

## Introduction

The following enquiry is concerned with the social and cultural upheaval which took place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a rural environment under the influence of the putting-out, or cottage, industry. Given the folklorist nature of our enquiry, we need to recognise how the fundamental conditions of human life and society are changed when men depend wholly or partly on industry for their livelihood, and how these changes in the lives of the common people are revealed in popular culture. The countryside of Zurich has been chosen for our enquiry, especially the Zurich Oberland, a region which underwent very early and intensive industrialisation. Three hundred years later, this region is nowadays still faithful to the various branches of the textile industry.

### A folklorist approach

Folklore is a branch of the arts, a definition which obliges us to understand the changeability of all the conditions of human existence in terms of people's changing mental attitudes. Without promoting a one-sided theory of the spiritual and causative interpretation of history and culture, it should simply be emphasised that the arts have the task of perceiving economic and technical changes – to wit industrialisation – against the background of a development in mental history which preceded and accompanied the changes.<sup>1</sup> It is from this vantage point that we will look for the driving forces of history and try to extrapolate them from their secondary effects. Deducing economic changes from particular constellations in mental history is essentially a matter for economic historians. The folklore analysis begins where economic history (and history generally) stops. The aim and object of folklore is to investigate the transposition of mental impulses within the sphere of popular thoughts and values and to pursue personal culture through its transformation into popular culture bound up with tradition and community. This purpose provides the basic questions of our enquiry: how is industrialisation received on the popular level and how is the life of the common people shaped by the process of industrialisation? Since their life can be perceived in the relationship

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between people and objects, we can research into the links between the mentality of the industrial workers and the new material world and popular culture pertaining to this mentality.

The folklorist viewpoint is thus briefly outlined and distinguished from other disciplines in the arts. However, our choice of theme requires further justification. Folklorist research into those people whose work and basis for existence binds them to the process of industrialisation is still in its infancy. This is due on the one hand to the present state of historical knowledge and technical theory, which does not concern us. On the other hand, there are problems inherent to the object of our research: industrialisation seems by its very nature to be hostile to community and tradition. We stress 'seems' because we cannot share this attitude. Industrialisation and industrial labour has until now been perceived and judged almost exclusively from the point of view of 'uprooting, disruption and stereotyping'<sup>2</sup> and any discussion generally starts from hidebound assumptions and views: industrialisation and industrial work destroy old crafts, working patterns and associations; they displace ancient folklore, long-lived customs and practices and traditional forms of community; there is a dynamism inherent to the industrial system of production which disregards human and material ties, and so on. Industrialisation is only too eagerly made into a whipping boy and held responsible for our uncultured age, for our rootless lives and for our loss of centre. This is not the place to counter such views, judgements and preconceptions, or to discuss the cultural value (especially the popular cultural value) of industrialisation and industrial labour. Let us assume only that our investigation will show how the life of the common people and their culture are altered under the influence of industrialisation, not in the sense of disruption and destruction, but in the sense of being given a new shape, one adjusted to the altered conditions of existence. What is more, the investigation will demonstrate that it is only industrialisation which guarantees large sections of the population a homeland. Indeed, industrialisation provides people with a homeland, allowing them to stay put on their own soil among their own folk.

We are dealing here not with a factual but a methodological problem: if industrialisation appears by its very nature to be hostile to community and tradition, how then can we justify researching this subject from a folklorist point of view, which considers everything relating to tradition and community to be of central significance? Can substantive folklorist research be possible in this context?

Two fundamentally important preconditions allow us to place the folklorist approach alongside other disciplines in the arts: both the need for community and belief in tradition are deeply entwined in the human psyche.<sup>3</sup> Even the process of industrialisation is subordinate to the effect of these two fundamental forces, once it is rooted in the life of the common people and is accepted and supported by them. In any case, and this is of decisive significance, belief in

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tradition should not be confused with folklore, nor the need for community with traditional forms of community. Both folklore and traditional forms of community have to change along with the process of industrialisation, but belief in tradition and the need for community ensure that new forms of folklore and community emerge from the new industrial base. The changes in the life of the common people are revealed in a new popular culture adapted to the changed conditions. There can therefore be no danger that the folklorist approach is invalid. Let us start by referring these preliminary and general remarks to the problem in hand, in order to define our theme and to justify our monographical approach.

### **Defining the topic**

Our field of research is the countryside of Zurich. The industrialisation of this area was an historical process and as such unique and unrepeatable. The nature and shape of the Zurich textile industry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with its putting-out (*Verlag*) system of production, were determined by the political and economic framework in which they developed. During this lengthy process the Zurich putting-out industry emerged with features peculiar to its locality and period. Man as the creator and upholder of cultural life shaped from his struggle with the prevailing environment the mental, social, economic and technical foundations of this early system of industrial production and manufacture, which attained its first peak in the eighteenth century.

The putting-out system was harnessed to the legal organisation and structure of the Zurich city-state with its territory. A feature of the putting-out system of production was that it extended beyond the city walls into the surrounding countryside and that its workforce included not only town burghers but also peasant subjects. The putting-out system thus involved representatives of both classes, distinguished politically and socially by their origins, i.e. their birth. The effect of this division was to give the members of each class different opportunities to participate in economic life. They were allotted, according to their origins, differentiated functions in the putting-out system.

The first social class was made up of privileged town burghers. As the originators of the State's political and economic system, they were keen to ensure that the new system of production and manufacture was under their control and management. They monopolised the putting-out system. Only town burghers were entitled to buy in raw materials and to distribute finished goods. Their monopolistic control was tightest in the eighteenth century, protected by a network of regulations. The peasant subjects formed the second social class involved in the putting-out process. They did not possess the trading and manufacturing prerogatives of the town burghers. They were

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allowed only specific functions in production and manufacture; processing the raw material with all the various associated functions. However, the range of these specific functions was so extensive that a hierarchical order was able to emerge among the peasant subjects involved in the putting-out system. Another feature of this system was that intermediate stages could be inserted into the production process with entrepreneurial opportunities of their own. Turning raw materials into yarn and cloth involved a complex process, and the distribution of the raw material and the allotment and coordination of the various tasks all allowed the peasant subjects latitude and opportunity to act as entrepreneurs (with all the associated risks) even when they could not infiltrate the upper echelons of the putting-out hierarchy – i.e. they remained excluded from the management. Within specific limits, then, the putting-out system provided the peasant subjects it employed with opportunities for social advancement and social differentiation. We will get to know these peasant entrepreneurs, the *Tüchler* (clothiers), who often described themselves proudly as *Fabrikanten* (manufacturers).<sup>4</sup> They formed an intellectual and social elite in the countryside and acted as a catalyst, which wrought the great upheaval at the end of the eighteenth century.

The two classes represented in the putting-out system are thus briefly introduced. As far as our folklorist enquiry is concerned, the second social class, the peasant subjects, forms its chief object, whereas a study in economic history would have aimed at putting the first class of town burghers in the forefront, they being the leaders and managers of the putting-out system. As the putting-out system developed, it drew great sections of the population of the Zurich territory within its catchment area. These peasant subjects' own social and economic structure gave the putting-out system both directly and indirectly its local and period character: the local environment and culture restrict or promote the process of industrialisation, and so participate in the process not only as passive receptors but by actively shaping it. We will pursue this aspect in Chapter 1. Our field of research is particularly suited to this; the Zurich territory comprises on the one hand regions which were predestined by their social, legal and economic structure to adopt the putting-out system. Consequently, these regions underwent intensive industrialisation. On the other hand, the territory also extends over regions where putting-out was not established at all until the nineteenth century because their social, legal and economic structures excluded or impeded such development. This provides us with a means of comparing and assessing the determining factors.

Putting-out was, as stated above, harnessed to the Zurich city-state system, which endowed the Zurich putting-out industry with its local character; its social structure as much as its forms of production, manufacture and trade. In the field of force between two magnetic poles the following configuration emerged; pulling from above were the privileged town burghers who represented the ruling class and shaped the putting-out system according to a tangle of

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laws and business regulations for town and countryside. Pulling from below were the peasant subjects who gave the putting-out system its character, according to the differing local byelaws and social and economic structures in different parts of the territory.

This brings us to the important matter of reciprocity; as the putting-out system developed, it changed the social and economic structure, altered the organisation and working of the State and prepared the ground for the great upheaval at the turn of the nineteenth century. This applies as much to the town and its burghers as to the countryside and its peasant subjects.

As we stressed at the beginning, the main object of this investigation is to pursue the changes to people's life styles under the influence of the putting-out system. People, with their traditional mental attitudes and life styles, bound themselves to an existence based on the putting-out industry, thereby necessarily producing more stable living conditions, which were ineluctably entwined with the process of industrialisation. People's behaviour towards their previous (chiefly rural) lives and community, to their intellectual and material world, changed. New life styles and forms of community developed, protected and supported by new compulsory norms of behaviour, which can be observed in human relationships. New forms of settlement, building and homes arose. Agriculture acquired a new face along with altered ground rights and land use. In short, the life and culture of the common people were altered under the influence of the putting-out system. The more deeply entrenched industrialisation became, the greater and more lasting was its impact, shaping both man and landscape. An established and settled workforce emerged, along with an environment and culture which can be described in the cultural morphological sense as an industrial landscape. While these brief observations represent at this stage no more than a working hypothesis, they do help to define the aims of our enquiry more clearly. Once again our field of research is shown to be particularly suitable, since the countryside of Zurich contains, alongside its highly industrialised regions, others which were not (or only slightly) industrialised until the nineteenth century. This provides a means of comparing the changes to life styles under the influence of the putting-out system: industrial landscapes, neighbouring and overlapping zones, as well as purely agricultural regions are all found within the same political and legal framework, providing material for examples and comparisons. The new creative powers aroused in the lives of the common people by the putting-out industry may thus be distinguished clearly.

The changes to the life styles, and the altered lives and values of the common people should, however, not be understood solely as a result of the putting-out industry. We stress this most emphatically and will often refer back to this during the course of our enquiry. Our task is rather to understand these changes as the product of a conflict between the process of industrialisation and the existing political, social and economic order. It is this which

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imbues the changes with their chronological, mental and local historical relevance; hence our monographical approach. It is only when comparable conditions are available, as is the case in the state of Zurich, that these changes can be analysed in the sense outlined above.

This brings us to a further delimitation: we are restricting our research to the countryside of Zurich and direct our gaze chiefly on the Oberland. We neither can nor wish to compare it with other Swiss or foreign industrial landscapes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This would fall outside the perimeter of this study. In the same way, we refer only seldom to parallel developments in the industrial landscapes of Switzerland or the rest of Europe. Although this may be considered a weakness, we must be bold and stand by our decision.

In the same way, our study is limited chronologically: we restrict ourselves to the Ancien Régime, although much of our source material extends beyond this period. The great changeover at the close of the eighteenth century is only briefly outlined towards the end of the book. As already mentioned in the Preface, we intend to investigate in a future study the transition from the putting-out industry to the factory industry, with its machine manufacture and the consequent effect on the life styles of the Oberland population up to the present day. The material for this sequel is in greater part already gathered. In order to understand the changes under the influence of the factory industry in the Zurich Oberland, we need to know more about the conditions of existence and how they gave rise to the early industrial putting-out system. The following investigation will provide more than sufficient documentation.

*We must emphasise, in order to avoid misunderstandings, that this investigation cannot and does not intend to provide a history of the Zurich putting-out industry.* In the same way the nature and shape of the putting-out system, in terms of its economic history and significance, is not presented.<sup>5</sup> Further, we have avoided describing the outworkers' spinning and weaving methods and the accompanying processes, in so far as this is not necessary to understanding this book. For all such information, we refer the reader to the comprehensive literature on the subject.<sup>6</sup>

The reader interested in economic matters will note the absence of a thorough presentation of the cost of living under the Ancien Régime. We have deliberately avoided providing a wage-price index because this requires specialised research. Wages and prices fluctuated so wildly in this period that only the most rigorous analysis could succeed and, so far as our folklorist approach is concerned, these questions are of secondary importance.

We have attempted briefly to outline the questions and aims of our investigation and to define our theme. We are aware that, in spite of the restricted range of our study, we cannot hope fully to grasp and present the transformation to the lives and culture of the common people. These are only snippets from the whole breadth of traditional life styles and cultural expres-

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sions. Nonetheless, we must attempt to project these painstakingly assembled pieces back into a living unity, to see them in their manifold relations to other spheres of life and culture and to consider them from different points of view. In attempting this projection, we cannot avoid blending past and future. Nor, indeed, have we avoided repeating ourselves in order to ensure that the connections and implications are grasped, or to emphasise mutual dependence. We scarcely need to emphasise that we are trying to understand how things were by studying the spirit and life of the age, and we have chosen to present this analysis in the form which allows the sources to speak for themselves as often as possible. Analysis and critique of these sources is to be found generally in the text or the notes at the end. At this point, we should mention that the greater part of the source material could not be used.

We hope that our study reaches conclusions of general significance to the theme 'Industrialisation and Everyday Life'. Although we have chosen a monographical approach, we emphasise yet again the chronological, local and mental historical relevance of the changes to the life of the common people and their culture under the influence of the putting-out system.

## 1 ♣ The preconditions for industrialisation

Those parts of the Zurich territory to be caught up soonest in the putting-out industry lay near to the city, in the regions around the Lake (the Zurichsee) and in the province of Knonau. In the seventeenth century the Zurich textile manufacture also drew the Oberland within the catchment area for cottage industry. Raw materials from foreign lands were brought to the forest valleys to be processed and with them came a system of production based on new social and economic foundations. The industrialisation of the Oberland had begun.

Before this process began, however, yarn was already being produced locally, as part of the peasants' agricultural output. Growing flax and especially hemp was an important item in the annual budget both for wealthy peasants and for poor day-labourers, and was as such highly regarded. Even the poorest families tried to get hold of a *Hanfländli* (little field of hemp) alongside their *Krautgärtli* (vegetable patch). Often enough such a *Hanffäckerli* (little acre of hemp) would be all the land they owned.<sup>1</sup> In numerous parishes the hemp pounds were part of the commonage enjoyed by those parishioners entitled to use it.<sup>2</sup>

In rainy or winter weather, no farmhouse was without its busily spinning wives and daughters, with their husbands and children, or an attentive lover, preparing the fibres for them. They also tried to produce more yarn than they needed, using the profit to offset their heavy debts. Yarn carders went from farmhouse to cottage, buying up their wares. In places with a weekly market (Wald 1621) the market regulations insisted on all spun fibres and yarn being sold there. Many poor families were dependent on spinning hemp and flax not grown and harvested by them, but taken on from neighbours and carders. The weekly market regulations of Wald acknowledged that many poor villagers had to earn their living by producing flax yarn; *flächsinen Garn der Orten vil arm volck ernehren muss*.<sup>3</sup>

Linen weaving, a characteristic peasant handicraft, emerged alongside this locally restricted trade in yarn. Both the trade and the handicraft, however, scarcely exceeded the demands of the peasant economy and the limited marketing opportunities open to them. Yarn was just one of a variety of



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agricultural market products. Preparing and spinning hemp and flax was just an additional harvest task and formed a usual and familiar part of the agricultural working year. Even when people had to earn their living by spinning flax, this source of income retained the character of a labouring task, not intrinsically different from other farmwork. The demand for such work was still determined by the local cultivation and field systems and depended to a great extent on the varying quality of the regional harvests.<sup>4</sup> The Oberland textile industry did not grow out of the peasant economy, although, seen from a purely technical point of view, this did prepare the ground for it. Instead, it was the product of bourgeois and urban conditions (albeit not the guilds), and not of agricultural and rural conditions.

We do not intend to pursue the post-Reformation history of the Zurich textile production and the development of the Zurich putting-out industry.<sup>5</sup> The emergence of a form of city-state mercantilism in Zurich caused many factors to intermingle, thereby influencing one another and becoming increasingly effective. Church and State, with their religious, political and economic powers, were involved both at the local Zurich level and on a European scale. One need only recall the Protestant refugees who brought a foreign economic philosophy to the city along with their new skills.<sup>6</sup> Forms of production and trade developed, whose social and economic structure was fundamentally different from the traditional guild trades. A system of production developed called *Verlag* or putting-out system, whose structure and organisation extended out beyond the town walls into the countryside.<sup>7</sup> The new forms of production and management were at permanent variance with the old order of guilds and trades,<sup>8</sup> which were to frame the political and economic life of the city-state for a long time to come. The new economic structure made only painful progress, bringing the old order into question and contributing considerably to the collapse of the Ancien Régime.

An early industrial entrepreneurial type emerged to represent the new orientation and organisation, who combined competence in business with his firm, almost puritanical, religious faith to achieve a more elevated aim in life. His business mentality and dealings were based on religious foundations and imbued with the moral and ethical values of the age. No accounts book is without its pious inscription, such as: L.D.S. (*Laus Deo Soli*) or L.D.M. (*Laus Deo Maximo*) or G.g.G. (*Gott geb Glück*).<sup>9</sup> The hand of God directed the course of manufacture and rich business profits were recognised and valued as the blessings of God. This religious base was still strong in the eighteenth century, although much of it had become mere form, and the *Zeitgeist*, together with the rich profits from business, was moving in the direction of secularisation, whereas the puritanical attitude to the world renounced luxury, ostentation and a worldly seigneurial life style. The degree to which the character of eighteenth-century Zurich was formed by her textile manufacturing families is well known.

## 10 Industrialisation and everyday life

An economic history of the nature and shape of the early Zurich textile industry would need to start by studying the putting-out system and the urban putting-out masters who controlled it. Such an account would trace local variants of forms of production and manufacture in the early industrial putting-out system. It would have to explain the technical processes and organisation, and set out the social arrangements and so on. But we are faced with a different problem: our focus is on the countryside of Zurich, particularly on the Oberland. It is here that we must pursue and understand industrialisation.

When an urban and bourgeois industry spreads out from the city into the surrounding countryside, it penetrates an unfamiliar environment and economy which receives industrialisation on its own terms. For those involved in the industrialisation process, it meant that the country inhabitants experienced industrialisation not merely as passive recipients, but also by actively shaping it. Although they were politically and economically dependent on the town, in whose order the putting-out system was anchored, they introduced preconditions which favoured or impeded, and sometimes prevented, reception of industrialisation. These preconditions can only be explained in relation to rural conditions in their regional variations. If we look for the primary conditions enabling the Oberland and other regions of the Zurich territory to become early industrial landscapes, we must attempt to trace the history of the deep-seated transformation of the economy and life style of the Oberland. Natural preconditions are muddled up with legal, social and historical preconditions, forcing us to look at nature and mankind in relation to one another and to understand the Oberland in the seventeenth century as a cultural landscape.

Given our interest in folklore, let us begin by studying man. In the 'Beschreibung der Armen uff der ganzen Landschaft Zürich' ('Description of the Poor in the Whole Countryside of Zurich') (1649, 1660, 1680, 1700) we meet that section of the Oberland population whose lives were linked earliest and most exclusively to the Zurich putting-out industry. The Poor Registers owe their creation and compilation to purely superficial motives. We know of the existence of the first people to fall into industrial dependence only through their common poverty, which forced them to place petitions for alms. An endless portrait gallery of poor people passes before us, 'humbly and piteously requesting' their weekly rations, shoes and clogs, Nordling cloth and warm winter clothes from the Alms Office. Spinning had become these poor people's most important, if not their only, source of income, a fact deduced from a few recurring phrases. People petitioning for alms were described in the records in the following terms: 'helps self by spinning cotton'; 'feeds self with spinning silk'; 'has to support self with spun work'; 'does her best by spinning cotton'; 'can support self miserably by spinning'; 'busies self with spun work'; 'supports self with spinning'; 'owns nothing apart from her spindle' etc.<sup>10</sup>