EARLY VICTORIAN POETRY
OF
SOCIAL FERMENT

A. BOSE

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visited a foreign country and has never liked foreign food. What about the port wine that you drink ?", queries a chimney-sweep from the audience. The resourceful Mogg answers, "Ah, I sometimes drink wine, it's true, but that is only to help our great Commercial Interest." And so he proceeds with his views on Corn Laws, the Constitution, British Freedom, and the Church:

> I love the Constitution, yet maintain
> 'Tis far too mild tow'rds all who dare complain.
> Our boast is British Freedom; no one here
> Needs learn, work, dress, or eat from slavish fear.
> The rich their daily joint in freedom carve;
> The poorest men in equal freedom starve;
> And he who naked in a ditch expires,
> Yet dies with freedom like his freeborn sires.
>
> ... ...
>
> A loyal Church that keeps the rich and poor
> Duly apart, nor blends the lord and boor.
>
> ... ...
>
> My thoughtful friends, I stick to Church and State;
> The State, that guards our rights, and lives, and cash,
> And scorns all change as impudent and rash;
> The Church, that one day out of every seven
> Throws wide the turnpike between us and Heaven.
>
> (*The Election*, Book IV)

This crude banter contrasts with Ebenezer Elliott's vigorous onslaught on anti-reform Tories who are supposed to announce their creed thus:

> No printing ! the printers are devils,
> Whose lore teaches slaves to be free:
> Long life to all orthodox evils,
> Our watchword and motto shall be.
> The dust of Old Sarum is holy,
> In our hearts live her ramparts and towers;
> No progress ! improvement is folly:
> The foes of Green Gatton are ours.
>
> (*Corn Law Rhymes*, "Creed o' the Canny")

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Elliott acclaims the passing of the Reform Bill in several poems of *Corn Law Rhymes,* 'Reform', 'Battle Song', 'The Revolution of 1832', 'The Triumph of Reform', and 'The Press'. An unrelenting advocate of the repeal of the Corn Laws, Elliott gloats over the consequences which, he fancies, will overtake the aristocratic upholders of the laws as soon as the repeal comes to pass. 'The Black Hole of Calcutta' is an unrelieved chant of hatred, splendidly fierce:

What shall bread-tax yet for thee,
Palac'd pauper ? We shall see.
It shall tame thee and thy heirs,
Beggar them and beggar theirs,
Melt thy plate for which we paid,
Buy ye breeches ready made,
Sell my lady's tax-bought gown,
And the lands thou call'st thy own.
Then of courses five or more,
Grapery, horse-race, coach and four,
Pamper'd fox-hounds, starving-men,
Whores and bastards, nine or ten,
Twenty flunkies fat and gay,
Whips and jail for holiday,
Paid informer, poacher pale,
Sneaker's license, poison'd ale,
Seat in senate, seat on bench,
Pension'd lad, or wife, or wench,
Fiddling parson, Sunday card,
Pimp, and dedicating bard,—
On the broad and bare highway,
Toiling there for a groat a day,
We will talk to thee and thine,
Till thy wretches envy mine,
Till thy paunch of baseness howl,
Till thou seem to have a soul.

(Corn Law Rhymes)

In the same tone of angry bitterness, Elliott threatens the aristocrats that their destruction is on the way:

Ye coop us up, and tax our bread,
And wonder why we pine;
But ye are fat, and round, and red,
And fill'd with tax-bought wine.
Thus, twelve rats starve while three rats thrive,
(Like you on mine and me.)
When fifteen rats are caged alive,
With food for nine and three.

Haste ! havoc's torch begins to glow,
The ending is begun;
Make haste; destruction thinks ye slow;
Make haste to be undone !
Why ye are call'd 'My lord', and 'squire',
While fed by mine and me,
And wringing food, and clothes and fire
From bread-tax'd misery ?
(Corn Law Rhymes, "Caged Rats"*)*

These outbursts of hate alternate with pathetic narrations of the miseries of the poor—as in the first of the extracts given below—and amidst much foam and froth, one occasionally meets with memorable lyrics:

Child, is thy father dead ?
Father is gone !
Why did they tax his bread ?
God's will be done !
Mother has sold her bed;
Better to die than wed !
Where shall she lay her head ?
Home we have none !
(Corn Law Rhymes, "Song")

Day, like our souls, is fiercely dark;
What then ? 'Tis day !
We sleep no more; the cock crows—hark !
To arms ! away !
They come ! they come ! The knell is rung
Of us *or* them.
Wide o'er their march the pomp is flung
Of gold and gem.
(Corn Law Rhymes, "Battle Song" *)*

Among Elliott's many contemporary admirers was John Stuart Mill who, in a letter to Carlyle, described the poems of *Corn Law Rhymes* as

> works which will go down to posterity as one of the principal memorials of this age...these poems, having, as they have, sufficient intrinsic merit to live, will hereafter be a text for annotations, explanations, and commentaries without end, and that future historians...will build largely upon them.
> (Ed. H. S. R. Elliot, *Letters of John Stuart Mill*, i, p. 28.)

The best of his poems pulsate with a passion which, as he himself says[9], takes its origin in actual experience. Though he was condemned by the *Quarterly*[10] "for the spirit of ferocious jacobinism", Elliott had really an orthodox social philosophy. Grant him Free-trade and all his ferocity disappears.

Oh, vengeance !—no, forgive, forgive !
'Tis frailty still that errs:
Forgive !—Revenge ! Shall murderers live ?
Christ bless'd *his* murderers.
Father, we only ask our own;
We say, "Be commerce free,
Let barter have his mutton-bone,
Let toil be liberty."
(Corn Law Rhymes, "Oh Lord, How Long ?"*)*

His biographer, G. S. Phillips, adduces evidence[11] of Elliott's anti-communism and anti-Owenism, describes him as " a redoubted champion of competition" , and represents him as saying that free trade would give all that the British people wanted of material wealth while education would gradually introduce a better feeling and a kinder understanding between masters and men. In the preface to *Corn Law Rhymes*, Elliott writes:

> Believing as I do, that the Corn Laws have a direct and rapid tendency to ruin my ten children and their country, with all its venerable and venerated institutions, where is the wonder if I hate the perpetrators of such insane atrocities ?

Between the Tory Nahum Whistlecraft's national bulwarks and Elliott's "venerable and venerated institutions" , there is no difference. Elliott was no revolutionary, not a wrecker of the social framework. G. S. Phillips says[12] that Elliott, as a poet, would have died to save the working classes, while, as a political economist, he could have seen the earth filled with graves, rather than have abandoned it to poor Dudevant, 'Ashley's Cow' , and Louis Blanc....A significant dichotomy of sympathies, as we shall presently see.

To some of those who did not regard the miseries of indus trial or agrarian life as separately remediable but believed them all in the mass to be the product of a basically wrong social philosophy, Owenism offered a comprehensive creed. In *The Reproof of Brutus (1830)*, a doctrinaire tract in heroic couplets unillumined by real poetry, John Minter Morgan[13] surveys the various branches of contemporary thought from the angle of an ardent Owenite. The book opens with a vision in which Morgan

finds himself in the Coliseum of Rome and hears the shade of Marcus Brutus scold an assembly of English aristocratic tourists. Brutus argues that Britain, the land of Alfred, Shakespeare, Hampden, Milton, and Pope, is classic enough in her own rights; why should then these "pampered parasites", these "tinsel few" rather spend time in Rome than go back to their own country and help their country-men ? This unhelpful prologue over, a question put forward by Atticus, "With so much wealth why poverty is found," leads to a lengthy discussion between the interrogator and the author on the present state of society in England. Morgan explains thus the aim of his work:

> The Muse essays—
> Foe to all parties, but friend of man—
> To join their efforts in one general plan,
> Where each shall find its own peculiar aim,
> Their means though different, yet their ends the same;
> Shall there security with freedom find,
> Wisdom with peace, and wealth with love combined.
> (*The Reproof of Brutus,* Part I, p. 28)

The first part of the book is a criticism of politicians, the second of economists. In Malthus's theory of population, the wealthy classes, argues Morgan, have found a suitable handle to serve their interests; Macculloch, James Mill, and Bentham suffer from purblind doctrinism, while lawyers like Brougham, Eldon, and Scarlett, are lackeys of social iniquities. Of the poets of England, Shelley alone belongs to the tribe of prophetic bards such as Edward I trembled to hear in the valley of Cambria. It is interesting to note that although Morgan has more or less respect for Wordsworth the poet of nature, Coleridge the metaphysician, Southey the erstwhile progressive, and Tom Moore the patriot, his enthusiasm is deepest for Shelley. He calls Shelley a poet-prophet, and, writing in 1830, refers (in a footnote) to "the rising fame of Percy Bysshe Shelley". In Morgan, we have the earliest evidence of that appeal which

Shelley has for the socialist writer but, unfortunately, it is not an encouraging evidence. Morgan then turns his attention to religion. Too full of superstitious and intolerant sectarianism, established religion requires to be replaced by Owen's teachings. Once spread, these teachings will arouse to truth equally the savage, the anchorite, the Calvinist, Churchmen, Romanists, Mussulmans, Hindoos, Chinese, in fact, men and women of all varieties of religious opinions. For special denunciation comes in the Archbishop of Canterbury who is supposed to declare the policy of the Church thus:

> King, and Lords, and Commons, all might sink,
> If at some venial faults we did not wink:
> And as the Lords themselves enact the laws,
> With them 'tis heedful to make common cause.
>
> ... ...
>
> But chief that precept hold we in esteem,
> Which taught obedience to the power supreme,
> 'Render to Caesar all of Caesar's things':-
> That text harmonious to the ear of Kings:
> Useful to all if people would obey,—
> Taxes and tithes without reluctance pay;
> And with submissive patience humbly wait,
> To see all righted in a future state.
>
> (*The Reproof of Brutus*, Part VI, pp. 165-66)

An exposition of the ideal social structure comes in the seventh and last part of the book. A Socialist of the Owenite tribe, Morgan naturally believed in pacifism.

> Ye kings, urge no more inglorious fight,
> See the scales of heaven prove your actions light.
>
> (*Poetical Works*, p. 65)

Wars should be sanctioned

> Not when kings with furious anger rage,
> But when heavens the war of justice wage.
>
> (*Ibid.*, p. 65)

Morgan is unaware of the baffling situation when each contending party claims it to be a holy and just war from its particular point of view.

Morgan's zeal for Owenism is offset by William Dearden's vigorous distrust of every attempt to tamper with the existing order of things; especially odious to his middle-class notions is the Owenite brand of sexual morality.

> A subtle Sciolism, from hell let loose,
> Decked out in tinsel theories so spruce,
> Its wild phantasmas of a life all bliss,
> Portrays as possible, in a world like this !
> Deluded ignorance, void of every doubt,
> Hails the bright picture with ecstatic shout;
> Sees, in perspective, the old Moral World,
> With all its follies into chaos hurled;
> And all phoenix-like from OWEN'S prurient brain,
> A glorious system spring without a stain !
> No longer man to man an abject thrall,
> But equal rights, and equal toil to all !
> The crownless king, the uncoroneted lord,
> Lab 'ring; and feasting at the self-same board,
> With the rude boor they once had frowned to see
> ... ...
> The bond of union between man and wife
> Being not, as now, a heavy chain for life,
> But light as that which yoked each cooing dove
> To the bright chariot of the Queen of Love;
> As easy at any time, to be transferred
> From Sue to Sally, as from bird to bird,
> ... ...
> O blest Community ! no restrictive law
> To bind the will, or with religious awe,
> Restrain the passions in their wild career—
> No GOD to worship—and no hell to fear !
>
> (*The Vale of Caldene*, Bk. IV, sec, ii)

Dearden diagnoses the cause of all social miseries as "Insatiate AVARICE", "the poison'd chalice of the nation's woe" (IV, x) and represents the non-industrial middle-class gentry in his denunciation of trade-profits.

Like the Owenites, the Chartists too held to a "general plan", but while Owenism was pacifist in method, Chartism was an insurrectionist movement, fierce and angry even when for a while non-violence was approved. Capel Lofft's *Ernest; Or, Political Regeneration*, was hailed as a Chartist document by the few reviewers who noticed it. The reviewer in the *Monthly Magazine*,[14] presumably its editor, the bumptious John Abraham Heraud, called the work "the Chartist Epic", and Dean Milman, the reviewer in the *Quarterly*, found in it "the growth, struggles, and triumph of chartism". The book has a curious history. Capel Lofft (1806-1873) was a well-born man, educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, who joined the Middle Temple but preferred association with political agitators to his profession. The poem, as the *Dictionary of National Biography* says, makes use of the traditional German belief in Ernest who, like his Welsh counterpart, King Arthur, will someday return to his people permanently to establish an ideal State. With a dedication "to the Memory of Milton, the Poet, the Divine, and the Republican", *Ernest* was printed in 1839 without the author's name, as the Bodleian copy of this print shows. We cannot definitely say but can only surmise that Milman's disapproval of the revolutionary political doctrine of the epic was shared by many others of the society to which Lofft belonged, and even as the book was in the press, the author probably thought it prudent not to publish it. The book was withdrawn from publication. It was in 1868 that the epic was finally published, this time with the changed title, *Ernest, the Rule of Right*. By

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that time, the political situation in the country had changed substantially, Lofft was 62, and he had "missed the bus". *Ernest* is not usually mentioned in histories of nineteenth century poetry, anthologists have neglected him, yet it remains a store-house of occasionally excellent and competent poetry and it is certainly one of the most distinguished works in English literature dealing with the theme of revolution.

The principal characters in the narrative of the poem are Frederick Hess and Hermann, the latter in love with the other's daughter, Lucy. When Hermann was a child, he once struck a playmate, the Squire's son; he was rebuked by both the Squire and his father, a peasant turned a schoolmaster. When he grew up, nursing a grievance against social inequality, he became a sort of dissenting preacher, preaching "faith, the gospel and love". To this prospective son-in-law, Hess narrates the story of his life which explains why he who was once a prosperous and law-abiding farmer, is now a broken man bent upon violent revolution. The narration covers almost the whole of the 772-line long Book II. Reading this Book, one watches the working up of a naturally peace-loving mind to the white heat of revolutionary frenzy in the attempts of Frederick Hess to convert Hermann to Chartism. As with Ebenezer Elliott, so with Lofft's Hess, political discontent is born of a sense of personal wrong. An unsuccessful litigation against the selfish local pastor over an enclosure had the effect of

> Leaving me bare to the bone; my wealth ground down
> And scattered to the winds; my being swept
> From the face of that fair land where it had birth;
> Myself beggared to rags; my home laid waste,
> My sons turned thief, my daughters prostitute.
> (*Ernest*, Bk. II, 323-29)

Hess feels that "the whole heart of the land is sick,/And the head faint" and he proposes to

> crush out of form,
> The artificial fabric of man's life,
> And frame it all afresh—darken the throne,
> Of kings with the shadow of a giant force,
> Striking amain his end—shuffle the fates
> Of prince and peasant most confusedly,
> Then deal them out anew—and last of all
> Set up the gospel for life's governance,
> Upon the ruins of the charnel church.
> (*Ernest*, Bk. II, 667-75)

This uncompromising desire for revolution has no respect for the accredited leaders of the state who, incapable of a total view of things, have recourse to fragmentary legislative reforms. The Chartists would do away with "saws of ancient use", give no more heed to "blear-eyed custom", would "make level every fence of privilege" abolishing enclosures. They would boil their "cankered constitution up to fervency and fullness of young blood in the fierce cauldron of democracy". They will not repeat the mistakes of the "philosophic fools" who led the French Revolution; they must remove "the incubus of selfish ownership" and exterminate the giant aristocracy. There shall be communisation of land; as for industry, mechanic gear, cattle, and stores, their owners will keep them "freely to have and give as free".

Such is Frederick Hess's exposition of the Chartist programme, and although several important details are obscured by the turbid eloquence of the narration, the broad intent is clear enough. Lofft proceeds to deal with the means to be adopted for the fulfilment of the programme. What will the means be, violent or non-violent ? The question is debated by Hermann in powerful passages of self-searching. His native desire was to secure for man his "proper mastery"

with fair means, and suasive gentleness,
Abhorrent from all force, with the light of truth
By knowledge lit...

... ...

I thought to win by righteousness,
And Christian love, and faith, and purity,
And if they serve not, how should robbery
Fulfil this service ?

(*Ibid.*, III, 440-451)

But the quick rush of events (including a Peterloo-like massacre of rustics in a country fair) sweeps the pacifist Hermann off his feet; the insurrection breaks out, Arthur Hermann is found in some mysterious manner transfigured into the legendary Christopher Ernest, and in the midst of the noisy violence adopted by both the rebels and the rulers, we listen to the desperate harangue of Ernest:

The lawyer and the priest, the thieves 'twixt whom
Sitting in state this people is crucified

... ...

They've starved us, have those men, of half our bread,
For two loaves, scantly one—they've made our church
A den of thieves and hirelings baser far,
And for the law, they have so fashioned it,
So murderously, to be a ball of spikes.

... ...

Go force these villains to gorge up our spoil
Though it come with their heart's blood; then slaughter them
Them, and their sons, on heap—and of their bones
Rear up a pile high as the pyramids.

(*Ibid.*, IX, 576-657)

The spokesman of the aristocrats, anticipating certain defeat, proposes to come to terms with the rebels.

Our strength is rottenness,
Our army falling off from us like flesh
In a fever; mercenary on our side,
But native in affection to our foes.
(*Ibid*, XII, 165-68)

And so consent we to the people in turn
To rule us, as they must despise of us,
And let the common will be common law,

... ...

And that hard tax
We now impose on the bread that labour eats,
Frankly we must forego it. Church and State
Must be reformed to such a rule of right
As suits with reason.
(*Ibid.*, XII, 210-21)

An equally fierce urge for revolution dominates the strange "Ways of Regard" of Ebenezer Jones, that powerful poet whose promise was extinguished by poverty and public indifference. His book of verses, *Studies of Sensation and Event* (1843), found no market nor received any notice from the reviewers beyond a note in the *Athenaeum*,[15] although men like W. J. Fox, R. H. Horne, Barry Cornwall, William Bell Scott and D. G. Rossetti thought well of his work. Years after Jones's death, on the publication of a reprint-edition of the work in 1878, Browning recalled how he had heard Eliot Warburton declaim "an impassioned Chartist *tirade* in blank verse—the speech of an orator addressing the crowd."[16] The reference is obviously to "Ways of Regard." The complex, philosophical scheme of this poem of 500 lines of blank verse admits at a certain stage the introduction of a rebellious people and their rulers, of a conflict between the many and the few. The rebel chief, excited as much by a grievous personal wrong as by a sense of collective insecurity, makes an impetuous harangue.

Slaves ! Brothers ! are we
Already thus cursed ! Damned are to endurance,
To acquiescence, to contentment ! Oh ! not so !
The habit of obedience hath not slain ye !
Arise ! shake out the fetters from your souls,
And they will leave your limbs ! All is not lost.
Hear me, Oh hear me ! We no more are slaves;—
Have we not hearts like men; do we not feel
The voice of kindness;—contemplate with pleasure,
The joys of life; are not our senses human;
... ...
They break you from the majesty of man,
Into gaunt monsters, crooked miseries,
... ...
banish from your souls
The light of knowledge, and proclaim you soulless,—
Rend you from God, saying you are not men.
... ...
Prove, prove that you are men ! Revenge ! Revenge !—
They bade us feed on grass—we will grow drunk
With their red blood; they trample us as snakes—
We will rise dragon-like, and with our fetters
Act inconceivably !—Revenge ! Revenge !
... ...
God ! we will rush through blood up to our arm-pits !"
(*Studies in Sensation and Events*,, pp. 181-83)

A young aristocrat espousing the cause of the people, mocks the rulers' counsels thus;

They outcry,
The nation flourishes, its power is vast,
Its wealth supreme." "Oh, idiot knaves and liars !
Say, is a flag a nation ? is an army ?
Do half a million traders make a nation ?
A thousand lords ? The people is the nation.
... ...

They counsel—If your slave seem fond of freedom,
Starve him, till he be glad to lick your foot
And then get crumbs; if he would fain be wise,
Work him, until the writhing of his body
Shall suffocate his mind ; if he would love,
And husband womanhood, let famished children
Of others terrify.

(*Ibid* , pp. 186-87)

Cleavage and hatred between classes is indeed the most passionate theme of Jones's poem. The rebels assert the essential human dignity that is theirs; they are bent on claiming their fundamental rights. There is a statesman in the poem, "a voluntary lackey, [who] ever kicks the lowest order", who is contemptuous of the middle classes but serves his own interest by pandering to the self-aggrandizing motives of the privileged few. The whole poem reeks of vitriolic anger against the hydra-headed corruptions of society, moral as well as material; the anger is focused against all classes believed to enjoy vested interests, members of the aristocracy as well as the dignitaries of the Church. It is difficult to imagine poems emitting more furious class-hatred than Ebenezer Jones's "Ways of Regard", Capel Lofft's *Ernest* and some of the lyrics of Ebenezer Elliott's *Corn Law Rhymes*. The credit of these poets is that they almost achieve poetic excellence in spite of much turbid emotion and abusive language.

No such violence inflames the verses of Thomas Cooper, another Chartist writer who was sent to gaol for carrying on violent propaganda. Cooper was one of "the uneducated poets" of the age. He was a self-made man who was encouraged by many distinguished men of letters of the day, including Disraeli, Dickens, Forster, Douglas Jerrold, Wordsworth and Carlyle. Cooper befriended several struggling poets, such as William Thom and Thomas Miller—also "uneducated poets"—and two other Chartist writers, John Bramwich (died 1846) and William Jones (died 1855). His remarkable career furnished Charles Kingsley with

the model of Alton Locke. In his autobiography, [18] Cooper quotes a hymn by Bramwich of which the last stanza goes thus:

All men are equal in His sight,
The bond, the free, the black, the white:
He made them all,—them freedom gave;
God made the man—Man made the slave !

William Jones's hymn is superior as poetry to the average Chartist hymn :

Sons of poverty assemble,
Ye whose hearts with woe are riven,
Let the guilty tyrants tremble,
Who your hearts such pain have gtven.

We will never
From the shrine of truth be driven,
... ...
Must ye faint—ah ! how much longer ?
Better by the sword to die
Than to die of want and hunger :
They heed not your feeble cry :

Lift your voices—
Lift your voices to the sky !
... ...
Dire oppression, Heaven decrees it,
From our land shall soon be hurled :
Mark the coming time and seize it—
Every banner be unfurled !

Spread the Charter !
Spread the Charter through the world.

Cooper says in his autobiography that a chant which the Chartists used to sing in course of their parades was wrongly attributed to him ; it was actually the composition of an obscure Chartist woman from Wales.

The Lion of Freedom is come from his den;
We'll rally around him, again and again:
We'll crown him with laurel, our champion to be:
O'Connor the patriot: for sweet Liberty !

Like most revolutionary poets, Cooper admired Milton and Shelley[19] but, obviously, did not learn much from his models. His *Purgatory of Suicides* (1845), consisting of over a thousand Spenserian stanzas divided into nine books of which each opens with some invocative stanzas before passing on to a dream of famous suicides of history; the suicides are different on different days. The work lacks an organising *motif*; the numerous interludes of personal biography and the cogitations on the misery of the common man ramble on without producing any sense of interlinked structure on the reader's mind; the language is that of cheerless rant all through, for rant was the normal mode of expression to Cooper who was an effective mob orator. Cooper's revolutionary verse is at its most poetical in the very first stanza of the *Purgatory of Suicides:*

Slaves, toil no more !—Why delve, and moil, and pine,
To glut the tyrant—forgers of your chain ?
Slaves, toil no more ! Up, from the midnight mine,
Summon your swarthy thousands to the plain:—
Beneath the bright sun marshalled, swell the strain
Of Liberty:—and while the lordlings view
Your banded hosts, with stricken heart and brain,—
Shout as one man,—'Toil we no more renew,
Until the Many cease their slavery for the Few !'

Championship of the cause of industrial labour and fervent belief in the authority of the Many, are two among the recurrent themes of the poem. Cooper's anger is directed against kings and priests who, he believes, are responsible for the miseries of the masses.

I hate ye—things with surplices and crowns !—
Serpents that poison,—tigers that devour
Poor human kind,—and fill the earth with groans,
Through every clime ! God send ye were no more !—
Ye'd have a merry requiem, from shore to shore !
(*The Purgatory of Suicides*, Bk. III, st. v)

Following in the footsteps of Shelley, Cooper finds "freedom's, virtue's, wisdom's direct foe" in "kingship propp'd by altar-craft". [20] This anti-monarchism reaches a ludicrous anticlimax in the seventh book where the poet declares his "devotion leal" to Queen Victoria at the same time that he warns her:

When next thou passest by Whitehall, look up,
I pray thee, and remember who felt there
The fatal axe ! ... ...
... ...
Hunger cries
Throughout thy realm—'Queen ! from the fearful Past—
be wise !'
(*Ibid.*, Bk. VII, st. ix)

Cooper's Chartism did not long survive his prison experience and subsequent literary success. The year 1848 marked the debacle of the Chartist Movement and therefore of the Chartist poets. Cooper, Gerald Massey, and even Ernest Jones emerged in course of time as respectable poets interested in more things than revolution. Ernest Jones, dedicating his *Corayda* (1860) to Bulwer Lytton, writes:—

> The Republic of Letters is beyond and above the political differences of the passing day...It is well that we should be reminded of this truth. It is well that we should have a common ground, far from the field of party and of passion, where we can meet amid the higher attributes of our humanity. It is well, while there is so much of the sordid and degrading in the political arena of the age, that men of widely different politics should say: "There is something truer and nobler than all this—a

calm and holy sanctuary of thought, wherein at least, if nowhere else, all men are brethren, and all brethren are friends."

Jones, a well-born person, a barrister, became a prominent leader of the Chartists; he was sent to prison for two years in 1848 on charges of sedition and violence. One of the boldest of the Chartists and a writer of some effective verses on the contemporary social ferment, even he, as the paragraph quoted above shows, dichotomized between the poetic faith and the political. Jones's revolutionary verse is to be found in the *Battle-Day: and other Poems* (1855), *The Song of the Lower Classes* (1856), *Songs of Democracy* (1856), and *the Revolt of Hindustan* (1857).

The land it is the landlords' ;
The traders' is the sea ;
The ore the usurers' coffer fills,
But what remains for me ? ...
I pay for all their learning,
I toil for all their ease ;
They render back, in coin for coin,
Want, ignorance, disease : ...
The hour of leisure happiness
The rich alone may see ;
The playful child, the smiling wife—
But what remains for me ?
The coming hope, the future day,
When wrong to right shall bow,
And hearts that have the courage, man,
To make that future NOW.

Here are grievances which, as we have seen, have been expressed in more or less similar language also by Ebenezer Elliott, Ebenezer Jones, Capel Lofft and others. The refrain in one of the songs of Ernest Jones—"The Song of the Lower Classes"—is still remembered:

PREFACE

THIS is the fourth publication in the series of the Raleigh Literary Society monographs which I started a few years ago. I am grateful to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts of this University for making funds available for this publication. I am also grateful to my colleague and friend, Dr. O. P. Govil, for correcting the proofs.

It is difficult, living in India, to collect materials for work on an obscure field of English literature. I have had sometimes to wait for months before copies of scarce and forgotten books arrived from England. Where it has not been possible to obtain a book at all, I have been content with microfilms.

The contents of the monograph fall into the following sections: (a) the opening section (pp. 1-4) refers briefly to the social situation in England in the 'thirties and the 'forties of the last century; (b) the second section (pp. 4-47) discusses the relevant works of a number of minor writers—some of them wholly forgotten today—whose verses record a keen consciousness of the contemporary social ferment; some of these writers were actively connected with various parties and schools while many others were non-party men stimulated by the humanitarian spirit of the age; (c) the third section (pp. 47-68) deals with the major poets of the age; and (d) the final section (pp. 68-81) embodies my reflections on the Early Victorian poetry of social ferment.

The emphasis in the monograph all through has been on the broad tendencies of the age rather than on individual writers and works.

A. BOSE

15 January, 1957
The University,
Aligarh.

We're low, we're low, we're very, very low.

Gerald Massey, like Thomas Cooper, rose from the ranks to the position of a prominent socialist. At the age of twenty-one, he edited the "Spirit of Freedom", a cheap journal started in 1849 for the benefit of working class men. He wrote also in the "Christian Socialist" and the" Leader", the latter edited by Thornton Hunt. Massey's career attracted persons like F. D. Maurice, Charles Kingsley, Walter Savage Landor, and George Eliot, the last of whom created her Felix Holt on the model of Massey. Massey, too, grew into a 'respectable' poet in course of time, described as " a born laureate of the people, and one of the most thoroughly English poets of the century."[21] Before, however, he began to dabble in Spiritualism and Shakespeare-criticism, Massey had already produced a sufficient quantity of verse to ensure him a place among the minor poets of the century. The volume entitled *Cries of Forty-eight* contains a number of competent poems on the theme of social justice.

If faith, and hope, and kindness passed, as coin,
'twixt heart and heart,
Up through the eye's tear-blindness,
how the sudden soul should start !
The dreary, dim, and desolate, would wear a sunny bloom,
And Love should spring from buried Hate,
like flowers from Winter's tomb.
"This world is full of beauty, as other worlds above;
And, if we did our duty, it might be as full of love."

(*Cries of Forty-eight*, "This world is full of beauty")

High hopes that burn'd like stars sublime,
Go down i' the heaven of freedom;
And true hearts perish in the time
We bitterliest need'em !
But never sit we down and say
There's nothing left but sorrow;

Through all the long, dark night of years
The people's cry ascendeth,
And earth is wet with blood and tears :
But our meek sufferance endeth !
The few shall not for ever sway—
The many moil in sorrow;
The powers of hell are strong today,
The Christ shall rise tomorrow !
(*Ibid.*, "Today and Tomorrow")

In Massey's verses, there is no recognisable evidence of his socialism. Unlike J. M. Morgan, Capel Lofft, and William Dearden, he is not the exponent in verse of any particular school of political and social ideology. Like most of the Victorian poets of the social ferment, Massey was a plain humanitarian talking vaguely and piously about hope and faith and kindness and love, of meekness and duty, of the mystical assurance that however gloomy the situation now is, everything will be all right in the end, "The Christ shall rise tomorrow". The poetry of Gerald Massey is another instance of the revolutionary ardour frittering itself away in tame generalities. Apart from the fundamental conservatism and mildness that the doctrinism of these poets failed to conceal for any length of time, there was also in the prevalent social conditions a certain dynamics that made it impossible for many conscientious poets to stick to a fixed doctrine. The urge for social revolution grew up in a certain setting of the material conditions of life ; as the conditions changed, the urge for social revolution too changed, more or less. A. V. Dicey's comments on the failure of Chartism apply to other brands of social revolution as well :

> Chartism had been discredited by the fact that some Chartists sought to attain their ends by the employment or menace of physical force...But between 1848 and 1868 unionism came under the guidance of capable, and from their own point of view, moderate leaders...When Young England came under the guidance of Mr. Disraeli, Tories

> could afford at times to exhibit sentimental friendliness towards workmen engaged in conflict with manufacturers whose mills offended the aesthetic taste, and whose radicalism shook the political authority of benevolent aristocrats.
>
> (*Law and Opinion in England*, pp. 241—42)

The empirical English mind, never responsive to set and immutable doctrines, nor also sympathetic to ideas and technique of violent revolution imported from over the turbulent continent, could not believe that the English social scene presented a spectacle of unmitigated iniquity. There were reasons to see silver linings in the cloud. At any rate, it was possible to attain the ends in a constitutional manner.

What was then required was not a band of furious insurrectionists, but a group of thoughtful patriots who would work in the parliament for a better order of society. While Owenites, Chartists, and Corn-Law Repealers were fulminating against the aristocracy and demanding immediate social equality, Benjamin Disraeli was inspiring the Young England group with a re-formulated Aristocratic principle of social relations. Disraeli's literary ventures were ancillary to his political objectives, and his literary gifts found better expression in his novels than in his verses, but *The Revolutionary Epick* (1834) is no negligible repository of his social philosophy.

> This work...will...evolve a moral, which governors and the governed may alike peruse with profit ; and which may teach wisdom both to monarchs and to multitudes.
>
> (Preface to *The Revolutionary Epick*, p. iv)

In this epic (we had better call it a pseudo-epic), Disraeli is, as his biographer Monypenny points out,[22] under the influence of Milton and Shelley; while "the diction and the versification of the poem are feebly reminiscent of Milton", the matter, the machinery, and even the sentiments "are still more reminiscent of Shelley, though unfortunately of Shelley in his least inspired

moments." In the Early Victorian period, all poets who ambitiously write of the contemporary social ferment are followers of Milton and Shelley. *The Revolutionary Epick* is in three parts. The first expounds the author's social philosophy; the second presents, among other things, historical estimates of Athens, Rome, the English Revolution, and the United States; the third part dwells upon Napoleon. He begins his epic with an exposition of the divine right theory of kingship:

> Kings are gods on earth, and blazing lights
> To guide and bless their race...
> ... ...
> Since
> The race who struggle for their daily life,
> Think only of the life for which they strive,
> Such thoughtless labourers as would surely tend
> The leaves and not the fruit, shall they be let
> To lord it in the vineyard of our joys?
> Deep in the strata of the human heart,
> The seeds of Aristocracy are sown:
> A vigorous plant, and soon a nation's pride.
> (*The Revolutionary Epick*, I, xxxi)

From the divine right theory of kingship, Disraeli proceeds to expatiating on the Aristocratic principle of society, essential and beneficial to the social structure. In Book I, also occurs the portrait of the ideal nobleman who, though he is high-born, does not hesitate to mix with the multitude, and, from the vantage-ground of his station, can enjoy a comprehensive view of society. He uses law-given leisure to make that law more loved; he devotes himself to learning and manly pursuits. Disraeli maintains that it was only under the feudal or aristocratic system that agriculture flourished, and commerce and the fine arts; that was the age when man's character was developed, and woman's was elevated. In any society, there are but two classes: the aristocracy, and the populace. What constitutes the People? Not a crowd of vagrant beings, not a "spawn of slime-begotten

entities", but men and women who yield only to Honour, Faith, Justice, love of the Fatherland, devotion to consecrating customs that embalm ancestral deeds.

> And chief of all, that Social Discipline,
> Instinctive in the heart of cultured man,
> That prompts the weaker and the poor to view
> In their more able brethren leaders apt
> To guide and aid. In multitudes thus formed
> A throne majestic yielding, and a band
> Of nobles dignified, and gently pure,
> And holy priests, and reverend magistrates:
> In multitudes thus formed, and highly trained
> Of Law and Arts, and truthful Prejudice
> And holy Faith, the soul-inspired race,
> I recognise a P E O P L E.
>
> (*Ibid.*, I xli)

Class-distinction, not class-antagonism, is the cardinal principle of Disraeli's scheme. That much-boosted principle, Equality, is wrong because unnatural:

> What is this Equality ? this vagrant lust,
> This panting of indefinite desire,
> This cry of feeble spirits, which they crown
> With attributes ommipotent, and make
> A goddess of their echo ? Is it Truth ?
> Is't Justice ? Is it aught that man believes ?
>
> ... ...
>
> Is Nature equal ? Doth she say to man
> Go see the mountain in the vale subside ?
>
> ... ...
>
> Yes ! where'er we gaze,
> GRADATION is the spell of Nature's sway,
> Hence Durability, the power of gods;
> Hence Order, Happiness, and Life; and hence
> Of parts discordant one harmonious whole.
>
> (*Ibid.*, I, xl.)

For the student of Disraeli's politics, the opinions expressed in *The Revolutionary Epick* should be as useful as those embedded in his novels, but the student of poetry cannot find anything poetically remarkable in the work. "Epic" is a misnomer for a work that wholly fails in finding a myth to incorporate the writer's thoughts. The language, impassioned, rhetorical, and polished, is of oratory rather than of poetry. Disraeli's judgment was entirely correct when he abandoned poetry although in the preface to *The Revolutionary Epick*, he had "cursed the destiny" that placed him "in an age that boasted of being anti-poetical" and desired to write an epic celebrating the spirit of his time. Two of the Young Englanders, George Sydney Smythe and Alexander Baillie Cochrane, were inspired by Disraeli to write some verses, praising the traditional life of England in language that is an amalgam of Byron and Felicia Hemans. Smythe, for instance, writes of the old merchants of England in preference to the Whig traders of the Victorian period :

> The land it boasts its titled hosts—they cannot vie with these,
> The merchants of Old England—the Seigneurs of the Seas,
> ... ...
> Not one among the conquerors that are or ever were,
> In wealth, or fame, or grandeur with England may compare.
> But not of this our Sovereign thought, when from her solemn throne,
> She spoke of the Poor, and what they endure, in her low and thrilling tone.
> And offered a prayer that Trade might bear relief through the starving land,
> To the strong man's weakened arm, and his wan and workless hand.
> And by the power, that was her dower, might Commerce once more be
> The Helper of the Helpless, and the Saviour of the Free.
> (*Historic Fancies*, "The Merchants of Old England")

In the verses of Disraeli and Sydney Smythe, we have early examples of the imperialist theme in English poetry.

Such are the treatments in verse of some of the social ideals of the time. The two main themes of the partisan poets, the problem of poverty and the question of social equality, occur in the verses of other writers too who, though they do not identify themselves with any particular social or political movement, are none the less stirred by prevalent social miseries. The bewildering variety of doctrinal slogans which distinguishes the period, is summed up in Charles Mackay's "The Fermentation" :

"Give us freedom for the conscience !"
"Equal rights !"—"Unfettered Mind !"
"Education !"—"Compensation !"
"Justice for a mighty nation !"
"Progress !"—Peace with all mankind !"
"Let us labour !"—"Give us churches !"
"Give us corn wherever it grows !"
(Voices from the Crowd)

The humanitarian spirit of the age, stimulated by Evangelicalism, ideals of enlightened democracy, and Benthamist faith in progress demanded justice for the weak and the oppressed wherever they might be. We meet with poems exulting over the abolition of the slave trade[23]; poems sympathizing with convicts; poems on the fallen woman; poems emphasizing the sorrows of emigrants; temperance is the theme of some propagandists, while colonial life finds some spirited exponents. Such of these verses as are not utterly worthless, are smeared with a soppy sentimentality, but Mrs. Ellis's (she was Sarah Stickney before marriage) *The Island Queen* stands out by virtue of its passionate conviction

and sincere human sympathy. *The Island Queen* (1846) and an anonymous work, *Pomare, Queen of Tahiti* (1847), are based on the historical facts of the French seizure of Tahiti and the brutal treatment of Queen Pomare of that island. It is doubtful if there is any other poetical work in English which spotlights colonizing tactics more effectively than Mrs. Ellis's poem.

> In all our schemes to civilize mankind
> By planting colonies, this doom we find—
> Extermination—slow, perchance, but sure,
> For how should he, with untaught mind endure
> The tempting snares which on that border ground
> His steps bewilder, and his paths surround ?
> Or how should those who go with purpose shrewd
> To seize whatever to themselves brings good,
> Poor, undivided, reckless, scheming souls,
> Whom naught but gold, or love of self, controls;
> Who deem it pastime, and a thing of jest,
> To aim a death-blow at a savage breast,
> Sport with his pain, and laugh to *see* him die,
> And when he dies not, worse inventions try—
> Gifts—bribery—fiery draughts that burn his brain,
> And send him thirsting to his haunts again,
> A demon then, and a worse a thousand times
> For lessons learned in European crimes.
>
> (*The Island Queen*, Bk. III, pp. 37–38)

The main bulk, however, of this humanitarian verse is devoted to the miseries of the poor English labourer, industrial as well as agricultural. The author of an anonymous work, *The Factory Child* (1831), supplements his rhymes with copious footnotes in order to describe the cruelties of the Overlooker, the long hours of work,"[4] children struck with straps to prevent them from falling asleep amongst the wool, accidents happening to dozing child-workers, the relentlessness of fathers who force their fatigued children to work while they themselves spend the children's wages on gin and rum. The sad tale is told of little Mary

whose father is compelled to send her to a factory in spite of his previous resolve against such a step.

> But all hand-labour now is come to nought,
> And steam performs what once by men was wrought;
> Whilst we employment seek, and seek in vain—
> Children their parents' bread must now obtain.
> (*The Factory Child*, p. 6)

Awakened early in the morning by her father, the tender Mary shivers in cold, cries, "O, father, is it time ?" and drops her sleepy head. When this girl grows up, she looks forward to married life which, she fondly believes, will release her from girlhood miseries but, alas, there never is an end to her sufferings. The author draws the familiar contrast between the prevalent movement for the abolition of slavery abroad, on the one hand, and callousness to child-labour at home, on the other:

> The Press—the Pulpit—Senate—and the Stage—
> Proclaim'd the Negro's griefs, and the Planter's rage:
> Whilst England's children, heavier far oppress'd,
> Rais'd not a qualm within her callous breast.
> (*The Factory Child*, p. 25)

In the same strain writes Eliza Cook, a self-educated poet of humble origin who became quite popular in the mid-Victorian period:

> We are busy in helping the far away slave,—
> We must cherish the Pole, for he's foreign and brave;
> Our alms-giving record is widely unrolled—
> To the east and west we send mercy and gold;
> But methinks there are those in our own famous land
> Whose thin cheeks might be fatten'd by charity's hand.
> (*Poems*, second series, p. 173)

"Our Father", in the third series of Eliza Cook's *Poems*, is another poem on the miseries of child-labourers, inspired by a reading of R. H. Horne's report on the subject. A number of

Eliza Cook's poems express her feelings about the contemporary situation as the very titles show: "Song of the Spirit of Gold", "Song of the City Artisan", "The Poor Man to His Son", "A Song for the Workers", "A Temperance Song", and so on. There is no speculation in Eliza Cook as to the cause and solution of social problems; she has a simple, unpretentious mind that has been moved by the situation, and without advocating any philosophical nostrum, she reflects the common man's sense of bafflement and pain at the situation. Writing under the shadow of the Chartist agitation, she addresses the people of England:

Trust not to the brawling leaders,
Lighting ye with Fury's brand!
'Tis brain-feeders, not blood-breeders,
That shall purify the land!
... ...
Ask for all that should be granted!
Show the fester of neglect;
If "a People's" love is wanted,
"People's Rights" must have respect!
... ...
Trust not to your brawling leaders!
Scorn to spring with tiger claws!
'Tis truth-heeders—not steel-speeders,—
That shall triumph in your cause.
League in firm, unflinching quiet;
Use your presses, print and read!
If you ope the gate of Riot,
Wives and little ones must bleed!

(*Poems*, vol. iii, "A Song", pp. 101-105)

Eliza Cook is a representative Victorian in her insistence on non-violent revolution and on the gospel of Work:

Work, work, my boy, be not afraid,
Look labour boldly in the face;

EARLY VICTORIAN POETRY OF SOCIAL FERMENT

> *"The fifteen years from 1830 to 1845, which may well be termed the era of the Reform Act, were among the most critical in the history of England. The time was out of joint. The misery and discontent of city artisans and village labourers were past dispute."*
>
> A. V. Dicey. *Law and Opinion in England.*

In Early Victorian England, the social situation evoked as much dissatisfaction as enthusiasm. In the Railway Age, while certain sections of the British people groaned under the crushing load of iniquitous laws and customs, there were also powerful and persevering forces working for the progressive welfare of the people. If railway-making did "more harm than good to the agricultural population", causing "employment of a demoralising nature, heavy burden by accidents, bastardry, crime"[1]; if an economic gloom that hung over rural England for years led to Kentish risings, agitation for the repeal of the Corn Law, and a sharp rise in emigration; it was also true that railway development coincided with an unprecedented fillip to metallurgy and mining, and that it facilitated the supply of goods to an "unlimited demand of unprotected markets in the tropics and sub-tropics."[2] An instance of the contemporary popular belief in progress occurs in an unsigned article[3] that came out in 1834 in one of the magazines. The writer asserts his "conviction that never was so much done, in the same space of time, since the world began, especially as these revolutions more particularly relate to and affect Britain and British society." He refers to the "wonderful changes"

Take up the hammer or the spade,
And blush not for your humble place.

(*Poems*, vol. iv, "The Poor Man to His Son")

Let Man toil to win his living,
Work is not a task to spurn ;
Poor is gold of others' giving,
To the silver that we earn.

... ...

No ! for Right is up and asking
Loudly for a fairer lot,
And Commerce must not let her tasking
Form a nation's canker spot.

(*Ibid.*, "A Song for the Workers")

Like almost all her contemporaries, Eliza Cook is optimistic about the future, though it is rather a far future. Until the proper social adjustment is achieved, there must be, she believes, unstinted exercise of mercy on the part of the privileged classes and ungrudging readiness for work on the part of the working classes.

Like Eliza Cook, other poets too plead for mercy. Portia's speech on Mercy forms the motto of the anonymous *Factory Child* and the author begins his versified propaganda with a paragraph on mercy. Mercy is the plea too of Mrs. Norton's anonymously published *A Voice from the Factories* (1836). In this work, dedicated to Lord Ashley, there is nothing bitter or intemperate or revolutionary. It is not labour Mrs. Norton objects to, but excessive labour, because "Excessive labour works the SOUL'S decay" :

We grant their class mut labour—young and old ;
We grant the child the needy parents' tool :
But still our hearts a better plan behold ;
No bright Utopia of some dreaming fool,
But rationally just, and good by rule.

Not against TOIL, but TOIL's EXCESS we pray,
(Else were we nursed in Folly's simplest school).
(*A Voice from the Factories*, *xxi*)

That class-disparity is axiomatic in her faith is evident in her use of the first and the third persons in this passage. She is unconcerned by any hypotheses of levelling up or levelling down the classes ; there must be servants where there are masters. She tries to persuade the upper classes that factory reforms are called for not on the ground of pity alone but on that of their own safety too.

the peasant, from his cradle taught
That some must *own*, while some must till the land,
Rebels not, murmurs not—even in his thought.
Born to his lot, he bows to high command.
(*Ibid.*, liv)

Too harshly ruled, the poor man learns to hate
And curse the oppressive law that bids him serve the Great.
(*Ibid.*, lv)

And from the gathering of this discontent,
When there is strength, REVOLT his standard rears.
(*Ibid.*, lvi)

Therefore should Mercy, gentle and serene,
Sit by the Ruler's side and share his throne:—
Lest due Authority be overthrown.
(*Ibid.*, lvii)

This plea for mercy—a case of virtue naïvely made of a necessity—recurs in another work of Mrs. Norton, *The Child of the Island* (1856), praised by the *Quarterly*. [25] Her aim here is to contrast the prospects in life of a privileged class (represented at its brightest by the Prince of Wales, the 'Child of the Islands') with the "shadow that lies beyond and around". There is some

creditable poetry in the descriptions of the seamstress toiling for a sapless life, the trapper in the mine, the pallid weaver at the loom, the Serpentine welcoming suicides, the Tyburn gate and gallows, homeless men and women passing nights in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, the Children's prison at Pankhurst, the death of an old pauper. Interesting too is the contrast that a lady of fashion institutes between her own class and the class beneath :

A life of self-indulgence is for US,
A life of self-denial is for them ;
For US the streets, broad-built and populous,
For them unhealthy corners, garrets dim,
And cellars where the water-rat may swim !
For US, green paths refreshed by frequent rain,
For them, dark alleys where the dust lies grim :
Not doomed by US to this appointed pain,—
God made us, Rich and Poor—of what do these
complain ?
(*The Child of the Islands*, II, xxix)

This passage, used by Mrs. Gaskell for the motto of the ninth chapter of *Mary Barton*, repeats the old contraposition between 'US' and 'them'. To these self-complaisant sentiments of the privileged classes, Mrs. Norton adds the average citizen's passive reaction to the suffering of the poor:

WHAT CAN I DO ? I know that men have died
Of their privations; truly, I believe
That honest labour may be vainly plied :
But how am I his sorrow to relieve ?
Go, let our Rulers some great plan achieve,
It rests with These to settle and command,—
We, meaner souls, can only sigh and grieve.
(*Ibid.*, IV, liv)

In this work as in the previous, Mrs. Norton prefers progressive amelioration of social miseries to revolution. She raises no fundamental questions, her sole plea is that of mercy :

The GRADUAL is God's law. And we all fail
Because we will not copy it, but would
Against deep-rooted obstacles prevail,
(Which have the change of centuries withstood)
By hurried snatching in our rashest mood.
(*Ibid.*, IV, lvii)

The Rich-and-Poor theme enters F. H. Doyle's *The Two Destinies* (1844) by way of a rare outburst of personal feeling that is characteristic of the author's cultured and humane temper pained by the iniquities of social conditions.

All civilizing arts we boast,
Enlargement of the human mind—
Science, and wealth, and taste refined ;
What does the vaunted progress cost ?
Alas for earth, if this great gain
Have its foundations laid in pain—
Pain of the poor, who suffer still,
Let the world brighten as it will.
... ...
What are these poor ? to pain consign'd—
Do they, or who, make up mankind ?
Was it for others ? or for them,
That Christ laid down his diadem ?
This world has riddles hard and old—
Old as itself—not mine the power.
Still it is well, from hour to hour,
To keep them clear in view and know
How blessedness contrasts with woe—
How some are ever breathing here
A bright and balmy atmosphere,
Whilst others, through unbroken gloom,
Unheeded falter to the tomb.
(*The Two Destinies*, pp. 19–20)

Doyle's position in this poem is purely that of the humanitarian. He does not theorize on the problem of poverty; he does not

mention revolution or natural law, nor does he indulge in diatribes against this or that school of political thinkers. The anomaly of increasing national wealth in the midst of the worsening misery of the people to which Doyle urbanely draws the reader's attention, is bluntly stated by another poet.

> What boots it to us that our country is rich ?
> The best of our life time is spent in a ditch.
> We know she is powerful—she tramples us down,
> And plentiful too—though our bread is so brown.
> (*The Village Poor-House*, III, ii)

James White, the author of *The Village Poor-House* (1832), employs the technique of juxtaposed pictures of the rich and the poor to emphasize the disparity of social classes, and he does so more often and sometimes to better effect than F. H. Doyle or Mrs. Norton. His frequent use of innuendo, irony, and epigram leaves us in no doubt about his own sympathies. The village of his poems is, as it were, the microcosm of English society in which the gentry live apart from and hostile to the common people. A different treatment of rural life—less ironical, more sympathetic—occurs in Mrs. Ellis's verse-tale, *The Sons of the Soil* (1840). This is a story in twelve books but, as Mrs. Ellis takes care to point out in the preface, "the story is adventitious, and has arisen out of the popular evils of the day". The poet's principal thesis is that the relation between landlord and farmer has debased into one of give and take of rent; it is entirely a mercenary relation, unenlivened by human and personal considerations, and all this debasement arises from a spirit of avarice that is abroad.

One of the most ancient of human passions, gold-lust assumed peculiar intensity in Britain during this period of commercial expansion, if we judge by literary references to it. When the hero of "Locksley Hall" cried that "Every door is barr'd with gold, and opens but to golden keys", he epigrammatized a common feeling of the day. *The Athenaeum*[24], for instance,

regarded as promising the theme of "scrip fever which is burning through all the veins and throbbing at all the pulses of society", a theme developed by Peter Placid, the pseudonymous author of *The twenty-first of October: or the Heroes of the Day* (1845):

> There is a fever on men's minds: the Lust
> Of Gold hath, like a shrewish despot, thrust
> All decency, all reason, out of sight.
>
> (*The twenty-first of October* &c., V)

Ebenezer Jones has two poems on the theme, "Song of the Gold Getters" and "Song of the Kings of Gold", and the second is the lyrical expression of a fiercely embittered imagination.

> The earth, the earth, is ours !
> Its corn, its fruits, its wine,
> Its sun, its rain, its flowers,
> Ours, all, all !—cannot shine
> One sunlight ray, but where
> Our mighty titles hold;
> Wherever life is, there
> Possess the Kings of Gold.
>
> (*Chorus*) We cannot count our slaves,
> Nothing bounds our sway,
> Our will destroys and saves,
> We let, we create, we slay,
> Ha ! ha ! who are Gods ?
>
> ... ...
>
> The father writhes a smile,
> As we seize his red-lipped girl,
> His white-loined wife; aye, while
> Fierce millions burn, to hurl
> Rocks on our regal brows,
> Knives in our hearts hold—
> They pale, prepare them bows
> At the step of the Kings of Gold.

(*Chorus*) We cannot count our slaves,
Nothing bounds our sway,
Our will destroys and saves,
We let, we create, we slay.
Ha ! ha ! who are Gods ?
(Studies of Sensation and Event)

A lesser poet but better known than Ebenezer Jones, Charles Swain declaims against contemporary Mammon-worship:

Shame upon this Mammon-worship ! Shame upon this lucre-love :

... ...

Out upon this rage for riches, striving up and strutting bold,
Out upon this craft which teaches scorn of everything but gold :
Out upon the slavish minions, vain disciples of a creed
Which believes in God, yet never acts as if it thus believes.

(*Dramatic Chapters, Poems and Songs*, pp. 200-202)

On the aetiology of Mammonism in contemporary society, opinions varied widely. Consequently, verse reactions to the phenomenon also varied from pietistic platitudes to radical anger and from the latter to liberalist complaisance. Of this last attitude, a good representative was Charles Mackay whose commonplace mind was matched to a knack of producing smooth and pleasant verse. His friend Angus Bethune Reach had the foolhardiness to declare that "The Charles Mackays and Thomas Hoods...tread on better and steadier ground than the Tennysons and Brownings".[27] Connected with the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Daily News*, Mackay believed that liberalism was ushering in a new era of civilization, an era of which the responsibilities required an earnest spirit in the poet. No one has iterated in verse the idea of Progress oftener than Mackay. In "Una Fata Morgana" (*Voices from the Crowd*, 1846), he speaks of "that great cause, the nearest to my mind, Progress". In

"The Three Preachers" of the same volume, the first preacher advises presumptuous man to go back ; the second asks man to stand still, while the third comes out with the exhortation :

Forward : ye deluded nations,
Progress is the rule of all :—
Man was made for healthful effort ;
Tyranny has crush'd him long ;
He shall march from good to better,
And do battle with the wrong.

In "Old Opinions", the refrain goes thus :

Old Opinions ! rags and tatters !
Get you gone : get you gone !

What are these ragged opinions that must go ?—They are that man was born evil and the earth was dark and joyless at best; that human sorrows were predestined to endure; that kings were holy and the Church was the Lord of Conscience; that Freedom was the enemy of Peace, Law, Virtue, Magistrate, and King; that Education was a luxury for the few; that it was right to foster antagonism between nation and nation. Mackay whose social philosophy is a curious combination of the teachings of Carlyle and Macaulay, has no patience with the political economist, the Benthamist, or the clergyman. Indeed he roundly scolds the Benthamist legislator :

A disciple in a science
Sprung of selfishness and scorn;
That considers Earth too scanty,
For its people and would treat,
Every poor man as a foe-man,
If the wretch made bold to eat—
Vilest culprit, if he married,
Till his corn and wine were sure,—
Life itself a shameful error
In the children of the poor.
(*Voices from the Crowd*, "The Clairvoyante")

Even as Distribution must be fair, there must be *laissez-aller* in Production:

> What do we want ? Our daily bread;
> Leave to earn it by our skill:
> Leave to labour freely for it,
> Leave to buy it where we will:
> For 'tis hard upon the many,
> Hard—unpitied by the few,
> To starve and die for want of work,
> Or, live half-starved, with work to do.
> (*Ibid.*, "The Wants of the People")

A necessary concomitant of this anti-restrictive view of economic life is belief in Work of which Mackay is a fervent exponent:

> No ! let us work ! we only ask
> Reward proportioned to our task:—
> We have no quarrel with the great,
> No feud with rank—
> With mill or bank—
> No envy of a lord's estate.
> If we can earn sufficient store
> To satisfy our daily need ;
> And can retain,
> For age and pain,
> A fraction, we are rich indeed.
> (Charles Mackay, *Voices from the Crowd*, "Daily Work")

Life planned according to these views, so thought this hopeful and amiable Early Victorian, would eliminate all possibilities of war, that barbarian wickedness into which self-aggrandizing individuals have led nations.

> Oh, foolish man ! to draw the cumbrous car,
> Of kings and chiefs, and potentates to war,

To waste your lives, and give your roofs to flame,
Your babes to slaughter and your wives to shame,
And all to aid the tyrant of an hour,
To round a province and expand his power.

(Charles Mackay, *The Hope of the World*, p. 9)

Since there is no rational cause for antagonism between men and men although the momentum of primitive selfishness urges men to fight and to suffer, the panacea for this evil is education. Mackay is a representative of his age in his profound faith in education:

Go forth ! ye friends and lovers of your kind !
Traverse the world from Labrador to Ind,
... ...
Teach ! teach the world ! and all its mental night
Shall melt away in the fulness of the light ;

(*Ibid.*, pp. 44-45)

Therefore Mackay remains an optimist. Things may not be at the moment all that one would desire them to be, but the future, one is assured, is clear and bright.

No—the Present, though clouds o'er her countenance roll,
Has a light in her eyes, and a hope in her soul.

(*Voices from the Crowd*, "The Days that are gone")

Of the Early Victorian poets of the contemporary social ferment, we have so far considered only the minor writers, some of them very minor indeed. Many of these verse-writers are nevermore heard of; quite a few of them publish their works anonymously; some of them, however, like Thomas Wade and F. H. Doyle, have strayed into the field of social ferment for a short while only. On the other hand, the place that Ebenezer Elliott has in the history of nineteenth century poetry is on

that have taken place since 1800, mentioning Catholic emancipation, abolition of slavery, changes in the poor-law, and the establishment of beer-houses. The British empire, he notes, has extended vastly, but what is that empire "compared with the strides she [Britain] has made in art, science and mechanism since 1800?" Among the novelties that have appeared in British life are changed modes of travelling; the introduction of vaccination; reconstruction in London; new roads, bridges, and docks; new theatre houses; the roads of Macadam; great engineering works like the breakwater at Plymouth; the tunnel under the Thames; the chain pier at Brighton; the metropolitan police. The writer finally asks rhetorical questions: "Who in 1800 would have expected to find water without digging for it? Who would have engraved upon stone? Who would have thought of calculating sums by machinery? Who would have thought of stuffing cushions with iron for softness?"

Anxiety, excitement, and agitation ran parallel to such high hopes. The *laissez-faire* policy of early nineteenth century industrialism ushered in a number of social evils such as child-labour, sweated labour, drunkenness among the workers, and disruption of family life, but the same industrialism also aroused the conscience of social workers and heightened the labourers' sense of the need of organised action. The social ferment of the age stimulated Cobden's fight for parliamentary reforms and for justice to the poor, Owen's lead in the co-operative movement, Francis Place's services to trade unionism, Ashley's tenacious steering of a series of factory legislations, and Chadwick's Public Health Act. A. V. Dicey is one of those who regard the Chartist agitation as an inevitable consequence of the unstable condition of contemporary society.

> The demand for the People's Charter was the sign of a social condition which portended revolution...Men who have known England only during the years of prosperity and of general goodwill which have followed the repeal of the Corn Laws, can hardly realise the urgency with

account of his radical verse while his other works like "*The Village Patriarch, Love, and other Poems*" (1834) and *Kerhonah, The Vernal Walk, Win Hill, and other poems* (1835) have been wholly forgotten. The large quantity of this minor verse—we have selected only a fraction of it here—proves how strongly and widely the poetical conscience of the period was stirred by the social unrest. But the largeness of the quantity scarcely conceals the poverty of the quality. If the obvious reason for this poverty of the poetry be the incompetence of the poets themselves (which is undeniable), it becomes necessary to review the relevant works of the major poets. "A man born in 1810", says G. M. Young, "entered manhood with the ground rocking under his feet as it had rocked in 1789."[25] As though anticipating these words of the later historian, an anonymous column-writer of the *Athenaeum* wrote in 1832:

> No man can expect to read a large work leisurely through, when the very ground under his feet seems to have a touch of the earthquake, and high houses threaten to topple down and crush ordinary people in the rubbish.
> (*Athenaeum*, 1832, p. 755)

How did the major poets react to this social commotion which, by all accounts, those of the minor and obscure poets as well as of historians, was of inescapable import in the period ? Were Tennyson, Browning and Matthew Arnold stirred at all by the commotion ? And, if they were, has their response formed any substantial and worthy part of their poetry ? For the student of poetry, the question that ultimately matters does not concern the nature of the political or social ideology that the poets may believe in—although our knowledge of their ideology should contribute to our understanding of their poetry—but relates to the quality of the poetry. As the substance of poetry, one ideology may be as good as another; the aesthetic validity of the ideology is in its power to stimulate the creative vision. To what extent did the contemporary social ferment serve as a

potent and productive stimulus for the poetic imagination of the major Early Victorian writers ?

Tennyson, for example, was fully alive to the movements of his time. He was among the young Cambridge supporters of the Anti-Slavery Convention; he was an interested witness of farm-fires; he had "an earnet desire to do something to help those who lived in misery"; he was actively involved in the luckless Torrijos affair; delighted with the passing of the Reform Bill, he rang the church bells wildly at night to the consternation of the parson; he and his Cambridge friends discussed the principles of current events.[29] Among his early poems, "The Statesman" and "The Goose" are records of his observation of class-cleavage in society. Some unpublished lines of Tennyson occurring in William Allingham's diary echo the opinions that we have already met with in the works of the minor writers:

> The rich wed richer, and the poor the poor,
> The mount of gold accumulating still,
> The gulf of want enlarging, deepening, till
> The one into the other sink at last
> With all confusion:
>
> (*William Allingham*, A Diary, p. 303)

Tennyson is ill at ease on account of the social scene. He would invite a change since change is in accordance with the law of Nature;

> For Nature also, cold and warm,
> And moist and dry, devising long,
> Through many agents making strong,
> Matures the individual form.

Meet is it change should control
Our being, lest we rust in ease.
We all are changed by dergees,
All but the basis of the soul.
... ...
Regard gradation, lest the soul
Of Discord race the rising wind.
("Love thou thy land")

The use of the word 'gradation' in this context brings Tennyson in to line with Disraeli and Mrs. Norton, their view of society being in principle the same. Like them, Tennyson draws lessons of social philosophy from observations of Nature. Like them he believes that social change is to be brought about by the wise guidance of the Statesman, not by popular revolution, not by blood and 'hoar anarchies' which he mentions in "The Poet". For 'the herd', Tennyson has deep distrust. As even his earliest poetry shows he had found nothing in popular revolution

Save the blind impulse of the brutal zeal
Which urges the mad populace to vent
Upon the breathless dead that cannot feel,
The fury of their senseless chastisement.
(*Poems by Two Brothers*, p. 232)

The attitude runs through expressions in early poetry like "the braggart shout for some blind glimpse of freedom work itself thro' madness", "a noise of hands that disarrange the social engine", to the "red fool fury of the Seine" and other phrases of his mature poetry. And along with the mob, the mob-leader too comes under the poet's disfavour. Tennyson deprecates the "loud lies of the time" and "the shallow fret and frothy fume of brass-mouthed demagogues, O' Connell, Hume", and exclaims in Miltonic solemnity :

Woe to the double-tongued, the land's disease,
Lords of the hustings, whose mob-rhetoric rends
The ears of Truth ! ! ... ...

... ...

Those that inflame themselves with idle words
In every market-place. Their doom is signed,
Tho' they shall cause confusion and the storms
Of civil blood—Moths, cankers, palmer-worms
That gnaw the bud, blind leaders of the blind.

(*Unpublished Early Poems*, p. 62)

Since mob-rhetoric rends the ears of Truth, the poet must have no truck with the leaders who mislead. He will, on the contrary, use his rhyme as a hammer to break the tricks of time-serving agitators:

Wherever evil customs thicken
Break thro' with the hammer of iron rhyme,
Till priest-craft and king-craft sicken,
But pap-meat-pamper not the time
With the flock of the thunder-stricken.
If the world caterwaul, lay harder upon her
Till she clapperclaw no longer,
Bang thy stithy stronger, and stronger
Thy rhyme-hammer *shall* have honour.

(*Ibid.*, p. 97)

It is a pity that Tennyson abandoned this style of writing that testifies to a virility in surprising contrast to the polished effiminacy of the bulk of his poetry. With Tennyson, the pivot of the social wheel is the ideal Statesman (perhaps Arthur Hallam, if he had lived) who would not "pamper a hasty time" nor feed "with crude imaginings the herd"; who would work according to "innovation grade by grade"; who would neither cling to some ancient saw nor allow himself to be mastered by some modern term; who would be above hollow verbalism of all kinds. Under this all-judging and benevolent authoritarianism, there must be no interference with individual liberty. Should individual freedom be stifled by banded unions, Tennyson says in "You ask me, why", he would rather migrate to "the palms and temples of the South." Two common motifs of the poetry

of social ferment—trade unions and emigration—have been woven along with others in this poem. If the fundamental principles of statecraft and social organization be fulfilled, principles that recognize individual liberty in co-existence with benevolent authoritarianism, organization that assumes a hierarchical society based on justice and harmony, Tennyson would look forward joyously to a time beyond the fear of change and the conflict between the Haves and Have-nots, beyond the controversy of the Corn-Laws, to the golden year

> When wealth no more shall rest in mounded heaps,
> But smit with freer light shall slowly melt
> In many streams to fatten lower lands,
> And light shall spread.
>
> ("The Golden Year")

Like Leonard of "The Golden Year", Tennyson sometimes feels he is "a tongue-tied Poet in the feverous days", and on one occasion, he writes:

> Oh, what care I how many a fluke
> Sticks in the liver of the time ?
> I cannot prate against the Duke,
> I love to have an idle rhyme.
> ... ...
> For, though she [the Muse] has her hopes and fears,
> She dwells not on a single page,
> But thrids the annals of the years,
> And runs her eye from age to age.
> What's near is large to modern eyes,
> But disproportions fade away
> Lower'd in the sleepy pits where lies
> The dropsied Epos of the day.
>
> (*Unpublished Early Poems*, "An Idle Rhyme")

The idea of the vastness of time and space deeply stirred the imagination of Tennyson. As a boy, he is reported to have advised Frederick Tennyson to "think of Herschel's great star-

patches" to get over shyness.[30] In some letters to Emily Sellwood, written in 1839, he writes:

> The far future has been my world always.
>
> That made me count the less of sorrows when I caught a glimpse of the sorrow-less Eternity.
>
> Annihilate within yourself these two dreams of Space and Time. To me often the far-off world seems nearer than the present, for in the present is always something unreal and indistinct, but the other seems a good solid planet...
>
> (*Tennyson, A Memoir,* i, pp. 168-72)

"The far future has been my world always"—a deeply significant statement this. The far future was Tennyson's world in regard to social and political movements as well. As he conceived it, his function as a poet was to instil into his readers an awareness of the essential requirements of the age. Hallam Tennyson records the effects of a letter written to his father in 1835 by G. S. Venables :

> The great Catholic painters could express what was at the same time ideal and real in the minds of the people: but the modern artist has hardly ever found similar objects of high imagination and intense popular feeling for his art to work upon. If, wrote Venbales, in a contemporary letter to my father, an artist could now find out where these objects are, he would be *the* artist of modern times. Venables affirmed they were not to be sought in transient fashions of thought, but in the "convergent tendencies of many opinions" on religion, art and nature,—of which tendencies he and others believed, he said, my father, with his commanding intellect, and conspicuous moral courage, ought to be the artistic exponent and unifier. My father pondered all that had been said, and—after a period of prostration from grief, and many dark fits of blank despondency—his passionate love of truth, of nature, and of humanity

> drove him to work again, with a deeper and a fuller insight into the requirements of the age.
>
> (*Tennyson, A Memoir*, i., 123)

Tennyson brooded over the requirements of the age and found that the age could best be served by those who would project their vision beyond the age. He would consider the "vast eddies in the flood of onward time"; he would "contemplate all this work of Time, the giant labouring in his youth"; he would merge his "private sorrow's barren song" into the "larger hope" for mankind; he must maintain that "what's near is large to modern eyes, but disproportions fade away". And in assuming such a far-stretching, visionary view of things, Tennyson advisedly refuses to overrate the meaning of the contemporary social unrest. His aim is to penetrate through the dust and cobweb of passing events to vigorous and stable principles; he must not cramp his heart by taking those "half-views of men and things" which are, he says in "Will Waterproof's Monologue", the consequence of party-politics.—This is a judicial and unimpassioned reaction to the social situation which prefers principles to events. The social unrest, as such, fails to lend substance to Tennyson's poetry, and almost the only significant contribution of his consciousness of the unrest to his poetry is the hungry lion image in "Locksley Hall", an image that came to him from a minor contemporary, Thomas Pringle. [31]

Browning, as a lad, came under the influence of Voltaire and Shelley. In early youth, he associated with the radical W. J. Fox. Apart from the possibility that his socio-political views might have been influenced by others, Browing's own intellectual curiosity should presumably have turned his thoughts to the contemporary social unrest. His early letters, few as they

are, show practically no interest in social conditions; there are slight references to the Corn-Laws, to "the fierce political reality"— a reference to the Chartist agitation—to Carlyle's radicalism, and to Peel's turning a Liberal.[1 2] Browning's first work, *Pauline*, has nothing to do with social questions, nor has *Paracelsus*, although in this story of the chequered career of an aspiring soul, we note the emergence of that humanitarianism which presently becomes a dominant and recurrent theme of his early works. The question of the rights of the common people attracts Browning's speculative mind and during the ten years after the publication of *Paracelsus* (years during which social conditions in England are exceptionally disturbed), Browning dwells upon the question in a series of works, chiefly the plays. The clearest testimony, however, of his intense interest in the contemporary social misery occurs in *Sordello*. Sympathy for suffering humanity is indeed the keystone of the Browningian version of the troubadour's story. When in 1837, Browning's composition of the poem reached an *impasse* and he went on his first Italian tour, he was inspired to a revitalized conception of the work because of this sympathy. In the personal digression of the third book, Browning speaks of his musings in Venice. Where is she who can be an inspiring queen of his unfinished poem ?—This busy Bassanese, that twinkling woman of Asolo, that Paduan girl ? The poet cannot make a choice. Meanwhile, a miserable beggar woman plucks at his garment, and he who till lately has complaisantly believed that happiness is everyone's portion except of "a luckless residue, we send to crouch in corners out of sight", now finds himself overwhelmed by a representative of that residue. In this beggar woman, Browning finds a symbol and a source of inspiration, an inspiring symbol that will inject vitality into his moribund verse-narrative. It is she, Browning decides, this Mater Dolorosa, this beggar-representative of the "warped souls and bodies" of suffering humanity who will be the ravishing genius of his poem:

> I call you ravishing, for I regret
> Little that she, whose early feet was set

Forth as she'd plant it on a pedestal,
Now, i' the silent city, seems to fall
Towards me—no wreath, only a lip's unrest
To quiet, surcharged eyelids to be pressed
Dry of their tears upon my bosom.
(*Sordello*, III, 773-79)

The woman-symbol of his early vision, the splendid queen standing on a pedestal, has changed now into the queen of sorrow. So deeply impressed is Browning by his experiences of the misery of common people and so strongly he comes to believe in the poet's social responsibility that, using the image of the Israelites in the wilderness, he denounces those poets who think it fit to sing frivolous madrigals while the people suffer. In 1837, how to wind up the story of Sordello was Browning's quandary; his Italian tour, increasing his sensitiveness to poverty and social iniquities, provided him with a solution in the conception of the troubadour as a champion of the oppressed and the miserable. Observing the crowd in the streets of Ferrara, Sordello realizes that society is divided into two classes, the few—the tall, prodigious pines; and the many:

a throng
Of shrubs he saw—a nameless common sort
O'erpast in dreams, left out of the report
And hurried into corners.
(*Sordello*, IV, 212-15)

He is startled by "the faint remainder of some worn-out smile" of this common sort,

startling all the more, that these
Seemed passive and disposed of, and uncared for.
(*Ibid.*, IV, 228-29)

But this social injustice cannot continue long:

And yet the people grew, the people grew,
Grew ever.
(*Ibid.*, IV, 218-19)

> which the "state of England question" thrust itself upon the attention of the public between 1832 and 1840. It was a terrible question enough; it was nothing else than the inquiry, how, if at all, was it possible to alleviate the miseries and remove the discontent of the working classes?
>
> (A. V. Dicey, *Law and Opinion in England*, 211-12.)

There is point indeed in Carlyle's definition of Chartism: "Chartism means the bitter discontent grown fierce and mad, the wrong condition therefore or the wrong disposition, of the Working Classes of England."[4] Again: "These Chartisms, Radicalisms, Reform Bill, Tithe Bill, and infinite other discrepancy, and acrid argument and jargon that there is yet to be, are *our* French Revolution."[5]

There is sufficient evidence in the economic and social history of England to indicate that the most striking feature of the years between 1830 and 1848 was "the emergence and prominence of the social questions."[6] A disturbing consequence of this social ferment was an acute class-hatred. As early as 1820, Walter Scott referred in a letter to "the unhappy dislocation which has taken place betwixt the employer and those in his employment."[7] In 1842, Sidney Herbert[8] spoke thus at a church meeting:

> There is too little communication between classes in this country. We want, if not the feeling, at least the expression, of more sympathy on the part of the rich towards the poor; and more personal intercourse between them.

In *Mary Barton*, Mrs. Gaskell comments thus on the economic conditions of the English working classes during the Early Victorian period:-

> This disparity between the amount of the earnings of the working classes and the price of their food, occasioned, in more cases than could well be imagined, disease and

Sordello resolves to work for the service of humanity, for the restoration of their rights to the deprived many:

> First a mighty equilibrium, sure,
> Should he establish, privilege procure
> For all, the few had long possessed !
> (*Ibid.*, IV, 261-63)

But how precisely is he to begin his service ? He cannot work alone. He will not be allowed to work alone in a country where social life is convulsed by the antagonism of two parties. Whom should he support—the Guelfs or the Ghibellines ? Sordello ponders much as an earnest Early Victorian—for that matter, Browning himself—might weigh between the Tories and the Liberals. "Rome's the Cause !", decides Sordello. And Rome for the medieval Christian, symbolized the ideal of an integrated spiritual and secular life above the selfish passions of mere partisanship.

Sordello does not live to fulfil his ideal. He dies under the stress of the tumultuous mental self-assessment which is imposed on him by the unexpected revelation of the mystery of his birth. Before he dies, he asserts the rights of common humanity, the collectivist ideal of social evolution—"that collective man outstrips the individual,[33]—and the poet's rightful status as the natural leader of the people.

Far more analytical than Tennyson in his socio-political philosophy, Browning is like Tennyson in his search for principles transcending party-interests. The non-partisan nature of his politics comes out in a sonnet published in 1885:

> Little do or can the best of us:
> That little is achieved through Liberty.
> Who, then, dares hold—emancipated thus—
> His fellow shall continue bound ? Not I
> Who live, love, labour freely, nor discuss
> A brother's right to freedom. That is 'Why'.
> (*New Poems*, "Why I am a Liberal", p. 54)

Browning is carried by his zeal for principles so far as to relate the problems of poverty and social justice to the rarefied metaphysical problems of Evil, Failure, and the interrelation between the Body and the Soul. It is also remarkable that though Browning's humanitarianism sprang presumably from his experiences of English conditions, it is non-English setting and character that stimulate his poetic thoughts on social questions. He is shocked by the "sad dishevelled ghost" of suffering humanity in Venice, not anywhere in England. Pippa, the only factory girl in his poetry, is an Italian though there was no dearth of forlorn factory girls in England.

Elizabeth Barrett, cooped up in her invalid's room, maintained an amazingly lively interest in the conditions and events of the world outside and made liberal use of this interest in her works. Her early poems testify to a vague liberalism. "The Appeal" in *Poems* (1833) thus exhorts the children of England:

> Are ye men, and love not man ?
> Love ye, and permit his ban ?
> Can ye, dare ye rend the chain
> Wrought of common joy and pain,
> Clasping with its links of gold ?
> Man to man in one strong hold ?

Presently, she comes to learn in greater details of the realities of social miseries: an early evidence of this new knowledge can be found in "The Soul's Travelling" of *The Seraphim* volume of 1838 in which the second section presents a jumbled picture of a street-scene with its thronged contrasts of the rich man and the whining beggar, the silk-dressed lady and the street-sweeper,

the business man and the cabman. From R. H. Horne she learnt of child-labour and wrote the "Cry of the Children", a poem of great propaganda value which earned her the admiration of the Anti-Corn Law League. In one of her letters, she calls herself a "(magna) Chartist", indicating her sympathies with the Chartist Movement. Contrast between the increasing wealth of the few and the misery of the many is the theme of "The Cry of the Human" :

> The curse of gold upon the land
> The lack of bread enforces;
> The rail-cars snort from strand to strand,
> Like more of Death's White Horses:
> The rich preach "rights" and "future days"
> And hear no angel scoffing,
> The poor die mute, with starving gaze
> On corn-ships in the offing,
> Be pitiful, O God !

Her humanitarian sympathies find expression in several passages of *Casa Guidi Windows*. Reviewing the pomp and splendour of the Crystal Palace, she asks the liberal nations, have they

> no light
> Of teaching, liberal nations, for the poor
> Who sit in darkness when it is not night ?
> No cure for wicked children ? Christ,—no cure !
> No help for women sobbing out of sight
> Because men made the laws ? no brothel-lure
> Burnt out by popular lightnings ? Hast thou found
> No remedy, my England ? for such woes ?
> (*Casa Guidi Windows*, II, 634-41)

From these occasional outpourings of passionate sympathy, Mrs. Browning passes on to a sustained expression in *Aurora Leigh* of her ideas on social questions. The two main themes of this novel-poem are love and social service. Romney Leigh is a

Christian Socialist who finds the world "half brutalised with a civilisation" and cries:

> The world's hard pressed:
> The sweat of labour in the early curse
> Has (turning acrid in six thousand years)
> Become the sweat of torture...
> (*Aurora Leigh*, II, 165- 68)

> And rich men make the poor, who curse the rich,
> Who agonise together, rich and poor,
> Under and over, in the social spasm.
> ... (*Ibid.*, II, 271-73)

> Who
> Being man, Aurora, can stand calmly by
> And view these things, and never tease his soul
> For some great cure ?
> (*Ibid.*, II, 279-82)

Romney Leigh teases his soul for a great cure, a comprehensive plan of life that will remove social ills and will also re-direct mankind to the way of Christ. He finds that

> the tyrannous sword,
> Which pierced Christ's heart, has cleft the world in twain
> 'Twixt class and class, opposing rich to poor,
> (*Ibid.*, IV, 122-24)

Romney has beheld the world "as one great famishing carnivorous mouth"[34] ; he has been "distracted with the cries of tortured prisoners in the polished brass of that Phalarion bull, society", he has suffered in his efforts to remove the evils of society and has at last come to believe that socialism and quick revolution cannot succeed. The eighth and the ninth books present lengthy arguments on the social situation and social philosophies and the reader should not be left in any doubt about Mrs. Browning's final position. That her personal opinions have been liberally introduced in this verse narrative has been admitted by herself:

> I have put much of myself in it—I mean to say, of my soul, my thoughts, emotions, opinions; in other respects, there is not a personal line, of course.
>
> (*Letters of E. B. Browning*, ii. 228)

In the letters, she states her social ideals in clear language:

> Fixed principles, either of opinion or action, seem clearly gone out of the world. The principle of Destruction is in the place of the principle of Re-integration or of Radical Reform.
>
> (*Ibid.*, i, 389)

> Really we are not communists, farther than to admit the wisdom of voluntary association in matters of material life among the poorer classes...I would have the government educate the people absolutely and *then* give room for the individual to develop himself into life freely.
>
> (*Ibid.*, i, 363)

As Aurora Leigh understands it, and Mrs. Browning too understands it, the real trouble with the world is that it has no faith in spiritual values—"materialist the age's name is" [35]. Basically mistaken are those who understand "our natural world too insularly, as if no spiritual counterpart completed it, consummating its meaning". Aurora is wise when she says :

> It takes the ideal, to blow a hair's-breadth off
> The dust of the actual,—Ah, your Fouriers failed,
> Because not poets enough to understand
> That life develops from within.
>
> (*Aurora Leigh*, II, 482-85)

At the end of the story, Romney accepts Aurora's wisdom:

> Fourier's void,
> And Comte absurd,—and Cabet puerile.
> Subsist no rules of life outside of life,
> No perfect manners without Christian souls.
>
> (*Ibid.*, IX, 868-71)

In plain words, Man doth not live by bread alone. The social worker is asked to realize that merely catering to the material well-being of the poor leaves the problem unsolved. Secondly, when we have recognized the spiritual counterpart of the natural world, we must necessarily take the individual soul into account. The usual error of the social worker is that in his zeal for collective justice to the poor, he forgets the individual, whereas in a healthy administrative system, there must be equipoise in the relations between the individual and the society.

> Genuine government
> Is but the expression of a nation, good
> Or less good—even as all society,
> Howe'er unequal, monstrous, crazed and cursed,
> Is but the expression of men's single lives,
> The loud sum of the silent units.
> (*Ibid.*, VIII, 873-78)

A further error of the social worker lies in his belief in "this or that quack nostrum";[36] he develops an inelastic, doctrinaire mind. Success comes to the worker who works quietly, patiently, remembering the importance of the individual soul.

> We want more quiet in our works,
> More knowledge of the bounds in which we work;
> More knowledge that each individual man
> Remains an Adam to the general race.
> (*Ibid.*, VIII, 852-55)

After being tossed rudely in the storm of unstable ideologies, Rommey Leigh at last finds his heaven in his knowledge of the integrality of love and service—"let us love so well, our work shall still be better for our work, and both commended, for the sake of each, by all true workers and true lovers born" [37]. Aurora will "blow all class-walls level as Jericho's past Jordan" so that all souls that hear her call shall get "to some purer eminence than any hitherto beheld for clouds", and shall also

realise "how by mounting ever we attain, and so climb on". Romney's last words—words that are equivalent to the poet's verdict—are :

> The world's old,
> But the old world waits the time to be renewed,
> Toward which, new hearts in individual growth
> Must quicken, and increase to multitude
> In new dynasties of the race of men;
> Developed whence, shall grow spontaneously
> New churches, new economies, new laws
> Admitting freedom, new societies
> Excluding falsehood.
>
> (*Ibid.*, IX, 941-49)

Mrs. Browning thought deeply and earnestly over social problems. More than any other poet of her age, she recognized the possibilities of the social situation as a theme of poetry. Her lyrics on particular social evils are among the best and the most effective of the kind. She alone among the major poets of the period, produced a sustained work on the many-sided social situation, and if the work leaves the impression of an academic endeavour somewhat at variance with the realities, the cause of the deficiency lies in the peculiar circumstances of her life rather than in her artistic integrity and moral intelligence.

A. H. Clough calls himself the 'Apostle of anti-laissez-faire',[38] and writes sarcastically in "In the Great Metropolis":

> Each for himself is still the rule:
> We learn it when we go to school—
> The devil take the hindmost, O !

Clough's letters show a more acute and consistent response to the contemporary social and political situation than those of any other major Victorian poet. To his friend, Burbidge, he writes in 1844:

> I do believe that he [the labourer] has not his proper proportion, that capital tyrannises over labour, and that Government is bound to interfere to prevent such bullying; and I do believe, too, that in some way or other the problem now solved by universal competition or the-devil-take-the-hindmost may receive a more satisfactory solution. It is manifestly absurd that, to allow me to get my stockings a halfpenny a pair cheaper, the operative stocking-weaver should be forced to go barefoot,
>
> (*Poems and Prose Remains*, i, 91)

The perplexity which distinguishes Clough's poetry is derived no less from his social consciousness than the religious. With a feeling heart, Dipsychus exclaims :

> How shall I laugh and sing and dance ?
> My every heart recoils,
> While here to give my mirth a chance
> A hungry brother toils.
>
> (*Ibid.*, ii, 133)

To which the Mocking Spirit replies :

> This world is very odd we see,
> We do not comprehend it;
> But in one fact we all agree,
> God won't, and we can't mend it.
> Being common sense, it can't be sin
> To take it as I find it;
> The pleasure to take pleasure in;
> The pain, try not to mind it.
>
> (*Ibid.*, ii, 134)

Clough's analyses of the contemporary social situation are always liberal and unorthodox, and it is possible to gather the impression from his writings that if he had lived longer or if he had been born at a slightly later date, he might have developed into a socialist. As it is, his generous and sensitive spirit, his connection with Florence Nightingale, and his skepticism about

many prevalent social philosophies force him to recognize only one kind of social principle possible in the contemporary situation,viz., service. Most other principles are liable to question. In a review-essay, Clough offers some significant statements :

> The crying evil, as it appears to us, of the present system of unrestricted competition, is not so much the distress of the workmen as the extreme slovenliness and badness of their work. The joy and satisfaction of making really good things is destroyed by the criminal eagerness to make them to suit the market. The love of art, which, quite as much as virtue, is its own reward, used in the old times to penetrate down as far as to the meanest manufacture...With us, on the contrary, the miserable truckling to the bad taste of the multitude has gradually stolen up into the very regions of the highest art...
>
> So far as co-operative societies or guilds would remove this evil, they would be of great use. But let it not be forgotten that the object of human society is not the mere culinary one of securing equal apportionments of meat and drink to all of its members. Men combine for some higher object; and to that higher object it is, in their social capacity, the *privilege* and real happiness of individuals to sacrifice themselves. The highest political watchword is not Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, nor yet Solidarity but *Service*.
>
> (*Ibid.*, i, 416)

The attitude in the first paragraph of the extract quoted might be Ruskin's or Morris's; the attitude in the second is that of Mrs. Browning minus her emotional eagerness. Clough has incorporated the views of Florence Nightingale within his framework of rational analysis.

He seemed to have reached some more or less stable notions towards the end of his life, judging by some of the prose works and later letters, but the poems testify to his perplexity and, be-

cause of the perplexity, ubiquitous banter. In *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*, the poet Philip Hewson, a hot Radical, a Chartist, argues with the tutor Adam on the question of Equality. To Adam's contention that however noble the dream of Equality, Equality reigns nowhere in the world, Philip raps out :

> Ah, replied Philip, Alas ! the noted phrase of the Prayer-book,
> *Doing our duty in that state of life to which God has called us,*
> Seems to me always to mean, when the little rich boy says it,
> Standing in velvet frock by mamma's brocaded flounces,
> Eyeing her gold-fastened book and the watch and chain at her bosom,
> Seems to me always to mean, Eat, drink, and never mind others.
>
> (A. H. Clouth, *Poems*, p. 221)

It is a hit simultaneously at the rich-and-poor hiatus and the prevalent subservience of religion to the vested interests of society. Philip's disillusion about the social reality breeds scorn in his soul, and he writes ironically :

> Often I find myself saying, and know not myself as I say it,
> What of the poor and the weary ? their labour and pain is needed.
> Perish the poor and the weary ! what can they better than perish,
> Perish in their labour for her, who is worth the destruction of empires ?
>
> ... ...
>
> Dig in thy dark prison, O miner ! and finding be thankful;
> Though unpolished by thee, unto thee unseen in perfection,

> death. Whole families went through a gradual starvation. They only wanted a Dante to record their sufferings. And yet even his words would fall short of the awful truth; they could only present an outline of the tremendous facts of the destitution that surrounded thousands upon thousands in the terrible years 1839, 1840, and 1841... The most deplorable and enduring evil that arose out of the period of commercial depression to which I refer, was this feeling of alienation between the different classes of society.
>
> *(Mary Barton,* ch. viii *)*

The distress which came to a head in 1840, had been accumulating for a long time, and, during the two decades between 1830 and 1850, assumed a particularly acute form. Allied to various political issues, the economic distress was the chief feature of the social situation of the period, and although not even a minor Dante arose to incorporate the situation in enduring and sustained poetry, a good deal of the verse of the period actually concerned itself with the perplexity and the class-alienation to which Mrs. Gaskell refers. No study of Victorian literature—of Victorian poetry, in particular—can be complete without a consideration of this verse of contemporary social distress.

The Reform Act of 1832 evoked a great deal of excitement. In one of Thomas Wade's "Reform Bill Hymns", we have a representative expression of Radical expectations that this Act would punish the aristocrats, and possibly even eliminate all class- inequality:

While thou art eating black bread in the poisonous air of thy cavern,
Far away glitters the gem on the peerless neck of a Princess.
Dig, and starve, and be thankful ; it is so, and thou hast been aiding.

... ...

Yea, what is more, be rich, O ye rich ! be sublime in great houses,
Purple and delicate linen endure; be of Burgundy patient;
Suffer that service be done to you, permit of the page and the valet,
Vex not your souls with annoyance of charity schools or of districts,
Cast not to the swine of the stye the pearls that should gleam in your foreheads.
(*Ibid.*, pp. 253-54)

And yet the upshot of all this fret and banter is a defeatist escape to the antipodes. Philip marries Elspie, goes over to New Zealand, and settles down in that new country away from "the whole great wicked artificial civilised fabric." Philip's flight from the closed air of Europe's civilization symbolizes a typical Victorian attitude. In the lover of Tennyson's "Locksley Hall", in the duchess of Browning's "Flight of the Duchess", in the personal lives of E. J. Trelawny and R. H. Horne, we have evidences of that modern preference of the simple and the primitive to the complex and the civilized, a preference that has continued from the Victorian period to our own times through Paul Gauguin, D. H. Lawrence, and the warped tropical characters of Somerset Maugham.

The intellectual's puzzlement at the social tangle, typified in Philip Hewson, is shown too in an incipient form in Claude of *Amours de Voyage*. Claude who neither meddles nor makes in politics, whose sensitive nature nevertheless makes him throbbingly aware of the people's miseries.

In his poems, Clough reaches no conclusion about the social muddle ; the social situation no less than the religious is responsible for the crumbling down of many of the intellectual and moral verities that he had received from tradition. It is because his attitude well represents the attitude of a sensitive section of the bourgeoisie of the times and because he is one of the few abler writers to introduce the contemporary social situation in sustained works that Clough is of considerable interest to the student of the social ferment of the Early Victorian period.

It is not surprising that Matthew Arnold who afterwards grew into a tireless and powerful social critic, should show in his letters a continued interest in the social scene. He is convinced that "the hour of the hereditary peerage and eldest sonship and immense properties" has struck; on one occasion, he is tempted to engage in some political writing ; he sympathizes with the Chartists though he would be sorry to live under their government. [39] The two sonnets "To A Republican Friend. 1848" give vent to his "sadness at the long heart-wasting show" and bespeak his distrust of quick, revolutionary change.

> Nor will that day dawn at a human nod,
> When, bursting through the network superposed
> By selfish occupation—plot and plan,
> Lust, avarice, envy—liberated man,
> All difference with his fellow man composed,
> Shall be left standing face to face with God.

Arnold's direct utterances in poetry on the social situation are few though spread over the whole of his productive period. The early "Horatian Echo" speaks of "the engine-work of state" and "the rights of man" ; the late sonnet "West London" deals with the rich-and-poor theme, yet the treatment of social questions is merely incidental in his poetry. When we compare Arnold's poetry with the prose and the letters, we are struck by the fact that the more in the latter he grows absorbed in social questions, the more does he explore distant legends for the content of his

poems. There is a significant dichotomy in the contents of Arnold's writings : what is good for prose is not apparently found good for poetry.

The reason for the dichotomy is inherent in Arnold's concept of the objects of poetry. In the preface to the 1853 volume of his *Poems*, Arnold explains his concept at length. "What", asks he, "are the eternal objects of Poetry, among all nations and at all times ?" The objects are "actions; human actions", and "the modernity or antiquity of an action...has nothing to do with its fitness for poetical representation; this depends upon its inherent qualities." Arnold says further that "poetical works belong to the domain of our permanent passions" and must produce a "total impression."

Accepting then the hypothesis that a poetic action set against one age is as valid as a poetic action set against another, Arnold nevertheless prefers the antique fable to the modern. He writes:

> I know not how it is, but their commerce with the ancients appears to me to produce, in those who constantly practise it, a steadying and composing effect upon their judgement, not of literary works only, but of men and events in general.
>
> (*Poetical Works*, p. 13)

I know not how it is: a significant admission that. An empirical inference need not necessarily agree with a logical deduction. That Arnold does not find his hypothesis ratified by his experience of the actual works of modern literature, even though he cannot explain why the ratification should be lacking, is an evidence of his literary taste, a taste that conforms to the taste and judgment of the other major poets of the age. Like Tennyson and Browning, Matthew Arnold is personally interested in social problems and yet, like Tennyson and Browning, he finds the contemporary situation aesthetically less acceptable than fables of distant times. Classically-minded authors, Arnold says,

> attained their grand results by penetrating themselves with some noble and significant action, not by inflating themselves with a belief in the preeminent importance and greatness of their own times. They do not talk of their mission, nor of interpreting their age, nor of the coming Poet; all this, they know, is the mere delirium of vanity...they ask what special fitness the present age has for supplying them: they are told that it is an era of progress, an age commissioned to carry out the great ideas of industrial development and social amelioration. They reply that with all this they can do nothing...that so far as the present age can supply such actions, they will gladly make use of them; but that an age wanting in moral grandeur can with difficulty supply such...
>
> (*Poetical Works*, p. 14)

The contemporary social situation does not provide Arnold with a theme. In rejecting this muddled situation in favour of deeper moral issues, Arnold brings himself in line with Tennyson and Browing. And perhaps this dichotomy within himself between his democratic sympathy for the suffering multitude and his realisation of the unsuitability of this sympathy and this suffering for aesthetic purposes was an aggravating factor to his melancholy.

This poetry of social ferment covers a wide range of topics and attitudes which not infrequently contradict one another. The contradiction was inevitable in an age when the nation—the first, in modern history, to take to democracy, technology and applied science—was excitedly trying to adjust its life to profoundly altered and still altering material conditions. This was the period when the principal implications of mechanised and science-dominated life manifested themselves in society, and the Early Victorians were really path-finders in problems that continue to face us today and in most regions of the world. Among nations that have been somewhat recently going the way of democracy, science and technology, the material conditions today are more or less comparable to the conditions prevailing

in Early Victorian England, when allowances are made for the differences signified by post-Victorian discoveries in science and technique. To the impact of machinery and democracy on the social organisation, the literatures of such nations have reacted along lines more or less similar to those of Early Victorian literature. The Early Victorian pattern of socio-economic ferment has its modern counterparts—once again, making all such allowances as history demands—in many parts of the world, not in Asia alone. Today's poet of a newly-emerging nation has, more often than not, to find himself confronted with aesthetic problems of a nature broadly similar to those of the Early Victorians and therefore it may be worth his while to draw lessons from, not necessarily to imitate, his British predecessor. Indeed, not only the poet of another nation and another language, but the British poet of today as well, might find it instructive to study the poetry of the social ferment of a century ago.

In an age of far-reaching changes, as the Early Victorian period was, a multiplicity of opinions regarding ends and means was certain to prevail. Orthodoxy and progressivism quickly proved to be relative terms and inasmuch as the radical of today is often the diehard of tomorrow, shifts in social ideals and movements left a Samuel Bamford or a Thomas Cooper behind.[40] Among writer-politicians, opportunists were quite numerous and Browning's "The Lost Leader" and Ebenezer Jones's "Opinions Change" are among the many poems that were written at the time on the theme of turn-coats. To whichever school of politics the poets of social reform may belong, they resolve themselves ultimately into two camps of social philosophy, individualist and collectivist, camps that distinguish the world of today as well.

Amidst the conflict of opinions—Tory, Radical, moderate, ecclesiastical, secular, Christian, materialist—we note an agreement on the sharp and antagonistic class-differences in society. The poetry of the period fully bears out, as the social and

economic history does, the essential justification of Disraeli's division of the British people of the time into two nations. Earlier in the century, Jeffreys had praised Crabbe for having chosen his characters from "the lower ranks of life" and his scenery from "the most ordinary and familiar objects of nature and art"[1]. In our period, a number of writers choose similar subjects with a definite social purpose. One of the effects of this class-difference on poetry etc. is the rise of a large group of "uneducated poets", some of whom try honestly to give expression to proletarian feelings while some others, for reasons we shall discuss presently, carefully avoid their distinguishing experiences. While the Chartist aims at removing class-difference by liquidating the privileged aristocracy; while the Young Englander urges an alliance between the two natural classes, the Aristocracy and Labour; while the Christian Socialist applies his interpretation of the gospel to social problems; while the humanist seeks to disentangle the enduring principles of life from the fluid passion of the moment; all agree that the miseries of poverty which have overwhelmed the labouring classes during the last half-century or more require speedy eradication. The rich-and poor theme is a frequent one in this period. Among the large number of other topical questions discussed in verse are the Corn Laws and Free Trade; the anti-social character of the Church; factory conditions, conditions in mines, child-labour, female labour, agricultural labour; slavery, colonial life, emigration, convicts; temperance and the fallen woman; Malthusian, Chartist, Owenite, Utilitarian, socialist doctrines. Indeed Early Victorian poetry represents faithfully and comprehensively the many-sided socio-economic problems of the times.

Attempts are made to diagnose the disease of the society and to find adequate remedies. In these early days of industrial and imperialist economy, there is very little attempt to make any objective and minute analysis of the causes, the nature, and the effects of the social ferment. Most poets desire to see a general, comprehensive plan—to be devised by some wise statesman—but their own approach to the solution of the social

predicament is almost invariably on a moral and emotional plane. Avarice, materialism and selfishness of the upper classes are supposed by some to be the root of the evil. Pleas for mercy to the poor mingle with aggressive and threatening assertions of their rights and these assertions raise the more fundamental problem of the structure of society. Can the rights of the people be best maintained under an oligarchical superintendence of their well-being or will they flourish better after a total elimination of class-inequality ? There are those who believe that hierarchy is a natural, beneficent and irremovable principle of society; there are others, on the contrary, who think that complete socialism alone (either the materialistic variety, or, better still, Christian socialism) can rid society of economic suffering as well as the travails of international war.

Whatever their views, none of the Early Victorian writers advocates the *status quo*. Nostalgic praise for the good old days is rare. Disraeli praises feudalism in *The Revolutionary Epick* while his admirer the Hon. George Sydney Smythe sings of the "Merchants of England". With less deliberate political ideology, William Dearden glorifies the "Sires of good old times", the "Dames of good old times", and the "primeval tenants of the native hills", and Eliza Cook writes wistfully of old story-books and old street-cries. A notable expression of this feeling comes from F. H. Doyle:

> Nay, in the rough old times of old,
> When steel had lordship over gold,
> Their life showed better hope and plan,
> Stood straighter before God and man.
>
> (*The Two Destinies* p. 19)

This nostalgia, issuing from a revulsion from the complexities of a fast-growing materialistic civilization, soon grew into a cult of medievalism with its stronghold among the Tractarians and the Pre-Raphaelites or into an escape to lands beyond the pale of European society. But in spite of these occassionally romantic tendencies, the poets were too powerfully conscious

of the forces of progress to fight shy of change. When Tennyson, writing the *Morte d'Arthur* in 1835, explained the changeability of the social order as an expression of the divine law, he and his readers might have had the contemporary social order in view which, however good it might originally have been, had now grown corrupt and needed replacement.

In Early Victorian poetry, even as opinions vary regarding the cause of social misery and the end of social reconstruction, there also arise different views in respect of the means to be adopted. The cry of revolution, quick and bloody, is raised in some quarters, yet 'Gradual' is a frequent word of peculiar potency in the vocabulary of the times, and most writers are at bottom constitutionalists. No writer, again, is too much of a materialist to ignore religion. In fact, even those who are furious with churchmen and the existing church organization, speak of their idea of a purer and more sympathetic church, and with all these writers God remains the final court of appeal. It is instructive to study the religious attitudes of such writers as Ebenezer Elliott, J. M. Morgan, Capel Lofft and Thomas Cooper. Morgan criticizes (in *The Reproof of Brutus*) the Bible, church-functionaries, and sectarianism but also emphasizes his reverence for the "great Exemplar of the Christian scheme." Elliott, even while writing blood-thirsty lyrics, gives evidence of religious humility. Capel Lofft, who bitterly hates priestcraft, believes Christ to have been the first of the Socialists :

> Saviour alike and leveller of man,
> Divine reformer, and arch-republican,
> For what are we but workers of his will ?
> ... ...
> Whatever befall, enduring all alike,
> Hardship or ease, to suffer or to strike :
> Counting all gain, and careless of all loss,
> Save of Christ only, and his holy Cross,
>
> (*Ernest* ,VII, 662-680)

The only agnostic among all these poets of social ferment, Thomas Cooper lost faith through his study of Strauss but, as he says in his autobiography, he underwent a strange experience while lecturing to an audience of rationalists and made a total recantation. Like Cooper, another Chartist poet, Gerald Massey, devoted his later days to religious thoughts.

In spite of the wide range and earnest treatment of social questions in verse, very little really good poetry emerges from this mass of writing and the outstanding poets seldom deal directly with these questions. That the social ferment loomed large in the vision of all sensitive and thoughtful men and women of the period is evident to one who has knowledge of the biographies, letters, and memoirs of the period. Contemporary critics and reviewers quite often regarded the social situation as a fit theme of great poetry. *The Quarterly Review*[42] writes: "Its [the age's] want cannot be of themes and interest, but rather of those able to seize what lies before them, and turn it to right imaginative use". Some time later, the journal refers[43] to the reproduction in imaginative literature of the Condition-of-England question but does not think that much good will come out of it. *The Athenaeum*[44] disapproves of those writers who "are still persisting in the dream of acquiring Fame by epics of the *past* and names bearing no relation to actual society and living interest". *The Monthly Repository*,[45] a progressive magazine, calls upon the poets to "participate in the task of improving man's condition, social, individual, physical, moral and intellectual". Although as a subject for poetry, the social situation was approved by public opinion, it is a curious fact that the social unrest constitutes in only a very small measure the substance of the worthy poetry of the age. Poems of Early Victorian social discontent that are still readable can almost be counted on one's fingers: some of Ebenezer Elliott's lyrics, some of Mrs. Browning's, Ebenezer Jones's and Thomas Wade's; Hood's "Song of the Shirt", "Bridge of Sighs", and "Miss Killmansegg"; the poems of Tregarva in Kingsley's *Yeast*; and a few lines in Thomas Cooper, Gerald Massey, and Ernest

Jones. Capel Lofft and Mrs. Browning render the social unrest into the basic theme of their sustained works while Clough does so partially. Browning, Tennyson, and Matthew Arnold soar beyond this unrest. That feeble poets should fare badly in their poetic ventures need not surprise us. After all, it is not the theme that makes memorable poetry but the poet. What is rather surprising is that the major poets, thoroughly conscious of the social situation in their personal lives, did not find in the situation any source of poetic inspiration. As poets, they kept themselves aloof from the ferment. Should we account for this dichotomy between man and poet by saying that the Early Victorians did not find the questions significant enough for impulsion into poetic utterance, or that they were too egoistic to care for problems that did not directly touch their own lives, or that their concept of the function of poetry did not admit of such themes ? Or will it be satisfactory to ask : Who shall say to the poet that he must write on such and such a theme because we, no poets ourselves, have argued in its favour ? The poet's artistic growth is a subtle process partaking of both the spirit of the environments and independent individual experience although the proportion of the two elements may and does vary unpredictably. Refusing to be lotos-eating world-losers and world-forsakers, the Early Victorians were keenly aware of their social responsibilities and yet, in their poetic practice, the major poets actually avoid immediate environments. It is possible to argue that in spite of the widespread distress and agitation in the country, the writers were satisfied that on the whole progress to prosperity and justice was being maintained. Correct estimates of the personalities of the poets would hardly justify such an argument. It is again possible to argue that the distress did not affect the class to which the major poets belonged. It is an argument that would prove how unbridgeable the class-cleavage had become but the argument is untenable seeing that the novelists who were of the same social class as the poets did not neglect the social distress.

It is hazardous to generalize where a number of capable

The Hoary Dotard, Aristocracy,
Shakes in his crumbling palace-halls; for, hark !
On the broad ocean of Democracy
Floats Liberty...
(Mundi et Cordis &c. " A Song of the People ")

The targets of the angry have-nots were the Church and the aristocracy—the latter described by Wade as the "bubbles and butterflies of men" :

Unto the Mass
Who toil with head or hand, what boot the feuds
That furnish gabble to your heated moods,
When truth runs over with wine, and shows ye—liars !
We must have answer to our great desires
For Social Progress; or we force the way,
And o'er ye, as a mighty whirlwind pass !
(Ibid., "To the Peers")

This hatred of the aristocracy was further whetted when proletarian expectations were frustrated by the limited scope of the Reform Act. In the 'forties, Ebenezer Jones thus dramatized a scene of the French Revolution with an eye to the contemporary English situation:

"Death to the aristocrats !" the people roared,—
Death to my master—each man freely thought,—
As through the capital of France they poured,
A revolution's mob, with madness fraught.
(Studies in Sensation and Event, "A Slave's Triumph")

The effects of the Reform Act were interpreted by the various political parties according to their particular ways of thinking. If the Tories came out with such verse-pamphlets as *Men and Measures; Or, the Political Panorama* (1839) and *Agitation, A Political Essay* (1843)—both of anonymous authorship—the Radicals answered with the anonymous *A Trifle for the Tories* (1841) and *The Times. A Poetical Jeu d'esprit* (1839). R. H. Horne's play, *Spirit of the Peers and the People*, anony-

poets are concerned. Each major poet is a world in himself and what urges a poet to correlate his creative impulse to one particular theme rather than to another is a matter to be understood in terms of his mental processes rather than of the facts of his environments. The reasons for Tennyson's reaction to the social situation may be miles asunder from, say, Mrs. Browning's reaction. But even after we have made allowance for every difference that individual temperaments make—and the Victorians were highly individualistic—it is still possible to understand the poets' deliberate rejection of the contemporary situation as a part of their larger concept of the function of poetry. What idea prevailed in the Early Victorian period of the legitimacy or otherwise of political and social questions as themes of poetry ? A good deal of discussion took place on the subject during the fourth and fifth decades of the century. *The Athenaeum* reviewing the *Corn Law Rhymes*, writes:

> The intention of poetry is, like that of sorrow, to make the human heart better—to strengthen its energies and purify its emotions. Political poetry, however, powerful, does not do this: it appeals not to our better passions—it stirs our blood, but it does not calm our tempers.
>
> (*Athenaeum*, 1831, p. 370)

> The only politics for *poetry* are the politics of human nature and the whole universe—not those modifications of law and government which are expounded by act of Parliaments...poetry may declaim and take a side, but, like a beautiful woman in battle, she is not in her sphere... The politics for poetry must be those that appeal to the heart universal...she may twine wreaths for Freedom—denounce Oppression—lighten down upon Cruelty—have, like angel of the Apocalypse, her vial of wrath no less than her golden vial of odours; but she must deal with these subjects rather in the abstract than in the detail—rather as principles than personalities.
>
> (*Athenaeum*, 1831, pp. 577-78)

The frothy images in these paragraphs do not conceal the uneasiness that the writer feels about the introduction of radical politics in poetry. Contemporary reviews state again and again a hope that the poets should absorb the new social ideals, and yet when actually some poets dare do so, the reviewers are seriously perturbed, on grounds not of their artistic incompetence but of their radicalism. This anomalous attitude of the critics is particularly noticeable in the reviews of the so-called "uneducated poets" or working-class versifiers, a whole crop of whom arose between 1830 and 1850. The liberalism of the age gave these writers, a welcome, frequently a condescending welcome, but as soon as one of them produced verses impregnated with political convictions or radical social ideas, the reviewers raised a hue and cry. Indeed, there is justice in Kingsley's comment in *Yeast* on Honoria's attitude to Tregarva's poem :

> She was a staunch believer, too, in that peculiar creed which allows every one to feel for the poor, except themselves, and considers that to plead the cause of the working-man is, in a gentleman, the perfection of virtue, but in a working-man himself, sheer high treason.
>
> (*Yeast*, ch. xi)

As a rule, these working-class poets, many of whom utterly lack any flair for poetry, avoid the unpleasant ground of social controversies, and even the sorrowful ground of their own social disabilities, in order docilely to follow the conventional themes of poetry. Samuel Smiles has pertinent observations on this matter :

> In former times, when literature was regarded mainly in the light of a rich man's luxury, poets who rose out of the working-class sang as their patrons wished. Bloomfield and Clare sang of the quiet beauty of rural life, and painted pictures of evening skies, purling brooks, and grassy meads. Burns could with difficulty repress the 'Jacobin' spirit which burned within him; and yet even he was rarely, if ever, political in tone...But come down

> to our own day, and mark the difference : Elliott, Nicol, Bamford, the author of 'Ernest', the Chartist Epic, David, the 'Belfast Man', De Jean, Massey, and many others are intensely political ; and they defend themselves for their selection of subjects.
>
> (Introductory Biographic Sketch to the *Poetical Works of Gerald Massey*, London, 1861, pp. viii-ix.)

Smiles is not correct when he includes Capel Lofft among working class writers ; Nicol and Bamford have very few political poems; it is supercilious to carp at a working class writer's writing of evening skies and purling brooks. The fact however remains that far too few of these poetical aspirants wrote of the life and environment of which they had personal and indeed poignant knowledge. Possibly they avoided the theme of social misery because of the hostility of the reviewers to it. Consider the attitude of the *Quarterly*, in those days treated as "the next book to God's Bible". The review of the *Corn Law Rhymes* warns the poet: "As he tenders his soul, let him keep his thoughts from blood !" [46] The same influential journal condemns the Chartist Epic *Ernest* for being "so extravagant in its political views, and so abhorrent from that attachment to public order, to gradual improvement, to Christian virtue and piety",[47] and the condemnation intimidated Capel Lofft into withdrawing the 1839 print of his work from circulation. If Capel Lofft, a poet as respectable and educated as the reviewers, and Ebenezer Elliott, who was held in high esteem by men like Cobbett and Mill, could receive rough handling from the reviewers just because of their political views, the poets of humbler origin could very well adopt the better part of valour. Ebenezer Elliott was about the only poet who had the courage and strength to defend his choice of political themes.

> I will now tell my friend of the Athenaeum why I think there is nothing unnatural or improper in the union of poetry and politics. Because, I think, that any subject

> whatever in which man takes interest, however humble and common-place it may be, is capable of inspiring high and true poetry.
>
> (Preface to *Corn Law Rhymes*, p. 48)

> Elegant critics complain that the union of poetry with politics is always hurtful to the politics and fatal to the poetry...the gentlemen critics must be wrong, if Homer, Dante, Milton, Cowper, and Burns were poets. Why should the sensitive bard take less interest than other men in those things which most nearly concern mankind ?
>
> (*Ibid.*, p. 49)

Similarly Charles Mackay discusses the question of a proper balance between poetry and politics :

> To introduce politics into poetry is thought to be wrong by many critics...These objectors confound politics with party, which is a mistake; and they think poetry destined for amusement, which is another.
>
> (Introductory Essay to *Egeria*, p. xi)

This notion of the nature of the politics of political poetry is shared by Gerald Massey :

> I am convinced that a poet must sacrifice much if he write party-political poetry. His politics must be above the pinnacle of party zeal ; the politics of eternal truth, right, and justice,
>
> (*Poetical Works of Gerald Massey*, p. xiii)

The notion agrees with contemporary critical opinion that poets are to be exponents of principles. If they are to play their rightful part in the "improvement" of society, which they are called upon to do, they must express in their works the *spirit* of the age rather than facts and details. They are not required to "commemorate in hexameters and alexandrines, the debates on the Factory Bill, and to imitate in verse the whistling, pan-

ting and screaming of a locomotive engine". [48] That the major poets were in agreement with this view of the function of poets is proved by their practice in the choice and treatment of themes. Tennyson represents the opinion of his contemporaries when he states that party-politics compel a poet to take only a half-view of things and that such intellectual astigmatism is fatal to the poet's business of presenting truth imaginatively. The novelists of the period had no such scruples about the choice of their themes. The flexibility and capaciousness of the novel as a literary form enabled Early Victorian novelists to embody social problems in their works and frequently to deal with documentary details relating to the social predicament. Some of the minor versifiers made valiant attempts to put their political convictions to poetic uses but their works suffer from a feebleness which not even their admiration for Milton and Shelley could remedy.

The question of the relation between poetry and politics exercises the modern reader's mind too. The modern reader can easily accept Ebenezer Elliott's assertion that "there is nothing unnatural or improper in the union of poetry and politics." From the point of view of poetry, the real weakness of the poets of the Early Victorian social ferment lies in their failure to realise how circumscribed the emotional content of the ferment was, and in their inability to adjust the form and style of their poetry to the content. Of a sense of social iniquity, two passions can be engendered, hatred, and anger. Neither of these is a delectable passion that the human mind would care to cherish for a length of time; nor does any of these passions possess a wide gamut of subtleties on which a poet can play several variations. As in the case of Ebenezer Elliott's *Corn Law Rhymes*, a number of lyrics on the same themes of anger and hatred sound insipid after a time. The lyrical form, occasionally suitable for the expression of these themes, fails to satisfy when the themes are recurrent. Some of the Early Victorians, realising the shortcomings of the lyrical form searched for a new form. "I am inclined to think," wrote Elizabeth Barrett, "that we want new *forms*, as well as thoughts" [49], and

she and several others among her contemporaries experimented with the form of what they called the "novel-poem". These writers seemed to realise that the unorthodox and elastic form of the verse-novel permitted them a freer scope to deal with the social situation than the lyric. They seemed also to realise that since the novel must have some kind of a fable and a plot, the plot could provide an objective correlative to the passion emanating from the social situation and thus mitigate its monotony. In Capel Lofft's *Ernest*, one of the earliest verse-novels in the language and a fairly successful one at that, the theme of revolution is intertwined with the theme of love, and both themes have been merged into a story. This process of integration and correlation can be discerned in the most successful verse-novel of the period—perhaps of all times so far—Mrs. Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. Other works like Clough's *Bothie*, Sterling's *Election* and Allingham's *Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland* present casual treatments of the social theme more effectively than the full-fledged lyrical treatments. With all its possibilities as a suitable form for the social theme, the verse-novel was however in the Early Victorian period in an experimental stage and we cannot blame the other poets for not joining the experiment.

Most Early Victorian poets, as we have seen, felt that the contemporary social distress was a symptom of certain fundamental needs of civilization and that the responsibilities of their high vocation made it necessary for them deeply to probe into these needs. And probe they did. In overleaping the details of the immediate problems, the Early Victorian poets were far from being escapists. Mr. Kenneth Muir who has studied these poets of social discontent, finds Victorian prose more serious than Victorian verse apparently on the ground that while all the novelists and prose writers dealt with the state of society, "poetry, generally speaking, had become a drawing-room pastime."[50] In literary criticism, we have to distinguish between prose and verse as forms. As we have seen already, what Matthew Arnold did as a writer of prose, he did not do as a poet. It would

therefore not be fair criticism to consider prose and verse as equivalents. It would be still less fair to suggest that the Victorian poets intended their poetry to be a drawing-room pastime. If *Sordello*, *In Memoriam*, *Aurora Leigh*, *Bothie*, *The Angel in the House*, and *House of Life* were drawing-room pastime for the average Victorian reader who, in Mr. Muir's words, "did not wish to be troubled with thoughts beyond the reaches of his soul", it speaks well of the average reader's soul and his notion of a pastime. The fact is, as a study of Early Victorian poetics can convince us, the age entertained a high conception of the function of poetry and the poets themselves were keenly aware of the climacteric in civilization that they were witnessing. So keenly indeed were they aware of their responsibilities that poet after poet sat down to write "the poem of the age", to attain to a philosophical synthesis of the many and sometimes conflicting aspects of life. As to whether the Victorians succeeded in discovering such a synthesis or whether even the post-Victorians have the glory of the discovery is another matter, but there cannot be any question about the seriousness of the Victorian concept of poetry. One could even find the concept a little too serious for enjoyment.

A notable consequence of the Victorian poets' attempt to interpret spiritual truths in the context of the requirements of their age is the emergence of the idea of the representative man. The idea is an integral part of the poets' reaction to the social situation. If we are on the threshold of a new phase of civilization, a new social order and new human relations, it behoves us to ponder more over the basic principles of such a civilization than over the painful details of the transition. Preoccupation with the details may throw the larger pattern out of focus. For that larger pattern, for the anticipated social order, man has to work, work singly or collectively, work with a deliberate purpose. This worker is the representative man, and nearly every Victorian poet worth the name tries to visualize the representative man. Tennyson's Arthur Hallam, endowed with "seraphic intellect and force" and a "soul on

highest mission sent" might have led his people to progressive self-fulfilment. In the character of Hallam, we have Tennyson's conception of the coming man, a conception which becomes somewhat abstract in the other Arthur of the *Idylls of the King*. Browning makes two experiments with the concept of the representative man, in Paracelsus and in Sordello; Mrs. Browning's Romney Leigh has suffered the agonies of leadership; R. H. Horne's Orion "is the type of a Worker and a Builder for his fellow-men"; William Bell Scott's Lyremmos in *The Year of the World* is the representative of his race; Philip James Bailey's Festus is "the world-man"; Capel Lofft's aristocratic Linsingen is the typical revolutionary social reformer; Charles Mackay's Julian in *Egeria, or the Spirit of Nature* is an earnest idealist who is eager to serve mankind. Preoccupation with the representative man is indeed widespread in the whole of Victorian literature. The major poets of the Early Victorian period sought to assess the value of the immediate social ferment in relation to larger and deeper spiritual issues; the lesser poets followed them sooner or later. Who shall say that as poets and thinkers they made an incorrect choice ?

NOTES

1. J. H. Clapham, *An Economic History of Modern Britain: the Early Railway Age, 1820-1850* (Cambridge, 1926), p. 474.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 481.

3. *The Monthly Magazine*, 1834, pp. 169-76, "Revolutions of the Nineteenth Century".

4. Carlyle, *Chartism* (London, 1840), p. 2.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

6. Norman Sykes, *The Social and Political Ideas of Some Representative Thinkers of the Age of Reaction and Reconstruction*, Ed. F. J. C. Hearnshaw (London, 1932), p. 18.

7. Quoted by A. V. Dicey, *Law and Opinion in England*, p. 119.

8. Speech of the Hon. Sidney Herbert at the Salisbury Diocesan Church Meeting, Nov. 17, 1842; quoted by Mrs. Norton, *The Child of the Islands*, after the title-page.

9. See the autobiographical first chapter in *Life, Poetry, and Letters of Ebenezer Elliott*, by his Son-in-law, John Watkins (London, 1850), p. 25.

10. *Quarterly Review*, March, 1832, p. 92.

11. See *The Life, Character and Genius of Ebenezer Elliot*, by January Searle (pseudonym of Geroge Searle Phillips) (London, 1850), pp. 131-32, and 178-84.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

13. *The Reproof of Brutus* was published in 1830 without the author's name; the Bodleian catalogue as well as the *D.N.B.* attributes it to John Minter Morgan (1782-1854) who had previously, in 1826, published a prose work (also anonymously), *The Revolt of the Bees*. The *D. N. B.* fails to mention *The Poetical Works of John Morgan* (London, 1844)

14. *The Monthly Magazine*, July, 1839, "The Chartist Epic", pp. 1-38. *Quarterly Review*, Dec., 1839, pp. 153-193.

15. *Athenaeum*, 1844, p. 335: the poet is said to have attempted to reach out of the same dead level of facility-ridden modern verse; poetry with him is an art; the love-lyrics are voluptuous; the poet has a tendency to startle by offensive daring, extravagance, frantic emotion, perpetual search for excitement.

16. Browning's reference to Eliot Warburton's reading occurs in a letter to Edmund Gosse; see *Letters of Robert Browning*, ed. T. L. Hood, p. 184.

17. See the Appendix on "The Uneducated Poets".

18. *The Life of Thomas Cooper* : Written by Himself (London, 1872); the hymns from Bramwich and Jones are quoted on pp. 166 and 167.

19. The admiration that the revolutionary poets cherished for Milton and Shelley is remarkable. Mr. Kenneth Muir in "Shelley's Heirs", *The Penguin New Writing*, no. 26, published in 1945—the only considerable essay on the subject of this monograph except a thin essay of Mr. Harold Williams on "The Victorian poetry of social unrest"—lays stress on the influence of Shelley alone. In fact, Milton whose spirit Wordsworth invoked in his sonnet, exercised at least as much vital influence on these revolu-

mously published in 1834, is perhaps the most notable of all Radical works of the time. The avowed aim of the play is to represent the complete cleavage between the rulers and the ruled in England, to show misrule at work, to emphasize the oppressive element of law, and to expose the selfishness and hypocrisy of the Church. Although the allegory used is quite obvious, the satire in this play on what has been called the Great Egg of Reform, shows that all the excitement preceding the Reform Act had ended in an anti-climax and that John Bull was, after all, left as ever at the mercy of machinating social parasites. The Tory point of view is presented in *The Reform Ministry, and the Reformed Parliament* (1834) by Nahum Whistlecraft—obviously a pseudonym—who calls himself the "Parliamentary Poet Laureate" and blatantly emulates the style of *Don Juan:*

> Our grand state maxim being "We would be better,"
> "Whatever is, is wrong"; and so on: "Men
> Must keep progressing";—change, that whig-begetter,
> Being our specifick.....
> (Canto I, xiv)

> We've ventured at some length on these "Reforms,"
> Or rather changes, which must sweep away
> Things that have stood a thousand years the storms,
> The test of many a trial. In one day
> Those bulwarks, levell'd by our powerful arms,
> —Lie prostrate in the dust.
> (Canto V, xvii)

A remarkable travesty of Tory politics occurs in John Sterling's *The Election*, anonymously published in 1841. A parliamentary bye-election forms the background of the verse-narrative; the deliberations of party-conclaves and the election speeches are convincingly realistic. The vote-catching speech of Mogg on the hustings is Sterling's version of Tory politics. He loves his country so dearly, Mogg declares, that he has never

tionary poets as Shelley. Ebenezer Elliott, J. M. Morgan, Thomas Cooper, the two Joneses—Ebenezer and Ernest, Gerald Massey, Capel Lofft, R. H. Horne, and a number of other yet lesser poets mention Milton and Shelley in the same breath. Apart from this evidence of lip-service, the poetical works of these minor writers provide internal evidence of Milton's creative influence; the most notable instance is Capel Lofft's *Ernest* which is Milton put to modern use.

20. *The Purgatory of Suicides*, l. cxxxiv-v.

21. A. H. Miles in *The Poets and Poetry of the Century*, Kingsley to Thomson, p. 322.

22. W. F. Monypenny, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli*, in six vols., (London, 1910), vol. i. p. 243.

23. (A) On the abolition of the slave trade:—
Charles Mackay, *The Hope of the World*, canto ii;
Nahum Whistlecraft, *The Reform Ministry &c.*, canto i;
Henry Ellison, *Medmoments*, "To Clarkson &c.";
M. J. Chapman, *Barbadoes;*
John Burridge, *The Slave Trade*.

(B) On convicts:—
T. K. Hervey, "The Convict Ship" in the *Literary Souvenir*, 1825;
Mrs. Boddington, "The Convict Mother", *Poems*,

(C) On the fallen woman:—
William Kennedy, "The Fallen Woman" in *The Arrow and the Rose;*
B. Simmons, "Sketch in the Old Bailey" in *Legends, Lyrics, and other poems*;
T. Westwood, "Love her still in *The Burden of the Bell &c*;

A. H. Clough, lines on prostitutes in *Bothie*, iv;
Charles Mackay, "May Mary, A street Romance" in *Egeria*; also "Waterloo Bridge" in *Selected Poems and Songs of Charles Mackay*, p. 100—Mackay claims that his poem preceded Hood's "Bridge of Sighs";
Mrs. Boddington, "Mary Graemes," in *Poems*;
William Bell Scott, "Rosabell" in *Poems*;
Coventry Patmore, "The Woodman's Daughter" in *Poems*;
W. C. Bennet, "Sketches from a painter's studio" in *Poems*.

(D) On emigrants:—

Charles Mackay, "The Emigrant's Farewell", and "The Scottish Emigrant's Farewell to Yarrow" in *The Hope of the World*; also "An Emigrant's Farewell" in *Voices from the Crowd;* Ebenezer Elliott, "The Emigrant's Farewell" in *Corn Law Rhymes;*
James White, *The Village Poor-House* (Part III, the song of the pauper-emigrant, Bill Hervey);
Mrs. Ellis, *The Sons of the Soil*, Bk. xiii.

(E) On Temperance:—

John O'Neill, *The Drunkard, a poem*:
Eliza Cook, "A Temperance Song", *Poems*, vol. iv, p. 104;
Anon., *Temperance Rhymes*:
Anon., *Amy of the Peak &c,*

(F) On colonial life:—

M. J. Chapman, *Barbadoes*;
Mrs. Ellis, *The Island Queen;*
Anon., *Francis Tamo &c.;*
„ *The Fettered Exile;*
„ *Scenes in the West Indies;*

,, *Polynesia and triumph in the South Seas;*
,, *Pomare, Queen of Tahiti.*

24. Among other works advocating shorter hours of work and holidays, are "A Song for the Workers" in Eliza Cook's *Poems* vol. iv; "Hours of Labour" in E. H. Burrington's *Revelations of the Beautiful;* and the anonymous *Sunday, a poem &c.*

25. *The Quarterly Review* June, 1845, p. 2. The phrase "the shadow that lies &c." in the next sentence of my text occurs in the preface to *The Child of the Islands.*

26. *The Athenaeum*, 1846, p. 116. On the gold-lust of the day, Eliza Cook has a poem, "Song of the Spirit of Gold" in *Poems*, second series. Henry Ellison writes on the theme in *Madmoments.* Ellison, a clergyman, expresses in this work his "soulabhorrence of Rankworship and Wealthidolatry" (preface, p. 4.). His pietistic attitude is precisely the sort of thing that provoked the Radicals to downright abuse of the church: he writes:

> Talk not of Rich and poor; for in the Eye
> Of God, *all all* are equal: there is none
> So poor, but can find words to call upon
> Him.
>
> (*Madmoments, i, p. 35*)

27. Introduction to *Selected Poems and Songs of Charles Mackay*, xii-xiii.

28. *Early Victorian England*, ed. G. M. Young (London, 1934) vol. i, p. 413.

29. These details of Tennyson's early life and the quoted words occur in *Tennyson, A Memoir*, vol. i., ch. ii.

30. *Tennyson, A Memoir*, vol. i, p. 20.

31. See *ibid.* i. p. 162. Tennyson read a description of a hungry lion in Pringle's *Travels*; his image grew out of that description.

Thomas Pringle (1789-1834), a Scotsman, did some journalism, took part in progressive movements and had contacts with Zachary Macaulay, Clarkson, and Wilberforce; lived in South Africa for some time; was a contributor to Annuals, and earned the good opinion of Coleridge who, reading "Afar in the Desert" wrote thus to Pringle: "For some days I did little else but read and recite your poem... I do not hesitate to declare it among the two or three most perfect lyrics in our language". (*Pringle's Poetical Works*, Memoir by Leitch Ritchie, p. cxlii.) Some of his poems deal with social problems.

32. See *Robert Browning and Alfred Domett*, ed. F. G. Kenyon pp. 42, 111, 114.

33. The phrase is from *Sordello*, V, 103.

34. *Aurora Leigh*, VIII, 396; the next quotation in my text is from *ibid.*, VIII, 86-88.

35. *Ibid.*, VIII, 635; the quotation in my next sentence is from *ibid.*, VIII, 617-19.

36. *Ibid.*, VIII, 687.

37. *Ibid*, IX 924-28; 932-33; 935-36; 938-39.

38. *Poems and Prose Remains of A. H. Clough*, i., p. 92, letter to J. P. Gell.

39. *Letters of Matthew Arnold*, ed. G. W. E. Russell, vol. i, pp. 4, 5, 8.

40. Bamford, one of the leaders at Peterloo, opposed industrial workers in 1826 and was against the Chartists afterwards; see his *Passages in the Life of a Redical*. Bamford used to

write verses; his "beautiful little poem"—'God help the poor'—is quoted by Job Leigh and admired by John Barton in Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton*. Mrs. Gaskell wrote to Tennyson on behalf of Bamford; Bamford wrote to Tennyson on receipt of a copy of *Poems*; see *Tennyson, A Memoir*, i, 283-86.

Thomas Cooper ceased to take any active part in the Chartist Movement after his release from prison, and indeed disapproved of later Chartism.

41. Jeffrey reviewed Crabbe's *The Borough* in the *Edinburgh Review*; I have quoted from the reprint of the essay in *Jeffrey's Essays from the Edinburgh Review*, published by Routledge (London), p. 307.

42. *Qtly. Rev.*, Sept., 1842, p. 390.

43. *Ibid.*, June, 1845, p. 1.

44. *Athenaeum*, 1843, p. 732.

45. *The Monthly Repository*, Aug., 1832, p. 537.

46. The *Quarterly* review of the *Corn Law Rhymes* is in the March 1832 number, p. 92. The saying about God's Bible occurs in *Tennyson, A Memoir*, i, p. 94.

47. *Qtly. Rev.*, Dec., 1839, p. 155.

48. The quotation is from the *Athenaeum*, 1844, pp. 318–19.

49. Elizabeth Barrett's statement is in the *Browning Love Letters*, i, p. 45.

50. Kenneth Muir, "Shelley's Heirs" in The *Penguin New Writings*, no. 26, ed. John Lehmann.

APPENDIX

The "Uneducated Poets"

That the rise of the "uneducated poets" in the Early Victorian period became quite a phenomenon is proved as much by the prolific production of such writers as by the attention that the journals gave to it. I have noticed the following contemporary articles on the subject:

Quarterly Review, vol xliv, pp. 52-82, vol. xlvii.
Edinburgh Review, Sept., 1831, pp.69-84.
The Athenaeum, 1830, p. 679; 1831, p.p. 130-32; 1834, p.622; 1842, pp.334-36; 1842,p.683.
The Literary Gazette, 1831, pp.81-82.
The Monthly Magazine, July, 1841, pp. 73-84.
The New Monthly Magazine, July, 1841, pp. 73-84.

The term "uneducated poets" received currency from Robert Southey. He wrote an "Introductory Essay on the lives and works of our uneducated poets" for a volume called *Attempts in Verse* written by John Jones, a domestic servant, and published in 1831 by John Murray. The chief points in Southey's essay are:

> The distinction between educated and uneducated poets did not obtain in early times; "the language of a Saxon thane was not more cultivated than that of the churl on his estate"; such a distinction came in vogue during the reign of Elizabeth when the mother tongue of the lower classes ceased to be the language of composition; that of the peasantry was antiquated, that of the inferior citizens became vulgar; in recent times, people from the uneducated classes have been drawn to poetical composition, sometimes achieving credit thereby.

Southey's essay is interesting and so is the literary phenomenon. The point of the term "uneducated" is that these poets belong to the lower classes of society; that they are, what today we should call, working-class men and women; that because of their poverty and social lowliness they could not be and were not educated in schools, far less educated in Oxford or Cambridge. Southey's distinction between the language of the thane and that of the churl suggests that the working-class poet of the nineteenth century might reasonably be expected to use the diction distinctive to his class. As far as I can see, not one of these "uneducated" poets uses a diction that is even remotely different from that of the upper class poets. In diction as well as in content, these poets of humble origin aim at imitating the upper class writer.

Below is a list of verses by working-class writers—such verses as I have either read or found being referred to—of the Early Victorian period. I am acquainted with works numbering 1 to 18; these works are also included in the Bibliography.

1. John Jones. *Attempts in Verse*. 1831. Jones writes amiable verses to the ladies and gentlemen of the houses he has served. There is no social consciousness in him.

2. Eliza Cook: enjoyed considerable popularity; conducted *Eliza Cook's Journal* (1849-54); was given a civil list pension of £100 in 1863. One of the best of the poets who rose from the working-classes. In the preface to *Poems*, second series, she retorts on reviewers who call her "a poet of and for the lower classes". She has numerous poems on the joys and sorrows of the working classes, but appears to hold no political doctrines.

3. Robert Millhouse: called "the Artizan Poet of Nottingham," "the Burns of Sherwood Forest". Started work at six. There is nothing in his writings to show that the economic and social conditions of his class aroused any poetical feelings in him.

4. Charles Crocker. A Chichester man, was an apprentice to a shoemaker until he set up as one himself. Crocker was favourably reviewed in *Athenaeum* (1830, p. 679; 1842, p. 335) and the *New Monthly Magazine* (Nov., 1830, p. 456). He has some facility in versification but gives no evidence of social consciousness.

5. Thomas Ragg's *The Deity*, another of those epical tomes so distinctive of the Early Victorian period, is a storehouse of unreadable commonplace and provoked the following comment in the *Athenaeum*, 1834, p. 622:

> We cannot but wish that some of these poets would... let their genius work upon the objects and images more immediately around them...Why should we not have songs for the people—of the harvest—of the loom—of the mine—of the forest ?

Ragg shows no social consciousness at all.

6. Robert Nicoll (1814-37) is described in the *D. N. B.* as "a strong, even a violent, radical politician", but his verses actually show no violence; he has however some praiseworthy lyrics of freedom. His imitations of Keats and Wordsworth are remarkable. Most of his poems are in Scots, and these are superior to the English poems.

7. Thomas Miller, a basket, maker came to be well-known to the literary circles of London. He published several novels and was much in demand with the Annuals. Miller shows no social consciousness.

8. John Bolton Rogerson. His *A Voice from the Town, and other poems* was found to be "a little too much, perhaps, sicklied o'er with the pale hue of sentiment" (*Athenaeum*, 1842, p. 1085). Rogerson gives no evidence of social consciousness, and like Ragg, Miller and Millhouse, tries to emulate the educated poets.

9. Mary Hutton's verses (*Cottage Tales, and Poems*) are worthless; she sometimes writes prose stories related to the life she knows but there is no criticism of social conditions.

10. John Overs's work, *Evenings of a Working Man*, has the distinction of bearing a prefatory essay by Dickens; it is a miscellany of prose tales and verse, full of colourless but sincere romanticism.

11. William Thom is a truer poet than most of these writers. His autobiography in *Rhymes and Recollections of a Handloom Weaver* (London, 1844) tells a poignant story. Some of his poems ("I've sought in lands ayont the sea", "My hameless ha' ", "The Mitherless Bairn") tell of personal suffering occasioned by social wrongs.

12. Robert Story was conscious of the socio-political changes of his time; he changed sides from the Radicals to the Conservatives.

13. Owen Howell, a draper's shopman, had considerable facility in writing verses, and was well-reviewed in the *Athenaeum*, 1842, pp. 1334-36.

14. Mary Colling's *Fables, and other pieces in verse* merited notice in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Aug., 1831 p. 159.

15. John Bethune (*Poems*) was reviewed in the *Athenaeum*, 1842, pp. 838-41.

16. Joseph Kirkham's *Poetical Flights of a Factory Youth*, was reviewed in the *Athenaeum*, 1842, pp. 334-36. No social consciousness.

17 F. P. Gibbins. *Attempts at Verse*, reviewed in the *Athenaeum*, 1842, pp. 334-36. No social consciousness.

18. Anonymous. *Verses by a poor man*; second edn., 1842; dedicated to the Prince Consort. No social consciousness.

19. John Alford P.L.T. ("I have likewise received the title of Poet Laureate to the town of Trowbridge") referred to Crabbe as a brother-poet, sent verses to the King, the Duke of Wellington, and Sir Robert Peel. He is noticed in the *Quarterly Rev.*, vol. xlvii, no. xciii, pp.80-103.

20. James Fulcher Brown, *Gasparoni and other poems*. (I am not in possession of any other details about this writer.)

21. C. Cole, Political and other poems; reviewed in *Literary Gazette*, 1834, p.134.

22. A Smart, *Rambling Rhymes*, reviewed in *Athenaeum*, 1845, p.1197.

23. James Barnfield, a weaver in Gloucestershire, reviewed in the *Qtly. Rev*., vol. xlvii no. xciii, pp.80-103.

24. Ossian Macpherson, *A Bard's Reverie*, reviewed in *Athenaeum*, 1846, pp.198-99.

25. William Jones, *The Spirit, or a Dream in the Woodlands*, reviewed in *Athenaeum*, 1849, p. 908.

26. Robert Macburnie, *The Peasant's Day*, reviewed in the *New Monthly Magazine*, 1833, vol. 39, p.103.

27. Richard Manley, *Miscellaneous Pieces in verse, Moral and Religious*, reviewed in *Athenaeum*, 1831, p. 120.

28. *The Mechanic's Saturday Night*, by a Mechanic; reviewed in *Literary Gazette*, 1830, p. 736.

29. *The Triumph of Time*, by the Blind Bard of Cicestria, reviewed in *Athenaeum*, 1842, p. 683.

30. *Odes, Elegies*, by B. F. S., reviewed in *Literary Gazette*, 1833, p. 98.

31. *Poems, Moral and Miscellaneous*, by a Journeyman Mechanic, reviewed in *Athenaeum*, 1842, p. 950.
