

HUGH WALKER

THE AGE OF
TENNYSON

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Hugh Walker

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PREFACE

The age of Tennyson is defined, for the purpose of the present volume, as extending from 1830 to 1870. The date selected as the beginning of the period needs no explanation; but perhaps the question may be asked why the age of Tennyson should be supposed to end more than twenty years before Tennyson died. The answer is twofold. First, I may plead the strong law of necessity. Sixty years, among the most fertile and varied in our literary history, could be compressed within the limits of a volume like the present only by completely changing the scale of treatment; and this again would have put it out of harmony with the other volumes of the series. But, secondly, about the year 1870 or before it there took place a change in the *personnel* of literature, less complete perhaps than that which marked the beginning of the epoch, but still sufficiently remarkable. Among the historians, Macaulay was dead and Carlyle had done his work. Among the novelists, Dickens died in 1870, Thackeray seven years before, and Charlotte Brontë still earlier; while, though George Eliot survived till 1880, the only great work of hers which lies beyond the limits of the period is *Middlemarch*. Mill,

who had been so long the dominant power in philosophy, died in 1873. The poets, Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold and Rossetti, survived. In poetry however Arnold's voice was by this time almost dumb. Browning continued to produce copiously; but after *The Ring and the Book* his style changed, and changed decidedly for the worse. Tennyson changed too, but in his case there was some gain to balance what was lost. The best of the younger poets, like William Morris and Swinburne, clearly show the influence of new ideals. The old order was changing, and new ambitions were beginning to sway men's minds. In short, if by the age of Tennyson we mean the period during which the influences which formed Tennyson and his contemporaries were dominant, we find that it came to an end long before Tennyson's life closed.

Tennyson and Browning, Arnold and Ruskin, therefore, have to be treated as survivors into a new period. But it is obviously undesirable to split a man's work in two; and consequently, though my period ends at 1870, I have included a sketch of the later work of these men as well. I have very rarely treated only a part of a man's work. I have preferred to leave wholly to my successor those writers who, though they had begun to write before 1870, seem on the whole to belong rather to the period still current.

In the plan of this book I have tried to follow out as faithfully as possible the general idea of the series to which it belongs; and thus I have been led rather to emphasise the thought of the greater men than to concern myself about including notices of a great

number of minor writers. In a period so prolific it has therefore been necessary to enforce a somewhat rigid law of exclusion. The law has been made especially rigid in the case of fiction; because there is nothing that bears the test of time so ill as bad or mediocre fiction.

Variety is, after copiousness, the most striking feature of the period under review; and this variety somewhat obscures the operation of ruling principles and ideas. I have taken as my guide the conviction that the key to the period is to be found in its search for truth and its resolve to understand. We see this everywhere, in the development of science, in the inquiry into the causes of the growth and decay of nations, in the intellectual quality of the best poetry, in the analytical psychology of so much prose fiction. It is the reaction against the extreme romanticism of the revolutionary period. The writers of the Revolution sought to grasp truth by an act of faith. In the Victorian period emotion plays a less and logic a greater part. Or we may describe the change as a partial reversion to the spirit of the eighteenth century. The imaginative glamour of the romantic movement is not lost, but there is conjoined with it a juster appreciation of the clearness and precision and the logical coherency of the age of Pope. Next to the eighteenth century the age of Tennyson has been the most critical in our literature.

I owe thanks to Professor Hales for his uniform courtesy and kindness in reading and considering my proofs, and for many valuable and helpful suggestions.

H. W.
Lampeter,
July, 1897.

INTRODUCTION

The epoch of literature which opened about the year 1830 is perhaps best described, in the first place, by negatives. It is distinguished from the previous period, when the spirit which gave rise to the French Revolution was dominant, by the absence of certain characteristics then conspicuous. First and chiefly, it is distinguished by the failure of the hopes which at once produced and were produced by the Revolution. On the border-land between the two centuries literature was marked by buoyant and often extravagant expectation. Even pessimists like Byron were somewhat superficial in their pessimism. Byron looked upon the evils from which he and others suffered as due largely to the perversity of society. But this perversity might be cured, and if it were cured an earthly Elysium seemed a thing not wholly unreasonable to expect. To all who were animated by the spirit of Rousseau the problem, how to secure happiness, appeared almost identical with the comparatively simple one, how to remove obstructions. Nature unimpeded was perfect: it was the vain imaginings and evil contrivances of man that did the mischief. There were not wanting, even in the Revolutionary period, men who thought more deeply and who saw more clearly. The speculations of Malthus, destined afterwards, both directly, and still more through the impulse they gave to Darwin, to prove among the most influential of the century, showed

that some, at least, of the roots of evil reached far deeper than the orthodox Revolutionists and speculators of the type of Godwin had imagined. The exhaustion of Europe after the great struggle with Napoleon brought dimly home to multitudes who knew nothing about and cared nothing for abstruse speculation a sense of the difficulty and complexity of social problems. Exaggerated expectations bring their own Nemesis in the shape of proportionate depression and gloom; and the men of the new era set themselves somewhat wearily and with little elasticity of spirit to climb the toilsome steep of progress. The way seemed all the rougher because they had hoped to win the summit by a rush. Failure left them in the mood of Cleopatra on the death of Antony,—

‘There is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.’

Hence in the beginning of the period there is on the part of all but the greatest a tendency to trifle. Sometimes even the greatest are not quite free from it; and in the early poetry of Tennyson we may detect evidence that the writer was as yet unmoved by any great interest.

But, though it was not clear at the moment, sixty years of subsequent history make it manifest that the generation then beginning had great work to do. In the first place, it had to work out, not the ideal of the Revolution as conceived by

the Revolutionists, but that in it which was vital, and which had given it the power to move Europe. Modern democracy, though its roots stretch farther into the past, has been, as a realised political system, the work of the Age of Tennyson. The process whereby democracy has become dominant in the West of Europe has been marked by no great political convulsion comparable to the French Revolution. Even on the Continent the movement which in 1848 shook so many thrones was trifling in comparison with it; and in England the agitations of the Reform Bill, of the Anti-Corn Law League, and even of the Chartists, either kept within the limits of the law or merely rippled the surface of social order. Nevertheless, the work done has been momentous. At the opening of the period we see political power placed by the first Reform Bill in the hands of the middle class; at its close, this power is by the operation of the second Reform Bill, logically completed by the third, transferred to the working class. If we believe at all in the influence of social circumstances upon literature, we must believe that great changes such as these have left their stamp upon it; and there is ample evidence that they have done so. Though Carlyle had little faith in popular government, his writings are everywhere influenced by the democratic movement. John Stuart Mill's works, and the whole literature of sociology, indicate how pressing the problem of the structure of society has been felt to be. Hood's *Song of the Shirt*, Mrs. Browning's *Cry of the Children*, Ebenezer Elliott's *Corn Law Rhymes* and Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, are a few

examples of the way in which the social, political and economic condition of the poor pressed upon the imaginative writers of the time. Others in earlier days had been interested too. No reader of the *Canterbury Tales* can doubt that Chaucer was keenly alive to the state of all the grades of society. Shakespeare by a few vivid words in *King Lear* proves himself a humanitarian before humanitarianism became fashionable. Crabbe was the stern, and perhaps, after all, only half-truthful painter of humble life in the generation which had just closed. Burns gave to the peasant a citizenship in literature more sure than that conferred by Crabbe, because he knew from personal experience that the life hardest pressed by poverty need not be wholly sordid. The interest is not new, but it has become more universal and has grown in importance, and the proportion it bears to other things is changed. The political revolution brought this in its train. He who possesses power is sure of consideration and respect; and the classes which, to the Elizabethans, were the 'rascal multitude,' have for sixty years been struggling towards mastership, and have at last attained it.

Among other results incident to this process, there has been a great change in the character of the audience appealed to by literature. That audience is now far wider than it ever before was. The spread of education through all classes has vastly increased the number of those who must and will read something. It was not till the year 1870 that the State took the great step which brought primary education fully under its control; but for

many years before that date the elementary schools had been partially supervised by the State, and from the year 1851 one of the greatest men of letters of the time, Matthew Arnold, had laboured as an inspector in the cause of popular education. The movement for the education of women and for political equality between the sexes, if it has not added a new class of readers, has certainly tended to widen the range of interest among female readers.

It would be rash to assert that this increase in the number of readers has been an unmixed benefit to literature. The proportion of those who have neither the culture nor the time and inclination to study serious books is probably greater now than at any former period. The taste of such persons is gratified by the mass of fiction and of periodicals which has grown and is still growing year by year, not only in absolute, but in relative quantity; and it cannot be considered satisfactory that growth is most vigorous just in those forms of literature which are least able to stand the test of time. It may be freely conceded that much of this growth would have taken place apart from any democratic movement or any extension of popular education; but nevertheless it has been stimulated by these causes.

In respect of periodicals the change, as compared with even the generation immediately preceding 1830, has been very great. The *Edinburgh Review* was for some years the only great critical periodical in Britain. The *Quarterly Review* was established to redress the political balance, shaken by the organ of the Whigs.

A little later, *Blackwood's Magazine* gave scope to the fun and humour for which there was no place in the graver pages of its contemporaries. The *London Magazine* and the *Westminster Review* likewise did valuable service to literature and thought. But the great development of the magazines and critical journals has taken place during the last sixty years. In the course of it two tendencies have become manifest: first, a tendency to shorten the intervals of publication; and secondly, a tendency to multiply the organs of this periodical literature. The old quarterly has almost given place to the monthly magazine; the latter in its turn has had to abandon no small share of its province to the weekly journal; and recently the daily newspaper has been encroaching more and more upon the sphere of the weekly. Partly, no doubt, the change has been due to differentiation of function; partly too it has been brought about by impatience, and necessarily implies greater hurry and less mature consideration. The multiplication of organs has been equally remarkable. In early days a few magazines held the field alone; now their name is legion. One result is that there will probably never again be concentrated on a single paper as much talent and genius as we find in the early numbers of *Fraser's Magazine*. Another is that in ever growing ratio the literary talent of the age finds its outlet in the periodical. If Horace was right in his celebrated maxim, the change is not one to rejoice over.

The increase of the magazines has influenced all literature, but especially fiction. It has greatly stimulated the demand, and

it has changed the manner of publication. In earlier days a book was as a matter of course finished before the publication began. Chiefly by reason of the example of Dickens it became common to publish in parts; and the magazines have made this the normal rather than the exceptional form of publication, at least for authors of sufficient reputation to command an audience first in the periodical and afterwards when the parts are gathered into a volume. Lately there have been indications that this may come to be the mode of publication, not of fiction only, but of serious historical and biographical works as well.

We see then that a large popular audience, the majority with little time, little money and little culture, is the environment in which the man of letters in these days has to live. For purposes of art it is neither the best nor the worst possible. It is not so good as that of the Elizabethan dramatists; for while many of the drawbacks are common to the two, there is wanting in this later time that living contact between author and public which invigorated almost every page written then. Still less is it equal to that of the golden age of Athens, when, as the commonest remains of art still indicate, the mere journey-work of the ordinary artisan proved the existence of culture in the man himself, and of culture generally diffused among those to whom his work appealed. In a less degree, but for similar reasons, it is inferior to the environment of the Italian Renaissance. On the other hand, it is better than patronage, whether individual or political, and better than the terrible

struggle out of patronage through which Johnson passed. It is, in fact, the logical development of that freedom which Johnson's struggle won. But the kind of 'natural selection' it implies is rough in its process and crude in its results. The popular audience nourishes and feeds fat a few classes who minister to its wants, but there are many others, in a literary sense nobler and more valuable, whom it barely enables to live. Darwin himself, though he made earthworms far more fascinating than many novelists can make the most romantic tale of love, could not have lived if he had been really subject to this competition. As late as the year 1870 Matthew Arnold was assessed for £1,000 a year; but the evidence satisfied the Commissioners that the assessment must be cut down to £200; and the author said that he must write more articles to prevent his being a loser even on the smaller sum. Browning's *Paracelsus*, *Sordello* and *Bells and Pomegranates* were all published at his father's expense and brought no return whatever. Edward FitzGerald, one of the greatest poets of the age, lived and died almost unknown, and is even now known to comparatively few. Tennyson alone among the greater poets of the time was really successful in the financial sense. Even in fiction there has been but little proportion between merit and remuneration. Dickens and George Eliot deserved and won success; Thackeray's reward was comparatively inadequate; and it is hardly probable that Mr. George Meredith ever received anything approaching the sums paid to not a few of the favourites of a day. Evils such as these—the accumulation of material

rewards upon one class of writers, want of discrimination even within that class, and neglect, more or less complete, of others—must necessarily tend to cramp and fetter literature. They are not new; perhaps they have been as bad in former times; but at best we have done little or nothing towards finding a remedy.

The development of physical science is another feature of the time plainly visible in its literature. It is needless to discuss its effect upon the material conditions of life; for that has been not only fully recognised, but its importance, for the present purpose, has been greatly exaggerated. Besides this however, the direct contributions of science to literature have been considerable, and some of them possess literary qualities rarely equalled among the scientific writings of past times. Moreover, science has so filled the minds and possessed the imagination of men that its indirect has been far greater than its direct influence. Whatever its ultimate creed may prove to be, science has certainly been in part responsible for the growth of a spirit of materialism, and has caused those who do not share that spirit to examine themselves and to remould their arguments. Science has therefore tended to depress and to give a tone of stoic resignation if not of pessimism to many who, without accepting materialistic opinions, have been affected by them.

But in another way science has been an elevating and inspiring power. Its discoveries have stimulated men's minds, and have done more than anything else to rouse them from the lethargy consequent upon the apparent failure of the Revolution. They

have profoundly influenced literature, both directly, and also through those philosophical and theological speculations which inevitably colour all poetry and all imaginative prose. The new facts of astronomy and geology have shaken many old theories and suggested many new ones; and the results of biological discovery have been still more striking. The transforming power upon thought of the theory of evolution may be measured by the fact that the majority even of those who dislike and deny Darwinian evolution still believe that there has been evolution of some kind. For thoughtful men, unless they are heavily fettered by preconceptions, the old view has become impossible; and no other except an evolutionary one has hitherto been even imagined. Here therefore there is a great unsettlement of popular ideas, and no little energy has been expended in fitting men's minds to the new conditions. Tractarianism, Pre-Raphaelitism, the satire, tempered with mysticism, of Carlyle, the idealistic optimism of Browning, and the creedless Christianity of Matthew Arnold, are all attempts to satisfy either the intellectual or the moral and artistic needs of modern times, and all show the influence of the scientific thought of the age.

Some of these forces however have been in the main reactionary. Side by side with the movement of science, which has on the whole tended to positivism, agnosticism, and in a word to negative views of things spiritual, there has gone on a remarkable revival of conceptions diametrically opposed to these. The old narrow Protestantism of England was powerful

enough to struggle against Catholic Emancipation until the delay became a danger to the state. Yet hardly was this act of justice done when the great reaction known as the Oxford Movement began. It was, as its consummate literary expression, the *Apologia* of Newman, proves, the product of a double discontent,—a discontent, on the one hand, with that movement of science just spoken of; and a discontent, on the other hand, with what was felt to be the ‘creed outworn’ of English Protestantism. As against the latter it has achieved, among those who hungered for a more emotional religion, a wonderful success. As against the former its utter failure has been veiled only by that success.

Kindred in spirit and almost contemporaneous in origin was the movement of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. On the surface, this seems quite unrelated to Tractarianism; for while the Tractarians were all for dogma, the Pre-Raphaelites were indifferent to it. But both movements were in essence protests on behalf of the imaginative and æsthetic in human nature against the exclusive nourishment of the intellectual element; and they proved their kinship by each in its own way seeking to bring about a revival of Mediævalism. In this fact moreover we see wherein their value consisted. They fought a battle on behalf of aspects of the truth temporarily threatened with neglect. In so far as they asserted or implied the incompleteness of the scientific view of life they were almost wholly right. In so far as they asserted its positive falsity they were almost wholly wrong. The latter was however the error principally of the religious movement. The

Pre-Raphaelites may have been wrong in many respects in their conceptions of art; but at least they generally confined themselves within their own domain.

Both of these schools, though they differ in degree of guilt, are chargeable with the sin of 'rending the seamless garment of thought.' The Pre-Raphaelite, implicitly if not in words, teaches that there is an intellectual world *and* an æsthetic world. The Tractarians not merely implied but insisted that there is a domain of reason *and* a domain of authority.¹ Because of this fundamental error we must look for the main current of modern thought elsewhere; for if there is any one thing that modern philosophy unequivocally teaches, it is that all such divisions are unsound. And we find that all the greatest men of letters of the period are on this point in agreement with the philosophers. Carlyle, Browning, Matthew Arnold, Thackeray and George Eliot, all in various ways teach that art must not ignore the intellectual problem. Tennyson seemed for a time to hold aloof and to live in a lotos-land of artistic beauty, but he soon became restless, and all his greater works are charged with an intellectual as well as an artistic meaning. These men are not in all respects self-consistent. Browning in particular turned his back in his old age upon the principle which inspired his more youthful work. But in spite of inconsistencies he and the rest must all be classed as teaching, with the philosophers, the unity of

¹ In later times this has been confused with the very different doctrine that there is a domain of authority *within* the domain of reason.

intellectual and spiritual life, and the impossibility of ministering to the one without satisfying the other; and for this reason it is to them rather than to writers of more limited view that we must look for guidance in the labyrinth of contemporary life.

CHAPTER I

THOMAS CARLYLE

Poetry is so clearly the head and front of literature that in most periods the first and chief attention must be paid to the poets. The Victorian age is an exception, at least as regards the order in which prose and poetry claim notice, and perhaps partly as regards their relative prominence. The man who first gives us a key to the significance of the age of Tennyson is not Tennyson himself, nor Browning, nor any writer of verse, but one who believed that the day of poetry was past,—Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). Considerably older than the poets, he had, notwithstanding his early difficulties, notwithstanding too the slow ripening of his own genius, made a name in literature and stamped his mark on his generation before either of them was widely known.

Carlyle was born at Ecclefechan (the Entepfuhl of *Sartor Resartus*) in Dumfriesshire. He was educated first at the local schools, and afterwards at the University of Edinburgh, to which he refers in *Sartor* as ‘the worst of all hitherto discovered universities.’ The purpose he had in view was to take the divinity course and enter the ministry of the Scottish Church. But this

was rather the design of his parents than his own; as time went on 'grave prohibitive doubts' accumulated; and about the year 1817 Carlyle definitely abandoned his purpose. He was already supporting himself by school-mastering, an occupation which grew more and more irksome, and which in turn was thrown up in December, 1818. For some time he drifted, oppressed by doubts and dyspepsia, until in 1821 occurred the one fact recorded in *Sartor Resartus*, the incident in the Rue St. Thomas de l'Enfer (Leith Walk), wherein Carlyle, shaking off his doubts, stands up and confronts the Everlasting No and its claim, 'Behold, thou art fatherless, outcast, and the Universe is mine (the Devil's),' with the answer, '*I am not thine, but Free, and forever hate thee.*' This he ranks as his 'spiritual new birth;' and as such it ought to receive attention in any account, however brief, of a life which was mainly inward and spiritual.

But spiritual regeneration could not supply the need of daily bread. Carlyle supported himself partly by the tutorship of private pupils, a form of teaching less distasteful to him than his school work had been. He was at the same time studying hard and reading widely, in French, Italian, Spanish, and afterwards in German, as well as in English, and was slowly gravitating towards the profession of literature. He contributed articles to Brewster's *Encyclopædia*. Through Edward Irving, who had been for several years a generous friend, he was introduced to Taylor, the proprietor of the *London Magazine*, who published for him the *Life of Schiller*. About the same time the translation of

Wilhelm Meister was issued through the agency of an Edinburgh publisher.

Carlyle's marriage occurred in 1826, and he was for a short time happy. But there still remained difficulties of finance as well as difficulties of temper. Literary occupation did not prove either as easy to get or as remunerative as Carlyle had hoped. His *German Romance* was financially a failure, and publishers were on that account the less disposed to consider his books. He made unsuccessful attempts to find employment as a professor, first in the London University, and again at St. Andrews. He had lived since his marriage at Comely Bank, but had cherished more or less all the time the purpose of retiring to his wife's farm of Craigenputtock, a solitary moorland place in Dumfriesshire. Moved probably by these disappointments, he carried out his purpose in 1828. 'Hinaus ins freie Feld,' to escape that necessity which 'makes blue-stockings of women, magazine hacks of men,'—this had been the impulse which drove him thither. In less than four months it was 'this Devil's den, Craigenputtock.' But 'this Devil's den' was his home from 1828 to 1834, and, whatever doubts may be entertained as to the wisdom and kindness of Carlyle in taking his wife there, if we judge by the result, we must pronounce that he did what was best for his own literary development. It was during those years that Carlyle grew to his full intellectual stature. There and then were composed a great number of his essays; notably, among the literary class, the essay on Burns, written at the beginning of the Craigenputtock

period, and, among the historical class, *The Diamond Necklace*, written near the end. There too was written that autobiography of 'symbolical myth' which, after being hawked in vain from one publisher to another, at last appeared piecemeal in *Fraser's Magazine*. There too the *French Revolution* was, not indeed written, but planned and brooded over; and it was with a mind already full of the subject that Carlyle in 1834 made his migration to London, his home for the rest of his life. His character, moral and literary, was now formed; all the influences subsequently brought to bear upon it were of subordinate importance; and though in length of years the future period exceeded the period past, it may be briefly dismissed.

The *History of the French Revolution*, delayed though it was by the accidental burning of the manuscript of the first volume, was finished in January, 1837, and published shortly afterwards. It was the turning point in Carlyle's literary life. Hitherto it had been a long, hard, almost fierce struggle; but the *History* at once established him as one of the foremost men of letters of his day. Success came none too soon. His resources were all but exhausted, and, like his countryman Burns, so close to him in some of the circumstances of his early life, he contemplated emigration to America. From this he was saved by the project, devised by Harriet Martineau, which produced his lectures on German literature. The popularity of the *History* reacted on his earlier works; publishers sought him instead of waiting to be approached; a proposal was made for republishing even *Sartor*;

and for the future Carlyle was sure, at any rate, of a competence. His next work of moment was *Chartism* (1839), written with a view to publication in the *Quarterly Review*. It was declined by Lockhart, but in such a way that the author and the editor retained for the future a strong mutual regard. In the year following Carlyle delivered the last of his courses of lectures, afterwards (1841) printed as *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. He was already deep in study for his *Cromwell*, and finding, as usual, great difficulty in beginning. Very different was his experience with *Past and Present*. This book, inspired by the same sense of social evils to which we owe *Chartism*, 'was written off with singular ease in the first seven weeks of 1843.' *Cromwell* was not finished till 1845. It was no sooner out than Carlyle began to think of *Frederick*; but of all the long 'valleys of the shadow' of his literary life, that was the longest. Before it took shape there appeared his *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), of which the celebrated paper on *The Nigger Question* was the precursor. The *Life of Sterling* (1851) is a strange contrast in tone and temper; for while the *Pamphlets* are among the most violent of Carlyle's writings, the *Life of Sterling* is one of the calmest. It was not until after the publication of *Sterling* that he seriously took to *Frederick the Great*, which had hitherto been only a project floating in his mind with many others. He visited Germany to see the scenes with which he had to deal and to gather materials. The first and second volumes were published in 1858, and the third followed in 1862. In the interval Carlyle had visited Germany a

second time. *Frederick*, finished in January, 1865, set the seal on Carlyle's reputation as the head of the literature, at least the prose literature, of his time. It was also practically the end of his literary career. The world was ready to shower honours upon him. He was chosen Rector of the University of Edinburgh; but the triumph of his great inaugural speech was dashed almost immediately by the news of the sudden death of his wife. He wrote one or two minor articles, such as *Shooting Niagara*, and left the vivid and interesting, but frequently uncharitable, *Reminiscences*. With such exceptions, he lived henceforth, till his death on the 5th of February, 1881, the quiet, retired life of a man whose work was done.

This man, so long neglected, was during a considerable part of his life, and especially in the years between the publication of the *Frederick the Great* and his death, the greatest literary force in England. The reasons which ultimately secured for him this power are in part just the reasons which so long stood in the way of his advancement. He was eminently original in his matter, and perhaps even more in his style. But there is always some difficulty in appraising the value of originality; and the difficulty is all the greater when the originality is defiant and even borders on eccentricity. To a great extent Carlyle's early struggles were necessary because no party, creed or faction could attach him to itself or claim him as its champion. Every party in turn found it possible to assent to his negations, yet each in turn had to disapprove of what he affirmed. In politics, how could such

an explosive force work in harmony with orthodox Toryism? He was constantly ridiculing and denouncing a mere fox-hunting and partridge-shooting aristocracy. 'Si monumentum quaeris, fimetum adspice.' On the other hand, if the Radicals thought they had his sympathy, they soon found that the gulf between him and them was even wider, if possible, than that which separated him from their opponents. It was the disclosure of this gulf which led to the breach with their best man, and one of his best friends, Mill. They believed almost wholly in the machinery of government, and he believed in it not at all. They were economists, and he denounced economics as a mere pretended science. They believed in government by majorities, and he considered it 'the most absurd superstition which had ever bewitched the human imagination—at least, outside Africa.' Again, he would admit no accepted theological creed, and was consequently looked on askance by the accredited leaders of religion. Anything like superstition he abominated. Newman, he thought, had 'not the intellect of a moderate-sized rabbit.' On the other hand, he had no sympathy with the liberal party of the Church of England. He condemned the writers of *Essays and Reviews*. He respected Thirlwall, but wished him anywhere but where he was. 'There goes Stanley,' said he of a man whom he personally liked, 'boring holes in the bottom of the Church of England.' He thought Arnold of Rugby fortunate in being taken away before he was forced to choose between an honest abandonment of an untenable position and a trifling with his own

conscience. He liked best the clergymen who could still honestly and literally and without misgiving accept the Prayer Book, but he did not respect their intellect. Again, if he did not like the 'liberals' within the Church, he liked still less the liberals outside it. However much he dissented from the champions of belief, he dissented still more from the apostles of unbelief. He had a faith, though not a creed. Separated thus from the orthodox by what he did not believe, and from the heterodox by what he believed, from one political party because he saw it would be fatal to remain inactive and leave *ill* alone, and from the other because he was convinced that movement in the direction they desired would be futile or worse, Carlyle stood alone. He had to create his own party, and the process was necessarily a slow one. But the very cause which made the work slow made it also great when it was accomplished.

One aspect of Carlyle's work not always duly recognised is its concentration of purpose. Superficially viewed, it has the appearance of a heterogeneous miscellany. Essays, literary, historical and mixed, biographies and mythical autobiography, histories drawn from different centuries and different peoples, idealised pictures of the past, and fierce pamphlets, not at all idealised, on questions emphatically of the present, succeed each other in his volumes. The very records of his literary life help to confirm this impression. No sooner has he finished one important work than he casts about to discover a subject for another. He makes no nation and no century specially his own, as

it is the custom of the modern historian to do. In his longer works he jumps from the French Revolution to Cromwell, and from Cromwell to Frederick the Great. He seems to have been turned to the second subject almost by accident. He had been asked by Mill to write on Cromwell in the *London and Westminster Review*. 'There is nothing,' says his biographer, 'in his journals or letters to show that Cromwell had been hitherto an interesting figure to him.' The projected magazine article was turned into a book through the impertinence of Mill's substitute, who in the absence of his superior wrote to Carlyle that he 'need not go on, for "he meant to do Cromwell himself."' The choice of Frederick seems to have been hardly less fortuitous, and in itself it was more surprising than the choice of Cromwell.

Yet under this diversity it is always possible to detect a unity both of purpose and of effect. In the first place, there is the unity of Carlyle's own character. Everything he wrote was self-revealing; and it is scarcely too much to say that his whole works are an expansion and, as circumstances demanded, a modification, of the autobiographic *Sartor Resartus*. We see this in many ways. Carlyle is best when the conditions under which he works are such as to allow himself to appear freely, naturally, spontaneously, without fierce invectives and exaggeration. This, in his case, generally implies similarity without personal contact, or with contact from which the aspect of possible competition is removed. He is worst of all where there is a partial similarity without sympathy. Thus, the best perhaps of Carlyle's literary

essays is that on Burns; and the reason why it is best is that Burns was in some ways so like himself. Both sprang from the Scottish peasantry, and the minds of both were deeply coloured by the experiences of their early youth. In writing of Burns and his father, Carlyle never forgets himself and his own father. On the other hand, the essay on Scott is certainly among the worst of his essays, just because Scott is at once too near to him and too far from him. Scott belonged to a different class in society, pursued different aims, and had a widely different literary history from Carlyle. Yet both were Scotch, and in the blood which they inherited as well as in the mental and moral food on which they were nourished there was much to bring them together. The same contrast is illustrated by the *Reminiscences*. There, every reference to his own family is distinguished by clear comprehension and profound sympathy; while, unfortunately, nearly every reference to contemporaries not related to him by blood is disfigured by acrimony and depreciation. In the *Life of Sterling* friendship performs the function which blood-relationship performs in the *Reminiscences*. The essays on foreign writers, both French and German, deal with men much farther removed from Carlyle than Scott was; and if they have not that depth of sympathy and that fineness of perception which are the charm of the essay on Burns, they are free from the bitterness and ungenerous depreciation which mar the essay on Scott. Take, for example, Carlyle's treatment of Goethe. In many ways the great German was almost as far removed as it was possible to be

from his Scotch disciple. Yet Carlyle's comprehension is clear, his appreciation ready, his criticism wise. We see himself in it all, but just because of their wide differences his own image never blurs that of Goethe.

It will be found that the principle underlying Carlyle's choice of historical themes was similar. He was bound to reveal *himself*; but Carlyle's *self* was a particular view of the universe. His subject therefore must illustrate this. He was naturally attracted to the French Revolution. It is the greatest movement of recent history; and Carlyle invariably sought for lessons for the present. It dealt the death-blow to many shams and hypocrisies; and Carlyle waged a life-long war against these. While its creed was the equality of men, no great movement has ever more vividly illustrated their great and inevitable inequality; and Carlyle rejoiced to see the truth assert itself in spite of the prepossessions of a victorious mob, and rejoiced to point to the confirmation of his own favourite doctrine. Again, though Cromwell seems to have been brought to his mind almost by chance, the points of contact between the hero and his historian are sufficiently obvious. Cromwell's strength, his thoroughness, his roughness, his veracity, his piety, all contributed to endear him to Carlyle. The 'Calvinist without the theology' was fundamentally in sympathy with the great English Puritan. His boyhood and early training fitted him, better perhaps than any other training of the nineteenth century could possibly have done, to sympathise with the opinions of the Puritan of the seventeenth. It was the

instinct which draws like to like that made him welcome the first suggestion of Cromwell as a subject; just as the same instinct made him afterwards ponder upon Knox as another possible subject.

The choice of Frederick is certainly that which requires most explanation, for in many ways his character seems strangely foreign to anything likely, *a priori*, to attract Carlyle. Complete explanation is perhaps not possible, but partial explanation certainly is. We must remember Carlyle's worship of force. He had been preaching all his life a form of the doctrine, might is right; and, as was usual with him, the doctrine had grown more extreme under contradiction and opposition. Thus we have the *Nigger Question* and the *Iliad in a Nutshell*. There is an element of truth in the doctrine, and under Carlyle's original application of it there had been a well-marked moral foundation, so that it could have been in many cases altered to read, 'right is might.' He meant not merely that 'Providence is on the side of the heaviest battalion,' but quite as much that the battalion is heaviest because Providence is on its side. In other words, he believed that the forces of the universe are moral forces and that true and permanent success mean being in harmony with them. As time went on however the qualifications were gradually stripped off, and latterly what Carlyle worshipped was little better than naked force. Now, in all the eighteenth century he could hardly have found a better example of successful force than Frederick. Destitute as he was of the piety of Carlyle's

previous hero, he was at least an eminently successful governor, and Carlyle respected nothing so much as the faculty for the genuine government of men, not what he would have called sham government, the kind of government which follows while it seems to lead. If Frederick had not created a state, he had raised it from a position bordering on insignificance to one not far from the front in the European system. Moreover, this state was peculiarly interesting to Carlyle, for he saw in Prussia the future head of Germany, and in Germany a possible leader of Europe. These reasons induced him to turn to Frederick, and perhaps tempted him to clothe Frederick with attributes which were not all his. For the method of hero-worship has its dangers, and only prejudice would assert that the great hero-worshipper, keen as was his insight into character, has wholly escaped those dangers.

It was through these barriers, the barriers of an original and not infrequently eccentric genius, and of a personality strange and uncouth to the majority of his readers, that Carlyle had to fight his way to fame. It is true that at first the uncouthness and eccentricity were less prominent. The style of his earliest writings—the *Life of Schiller* for example—is simple and almost limpid; the arrangement is orderly, the development obeys the rules of a logic easily comprehended. But Carlyle speedily worked his way out of this style, and seldom used it afterwards. *Sartor Resartus*, the great product of the Craigenputtock period, presents all his peculiarities in their most aggressive form.

Partly in fact, but still more in appearance, it is lawless and chaotic. Its style, difficult even now to a generation accustomed to and partly formed by Carlyle, was then unparalleled and, except after serious study, almost incomprehensible. It is full of evidences of German studies, German sympathies, and the influence of German thought. Carlyle has done more than anyone else to make these familiar in England; but before *Sartor* was published almost the only interpreters of Germany to England were men like Coleridge and De Quincey, who not only made the form English, but gave an English stamp to the matter as well. *Sartor*, moreover, was full of a humour deep and genuine but unfamiliar in kind, and, as regards the first impression produced, almost sardonic in character. Its subject was not calculated to arrest immediate attention. It was not the history of a nation or of a national hero. What it actually was could not be immediately perceived; but after bestowing some attention the reader discovered it to be the spiritual biography of a man then unknown, and his thoughts on human life and human society, presented humorously, whimsically, often enigmatically. It is not therefore altogether matter for wonder that this strange book with difficulty found a publisher, nor even that it threatened with ruin the magazine which at last received it. America, more tolerant of novelties, to her honour welcomed it; but in England the current opinion seems to have been expressed by the 'oldest subscriber,' who said to Fraser, 'If there is any more of that d-d stuff, I will, etc., etc.' We frequently boast of our progress. Is it certain that

even now a phenomenon as strange as *Sartor* would meet with any better reception? John Stuart Mill, a man as open-minded as he was intelligent, for a long time saw nothing in Carlyle's early essays but 'insane rhapsody;' and, though he was afterwards one of the warmest panegyrists of *Sartor*, which he thought Carlyle's greatest work, he read the manuscript unmoved. Not once nor twice, either in this island's story or in the history of the world, has the prophet been rejected by the generation he was sent to serve. Rather, rejection has been the general fate of prophets ever since the time when the children of Israel rebelled against Moses in the wilderness.

What redeemed *Sartor* in the eyes of those who had the patience to study it, was the discovery that the inner history of this unknown man had, in the first place, the interest which always belongs to human experiences told with absolute sincerity. For though *Sartor* contains little or no truth of fact, it is wholly true in idea. Carlyle, now as always, was intolerant of the very shadow of falsehood; and it was to his unswerving truth that he ultimately owed the greater part of his influence.

In the second place, the small band of careful readers discovered that *Sartor* was not only true and sincere, but that its truth was capable of an immediate and practical application. It was not something applicable only to a distant past or to another state of existence; its sphere was here and now. This is characteristic of Carlyle in all his works. He was always in intention, and generally in effect, the teacher first of his own

generation, and secondly of the future. His interest in ancient history and literature was comparatively feeble, because he saw not how to bring them to bear so directly on the present. It was modern England, France and Germany, rather than ancient Greece and Rome, that nourished his mind. And for this reason, though his influence was of slow growth, it was deep rooted when it did spring.

Sartor Resartus is peculiarly important because of its chronological position. We have seen in the Introduction that the failure of the revolutionary ideal gives to the new period its most prominent characteristic. 'The gospel according to Jean Jacques' was accepted no longer. *Sartor* may be called a grim sort of gospel according to Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle himself had written before this; Macaulay had begun his brilliant career; among the poets, Tennyson, Browning and Elizabeth Barrett had published their earlier works; but *Sartor* is the first great book which faces the difficulties, and, in a way, embodies the aspirations of the new period. Its grimness no one will dispute. It is also a gospel, because the Everlasting No is routed, and under all the enigmas there is the promise of success and, if not Happiness, Blessedness, in work. It deals with quite a surprising range of modern problems. All the principal social, political and religious questions of the century are treated in greater or less detail. Carlyle's attitude towards economic and other science, his views on religion, the outline of his opinions as to the position and proper treatment of the poor, his conviction

of the need of a better and stronger government, may all be seen in *Sartor*. He expanded greatly and illustrated in his later writings, but he did not add much. *Sartor* is his most original and probably his greatest work. It is peculiarly interesting to notice that in it the central point of his creed is the need of reconstruction. Religion must be reconstructed: the 'Hebrew old-clothes' have had their day and will serve for human garments no longer. But this is equally true of the tailoring of the French Revolution: society itself has to be reconstructed. And the reconstruction, in Carlyle's view, is a complex task. The salvation of mankind must be sought by the positive, not by the negative method. The way will be long and difficult, not short and simple as the Revolutionists supposed. Neither will any amount of political machinery suffice. Not by majorities, however numerous, nor by ballot-boxes, however ingenious, can sound government be carried on, but only by something which goes to the root of character. Carlyle, writing in the midst of a great agitation for improvement in political machinery, merely looks on in contemptuous indifference, convinced that at least the true solution lies not there. He was too contemptuous, for the true solution lies not in any one thing but in the union of many, and of these political machinery is one.

Carlyle was not the only writer of this period who gave thought to such problems, nor the only one who appreciated their complexity, but it was he who first adequately expressed them; and it is *Sartor Resartus*, written in solitude on the Dumfriesshire

moors, that summons the crowds of modern cities to face and solve them. If the voice is the voice of one crying in the wilderness, it is addressed to the multitudes of human society wherever they are gathered together.

The principle at the root of all Carlyle's other works is the same. It has been already pointed out how his own character forms, as it were, a background even to his histories. As that character had been built up in the struggle with, and continued to be absorbed in the contemplation of, those problems, it follows that the histories are just the presentation of the same problems under the wider and more varied conditions of national existence. There was artistic gain to Carlyle in the new conditions. A longer dwelling in the regions of *Sartor* would have fed the morbid blood in him. History, without smothering his own personality, took him sufficiently out of it to check this tendency. The *History of the French Revolution* is much purer as an artistic conception than *Sartor*. It is more orderly in development, it has more artistic unity. Indeed, with the exception of one or two of Carlyle's smaller works, like the *Life of Sterling*, it is in this respect the best he ever wrote. Among histories it is quite singular for its coherence. Few histories have the unity of works of imaginative art. Among early works we may find one or two, like the history of Herodotus, which simulate the character and rival the proportions of a national epic. Among later works we may find one or two, like Gibbon's, which derive an impressive unity from the stately march of events to a great far-off catastrophe.

But probably nowhere is there a history which in every chapter, and almost in every sentence, breathes the artistic purpose as Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution* does. It has been frequently called the 'epic' of the Revolution. In point of fact, as Froude justly says, the conception is rather dramatic, and the best comparison is to Æschylus.

Carlyle had an infinite respect for facts, and as far as he could by industry and care, he assured himself that all he wrote as history was exactly true. It is of small moment that, like all the historians who have ever lived or ever will live, he has been proved to have made mistakes. But it is well to notice that, much as he revered facts, no one is farther removed than he from the school of Dryasdust. Few were so bold in making selection of their facts. The artistic principle always underlying his work saved him from the mistake into which so many recent historians seem prone to fall, the mistake of attempting to tell everything. To Carlyle, the fact must be illuminative, or he cast it aside. Moreover, while he denounced theorists, few bolder theorists than himself have ever written. Behind almost every sentence of his *French Revolution* there lies a theory, of character or motive, if not of cause and effect. The difference between him and the theorists he railed at was really that he presented poetically what, they presented logically. He was aware of the limited truth attainable by their method; he was not perhaps fully aware of the dangers of his own. We see this imaginative element in the great part which character plays in the development of the

French Revolution as Carlyle conceived it. It is in men, not in political machinery, that we must seek the clue to it. Hence the prominence, perhaps exaggerated, given to Mirabeau. Carlyle's facts are never left bare facts. He reverences them, not so much in themselves, as for the insight they give into the souls of men. This is the key-note of Carlyle's histories. They are essentially imaginative; and the writer spends his strength less in a narrative of events than in delineation of characters, and in the tracing of moral forces.

Carlyle's *Cromwell* is, more than either of the other histories, an illustration of his own doctrine of heroes, and less than either of the others is it a history of a nation as well as of a man. Cromwell to a great extent speaks for himself, and Carlyle expounds and comments on his uncouth and sometimes obsolete manner of expression. The commentary is free and even ample, yet there is less of Carlyle himself in this than in any other of his works. The great features of it are its delineation of the man Cromwell and the proof it presents of Carlyle's skill in the use of documents. Carlyle has not converted everybody to his own view of Cromwell, but he has at least coloured the opinion of everybody who has since studied the period.

If *Cromwell* is narrower in its scope than the *French Revolution*, *Frederick the Great* is even wider. The Revolution expanded into a European movement, but within the limits Carlyle set to himself it was essentially French. Frederick was the centre of a movement which Carlyle found could only be

treated as a European one. He was led by the relations, alliances and wars of his hero, to deal at greater or less length with all the principal countries of Europe, and his book, instead of being merely the history of a man, became the history of one of the most momentous series of events of the eighteenth century. In this respect therefore the history of Frederick is his most ambitious historical work; and either to it or to the *French Revolution* must be adjudged the palm of excellence in its class. Various arguments might be adduced on both sides, and it would be rash to pronounce definitely. For the earlier work it might be pleaded that it is clearly the more perfect in artistic conception. It is also true that, interesting as is the Seven Years' War, and interesting as, in Carlyle's hands, the growth of the Prussian Monarchy becomes, there is nothing in the subject-matter of *Frederick* quite as enthralling as the volcanic scenes of the *French Revolution*. It may also be pleaded that passages of eloquent writing are more frequent, and individual passages probably greater in the latter. The art in it moreover is purer, less intermixed with the grotesque, and with what can only be set down to Carlyle's individual eccentricities. On the other hand, *Frederick* is even more forcible than the *French Revolution*. Carlyle gathered power as years went on, and he never expended it more lavishly than on this latest and most ambitious of his works. Nowhere, except perhaps in *Sartor*, are all his peculiarities more conspicuous; nowhere is his gospel preached with more uncompromising energy; nowhere is his strange style more

unrestrained and less amenable to the ordinary laws of English composition. For these reasons, combined with the wide range of the work, which tasked his power of construction as it had never been tasked before, *Frederick the Great* will probably always win the suffrages of a large proportion of Carlylean devotees. For the same reasons, those who, acknowledging Carlyle's original genius and admiring his power, are only half reconciled to his sometimes wanton eccentricities, will doubtless continue to prefer the more regular *French Revolution*.

Regarding the purely historical essays as minor examples of the kind of works just discussed, Carlyle's remaining writings may be divided into two classes. These, in the order of their importance in his own eyes, and probably to the world, are, (1) works dealing with or bearing directly upon contemporary social and political problems; and (2) literary essays, including under the latter head the translations and the two biographies of Schiller and Sterling.

Under the first class rank such works as *Chartism*, *Past and Present* and *Latter-day Pamphlets*. Under it too might be fairly brought some of the essays, such, for example, as the essay on the *Corn Law Rhymes*, which, though it deals primarily with a literary subject, was written because that subject opened immediately into a social one. But indeed all Carlyle's works are closely cognate to this section; for if he was not directly treating of such themes, his thoughts were never far away from them. Still, there is a difference between dealing directly with a

subject and illustrating it by a borrowed light. In Carlyle's case the latter was the preferable method, and his wisest teaching on matters of immediate practical moment is not contained in the class of works here considered. The reason is that in discussing such questions he usually became violent and one-sided. Carlyle, as much as any man who ever lived, had 'the defects of his qualities.' We see in his own life how force and directness, his greatest qualities both literary and personal, become on occasion vices instead of virtues. He recognised the fact himself, and once humorously warned his own people, whom he had alarmed by his outcries, that they ought to know him too well to believe that he was being killed merely because he cried murder. But this habit of crying murder, trifling perhaps in itself, had no little influence for evil on his own life and on the life of her who was most closely associated with him. Just the same fault may be observed in all his works to some degree, but especially in the section of them now under discussion. Carlyle habitually saw through a magnifying glass. As he made an outcry if his own finger ached, so he did in the case of the evils of his own time. The 'something in the state of Denmark' he could contemplate with comparative equanimity, and the lesson he drew from that state was apt to be more just because more temperate than that which he drew directly from the present time itself. Compare, for instance, the 'past' with the 'present' in *Past and Present*. The former is calm, pure, beautiful, and, we feel convinced, true. The latter is lurid, turbid, exaggerated, repellent, only in part true.

We cannot accept as true at all the contrast between the one age and the other; only a most enthusiastic disciple can fail to note that a select specimen of the past is pitted against the average, or worse than the average, of the present. But not thus is truth reached, and not thus is conviction carried to the candid mind. Doubtless Carlyle wished to reform, and the way to reform, it may be urged, is rather to point out what needs amendment than to insist upon the advantages of 'our incomparable civilisation.' This is true, but justice is the prime requisite as a preliminary to reform. The way to win men's acquiescence is not to paint Hyperion on the one hand and a satyr on the other. The better way is to point out how a society faulty, troubled, but, it may be, not hopelessly corrupt, may be made in this point and in that a little less faulty, less troubled, less corrupt.

There is no such contrast in Carlyle's other works to drive the sense of his error home; but the same error is present in them. It is far from being the case that their matter is essentially bad, or that Carlyle is essentially wrong. There is much that is wholly sound and good in *Chartism*; but it is unrelieved and unbalanced. The same is true of the *Latter-day Pamphlets*. Even the much-abused *Nigger Question* is fundamentally right. What it means is that unless we organise free labour we had better give up boasting that we have set it free. The liberation of the West Indian slaves had brought to the verge of bankruptcy what had previously been the richest of British colonial possessions, robbed them of a prosperity which they have never fully recovered, ruined

the whites, and deprived the blacks themselves of a government and discipline which Carlyle believed to be morally necessary to them, and therefore their right. There are several points of contact between this and the theory of Aristotle; there is also a general resemblance between it and the bold doctrine of Carlyle's countryman, Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, who, impressed by the evil of unorganised free labour degenerating into vagabondage, advocated the re-introduction of slavery. It does not follow from the evils pointed out by Carlyle that slavery ought to have been maintained; but it does seem a fair inference that the process of liberation actually adopted was ill considered, and was no subject for unqualified jubilation. If Carlyle had advanced such ideas in a moderate and conciliatory way he might have made converts. Instead of that, he was aggressive. He sowed the wind of provocation, and he reaped the whirlwind of opposition, rejection, sometimes of vituperation. It is vain to wish that he had done otherwise; he could only do as his character allowed him to do; but we shall do well to recognise that violence proved to be not strength but weakness, and that with more self-control he would probably have produced greater practical effect.

The class of writings dealing with literature and literary men is that to which Carlyle himself would have attached least importance. He was a man of letters by necessity rather than by choice. He would do nothing which did not promise him an opening into the sphere of the ideal, and literature was the only profession within his reach which seemed to do that. He

would have preferred a life of action, provided the action had not for its end mere money-getting; and he declared there were few occupations for which he was not better fitted by nature than for that in which he spent his life. There may have been some exaggeration in this. If Carlyle had not by nature the faculty for writing, he made a marvellous faculty for himself. In favour of his own view, however, we may call to mind his well-known contempt for poetry, or rather verse, as it existed, and as he conceived it could alone exist, in his own day. Probably no born man of letters ever cherished such contempt, or ever submitted to be a writer of prose without some regret that he could not be a poet. Carlyle's half-dislike and more than half-disbelief in his own profession shows itself in the fact that he escapes as soon as possible from the region of pure literature; and, while he remains himself a man of letters, he writes by preference about action and as little as may be about books and authors. His literary essays therefore belong principally to the first period of his authorship. Moreover, he betrays his tendency by his choice of subjects. He writes with most satisfaction on authors whom he can regard as teachers; on others he writes only of necessity and with little sympathy.

Carlyle's creed was that a critic must first stand where his subject stood before criticism could be other than misleading. The way to write either fruitful criticism or true history was to read and reflect until it was possible to think the thoughts of men of the time or of the country to be commented on.

He carried out these precepts by way of biography as well as of critical essays. Of his two biographies, the *Life of Schiller*, though good, is much the less interesting and valuable. The *Life of Sterling* by common consent ranks among the best in English literature. Carlyle's work is, as a rule, remarkable rather for the presence of merits than for the absence of faults, but the *Life of Sterling* has few faults. It is exceedingly well proportioned, both in its several parts and with reference to its subject. Carlyle has moreover, while showing sincere friendship everywhere, preserved a wonderful sanity of judgment. It is impossible to rank Sterling's performances high, and his biographer, while respecting the man and steadily believing him greater than his works, steadily refuses to eulogise mediocre writings. An air of moderation, of charity and of kindliness breathes over the whole, as if Carlyle still felt the influence of his dead friend. He has written greater things, but none perhaps equally delightful.

It is necessary to add a word about Carlyle's much-debated style. But, in the first place, we ought in propriety to speak of Carlyle's *styles*. He had two, practised mainly, though not exclusively, in different periods of his life. His early style was a clear, strong, simple English, almost wholly free from the ellipses, inversions and mannerisms associated with his name. These gradually grew, and appeared fully developed for the first time in *Sartor Resartus*. Carlyle retained but seldom exercised the power of writing in his earlier style. The *Life of Sterling* has more affinity to it than to his later mode. But when Carlyle's

style is spoken of, what is meant is invariably the style of his later books. It is over this that the battle has raged. There is no style more strange and unexampled in English, or more at war with ordinary rules. It is in the highest degree mannered, it seems to be affected, it is anything but simple. Certainly it is the last and worst of all styles to select for imitation. No man would ever advise another to give his days and nights to the study of Carlyle in order to learn how to write English. In the abstract, if it were possible to take it in the abstract, it would be described as an exceedingly bad style; but whether it was bad for Carlyle is less clear. Though it is not natural in the sense of being born with him, it is natural in the sense that it seems peculiarly adapted to his turn of thought. Could Carlyle have expressed his humour and irony otherwise? It is difficult to say; but at least he never did it with perfect success until he developed this style. If the style was really necessary to the complete expression of what was in Carlyle, then that is its sufficient justification. Among the various 'supreme virtues' which have been assigned to style, the only genuine one is just this, that it and it alone, whether simple or ornate, curt or periodic, best expresses the thought of the writer. Yet we are apt to exclaim after all, 'the pity of it!' If only the humour and irony, the intensity and passion, could have found a voice more nearly in the key of other voices! This style will almost certainly tell against the permanence of Carlyle's fame. The world is a busy world, and the simple, clear, direct writer, the man whom he who runs may read, has a double chance of the

busy world's attention. Swift, whom Carlyle resembled in not a few ways, wrote a style unsurpassed for clearness and simplicity, yet he is not much read. How much less would he be read were *Gulliver's Travels* written in the style of *Sartor Resartus*!

CHAPTER II

POETRY FROM 1830 TO 1850. THE GREATER POETS: TENNYSON AND BROWNING

While it is in the prose of Thomas Carlyle that we first find a key to the ultimate and deeper tendencies of literature, it is in verse that we see most clearly its characteristics for the moment. In the interesting preface to *Philip van Artevelde*, published in 1834, Henry (afterwards Sir Henry) Taylor remarked that the poetry which had been recently popular, of which he took Byron's as typical, was marked by great sensibility and fervour, profusion of imagery and easy and adroit versification; while it showed inadequate appreciation of what he called the intellectual and immortal part, and a want of subject-matter. 'No man,' he adds, 'can be a very great poet who is not also a great philosopher.' About the poetry of his own days, he says that 'whilst it is greatly inferior in quality, it continues to be like his [Byron's] in kind.'

The criticism is just, and the aspiration is not only towards a desirable reform, but towards that which in point of fact has redeemed literature in the later decades of the century, and has given the Victorian age a position among the great poetic epochs

of English literature. At the moment when Taylor wrote, the sinking so frequently noticeable between two great periods of literature was plainly to be seen, and it was far deeper in poetry than in prose. The great poets were somewhat later in coming than their brethren in prose, Macaulay and Carlyle; and, still more, it was longer before they proved to the satisfaction of criticism their title to be considered great. The field was for the time in possession of a band of minor poets, some of them not merely minor but insignificant. It is not enough to say that they are inferior to Byron, they belong to a different order altogether; for Byron, with all his faults, was great. It was however in his footsteps that they trod. As Keats and Shelley and Wordsworth have been the ruling powers since 1840, so during his brilliant life, and from his death down to about that year, was Byron. The poetry of the opening years of this period is therefore rightly affiliated to him. Even Tennyson, a man of wholly alien genius, felt the influence, as the *Poems by Two Brothers* shows; while the verse of Letitia Elizabeth Landon proves that sex was no barrier to it.

Want of subject-matter and of capacity for the intellectual and immortal part is precisely the defect of the poetry of those years. It is essentially trivial. It leaves the impression that the poet is writing not because he must, but because he has determined to do so. For the present purpose it is safer to draw conclusions from the work of a single great man than from that of many mediocre writers; and when we find Tennyson, already great in

technical skill and graceful in style, sinking to triviality in subject and to commonplace sentiment, we look for an explanation not wholly confined to himself. We find it in the fact that those years were an interregnum between the philosophy of Rousseau and that gospel of work of which even Carlyle was as yet only half master, and which no one else had then grasped at all. Men were oppressed by a sense that the Revolution had shattered the old foundations of society; and they had scarcely gathered courage to attempt the task of reconstruction. To call therefore for a philosophy in poetry was right; but to supply it was impossible until the hour had come, and the man. Meanwhile the ordinary writer of verse groped in darkness or walked by a borrowed light. But in a sense, the man, or the men, had come, and the hour was rapidly approaching. Just three years before the beginning of the period Alfred Tennyson began to write, and just three years after it Robert Browning published his first poem.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson
(1809-1892).

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, was born at Somersby in Lincolnshire, of which place his father was rector. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he was contemporary with and made the acquaintance of an unusual number of men afterwards highly distinguished. Tennyson's most intimate friend was Arthur Henry Hallam (1811-1833), son of the historian, and himself a writer of high promise, both in verse and prose. The literary remains published after Hallam's death

can only be regarded as the promise of something that might have been. There is nothing great in them, but there is evidence of power which would probably have led the writer to greatness. Dying so young however, Hallam is memorable not so much for anything he did himself, as for his influence on his friend, and especially for the fact that he inspired *In Memoriam*.

During his course at Cambridge Tennyson won the Chancellor's prize with the poem of *Timbuctoo*, a piece above the ordinary prize-poem level, but not in itself remarkable. Still earlier, in 1827, he had joined with his brother Charles in a small volume entitled *Poems by Two Brothers*. But these compositions were merely boyish, and Tennyson's first noteworthy contribution to literature was the *Poems, chiefly Lyrical*, of 1830. This was followed by another volume bearing the date 1833, and entitled simply *Poems*. Then came nine years of almost complete silence, broken, in 1842, by two volumes entitled once more, *Poems*. These mark the end of Tennyson's first period of authorship. In the volumes of 1830 and 1833 we may look upon him as in many respects an apprentice in poetry; in those of 1842 he has passed far beyond mere apprenticeship. *The Princess* (1847) indicates a change in his method and in the nature of his ambitions; while *In Memoriam* (1850), though it has its roots in the early life of Tennyson, and was in part at least written when the grief it commemorates was fresh, is connected by its subject-matter rather with Tennyson's later work and with the interests of the second half of the century. In the year when

In Memoriam was published Tennyson succeeded Wordsworth in the laureateship, an office which he held for a longer period than any of his predecessors. His appointment was the public recognition of him as the chief poet of his time.

The most interesting feature of Tennyson's writings during those years is the evidence of development they present; and this is especially important in any attempt to gauge the tendencies of the time. This evidence has been much obscured by changes and omissions. Part of the contents of the volumes of 1830 and 1833 has been incorporated in the collected editions of Tennyson's poems. About half of the collection of 1842 consisted of select poems from the earlier volumes; but many pieces were omitted, and of those retained almost all were freely changed, and some nearly re-written. For this reason it is difficult for the reader of the present day to appreciate fairly the early criticisms of Tennyson. It is well known that he was severely handled, especially by Lockhart in the *Quarterly Review*; and it is supposed, on the ground of the poet's great achievements, that this is only another example of perverse and utterly mistaken criticism. But such a judgment is hardly fair to the critic. Carlyle long afterwards condensed the criticism in his expressive way into a word,—'lollipops.' A great many of Tennyson's early poems were 'lollipops,' dainty, exquisite, delicious to taste, but not food. They are elegant, not strong. They are deficient in two things essential to great poetry, depth of thought, and fervour of passion. The need of passion to poetry will be universally

admitted; and to the need of thought, especially in the present century, one of the greatest of English critics has borne emphatic testimony. 'I do not think,' says Matthew Arnold in his *Letters*, 'that any poet of our day can make much of his business unless he is intellectual.'

Now, among the early poems of Tennyson there are many pieces in which the want of these qualities is felt. He was certainly not in those days a poet of passion. His pulse temperately keeps time all the while he is drawing his Lilian, his Margaret and his Adeline. Though these pieces deserve, within certain limits, warm praise, they cannot be ranked as great poetry. They are masterpieces of grace, but they want depth. The writer is himself unmoved, and in consequence he leaves his readers equally calm. The same holds true of the thought in these volumes. It is usually cold and somewhat superficial. The critics, alive to these defects, were, it is true, both incautious and unfair. The early volumes contained a few poems showing no small force of mind, as well as a technical skill remarkable in so young a man. They contained, in particular, *The Palace of Art* and *A Dream of Fair Women*, both, even in their original shape, indubitably the productions of a strong intellect. In them also we find the exquisite *Lotos-Eaters*, with its wonderful melody, one of the most poetic poems Tennyson ever wrote, and one which, for suggestive beauty of thought as well as for rhythm, ranks among the masterpieces of the English language.

Tennyson then, judged by those early volumes, was a man

who might prove to be less gifted intellectually than artistically. He certainly had grace, but it might be reasonably questioned whether he had much strength. On the other hand, it might prove that the surface show of weakness was the fault rather of the time than the man. For the production of truly great poetry two things must co-operate,—great gifts in the individual, and a great life in the community in which his lot is cast. Without the latter the former will lie dormant, like the strength of Samson till the Philistines are upon him. Now, this is exactly what has been described as the position of matters when Tennyson began to write. The old impulse which had stirred the giants of the Revolution was failing or was undergoing transformation; the new impulse was only beginning to be felt.

As the poet was, so to speak, in the balance, his next publication is an object of special interest. He had taken plenty of time; and an interval of nine years, considerable at any time of life, is great in the space between twenty and thirty. He had moreover undergone a great personal sorrow in the death of his friend Hallam. If any change was ever to take place in his work it might be expected now. And we do find a great change, partly in the tone of the new poems, and hardly less in the omissions and revisions of the old. The purely trivial pieces are not reprinted. It is hardly less instructive to note that in the lighter pieces which are retained the changes made are comparatively slight; for they were already nearly perfect of their kind. Very different is the treatment of the more weighty poems. Tennyson evidently felt

that he had been less successful with these; and accordingly he freely revised all, and nearly rewrote some of them. The new pieces present similar evidence of development. The poet is still an artist first of all, but in a large proportion of the pieces he is a thinker as well. The whole tone of these volumes is therefore more thoughtful and more profoundly serious than that of their predecessors. *Ulysses*, *Locksley Hall*, *Morte d'Arthur* and the *Vision of Sin* may be mentioned as typical of the new work. Edward FitzGerald thought that Tennyson never rose above, nor even equalled, the poems of 1842; and, if we judge by the perfect balance of thought and expression, much might be said in defence of this view. At any rate, he had proved himself a poet who must be taken seriously, and it is from this date that we may regard his position among the greater English poets as assured. We have glimpses of artistic ideals to be realised and of intellectual problems to be solved. On the artistic side, the ideals are fundamentally a development from Keats, but they are a development by an original genius. On the intellectual side, *Locksley Hall* presents social problems, and the *Vision of Sin* raises moral and religious difficulties similar, it is true, in essence to those which men had discussed in former days, but seen in the light of the poet's own time.

Hitherto Tennyson's pieces had all been short. In 1847 he published his first long poem, the medley of *The Princess*. This serio-comic production on what is called 'the woman question' will probably not hold for long a high place among Tennyson's

works. The main body of it contains no great illuminating thought. The reflexions upon the position of women and the relations of the sexes are not beyond the range of an intelligence considerably short of genius, and the jest and earnest are not very happily mingled. The poem is remarkable rather for fine passages than for greatness as a whole. In point of length it was the most important experiment Tennyson had yet made in the most difficult but most flexible form of English metre, blank verse. There is however no part of *The Princess* of similar length which can be ranked as equal to *Morte d'Arthur*; and its best feature, the lyrics between the parts, were a subsequent addition. But whatever may be the intrinsic merit of *The Princess*, it is valuable as a symptom. The poet who had at first held so far aloof from the interests of everyday life is now found devoting his longest work to a social question of the day. He is at least endeavouring to be what Sir Henry Taylor says the great poet must be, a philosopher as well as an artist. If 'art for art's sake' be the proper creed of the poet, then Tennyson is wrong, and he remains wrong all the rest of his life. We must rank him among those poets who seek to base their work on an intellectual foundation, not among those who hold that feeling alone is sufficient. He seeks to see Truth as well as Beauty, instead of resting satisfied, like Keats, with their ultimate identity.

Robert Browning
(1812-1889).

Robert Browning is the only poet of that time who can be

placed beside Tennyson, and it is only in respect of greatness that the two can be conjoined; for in the great features of his poetry Browning stands apart, not only from Tennyson, but from all contemporary writers. The Browning family were dissenters in religion, and in those days dissenters were to a large extent cut off from society and from the usual course of education. The young poet went to no public school, and his higher education was given not at Oxford or Cambridge, but in the University of London, afterwards University College. There he remained only one year, and the travels on the continent which followed were unquestionably more important for his intellectual development. On his return he settled down to a literary life, and, notwithstanding narrow means and want of appreciation, became a poet by profession. His works consequently are the landmarks of his life. The most important event, outside the record of his publications, is his marriage in 1846 to Elizabeth Moulton Barrett, who was already known as a poetess. This union is unique in the records of English literature, and indeed, it would be hardly too much to say, of all literature. It has been said that men of genius usually marry commonplace wives. The two Brownings were, the one certainly among the greatest of nineteenth century poets, the other generally regarded as the greatest of English poetesses. The health of Mrs. Browning necessitated their living abroad; and the works of both bear deep marks of the influence of their long residence of fifteen years at Florence.

Browning, like Tennyson, lived and worked all through the present period, and far beyond its lower limit; but, unlike Tennyson, he neither illustrates in his own writings the characteristic influence of the time, nor did he in the early years make any deep mark upon it. One reason for his escape from the influence was that his interests were during those years more purely intellectual than those of any other poet. He had moreover a native buoyancy which saved him from the paralysing effect of disappointment and of fading hopes. He was an idealistic optimist born into a world where pessimism, or faith only in material prosperity and material progress, prevailed. Hence we find that from the start his works, unlike those of Tennyson or his contemporaries in general, were characterised by an even extravagant largeness of design. His first work, *Pauline* (1833), though it contains more than one thousand lines, is a mere fragment of a most ambitious scheme, which the poet afterwards admitted to have been far beyond his strength. *Paracelsus*, *Sordello*, *Strafford*, and the other dramas, all exhibit a similar boldness. While the other poets of the time had to be slowly made conscious of their strength and encouraged to undertake great things, Browning had by degrees to become aware of the limits of his powers, and to learn that he must reach through small things up to great. It was after what we may call an apprenticeship in the shorter dramatic monologue, such as we find in *Dramatic Romances*, *Dramatic Lyrics* and *Men and Women*, that he achieved his greatest triumph, *The Ring and the*

Book.

Pauline is interesting chiefly for the evidence it presents of the poet's early tastes. Shelley was the poet to whom in this piece he owed most; but Shelley's genius was not in harmony with Browning's, and afterwards his influence vanished almost as completely as did that of Byron from the works of Tennyson. *Pauline* was followed by *Paracelsus* (1835), a poem in which the writer seemed to spring all at once to the full maturity of his powers. He failed however to maintain his ground. *Strafford* (1837) was the first of a series of dramas published between that year and 1846, when the last number of *Bells and Pomegranates*, containing *Luria* and *A Soul's Tragedy*, appeared. Browning never afterwards attempted the drama proper, for *In a Balcony*, first published among *Men and Women*, is rather a dramatic episode than a drama. Besides the dramas, there had appeared during those years *Sordello* (1840), the most enigmatical poem Browning ever wrote. Despite the beauty of the descriptive passages in the poem, it may be questioned whether the enigma is worth the trouble of solution; at any rate, all the ingenuity bestowed upon it has not yet suggested a satisfactory explanation. There had appeared also, as parts of the series of *Bells and Pomegranates*, *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) and *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845). *Pippa Passes* (1841) is sometimes misleadingly classed as a drama. It is far more closely akin to the dramatic romances and dramatic lyrics.

The decade between *Strafford* and *A Soul's Tragedy* may

be described then as, for Browning, a period of dramatic experiment. The result was to demonstrate that, though his genius was in some respects intensely dramatic, he was not fitted to write for the stage. His failure is all the more remarkable because of his keen interest in character and his great success, under certain conditions, in understanding and interpreting it. The question naturally arises whether there is any connexion between Browning's failure and the often noted incapacity of the present century to nourish a dramatic literature. This incapacity is conspicuous in the preceding period as well as in that now under discussion. Scott failed completely as a dramatist. The once great reputation of Joanna Baillie has withered away. The dramas of Byron are striking, but their centre is always George Gordon. Shelley succeeded once, in *The Cenci*; for, great as is *Prometheus Unbound*, its greatness is not dramatic. With respect to the present period, the most convincing proof of the scarcity of dramatic talent is the fact that there is no need to devote a separate section to the criticism of this form of literature. To most writers the drama has been a mere interlude among other literary work, and this in spite of the fact that fiction alone can compare with it in respect of the material rewards it offers. Almost the sole exception, among those who can be regarded as rising into the ranks of literature, is James Sheridan Knowles who belongs more to the preceding period than to this. As literature, his plays are far from remarkable. His tragedies are of little interest, and his comedies, while ingenious, are pieces

of skilful mechanism rather than works inspired by the poetic spirit. Men like Tom Taylor and James Robinson Planché and Douglas Jerrold, gifted with fluency, and capable of writing as many dramas as the theatres might demand, have a place only in ephemeral literature. Even better men, such as Thomas Noon Talfourd (1795-1854) and John Westland Marston (1819-1890), hold but a low position in its annals. The cold dignity of Talfourd's style hardly atones for the commonplace character of his thought; and Marston betrays an incapacity, fatal in a dramatist, to draw clear and consistent characters. Henry Taylor, who ranks much higher, will be considered elsewhere. As a rule, such drama as there is in the period comes under names more conspicuous in other departments. Great as are his literary defects, Bulwer Lytton is pretty nearly the best in the dramatic list; and, like Charles Reade, he is a novelist first and a dramatist only in the second place.

In some of these cases it might be fairly urged that the cause of failure is want of dramatic talent in the man himself; but this does not explain the strange fact that in one age, the Elizabethan, nearly all writers should prove themselves capable of producing dramas, always respectable and often great; while in another, our own, no one, except Tennyson in his old age, has written a drama that is likely to rank permanently among the treasures of literature. We can only account for this by the operation of the law of development in literature. We observe, in point of fact, that particular literary forms flourish at particular times. We

observe, further, that in ancient Greece and in modern France and Spain, as well as in England, the golden age of the drama is neither at the beginning nor at the end, and that in each case it coincides with a period of great national activity and exaltation. The fact is susceptible of a psychological explanation. The drama requires an even balance between the spirit of action and the spirit of reflexion. On the one hand, we can hardly conceive of the drama being as naïve as the poems of Homer; on the other hand, the growth of self-consciousness is apt to interfere, as it did in Byron's case, with true dramatic portraiture.

Herein we find the secret of Browning's failure. Though he rightly proclaimed that all his poetry was 'dramatic in principle,' yet he never wrote a successful drama. The reason is that in him the spirit of reflexion predominates unduly over the spirit of action. In his plays the action stagnates, because he has no interest in it. All his wealth of intellect is devoted to the unfolding of motive and inner feeling, because, little as he cares for what a man does, he cares very much for what he *is* and *why* he does it. The characters therefore, in Browning's mode of conception, are seen individually, each in himself; they are not developed, in accordance with the true dramatic method, by mutual interaction. Hence too it comes that Browning's stage is never more than half filled, and that even of the sparse *dramatis personæ* only one as a rule, or at most two or three, are brought out with tolerable fulness of detail.

In the dramas then we may say that Browning was merely

learning what he could not do. Side by side with them he was doing work which taught him what he could do eminently well. His name is associated, more than that of any other poet, with the dramatic monologue. Excluding the regular dramas, nearly all his work of the period under consideration is either dramatic monologue or closely akin to it. *Pippa Passes* is only slightly different, a series of dramatic scenes, bound together by a lyric thread and by the character and doings of the girl Pippa. Most of the *Dramatic Lyrics* and *Dramatic Romances* are pure monologues. *Paracelsus* may be described as modified monologue. And not only during these years, but throughout his life, Browning's success depended principally upon two things; first, on the fidelity with which he kept to monologue; and secondly, on his remembrance of the fact that the poet must be not only intellectual, but artistic. With few exceptions Browning's greatest things—in *Men and Women*, in *Dramatis Personæ* and in *The Ring and the Book*, as well as in the works above named—are monologues in which he bears this fact in mind. With few exceptions his failures in later days are due to the fact that he forgets the poet in the philosopher.

Reasons may easily be found to account for the fact that dramatic monologue proved so much more suitable to the genius of Browning than either the regular drama or any other form of verse. It gave scope to his interest in character, without demanding of him that interest in action which he only showed spasmodically. Moreover, it suited his analytic method. For

Browning is not, like Shakespeare, an intuitive but a reflective artist. His delineations are the result of a conscious mental process; and hence he can hardly call up more than one character at a time. Further, he does not care to trace character through a train of events. His pictures are usually limited to moments of time, to single moods. They reveal the inner depth seen through some crisis in life; and therefore, though they are highly impressive, they do not exhibit growth. Now, for purposes such as these the monologue is admirably adapted. It leaves the poet free to choose his own moment, to begin when he likes and end when he likes; and this is essential to the effect of many of Browning's poems, as for instance *In a Gondola* and *The Lost Mistress*. It explains likewise the extraordinary suddenness of his style, which is one among the many causes of the difficulty so often felt in understanding him. There is no preparation, no working up to the crisis. The scene opens abruptly on some tempest of the soul, and the reader has to penetrate the mystery amidst thunder-claps and lightning-flashes. Yet the method does not always give rise to difficulty. There is no better example of it in Browning than the magnificent sketch of *Ottima and Sebald* in *Pippa Passes*. It is not a monologue, for there are two interlocutors; but they stand isolated from all the world, bound together by crime, and are seen only in their moment of supreme tension. Yet everything is so clear that dulness itself could hardly mistake the meaning.

Paracelsus is so much the most important of the works of

this period that it demands separate notice. Although several characters appear in the course of it the method is fundamentally that of monologue. The whole interest is concentrated on the fortunes and spiritual development of Paracelsus; but in this instance they are followed through a life. The poem may be described as a poetical treatise on the necessity of a union of love with knowledge and of feeling with thought. But though loaded with reflexion it never, like Browning's later works, ceases to be poetical, and it must be ranked very nearly at the head of its author's writings. The intellectual theory of the universe which underlies all Browning's poetry is never afterwards as fairly stated, nor are the difficulties as fully faced, as in *Paracelsus*. It has the advantage therefore, not only as poetry but also as philosophy, over the works written after *The Ring and the Book*.

Boldness of design then, and an even excessive opulence of intellect, were from the first the characteristics of Browning. He did not acquire them, they were his birthright. Carlyle stood out from among his contemporaries by virtue of conquests won through toil and pain, Browning entered into his inheritance at once and without effort. The one might have said, like the chief captain, "With a great sum obtained I this freedom;" and the other might have answered, with St. Paul, "But I was free born." Yet the advantage was not all on one side. Carlyle had the deeper sympathy with the difficulties of the time, and laborious as was his way upwards he had far more power over his own generation than Browning. The latter was for many years one

of the least popular of poets, and what influence he possessed operated slowly and unseen. It was men of less vigorous intellect who stamped their character upon this early part of the period.

CHAPTER III

THE MINOR POETS, 1830 to 1850

The view presented in the last chapter is that even Tennyson in his early works displays the qualities to be expected in a time of lowered energy, and gradually, by native force, rises superior to its limits. If this view be sound we should expect the characteristics in question to be much more prominent in lesser men. And this we find to be the case. Besides Tennyson himself and his brothers, the principal poets who had begun to write before 1830, and who may be taken as representative of the early years of the period, were: Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Mrs. Hemans, Elizabeth Moulton Barrett, Thomas Hood, Henry Taylor, and William Motherwell. We may include also Winthrop Mackworth Praed, for, though his poems were not collected and published till long afterwards, a number of them were written before this date. The *Poems* of Hartley Coleridge came a little later; and in the last year of the decade then beginning Philip James Bailey won by the long and ambitious poem of *Festus*, a great reputation which has for many years been fading away.

These writers are unusually hard to classify, because of the absence of any dominant note or of any absorbing interest. The

two women first named, Mrs. Hemans and 'L. E. L.,' belong rather to the preceding period, though they overlap this. Both are sentimentalists, and time has taken from their work the charm it once possessed. Mrs. Hemans is now unduly depreciated, but the difference between the most favourable and the least favourable critic can only be with regard to the degree of weakness charged against her. L. E. Landon (1802-1838), who became by marriage Mrs. Maclean, was in her own day even more popular than Mrs. Hemans, but she has since been much more completely forgotten. Even the mystery of her death, which was believed by many to be due to foul play, but which in all probability occurred through misadventure, has failed to keep alive the interest in her. Yet, though her verse is of little value, she is one of the best examples of the tendencies of the time. She followed Byron as far as her talents and the restraints of her sex would allow. Her longer poems are on the whole poor; some of her shorter pieces are very readable, but they are chargeable with the fault of an excess of rhetoric. Such as she was in poetry, her work was mostly done before 1830. After that date she wrote some mediocre prose stories, but was comparatively inactive in verse.

Charles Tennyson Turner
(1808-1879).

Both of Tennyson's brothers, Charles and Frederick, were, like himself, poets. It has but recently become known that Frederick as well as Charles had a share in the *Poems by Two Brothers*. Except for this the eldest brother's publications were

of much later date; but Charles Tennyson, afterwards Charles Tennyson Turner, followed up the joint venture with another of his own, a slim volume of *Sonnets and Fugitive Pieces*, published in 1830. This attracted the attention of Coleridge, who bestowed warm but discriminating praise upon the sonnets. Both as to fame, and probably as to his own productiveness, Charles Tennyson Turner was crushed, as it were, under his greater brother. He wrote little more, though he carefully revised and in some respects decidedly improved his sonnets. It is by virtue of them that he takes his place among English poets. They are graceful and sweet, but the substance is not always worthy of the form. They reveal everywhere the interests and the pursuits of the Vicar of Grasby, and they are honourable to his peaceful piety. It is evident that both Charles and Frederick Tennyson, and especially the latter, might have been disposed to adapt to themselves the humorous complaint of the second Duke of Wellington, and exclaim, 'What can a man do with such a brother?' Though the eldest of the three, Mr. Frederick Tennyson belongs by the date of his publications rather to the period after than to the period before 1870.

Of the other writers, Praed, accomplished and exceedingly clever, but never impelled to do anything really great, may be regarded as a victim of the prevalent want of purpose. So may Hood, in respect of that section of his works which naturally goes along with those of Praed. Hood, it is true, was too great a man to be dismissed as merely a writer of the transition; yet,

just because of his greatness, his history shows better than that of any other man how earnestness was discouraged and triviality fostered. Seldom have so great poetic gifts been so squandered—with no dishonour to Hood—on mere puns. The poet, as an early critic pointed out, was a man of essentially serious mind; but he had to earn bread for himself and his children, and as jesting paid, while serious poetry did not, he was compelled to jest.

Thomas Hood
(1799-1845).

Thomas Hood inherited from a consumptive family a feeble constitution, and the latter part of his life was a gallant but painful struggle against disease. His literary life began in 1821, when he was made 'a sort of sub-editor' of the *London Magazine*. *Lycus the Centaur*, a boldly imaginative piece for so young a man, appeared in 1822. *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies*, a fine specimen of graceful fancy deservedly ranked high by himself, and the powerful and terrible *Eugene Aram's Dream*, were likewise early pieces. The latter may be contrasted for its treatment of crime with Bulwer Lytton's well-known novel on the story of the same murderer. The advantage in imaginative force and insight, as well as in moral wholesomeness, is all on the side of Hood.

These pieces prove that the vein of serious poetry was present from the first in Hood. The vein of jest and pun was equally natural to him. Jokes of all kinds, practical and other, enlivened and sometimes distracted his own household. This liking for

fun inspired the *Odes and Addresses to Great People*, written in conjunction with John Hamilton Reynolds, the *Whims and Oddities*, and the succession of *Comic Annuals*, the first of which appeared in 1830. The presence of such a light and playful element in a great man's work is by no means to be regretted, but in Hood's case, unfortunately, there was for many years little else. Hood was blameless, for he had to live. With characteristic modesty he seems for a time to have been persuaded that the public were right, and that nature meant him for a professional jester. It was fortunate that he lived to change this opinion, for much of his finest poetry belongs to his closing years.

Perhaps the most original fruit of Hood's genius is *Miss Kilmansegg*, which conceals under a grotesque exterior deep feeling and effective satire. It has been sometimes ranked as Hood's greatest work; and if comparison be made with his longer pieces only, or if we look principally to the uniqueness of the poem, the judgment will hardly be disputed; but probably the popular instinct which has seized upon *The Song of the Shirt* and *The Bridge of Sighs*, and the criticism which exalts *The Haunted House*, are in this instance sounder. The grotesque element cannot be employed freely without damage to the pure poetic beauty of the piece in which it occurs; and *Miss Kilmansegg* certainly does suffer such damage.

The Song of the Shirt and *The Bridge of Sighs* are by far the most popular of Hood's poems. They have the great merit of perfect truth of feeling. Handling subjects which tempt to

sentiment, and even to that excess of sentiment known in the language of slang as 'gush,' they are wholly free from anything false or weak or merely lachrymose. Pity makes the verse, but it is the pity of a manly man. *The Haunted House*, first published in the opening number of *Hood's Magazine*, stands at the head of the writer's poetry of pure imagination. Few pieces can rival it for eeriness of impression, and few exhibit such delicate skill in the choice of details in description. The centipede, the spider, the maggots, the emmets, the bats, the rusty armour and the tattered flags, all help to deepen the sense of desolation and decay. This piece, with the more serious ones already mentioned, and a few others, such as *Ruth* and *The Death-Bed*, are Hood's best title to fame. The growth in their relative number as time went on, the increasing wealth of imagination and the greater flexibility of verse, all show that Hood was to the end a progressive poet. If he had lived longer and enjoyed better health his fame might have been very great. He was the victim of the transition, and through tardiness of recognition and the want of any influence to draw him out, he failed to leave a sufficient body of pure and great poetry to sustain permanently a high reputation. As the author of a few pieces with the unmistakable note of poetry he can never be quite forgotten.

Laman Blanchard
(1804-1845).

Passing mention may be accorded along with Hood to Laman Blanchard, a very minor poet, who showed the same combination

of seriousness with fun. He was an agreeable writer, but not, even at his best, a distinguished one.

Winthrop Mackworth Praed
(1802-1839).

The man of closest affinity to Hood was Winthrop Mackworth Praed, who began by contributing at school to *The Etonian*, and continued at Cambridge to write for Knight's *Quarterly Magazine*. He entered Parliament, and if he had lived he would probably have risen to eminence there. Praed belongs to the class of writers of *vers de société* of which Prior is the earlier and Locker-Lampson the later master; and it is not too much to say that he surpasses both. It is a species of verse well adapted to such a period as that in which Praed lived. Great earnestness is not required, and is even fatal to it. The qualities essential to success are culture, good-breeding, wit and lightness of touch. Praed had them all. The cleverness and wit and delicacy which nature had given him were all increased by the influence of his school and university, where he acquired all the grace of scholarship without any of the ponderosity of learning. But Praed had one more gift, without which his verses must have taken a lower place—the gift of a refined poetic fancy. It is this that gives his wit its special charm, and it is this too that saves his verse from being that merely of a very clever and refined jester. The well-known character of *The Vicar* is one of the best examples of this combination of feeling with lightness. Herein we detect the difference between Praed's wit and the wit of Hood. The latter

commonly separated jest from earnest, and gave himself wholly over to one or the other. He is far the more pronounced punster. The pleasant surprises of Praed's verse usually arise from some delicate turn of thought rather than from a twisting of words. Hood's fun is sometimes almost boisterous, Praed's is never so. As regards the lighter verse, the advantage on comparison is all on the side of the younger man. But there is no other aspect to Praed. Notwithstanding the undertone of seriousness, notwithstanding too the strange power of that masterpiece of the grotesque, *The Red Fisherman*, it remains doubtful whether he had the capacity to be more than what he is, the prince of elegant and refined writers of light verse. Hood is indubitably a poet.

Richard Monckton Milnes, Lord Houghton
(1809-1885).

It is likewise as a writer of *vers de société* that Richard Monckton Milnes, Lord Houghton, is best known, and is happiest. But though he shines as a writer of what may be called, without disparagement, poetical trifles, there is also a serious strain by no means contemptible in his verse. *Strangers Yet* is a fine specimen of pathos. In *Poems, Legendary and Historical*, however, Houghton is less successful, and the best of them do not bear comparison with Aytoun's *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers*, which belong to the same class. Houghton's critical work in prose is on the whole more valuable than his verse, for there his culture told, and the lack of high imagination is less felt.

Richard Harris Barham
(1788-1845).

Richard Harris Barham represents a type of humour much broader than that of Praed. His *Ingoldsby Legends* have enjoyed a popularity wider, probably, than that of any other humorous verse of the century. They are clever, rapid in narrative, and resourceful in phrase and in rhyme. Yet a certain want of delicacy in the wit and of melody in the verse is evident when we compare them with the work of Hood and Praed, or that of such later humorists as Calverley, or J. K. Stephen, or Lewis Carroll. Barham's last composition, 'As I laye a-thynkyng,' contains the promise of success if he had written serious poetry.

Hartley Coleridge
(1796-1849).

Hartley Coleridge was a poet of a totally different type; and we must ascribe the fact that he never redeemed his early promise to hereditary weakness of will rather than to any adverse influence of the time. Against the latter he had a defence that did not in the same measure shield any other contemporary. He was the special inheritor of the great traditions of the so-called Lake school; and he was cradled in poetry. His infancy and childhood are celebrated both by his father and by Wordsworth. Derwent Coleridge tells a story of his brother, which shows that Wordsworth accurately described Hartley as one 'whose fancies from afar are brought,' and who made 'a mock apparel' of his

words. 'Hartley, when about five years old, was asked a question about himself being called Hartley. "Which Hartley?" asked the boy. "Why! is there more than one Hartley?" "Yes," he replied, "there's a deal of Hartleys." "How so?" "There's Picture-Hartley (Hazlitt had painted a portrait of him) and Shadow-Hartley, and there's Echo-Hartley, and there's Catch-me-fast Hartley"; at the same time seizing his own arm very eagerly.' Evidently this boy lived in a world of day-dreams, in a 'perpetual perspective.' The problem of the education of such a young idealist is a difficult one; but it seems clear that its principle ought to have been a judicious, not a harsh or pedantic, regularity. His father's aspiration of 'wandering like a breeze' was not for him. But instead, Hartley's actual education was irregular and desultory. Nothing was done to improve his natural defect and to discipline his will; and weakness of will wrecked his life. The fellowship he had won at Oriel College was forfeited for intemperance, and he never conquered the habit, but sank from depth to depth, a pitiable example of genius gone to waste.

Though Hartley Coleridge wrote prose as well, his name is now associated only with his poems. A volume of these was published in 1833. It was marked Vol. I., but no second ever appeared. The poems however were re-edited, with additions, by Derwent Coleridge, in 1851. Hartley Coleridge nowhere shows the supreme poetic gift his father possessed; but as in sheer genius the elder Coleridge was probably superior to any contemporary, so Hartley seems to have been the superior by

endowment of any poet then writing, Tennyson and Browning alone excepted. Weakness of will, unfortunately, doomed him to excel only in short pieces, and to be far from uniform in these. It would have been wiser to omit the section of 'playful and humorous' pieces. But the sonnets are very good, and some of them are excellent. A few of the songs take an equally high rank, especially the well-known *She is not fair to outward view*, and *'Tis sweet to hear the merry lark*. There are many suggestions of Wordsworth, but Hartley Coleridge is not an imitative poet. Without any striking originality he is fresh and independent. His verse betrays a gentle and kindly as well as a sensitive character. He evidently felt affection for all living things, and especially for all that was weak, whether from nature, age, or circumstance. Some of this feeling turns back, as it were, upon himself, in the numerous and often pathetic poems in which he appears to be contemplating his own history. He is of the school of Wordsworth in his love for and his familiar communion with nature; and here at least he gathered some fruit from the 'unchartered freedom' of his existence.

Sara Coleridge
(1802-1852).

Hartley Coleridge belonged to a family unique in its power of transmitting genius. His sister Sara likewise inherited intellectual and imaginative gifts probably little if at all inferior to his; but circumstances prevented her from making a great name. She married another Coleridge of genius, her cousin, Henry Nelson,

whose untimely death threw a burden upon her, as editor of her father's literary remains, that absorbed her time and energies. Her only book is *Phantasmion*, a fairy tale, whose lyric snatches prove her worthy of remembrance among English poetesses.

William Motherwell
(1797-1835).

Of the other poets who have been named, William Motherwell was the least considerable both in achievement and in gifts. He had a taste for research in old popular poetry, but he took such liberties that his versions are not to be trusted. He also allowed the pseudo-antique to mar some of his own work, especially the fine *Cavalier Song*. He is happiest in the vein of pathetic Scotch verse, of which the best specimen he left is his *Jeanie Morison*. He had the feeling and sensibility of a minor Burns, but not the force. Contemporary with Motherwell and, on the Scotch side of his work, not dissimilar, was William Thom (1798-1848), 'the weaver poet,' best known for *The Blind Boy's Pranks*. Dialect alone unites with these two George Outram (1805-1856) a man little known out of Scotland, but, in his best pieces, one of the most irresistibly humorous of comic poets. Nothing but unfamiliarity with the legal processes and phrases on which the wit frequently turns, prevents him from being widely popular. For rich fun *The Annuity*, his masterpiece, has seldom been surpassed.

Henry Taylor

(1800-1886).

Henry Taylor lifts us once more into a higher sphere of art. He lived an even and unruffled life, the spirit of which seems to have passed into his works. The son of a country gentleman, he procured an appointment in the Colonial office, gradually rose in it, was knighted, and after nearly half a century of service, retired in 1872. The comfortable and easy life of office permitted Taylor to develop his powers to the uttermost. For a greater man its very smoothness might have been damaging. Great poetry requires passion: either the passion of the emotional nature, or that passion of thought which, as Mr. William Watson has lately reminded the world, is no less valuable for the purposes of art. Official life fosters neither; but it would seem that Sir Henry Taylor's nature contained the germ of neither. Hence perhaps, in part, his disapproval of the school of Byron. His practice would have been as excellent as his theory had he been one of those who know

‘A deeper transport and a mightier thrill
Than comes of commerce with mortality.’

But he was wanting in the second kind of passion, as well as in the first. His work is like his life, smooth, calm, unchargeable with faults; but it is not the kind that animates mankind.

Sir Henry Taylor wrote prose as well as verse, in particular a very readable autobiography. It is however chiefly as a dramatist

that he is memorable. His plays are the closet studies of a cultured man of letters, who knew little and cared little about the conditions of the stage. *Isaac Comnenus* (1827) was followed by his masterpiece, *Philip Van Artevelde* (1834). *Edwin the Fair* appeared in 1842, and his last play, *St. Clement's Eve*, in 1862. He also wrote one other piece, *A Sicilian Summer*, a kind of comedy, not very successful.

Philip Van Artevelde is so clearly Taylor's best work that his literary faculty may be judged, certainly without danger of depreciation, from it alone. It is a historical drama, and the title sufficiently indicates the age and country in which the scene is laid. The whole drama is long, and the slow movement adapts it rather for reading than for representation. It is composed of two parts, separated by *The Lay of Elena*, a lyrical piece in which may be detected echoes both of Wordsworth and Coleridge, with an occasional suggestion of Scott. The weakest element of the drama is the treatment of passion. Taylor's incapacity to comprehend it is strikingly illustrated in the passage where Philip, immediately after his declaration of love to Elena, reflects upon the caprice of a woman's fancy which

'Takes no distinction but of sex,
And ridicules the very name of choice.'

The thought is a little trite, and the words are extraordinary in the mouth of a newly-accepted lover. We may confidently look to

Taylor for careful and workmanlike delineation of character, but we shall find in him no profound insight. Philip prosed about the burden he takes up and the cares he endures. But notwithstanding defects, the interest is fairly well sustained, some of the situations are impressive, and the verse is frequently lit with flashes of imaginative power. A man of talent with a touch of genius, Taylor saw clearly what the poetry of his time needed, but for want of the 'passion of thought' he failed to supply it.

Philip James Bailey
(1816-1902).

One contemporary at least showed by his practice that he agreed with Taylor as to the necessity of setting poetry on a philosophical basis. Philip James Bailey published *Festus* in 1839. It has been the work of his life, for though he wrote other pieces afterwards, most of them have been incorporated, wholly or in part, with *Festus*. The consequence is that the poem, long originally, has grown to enormous dimensions. It is an ambitious attempt to settle all the fundamental problems of the universe, and it was once hailed with a chorus of praise that would almost have sufficed for Homer or Milton. This praise remains one of the curiosities of criticism for later days to marvel at. *Festus* is not profound philosophy, and still less is it true poetry. The thought when probed is commonplace. A vigorous expression here and there is hardly enough to redeem the weak echoes of Goethe and Byron. Frequently the verse is distinguishable from prose only by the manner of printing. 'Swearers and swaggerers

jeer at my name' is supposed to be an iambic line. We are told that a thing is in our 'soul-blood' and our 'soul-bones;' and we hear of 'marmoreal floods' that 'spread their couch of perdurable snow.' Yet this passes for poetry, and *Festus* has gone through many editions in this country, and still more in America. The aberration of taste is not quite as great as that which raised Martin Farquhar Tupper and his *Proverbial Philosophy* to the highest popularity, but it is similar in kind.

Richard Hengist Horne
(1803-1884).

A more interesting and far superior example of the class of thoughtful poets was Richard Henry, or, as he called himself in later life, Richard Hengist Horne. Horne was a man of versatile talent who, after an adventurous youth in which he saw something of warfare and passed through many adventures on the coasts of America and, at a later date, in the Australian bush, settled down to a literary life. His first memorable works were two tragedies, *Cosmo de' Medici* and *The Death of Marlowe*, both published in the year 1837. A third tragedy, *Gregory VII.*, appeared in 1840. Horne's dramas are thoughtful, and they have the vigour which marked his own character. Yet Horne seems to have felt that there was something not wholly satisfactory in his dramatic work, and, except *Judas Iscariot* (1848), his more noteworthy writings in later days are either prose, or lyrical verse, or epic blank verse. He is best known by *Orion, an Epic Poem* (1843). It is an epic with a philosophic groundwork, 'intended,'

as the author himself explains, ‘to work out a special design, applicable to all time, by means of antique or classical imagery and associations.... Orion, the hero of my fable, is meant to present a type of the struggle of man with himself, *i.e.*

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