

# A Distinctively Northern Puritanism <sup>61</sup>

by R. D. Lancaster

'Don't drink and don't smoke?  
What fun do you have?' Len asked.  
'Arguing', I said,  
with a smile I'd learnt to use  
In two war years at Cambridge.

We were sipping tea—  
Or it could have been coffee,  
Flavour sub-petrol,  
Somebody'd muddled the tins  
The water was heated in—

And considering  
What the Beveridge Report  
Had in store for us.  
Sergeant-major Buxton said  
It was to fool the workers

Into accepting  
The capitalist system.  
I thought so too but  
He insisted officers  
All belonged to the same lodge.

Christ! Len Gomersall  
Turned fiercely on me and said  
When I was forty  
I'd be a true blue Tory.  
Len went out to chat with those

Who he reckoned knew  
Which side their bread was buttered.  
The men on the guns,  
If there'd be any more bread,  
Bread that a man could call bread,

Let alone butter,  
Once your socialists got in.  
I liked Len better  
When he talked about the roads  
In Lancashire he worked on

As a surveyor.  
Even then he'd soon branch off  
Into politics.  
'You come up and air those views  
To men with picks and shovels

On our country roads  
And you mightn't live to be  
A true blue Tory'.  
I smiled at that. He didn't.  
I've kept away from the North

Since I turned thirty,  
Except once in Manchester  
And then confirmed it.  
On a crowded bus I asked  
For a hall of residence

Where we were to talk  
About the States for a week.  
Bus conductor looked  
Hard at me and shook his head.  
No, he'd never heard of that.

Several passengers  
In the seats near suggested  
What I'd really meant—  
College of Technology,  
Grammar School, Fallowfield—

And at last agreed  
On the stop I should book to.  
They seemed very kind,  
Warning me well in advance  
How much further on to go—

I couldn't see out:  
Windows were misted over,  
Thick rain wall beyond—  
And telling me when we'd reached  
The stop they'd decided on.

It was the right one,  
By the hall of residence  
I wanted. I turned  
To wave to the faces pressed  
Against rubbed patches of glass

On the bus. They scowled.  
Hadn't I my trousers on?  
They glared out disgust.  
Was my after-shave too strong?  
They turned my gaze to a board

Inside the gates: a  
Women's hall of residence!  
Pervert and Tory!  
Only last year, shades of Len,  
I gave up the New Statesman.