthy of claims.) Its original free-trading fundamentals might even have influenced Mrs Thatcher's political credentials. And here Manchester was, in bright autumn sunlight, in post-industrial, post-Thatcher Britain, beginning to hold its head high again, having the advantage, like nearby Liverpool, of possessing good street patterns and some wonderful old architecture; perhaps, because of its smaller scale and the ease with which most of it can be taken in, displaying an air of genuine big city dignity. It was reassuring to see it.

Actually, I think what finally convinced me when I was in Manchester this time, more than the new architecture or the veneer of freshly painted industrial ironwork, was the sight of the new transport system being installed. Manchester has brought back the trams, or a rapid transit system as I believe it is termed, and it is difficult to put down convincingly on paper how uplifting a sight it was to see the construction work taking place without sounding like an excited schoolboy. That Manchester should be the first place in the country to operate such a system seems appropriate, bearing in mind that it was served by the first passenger-carrying railway in the world, when its manufacturers and merchants formed an alliance with their counterparts in Liverpool, enlisted the services of one George Stephenson, and thwarted the owners of the region's canals, who were charging exorbitant prices to transport goods in and out of the city. The trams were not yet operating when I was there, but to stand at the head of one of Manchester's wide streets and watch the lines being laid, as I did toward the end of my final afternoon, as dusk was approaching, the lights in the shop windows were intensifying, and the offices were emptying, it was impossible to escape the powerful sensation, for a few minutes anyway, that not only was the city on the verge of something new, but that the whole of England was finally moving forward again. It would be so easy to stand in a large English city today and spout the kind of sentimental rubbish that is written to put across some feeling for atmosphere, by talking about key historical happenings and listing meaningless dates. Manchester's plethora of strategic dates and important historical firsts, or that, because of poverty, it has a higher incidence of premature deaths under the age of sixty-five than the national average, even if it does possess the largest university campus in Europe, do not concern me here. What concerns me is the essence of the city I saw before me that afternoon. It was a bustling modern city that looked profoundly healthy and smelt *clean*. It had a breezy cosmopolitan air and without doubt was one of the smartest city centres I saw anywhere in the country, one that has suffered less badly from post-war redevelopment than plenty of other places, if nothing else.

Not long after I was in Manchester the new poles holding up the electric wires to power the tram vehicles were criticized by some traditionalist society or other as spoiling the views down some of the city's main thoroughfares. How predictably querulous, narrow-minded and absurd. To my mind the black tracery of tram wires suspended between the tall buildings, and the poles, do nothing but raise the spirits and capture the essence of a city that is moving ahead with the spirit and flavour of the times – and God knows we need our spirits raising at the present time. The tram lines and the plethora of new cobbles and street furniture smartening the feel of the city between them create a sense of uniformity and are starting to bind streets pleasingly together. At last the ground is speaking again. As the architectural journalist Ian Nairn once observed, 'roads, pavements, walls, and fences are not merely utilities but the cement of a town, as important to the total effect as the buildings themselves'. How very true. If Manchester was anything to go by, there is a real possibility that we might finally be making that realization once more.

Perhaps because I originate from this part of the north of England, because my movements felt to be much the same as they usually are when I am in Manchester, I telescoped together some of the city's more favourable qualities when I was there at the beginning of this journey, and consequently my observations were rather weighed in its favour. That may be so, but I can honestly say that nowhere else in England did I experience anything approaching the sense of optimism that I did, or think that the future might not be so horribly frightening and bleak, as when I was in Manchester. This in a world that is capable of being so fundamentally and horribly corrupt.

Liverpool

Some of that optimism was lingering the morning I caught the train from what was once the longest main line station platform in Europe, until half of it was turned into a car park, and made the short journey from Manchester's faded Victoria Station across the south Lancashire plain into Merseyside.

The sunshine had gone and it was a sullen morning heavily pregnant with rain; the sort of weather for which Manchester is unfortunately though not altogether frivolously renowned. The numerous little video surveillance cameras perched atop metal poles and bolted to the corners of buildings overlooking car parks, the chunks of broken glass embedded into the tops of walls, the station seats bolted to platforms, the signs sliding past the windows such as WARNING! INTRUDER ALARM SYSTEM NOW IN OPERATION, or the deliciously detailed DANGER! RAZOR BARBED WIRE, caught the eye repeatedly, and the optimism accompanying me soon disappeared. The continual threat to personal safety or valuables, the understanding that things are forever on the verge of being stolen, is never far from the surface when you are passing through modern big city England. I thought again about Ian Nairn describing street furniture and highways to be the cement of a town, when Britain's crime statistics were not much more than an itch in its collective trousers and could almost appear comely. I tried to think of a similar metaphor applicable to the never-ending parade of defence mechanisms trailing past the windows of the train, how they were the cement of an emerging civilization, but I quickly gave up. The real English journey, the real England, was, I suppose, finally getting under way.

This put me in the necessary frame of mind to tackle Liverpool, for the breaking of timeworn literary tradition formed the loose brief I tried to set myself for the way I approached the city when I arrived. It would have been easy to follow the example set by plenty of previous observers and carry on descending into pessimism about Liverpool, but I was determined to resist it. I was determined because, though my experience of the city was limited, I knew enough about it to realize there was more to it than the strife-stricken stereotype torpedoed politically by a left-wing hoi polloi as exists in the popular media-enhanced imagination. There can, for instance, be few civic panoramas in England as breathtakingly beautiful as that of the St George's Plateau that confronts you when you emerge from Lime Street Station, and before you stretches the mighty many-columned bulk of St George's Hall, a Grecian temple of such impressive proportions only Edinburgh is capable of offering architecture like this on this sort of grand scale. This is the Liverpool that strangers on arriving are shocked to discover goes some way to dispelling negative generalizations, for it is a Liverpool blessed with an abundance of the most magnificent nineteenth-century architecture; some of which you can see embellishing the new opening titles to *Brookside*.

As my taxi blended with the city centre traffic that morning I decided the positive Liverpool passing outside the windows resembled more the Liverpool I wanted to see. I was determined to avoid concentrating on the city's legendary riots, its impoverished black population, its labour troubles, its chronic unemployment, its contribution to popular entertainment, its 'roads, pavements, walls, and fences are not merely utilities but the cement of a town, as important to the total effect as the buildings themselves'. How very true. If Manchester was anything to go by, there is a real possibility that we might finally be making that realization once more.

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As my taxi blended with the city centre traffic that morning I decided the positive Liverpool passing outside the windows resembled more the Liverpool I wanted to see. I was determined to avoid concentrating on the city's legendary riots, its impoverished black population, its labour troubles, its chronic unemployment, its contribution to popular entertainment, its reputed scruffiness and its notoriety for being a city that has a chip on its shoulder, has not got any money, and has bred an idle and troublesome workforce. I was determined also to avoid talking about its political wranglings with the Thatcher government when it was controlled by Militant, when the talk was always of gangster socialism and jobs for the boys, rate capping, and unmentionable asides about the ludicrous Derek Hatton. This would all have been too easy and too obvious, though it goes without saying that by avoiding unpleasant subjects, such as the drugs rehabilitation centre I passed down one street, from which were issuing several very unfortunate-looking specimens, I am not denying for one moment that they are, or were, a reality. The poor and the disadvantaged populate cities other than Liverpool, and enough television documentaries have described the problems these people face so that we can bring to mind a rough understanding of what they are. I was also only yet at the beginning of my journey, meaning more opportunities to investigate these things lay ahead. These, at any rate, were the thoughts that were in my mind as the taxi passed the recently refurbished Adelphi Hotel and made its way on through the Chinese quarter toward the new hotel where I had arranged to stay, a few minutes' walk from the restored Albert Dock down along the waterfront. Perhaps I wanted to see a different Liverpool too because I feel I ought to have a stronger emotional attachment to the place than I do. I was born in Liverpool, in the general hospital at Sefton Park just over thirty years ago, one of those accidental babies conceived in a rush of juvenile lust before family planning became an industry, when moral values – or was it virtues? Somehow I can never quite remember which – were still stuck at the mother-in-law level of *A Kind of Loving*. I think I can therefore claim that my roots, my temperament, or my blood, are something of a product of the Merseyside area. The young lady who bore me in Liverpool was only sixteen-years-old, and I assume I was a disgrace to the family because a few weeks later I became an adopted child and was brought up in industrial Yorkshire by different parents, hardly setting foot in Liverpool again until fairly recently, when I started seeking out my beginnings. Despite this, and despite being driven past the said hospital and birthplace during this journey, I feel no emotional affiliation to Liverpool whatever. Nor do I recognize myself in the facial characteristics of people living in the area, many of whom are Irish Catholics or like me are very dark.

I have referred already to the way a series of symbolic snapshots continually presented themselves throughout this venture; small scenes synonymous with the atmosphere and changing face of the newly emergent post-industrial England, superimposing themselves selectively over the structure of the journey and embellishing it almost of their own accord. It happened again within minutes of arriving at my hotel in Liverpool. In each place I arrived at, before I was able to get on with anything else, I had to make a number of telephone calls, usually from hotels at exorbitant and outrageous charges. I had already been struck by the penetrating air of melancholy hanging over the refurbished dockland area along this part of the city's waterfront at Wapping, when I had stepped out of the taxi. I had requested a room overlooking the Mersey, and as soon as I dropped my bags on the floor, made a cup of coffee, and opened one of the complimentary packets of biscuits, I sat down in front of the window and began phoning people up. As I stared out across the dock basin at the glimmering expanse of water receding toward the shipyard at Birkenhead at the opposite side of the river, as I talked on the telephone, I was still half consciously registering the emptiness of the scene spread before me; how noticeable was the lack of shipping or much indication of life. A few seconds later a small white sailing dinghy floated into view directly beneath my window and began moving about like some ridiculous parody of a huge forlorn swan. It was a remarkable sight, not because of the spontaneity with which it happened and how it seemed such a marvellous comment on the spirit of the age. Nor was it because of how minuscule the tiny boat appeared set against an empty square of unusually clean water where once great cargo ships of the world would have rubbed cheek to jowl, the produce of nations going this way and that – fruit and tobacco, timber and metal, cotton and wool, and more than a third of British exports, up and down gangplanks, to and from cranes, on and off never-ending columns of lorries queuing beneath clouds of fluttering seagulls.

It was remarkable because it complied perfectly with the ironic concept of de-industrialized England, rediscovering itself amidst trendy quayside apartments fashioned from environments that were once vast havens of trade necessary to the sound progress through life of many of those now put out of work. An England busily adapting to changing economic fortunes, sprouting cottage industries, turning its architectural and industrial heritage into leisure, and pulling in tourists by the million. That is what the bundle of glossy promotional literature I have before me publicizing the new Merseyside intimates, as did the equivalent literature everywhere I went, though as you would imagine it does not quite use the words I have chosen here because I am reading innocently between the lines.

I went back out and had a look at some of that new Merseyside before lunch and spent an hour wandering round the Albert Dock. Whatever your feelings about the deeper causes behind the new age of nostalgia, there is no doubt that the dock, originally completed in the 1850s, has been magnificently restored. As you walk toward it from the south, the massive brick warehouses grouped to the left nicely contrasting against the granite whiteness of the Royal Liver and Cunard Buildings rearing in the background, the scene blurred by a melée of reproduction dockyard bollards and railings, the gleaming expanse of the Mersey beyond, and a handful of gulls circling high overhead (it is important to observe it is now only a handful), makes for an impressive sight. Once inside you find craft shops and cafés, museums and offices. The Tate Gallery has some space there and there is a television news studio housed in the old Dock Traffic Office, with its interesting cast-iron columns and portico. The old pumphouse has been turned into a pub. The refurbished dock was opened, not surprisingly, by the Prince of Wales, and has been so perfectly restored there is an illustrative, almost velvety quality about the buildings when you stand back and look at them in sharp sunlight; something tremendously solid and heavy. There are no ships, of course, only a few antique ones. If the whole of Liverpool were refurbished and cleaned up in this manner, it would be one of the most impressive cities in the country, piled as it is so effectively along the very edge of the water, forever

battered by winds. Some young Liverpudlians, who stopped me on the main road to ask why I was staring so philosophically across the basin, thought the warehouse buildings resembled prisons. I said that was a fair enough comment, until it was remembered that some of the most impressive structures put up by the Victorians happened to be prisons. What surprised me was how many people were there, plenty of them foreign tourists, a number of whom were staying at my hotel and became conscious of themselves in the dining room later that evening. Certainly the Albert Dock is attracting the tourists to Liverpool, though it is difficult to imagine them spending much time in other parts of the city, the coaches lined up in the car parks suggesting there was more than a grain of truth to this. There seemed to be as many French and German accents and inquisitive Japanese faces brandishing cameras, staring down at the square of water glistening in the sunshine around which the old dock warehouses are grouped, as you encounter when you are in the cathedral cities in the south-west of England. Now they are coming to take pictures of England's defunct industrial relics from its age of great commercial prosperity at its premier port in the north; one that never quite got over the day the liners were diverted to Southampton and the Adelphi lost the clientele for which it was supposedly built. The thinking behind the refurbishment of the Albert Dock originally rolled into motion after Michael Heseltine had tea at the Adelphi with a number of industrialists ten or twelve years ago, when the Toxteth riots swivelled the spotlight onto Liverpool. The idea was to create a focal point from which prosperity and employment would follow, or more accurately to which it would be attracted. Conservatism might be something of a dirty word in Liverpool, the voting habits of some of the city's famous working class entertainers and sportsmen a vile joke, particularly in the pubs down the old Dock Road. But at least Heseltine did something positive for Liverpool. Whether or not he was possessed of ulterior political motives, or whether things have turned out quite how he or everyone expected, is another matter, though before this is interpreted as criticism, I should repeat what I said in the previous chapter: economic transformations cannot be achieved overnight.

The Albert Dock is not indicative of Liverpool's seafaring position today by any means. The casual visitor who walks about the city's regenerated waterfront just here at Pier Head where everything tumbles gently down the hill, who peruses the Albert Dock – the largest and most robust group of grade one listed buildings in the country – who mingles with the hum of tourists, who glances across at the muddle of masts constituting the new marina and the inevitable maritime museum, and who squints toward the concrete basins scraped clean of buildings further down river, could be forgiven for assuming this is, or was, the sum total of the docks. For a time I half believed this to be the case myself. In fact, Liverpool's docks were once vast, stretching for more than seven miles along the city's waterfront. The Albert Dock merely happened to be conveniently sited when heritage suddenly became a fashionable word. To stand before the Albert Dock today and watch the tourists milling aimlessly, even if you are aware there is considerable dockland activity still carrying on out in the direction of Bootle and Sefton, it is truly astonishing to consider that as recently as the early 1950s these docks employed just over twenty-thousand people. As recently as the 1960s, across that huge expanse of water before me, now being touched by a sun breaking between the clouds, the golden emptiness of the Atlantic winking beyond for the benefit of all we romantic sightseers leaning against the railings contemplating the long lost Liverpool of the past, it was common to see ships queuing at the mouth of the Mersey ready to berth, sometimes remaining at anchor for more than a week awaiting their turn. But that was before the effects of the loss of Empire, the shifting pattern of world trade, the industrializing countries of the East rising to manufacturing prominence, and the serious decline that finally set in to the British economy toward the end of the 1960s. It was before the massive reduction in Britain's merchant sailing fleet, too, which fell from over three-thousand registered vessels after the war to the several hundred or so we have today. It was also before there emerged different methods of transportation and loading, both nationally and internationally. Cargo that would once have been carried around by men and stored in those vast musky Liverpool warehouses, so quaint now as they are transformed into luxury apartment blocks and art galleries, began to be craned around in containers or on aeroplanes instead. Where ten or twenty pairs of hands were once needed, now were needed only two. And, finally, it was before the effects of labour troubles and the slothful outlook fostered in the mind of a workforce by the National Dock Labour Scheme, guaranteeing dockers a job for life on full pay regardless of trading conditions, filtered through, as they inevitably would. In conjunction with unions' restrictive practices, childish work-to-rules, and Liverpool dockers' stubborn unwillingness to move with the times and handle the new containers (a stubbornness you soon gather was connected to the rampant theft of goods the pre-container age permitted), it was hardly surprising that incoming cargo showed a reluctance to queue up any more at the mouth of the Mersey, but preferred to divert itself to expanding ports on the south and east coasts instead. The consequence of this process, in conjunction with Britain's industries inland upon which Liverpool depended for much of its trade being in decline, was contraction and the drifting of what little trade remained irredeemably away. The world was changing, and Liverpool looked like it was going to lose.

Most of this is obvious when considering the story of Liverpool and its chronic decline, all of it picked up easily enough when you spend some time in the city and talk to its people. So why bother to repeat it? Because, in the same way it is not very widely reported that Liverpool's sectarian political problems of the 1980s are largely a thing of the past, the left-wing rabble that nearly bankrupted it having been marginalized, the council finely balanced and progressing via consensus, it is not so very widely known that in tonnage terms the Liverpool seaport now handles almost as much cargo as it did during the halcyon days of the Empire. Perhaps it has not been so widely reported because the only news the country seems to want to hear about Liverpool these days is bad news. Well, here is some good news. Nearly ten years ago the government let its major share in the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company go, denationalized it so to speak, wrote off its debts, and granted Liverpool freeport status. A few years later it abolished the National Dock Labour

Scheme, meaning investment that had stayed away because of the labour problems associated with it could now flow freely and less warily. Management could at last do its job properly and the private sector could expand. Liverpool began to look interesting again. The result of privatization, rationalization, the reduction in overmanning, and the shaking loose of socialist-inspired shackles has been that the port's annual tonnage handled has quadrupled in ten years from just over nine million tonnes to over twenty-five million tonnes, and it is still rising. In less than a decade, Liverpool docks have been brought back from oblivion to become the country's most successful freeport; one comparable to the very best in Europe. When I was there new container terminals were under construction, and a major railhead was being expanded and upgraded, turning the Royal Seaforth Dock into a Eurofreight Terminal in readiness for the opening of the Channel Tunnel. The idea is that the new terminal will become a gateway for Irish and North American sea traffic, enabling it to be loaded straight onto trains then sent down through England and through the tunnel and on into Europe. There is, however, a crucial difference, or it might be described as a catch, between Liverpool the English seaport of old and the revitalized, expanding freeport of new. Where twenty-thousand men were once needed, and even six-thousand only a decade ago, now are employed a mere *five-hundred.* That to handle what in tonnage terms is claimed to be a comparable amount of traffic as when the workforce was forty times larger (no doubt most of it now imports), means there are probably more shop assistants working in Liverpool today than there are dockers. Clearly, there have been significant improvements in performance and productivity if a fraction of men can handle the same amount of traffic as was once handled by so many, but there is also about such rationalization something rather disturbing.

What *has* been happening economically over the past ten or fifteen years that has resulted in massive redundancies such as those on the docks at Liverpool, or the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs in other industries elsewhere? What, if one comes to think about it, has been happening over the past thirty years? Now that the fatuous euphoria of the Thatcher years has died away it is possible to step back and see that, if present trading conditions are anything to go by, the supposed economic transformation the 1980s was meant to portend, the new Liverpool – the new England – that was supposed to be in the process of rising phoenix-like from the ashes of the old, might be rather longer in coming than was first expected. True, the old industries have been slimmed down and overmanning problems obliterated more or less at a stroke. They had to be slimmed down to prevent themselves from ultimately imploding. Former unprofitable nationalized industries are now profitable, albeit with hugely reduced workforces, their productivity improved, never mind that they ought still to be in the public sector because their monopoly position enables them to countermand the government's supposed strategy against inflation. But, though it has played an important part, it is doubtful if it has been a question only of the reduction in overmanning. In spite of the noise generated over the past few years about political and economic transformations, after all the hype about the changing of attitudes and the working of economic miracles, it could be said that what has actually taken place in this country is a vast economic contraction for the benefit of the fifteen million or so part of the working population that was never industrially inclined anyway. Manufacturing industry might have been streamlined, but it has also been contained at the expense of the expanding service and high finance sector. Because of the structural weaknesses this ha created within the economy, the stability of the service secto is now in jeopardy. Wherever I went during this journey I wa told that high technology would have to replace more and mor jobs in the service sector – in banking, office work, and variou other administrative occupations – as it has done in variou fields of manufacturing and would continue to do so.

That sounds fine, until one examines some of the processes at work deep within our civilization. It is obviou that what is actually happening, roughly speaking over te or twenty year cycles, but in cycles that are going to becom shorter and faster as high-technology influence intensifies, i that international capital is restructuring itself by jettisonin the need for human labour and replacing more and mor jobs with machines. What is more, it is being forced to do so all the time to remain competitive. There are now sixteen million people unemployed in European Community countries alone. It does not take a very intelligent mind to calculate what the nett result of this contracting process, taken to its logical conclusion, might be. Every time another contraction occurs – and we are experiencing one at the moment: because of it British industry expects productivity and output to rise, but to be employing fewer people to support it when there is an upturn – the economy does not so much shrink as throb a generation tighter. The conventional wisdom is that the main body of the economy will become healthier each time it slims itself down and eliminates waste in this way, but I seriously doubt whether it will. There is insufficient investment in the industrial infrastructure to fill the gap being left behind. Fat dieted away by an organism becomes released from the main body as water and can easily be flushed away: fat released from an economy generally produces piles of unemployed people. A temporary respite might be accommodated by an artificial boom, such as we experienced five or six years ago, but the deeper malaise continues. Few of our reputable economists appear to possess the imagination to contemplate the dreadful consequences of this tightening process, or more importantly, its social consequences on the potential stability of our society and our civilization. They are adept when it comes to spouting facts and figures, predictions about the alterations to GDP, the effect of economic shifts on the workings of stocks and bonds. But when it comes to the human cost and the workings of fiscal vicissitudes on the human mind they generally seem to be left wanting.

And it is always worth remembering that it is the economics and financial vicissitudes which are a direct product of the workings of the human mind.

The Shape of Things to Come

I was taken for a drive round Liverpool the following morning, rather ironically by a successful young financial advisor I know working in the city, and found myself contemplating something of that human cost; what this relentless economic contraction is capable of doing to the human mind.

I was driven out along the southern part of the waterfront corridor to begin with, out in the direction of the airport, past miles and miles of derelict dockland, abandoned railway land, refurbished warehousing, car showrooms, and the ambiguously landscaped, lumpy grassy site of the Garden Festival. But it was when we made our way back through the inner suburbs that my honourable intentions for the positive picture I wanted to paint of Liverpool took something of a nose-dive. For I was taken, perhaps inevitably, up into Toxteth. Toxteth, battleground of the riots ten years ago, and still showing scars of that tragedy today. But Toxteth, or at any rate the section of Toxteth I saw that bright morning, does not look anywhere near as dangerous or as derelict as the photographs reproduced in the newspapers might have led you to believe. But then, these places rarely do, because some of the domestic architecture to be found in them was built when it was considered fashionable for the prosperous classes to live within the city, and it acts as a disinfectant. Some of the wide tree-lined avenues we passed along in Toxteth, with the big maroon-and-cream Merseybuses tearing along them, dragging up cascades of brilliant yellow sycamore leaves in the downdraught from the central reservations, where they were piled like ploughed snow, looked positively residential. Almost immediately we were passing along another impressive residential avenue with wide pavements facing onto the huge expanse of undulating greenery called Sefton Park; then I was looking for the first time at the hospital where I was born, not feeling any emotion whatever, but only wondering how much smaller the trees might have been thirty years ago. In Sefton Park there is a boating lake, tennis courts, and gardens, and that morning there opened up before us a scintillating explosion of the colours of autumn, thrown across a vivid canvas of the most intense luminous green. Thick black tree trunks stood out against the misty sunshine, crowned by great overhanging bonnets of dewy gold that were peeling away in tiny glittering fragments all the time. I have never seen leaves so thickly piled