Tennyson

Guinevere

Queen Guinevere had fled the court, and sat
There in the holy house at Almesbury
Weeping, none with her save a little maid,
A novice: one low light betwixt them burn'd,
Blurr'd by the creeping mist, for all abroad,
Beneath a moon unseen albeit at full,
The white mist, like a face-cloth to the face,
Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still.

For hither had she fled, her cause of flight
Sir Modred; he the nearest to the King,
His nephew, ever like a subtle beast
Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne,
Ready to spring, waiting a chance: for this,
He chill'd the popular praises of the King
With silent smiles of slow disparagement;
And tamper'd with the Lords of the White Horse,
Heathen, the brood by Hengist left; and sought
To make disruption in the Table Round
Of Arthur, and to splinter it into feuds
Serving his traitorous end; and all his aims
Were sharpen'd by strong hate for Lancelot.

For thus it chanced one morn when all the court,
Green-suited, but with plumes that mock'd the may,
Had been, their wont, a-maying and return'd,
That Modred still in green, all ear and eye,
Climb'd to the high top of the garden-wall
To spy some secret scandal if he might,
And saw the Queen who sat betwixt her best
Enid, and lissome Vivien, of her court
The wiliest and the worst; and more than this
He saw not, for Sir Lancelot passing by
Spied where he couch'd, and as the gardener's hand
Picks from the colewort a green caterpillar,
So from the high wall and the flowering grove
Of grasses Lancelot pluck'd him by the heel,
And cast him as a worm upon the way;
But when he knew the Prince tho' marr'd with dust,
He, reverencing king's blood in a bad man,
Made such excuses as he might, and these
Full knightly without scorn; for in those days
No knight of Arthur's noblest dealt in scorn;
But, if a man were halt or hunch'd, in him
By those whom God had made full-limb'd and tall,
Scorn was allow'd as part of his defect,
And he was answer'd softly by the King
And all his Table. So Sir Lancelot holp
To raise the Prince, who rising twice or thrice
Full sharply smote his knees, and smiled, and went:
But, ever after, the small violence done
Rankled in him and ruffled all his heart,
As the sharp wind that ruffles all day long
A little bitter pool about a stone
On the bare coast.

But when Sir Lancelot told
This matter to the Queen, at first she laugh'd
Lightly, to think of Modred's dusty fall,
Then shudder'd, as the village wife who cries
'I shudder, some one steps across my grave;'
Then laugh'd again, but faintlier, for indeed
She half-foresaw that he, the subtle beast,
Would track her guilt until he found, and hers
Would be for evermore a name of scorn.
Henceforward rarely could she front in Hall,
Or elsewhere, Modred's narrow foxy face,
Heart-hiding smile, and grey persistent eye:
Henceforward too, the Powers that tend the soul,
To help it from the death that cannot die,
And save it even in extremes, began
To vex and plague her. Many a time for hours,
Beside the placid breathings of the King,
In the dead night, grim faces came and went
Before her, or a vague spiritual fear –
Like to some doubtful noise of creaking doors,
Heard by the watcher in a haunted house,
That keeps the rust of murder on the walls –
Held her awake: or if she slept, she dream'd
An awful dream; for then she seem'd to stand
On some vast plain before a setting sun,
And from the sun there swiftly made at her
A ghastly something, and its shadow flew
Before it, till it touch'd her, and she turn'd –
When lo! her own, that broadening from her feet,
And blackening, swallow'd all the land, and in it
Far cities burnt, and with a cry she woke.
And all this trouble did not pass but grew;
Till ev'n the clear face of the guileless King,
And trustful courtesies of household life,
Became her bane; and at the last she said,
'O Lancelot, get thee hence to thine own land,
For if thou tarry we shall meet again,
And if we meet again, some evil chance
Will make the smouldering scandal break and blaze
Before the people, and our lord the King.'
And Lancelot ever promised, but remain'd,
And still they met and met. Again she said,
'O Lancelot, if thou love me get thee hence.'
And then they were agreed upon a night
(When the good King should not be there) to meet
And part for ever. Passion-pale they met
And greeted: hands in hands, and eye to eye,
Low on the border of her couch they sat
Stammering and staring: it was their last hour,
A madness of farewells. And Modred brought
His creatures to the basement of the tower
For testimony; and crying with full voice
'Traitor, come out, ye are trapt at last,' aroused
Lancelot, who rushing outward lionlike

Guinevere (2)

Leapt on him, and hurl'd him headlong, and he fell
Stunn'd, and his creatures took and bare him off
And all was still: then she, 'the end is come
And I am shamed for ever;' and he said,
'Mine be the shame; mine was the sin: but rise
And fly to my strong castle overseas:
There will I hide thee, till my life shall end,
There hold thee with my life against the world.'
She answer'd, 'Lancelot, wilt thou hold me so?
Nay, friend, for we have taken our farewells.
Would God, that thou could'st hide me from myself!
Mine is the shame, for I was wife, and thou
Unwedded: yet rise now, and let us fly,
For I will draw me into sanctuary,
And bide my doom.' So Lancelot got her horse,
Set her thereon, and mounted on his own,
And then they rode to the divided way,
There kiss'd, and parted weeping: for he past,
Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen,
Back to his land; but she to Almesbury
Fled all night long by glimmering waste and weald,
And heard the Spirits of the waste and weald
Moan as she fled, or thought she heard them moan:
And in herself she moan'd 'too late, too late!'
Till in the cold wind that foreruns the morn,
A blot in heaven, the Raven, flying high,
Croak'd, and she thought, 'He spies a field of death;
For now the Heathen of the Northern Sea,
Lured by the crimes and frailties of the court
Begin to slay the folk, and spoil the land.'

And when she came to Almesbury she spake
There to the nuns, and said, 'Mine enemies
Pursue me, but, O peaceful Sisterhood,
Receive, and yield me sanctuary, nor ask
Her name, to whom ye yield it, till her time
To tell you:' and her beauty, grace and power,
Wrought as a charm upon them, and they spared
To ask it.

So the stately Queen abode
For many a week, unknown, among the nuns;
Nor with them mix'd, nor told her name, nor sought.
Wrapt in her grief, for housel or for shrift,
But communed only with the little maid,
Who pleased her with a babbling heedlessness
Which often lured her from herself, but now,
This night, a rumour wildly blown about
Came, that Sir Modred had usurp'd the realm,
And leagued him with the heathen, while the King
Was waging war on Lancelot: then she thought,
'With what a hate the people and the King
Must hate me,' and bow'd down upon her hands
Silent, until the little maid, who brook'd
No silence, brake it, uttering 'late! so late!
What hour, I wonder, now?' and when she drew
No answer, by and by began to hum
An air the nuns had taught her; 'late, so late!'
Which when she heard, the Queen look'd up, and said,
'O maiden, if indeed you list to sing
Sing, and unbind my heart that I may weep.'
Whereat full willingly sang the little maid.

'Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

'No light had we: for that we do repent;
And learning this, the bridegroom will relent.
Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now.

'No light: so late! and dark and chill the night!
O let us in, that we may find the light!
Too late, too late: ye cannot enter now.

'Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
O let us in, tho' late, to kiss his feet!
No, no, too late! ye cannot enter now.'

So sang the novice, while full passionately,
Her head upon her hands, remembering
Her thought when first she came, wept the sad Queen.
Then said the little novice prattling to her.

'O pray you, noble lady, weep no more;
But let my words, the words of one so small,
Who knowing nothing knows but to obey,

And if I do not there is penance given –
Comfort your sorrows; for they do not flow
From evil done; right sure am I of that,
Who see your tender grace and stateliness.
But weigh your sorrows with our lord the King's,
And weighing find them less; for gone is he
To wage grim war against Sir Lancelot there,
Round that strong castle where he holds the Queen;
And Modred whom he left in charge of all,
The traitor – Ah sweet lady, the King's grief
For his own self, and his own Queen, and realm,
Must needs be thrice as great as any of ours.
For me, I thank the saints, I am not great.
For if there ever come a grief to me
I cry my cry in silence, and have done:
None knows it, and my tears have brought me good:
But even were the griefs of little ones
As great as those of great ones, yet this grief
Is added to the griefs the great must bear,
That howsoever much they may desire
Silence, they cannot weep behind a cloud:
As even here they talk at Almesbury
About the good King and his wicked Queen,
And were I such a King with such a Queen
Well might I wish to veil her wickedness
But were I such a King, it could not be.'

Guinevere (3)

Then to her own sad heart mutter'd the Queen,
'Will the child kill me with her innocent talk?'
But openly she answer'd 'must not I,
If this false traitor have displaced his lord,
Grieve with the common grief of all the realm?'

'Yea,' said the maid, 'this is all woman's grief,
That *she* is woman, whose disloyal life
Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round
Which good King Arthur founded, years ago,
With signs and miracles and wonders, there
At Camelot, ere the coming of the Queen.'

Then thought the Queen within herself again,
'Will the child kill me with her foolish prate?'
But openly she spake and said to her,
'O little maid, shut in by nunnery walls,
What canst thou know of Kings and Tables Round,
Or what of signs and wonders, but the signs
And simple miracles of thy nunnery?'

To whom the little novice garrulously:
'Yea, but I know: the land was full of signs
And wonders ere the coming of the Queen.
So said my father, and himself was knight
Of the great Table – at the founding of it;
And rode thereto from Lyonnesse, and he said
That as he rode, an hour or maybe twain
After the sunset, down the coast, he heard
Strange music, and he paused and turning – there,
All down the lonely coast of Lyonnesse,
Each with a beacon-star upon his head,
And with a wild sea-light about his feet,
He saw them – headland after headland flame
Far on into the rich heart of the west:
And in the light the white mermaiden swam,
And strong man-breasted things stood from the sea,
And sent a deep sea-voice thro' all the land,
To which the little elves of chasm and cleft
Made answer, sounding like a distant horn.
So said my father – yea, and furthermore,
Next morning, while he past the dim-lit woods,
Himself beheld three spirits mad with joy
Come dashing down on a tall wayside flower,
That shook beneath them, as the thistle shakes
When three grey linnets wrangle for the seed:
And still at evenings on before his horse
The flickering fairy-circle wheel'd and broke
Flying, and link'd again, and wheel'd and broke
Flying, for all the land was full of life.
And when at last he came to Camelot,
A wreath of airy dancers hand-in-hand
Swung round the lighted lantern of the hall;
And in the hall itself was such a feast
As never man had dream'd; for every knight
Had whatsoever meat he long'd for served
By hands unseen; and even as he said
Down in the cellars merry bloated things
Shoulder'd the spigot, straddling on the butts
While the wine ran: so glad were spirits and men
Before the coming of the sinful Queen.'

Then spake the Queen and somewhat bitterly,
'Were they so glad? ill prophets were they all,
Spirits and men: could none of them foresee,
Not even thy wise father with his signs
And wonders, what has fall'n upon the realm?'

To whom the novice garrulously again.
'Yea, one, a bard; of whom my father said,
Full many a noble war-song had he sung,
Ev'n in the presence of an enemy's fleet,
Between the steep cliff and the coming wave;
And many a mystic lay of life and death
Had chanted on the smoky mountain-tops,
When round him bent the spirits of the hills
With all their dewy hair blown back like flame:
So said my father – and that night the bard
Sang Arthur's glorious wars, and sang the King
As wellnigh more than man, and rail'd at those
Who call'd him the false son of Gorloïs:
For there was no man knew from whence he came;
But after tempest, when the long wave broke
All down the thundering shores of Bude and Bos,
There came a day as still as heaven, and then
They found a naked child upon the sands
Of dark Dundagil by the Cornish sea;
And that was Arthur; and they foster'd him
Till he by miracle was approven king:
And that his grave should be a mystery
From all men, like his birth; and could he find
A woman in her womanhood as great
As he was in his manhood, then, he sang,
The twain together well might change the world.
But even in the middle of his song
He falter'd, and his hand fell from the harp,
And pale he turn'd, and reel'd, and would have fall'n,
But that they stay'd him up; nor would he tell
His vision; but what doubt that he foresaw
This evil work of Lancelot and the Queen?'

Then thought the Queen 'lo! they have set her on,
Our simple-seeming Abbess and her nuns,
To play upon me,' and bow'd her head nor spake.
Whereat the novice crying, with clasp'd hands,
Shame on her own garrulity garrulously,
Said the good nuns would check her gadding tongue
Full often, 'and, sweet lady, if I seem
To vex an ear too sad to listen to me,
Unmannerly, with prattling and the tales,
Which my good father told me, check me too:
Nor let me shame my father's memory, one

Guinevere (4)

Of noblest manners, tho' himself would say
Sir Lancelot had the noblest; and he died,
Kill'd in a tilt, come next, five summers back,
And left me; but of others who remain,
And of the two first-famed for courtesy –
And pray you check me if I ask amiss –
But pray you, which had noblest, while you moved
Among them, Lancelot or our lord the King?'

Then the pale Queen look'd up and answer'd her.
'Sir Lancelot, as became a noble knight,
Was gracious to all ladies, and the same
In open battle or the tilting-field
Forbore his own advantage, and the King
In open battle or the tilting-field
Forbore his, own advantage, and these two
Were the most nobly-manner'd men of all;
For manners are not idle, but the fruit
Of loyal nature, and of noble mind.'

'Yea,' said the maid, 'be manners such fair fruit?
Then Lancelot's needs must be a thousand-fold
Less noble, being, as all rumour runs,
The most disloyal friend in all the world.'

To which a mournful answer made the Queen:
'O closed about by narrowing nunnery-walls,
What knowest thou of the world, and all its lights,
And shadows, all the wealth and all the woe?
If ever Lancelot, that most noble knight,
Were for one hour less noble than himself,
Pray for him that he scape the doom of fire,
And weep for her, who drew him to his doom.'

'Yea,' said the little novice, 'I pray for both;
But I should all as, soon believe that his,
Sir Lancelot's, were as noble as the King's,
As I could think, sweet lady, yours would be
Such as they are, were you the sinful Queen.'

So she, like many another babbler, hurt
Whom she would soothe, and harm'd where she would heal;
For here a sudden flush of wrathful heat
Fired all the pale face of the Queen, who cried,
'Such as thou art be never maiden more
For ever! thou their tool, set on to plague
And play upon, and harry me, petty spy
And traitress.' When that storm of anger brake
From Guinevere, aghast the maiden rose,
White as her veil, and stood before the Queen
As tremulously as foam upon the beach
Stands in a wind, ready to break and fly,
And when the Queen had added 'Get thee hence,'
Fled frighted. Then that other left alone
Sigh'd, and began to gather heart again,
Saying in herself, 'The simple, fearful child
Meant nothing, but my own too-fearful guilt,
Simpler than any child, betrays itself.
But help me, heaven, for surely I repent.
For what is true repentance but in thought –
Not ev'n in inmost thought to think again
The sins that made the past so pleasant to us:
And I have sworn never to see him more,
To see him more.'

And ev'n in saying this,
Her memory from old habit of the mind
Went slipping back upon the golden days
In which she saw him first, when Lancelot came,
Reputed the best knight and goodliest man,
Ambassador, to lead her to his lord
Arthur, and led her forth, and far ahead
Of his and her retinue moving, they,
Rapt in sweet talk or lively, all on love
And sport and tilts and pleasure, (for the time
Was maytime, and as yet no sin was dream'd,)
Rode under groves that look'd a paradise
Of blossom, over sheets of hyacinth
That seem'd the heavens upbreaking thro' the earth,
And on from hill to hill, and every day
Beheld at noon in some delicious dale
The silk pavilions of King Arthur raised
For brief repast or afternoon repose
By couriers gone before; and on again,
Till yet once more ere set of sun they saw
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship,
That crown'd the state pavilion of the King,
Blaze by the rushing brook or silent well.

But when the Queen immersed in such a trance,
And moving thro' the past unconsciously,
Came to that point, when first she saw the King
Ride toward her from the city, sigh'd to find
Her journey done, glanced at him, thought him cold,
High, self-contain'd, and passionless, not like him,
'Not like my Lancelot' – while she brooded thus
And grew half-guilty in her thoughts again,
There rode an armed warrior to the doors.
A murmuring whisper thro' the nunnery ran,
Then on a sudden a cry, 'the King.' She sat
Stiff-stricken, listening; but when armed feet
Thro' the long gallery from the outer doors
Rang coming, prone from off her seat she fell,
And grovell'd with her face against the floor:
There with her milkwhite arms and shadowy hair
She made her face a darkness from the King:
And in the darkness heard his armed feet
Pause by her; then came silence, then a voice,
Monotonous and hollow like a Ghost's
Denouncing judgement, but tho' changed the King's.

Guinevere (5)

'Liest thou here so low, the child of one
I honour'd, happy, dead before thy shame?
Well is it that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea.
Whom I, while yet Sir Lancelot, my right arm,
The mightiest of my knights, abode with me,
Have everywhere about this land of Christ
In twelve great battles ruining overthrown.
And knowest thou now from whence I come – from him,
From waging bitter war with him: and he,
That did not shun to smite me in worse way,
Had yet that grace of courtesy in him left,
He spared to lift his hand against the King
Who made him knight: but many a knight was slain;
And many more, and all his kith and kin
Clave to him, and abode in his own land.
And many more when Modred raised revolt,
Forgetful of their troth and fealty, clave
To Modred, and a remnant stays with me.
And of this remnant will I leave a part,
True men who love me still, for whom I live,
To guard thee in the wild hour coming on,
Lest but a hair of this low head be harm'd.
Fear not: thou shalt be guarded till my death.
Howbeit I know, if ancient prophecies
Have err'd not, that I march to meet my doom.
Thou hast not made my life so sweet to me,
That I the King should greatly care to live;
For thou hast spoilt the purpose of my life.
Bear with me for the last time while I show,
Ev'n for thy sake, the sin which thou hast sinn'd.
For when the Roman left us, and their law
Relax'd its hold upon us, and the ways
Were fill'd with rapine, here and there a deed
Of prowess done redress'd a random wrong.
But I was first of all the kings who drew
The knighthood-errant of this realm and all
The realms together under me, their Head,
In that fair order of my Table Round,
A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds,
Until they won her; for indeed I knew
Of no more subtle master under heaven
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
Not only to keep down the base in man,
But teach high thought, and amiable words
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.
And all this throve until I wedded thee!
Believing "lo mine helpmate, one to feel
My purpose and rejoicing in my joy."
Then came thy shameful sin with Lancelot;
Then came the sin of Tristram and Isolt;
Then others, following these my mightiest knights,
And drawing foul ensample from fair names
Sinn'd also, till the loathsome opposite
Of all my heart had destined did obtain,
And all thro' thee! so that this life of mine
I guard as God's high gift from scathe and wrong,
Not greatly care to lose; but rather think
How sad it were for Arthur, should he live,
To sit once more within his lonely hall,
And miss the wonted number of my knights,
And miss to hear high talk of noble deeds
As in the golden days before thy sin.
For which of us, who might be left, could speak
Of the pure heart, nor seem to glance at thee?
And in thy bowers of Camelot or of Usk
Thy shadow still would glide from room to room,
And I should evermore be vext with thee
In hanging robe or vacant ornament
Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair.
For think not, tho' thou would'st not love thy lord,
Thy lord has wholly lost his love for thee.
I am not made of so slight elements.
Yet must I leave thee, woman, to thy shame.
I hold that man the worst of public foes
Who either for his own or children's sake
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife
Whom he knows false, abide and rule the house:
For being thro' his cowardice allow'd
Her station, taken everywhere for pure,
She like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young.
Worst of the worst were that man he that reigns!
Better the King's waste hearth and aching heart
Than thou reseated in thy place of light,
The mockery of my people, and their bane.'

He paused, and in the pause she crept an inch
Nearer, and laid her hands about his feet.
Far off a solitary trumpet blew.
Then waiting by the doors the warhorse neigh'd
As at a friend's voice, and he spake again:

Guinevere (6)

'Yet think not that I come to urge thy crimes,
I did not come to curse thee, Guinevere,
I, whose vast pity almost makes me die
To see thee, laying there thy golden head,
My pride in happier summers, at my feet.
The wrath which forced my thoughts on that fierce law,
The doom of treason and the flaming death,
(When first I learnt thee hidden here) is past.
The pang – which while I weigh'd thy heart with one
Too wholly true to dream untruth in thee,
Made my tears burn – is also past, in part.
And all is past, the sin is sinn'd, and I,
Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God
Forgives: do thou for thine own soul the rest.
But how to take last leave of all I loved?
O golden hair, with which I used to play
Not knowing! O imperial-moulded form,
And beauty such as never woman wore,
Until it came a kingdom's curse with thee –
I cannot touch thy lips, they are not mine,
But Lancelot's: nay, they never were the King's.
I cannot take thy hand; that too is flesh,
And in the flesh thou hast sinn'd; and mine own flesh
Here looking down on thine polluted, cries
"I loathe thee:" yet not less, O Guinevere,
For I was ever virgin save for thee,
My love thro' flesh hath wrought into my life
So far, that my doom is, I love thee still.
Let no man dream but that I love thee still.
Perchance, and so thou purify thy soul,
And so thou lean on our fair father Christ,
Hereafter in that world where all are pure
We two may meet before high God, and thou
Wilt spring to me, and claim me thine, and know
I am thine husband – not a smaller soul,
Nor Lancelot, nor another. Leave me that,
I charge thee, my last hope. Now must I hence.
Thro' the thick night I hear the trumpet blow:
They summon me their King to lead mine hosts
Far down to that great battle in the west,
Where I must strike against my sister's son,
Leagued with the lords of the White Horse and knights
Once mine, and strike him dead, and meet myself
Death, or I know not what mysterious doom.
And thou remaining here wilt learn the event;
But hither shall I never come again,
Never lie by thy side, see thee no more:
Farewell!'

And while she grovell'd at his feet,
She felt the King's breath wander o'er her neck,
And, in the darkness o'er her fallen head,
Perceived the waving of his hands that blest.

Then, listening till those armed steps were gone,
Rose the pale Queen, and in her anguish found
The casement: 'peradventure,' so she thought,
'If I might see his face, and not be seen.'
And lo, he sat on horseback at the door!
And near him the sad nuns with each a light
Stood, and he gave them charge about the Queen,
To guard and foster her for evermore.
And while he spake to these his helm was lower'd,
To which for crest the golden dragon clung
Of Britain; so she did not see the face,
Which then was as an angel's, but she saw,
Wet with the mists and smitten by the lights,
The Dragon of the great Pendragonship
Blaze, making all the night a steam of fire.
And even then he turn'd; and more and more
The moony vapour rolling round the King,
Who seem'd the phantom of a Giant in it,
Enwound him fold by fold, and made him grey
And greyer, till himself became as mist
Before her, moving ghostlike to his doom.

Then she stretch'd out her arms and cried aloud
'Oh Arthur!' there her voice brake suddenly,
Then – as a stream that spouting from a cliff
Fails in mid air, but gathering at the base
Re-makes itself, and flashes down the vale –
Went on in passionate utterance.

'Gone – my lord!
Gone thro' my sin to slay and to be slain!
And he forgave me, and I could not speak.
Farewell? I should have answer'd his farewell.
His mercy choked me. Gone, my lord the King,
My own true lord! how dare I call him mine?
The shadow of another cleaves to me,
And makes me one pollution: he, the King,
Call'd me polluted: shall I kill myself?
What help in that? I cannot kill my sin,
If soul be soul; nor can I kill my shame;
No, nor by living can I live it down.
The days will grow to weeks, the weeks to months
The months will add themselves and make the years
The years will roll into the centuries,
And mine will ever be a name of scorn.
I must not dwell on that defeat of fame.
Let the world be; that is but of the world.
What else? what hope? I think there was a hope,
Except he mock'd me when he spake of hope;
His hope he call'd it; but he never mocks,
For mockery is the fume of little hearts.
And blessed be the King, who hath forgiven
My wickedness to him, and left me hope
That in mine own heart I can live down sin
And be his mate hereafter in the heavens
Before high God. Ah great and gentle lord,
Who wast, as is the conscience of a saint
Among his warring senses, to thy knights –

Guinevere (7)

To whom my false voluptuous pride, that took
Full easily all impressions from below,
Would not look up, or half-despised the height
To which I would not or I could not climb –
I thought I could not breathe in that fine air
That pure severity of perfect light –
I wanted warmth and colour which I found
In Lancelot – now I see thee what thou art,
Thou art the highest and most human too,
Not Lancelot, nor another. Is there none
Will tell the King I love him tho' so late?
Now – ere he goes to the great Battle? none:
Myself must tell him in that purer life,
But now it were too daring. Ah my God,
What might I not have made of thy fair world,
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?
It was my duty to have loved the highest:
It surely was my profit had I known:
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
We needs must love the highest when we see it,
Not Lancelot, nor another.'

Here her hand
Grasp'd, made her vail her eyes: she look'd and saw
The novice, weeping, suppliant, and said to her,
'Yea, little maid, for am *I* not forgiven?'
Then glancing up beheld the holy nuns
All round her, weeping; and her heart was loosed
Within her, and she wept with these and said:

'Ye know me then, that wicked one, who broke
The vast design and purpose of the King.
O shut me round with narrowing nunnery-walls
Meek maidens, from the voices crying "shame."
I must not scorn myself: he loves me still.
Let no one dream but that he loves me still.
So let me, if you do not shudder at me
Nor shun to call me sister, dwell with you;
Wear black and white, and be a nun like you;
Fast with your fasts, not feasting with your feasts;
Grieve with your griefs, not grieving at your joys,
But not rejoicing; mingle with your rites;
Pray and be pray'd for; lie before your shrines;
Do each low office of your holy house;
Walk your dim cloister, and distribute dole
To poor sick people, richer in His eyes
Who ransom'd us, and haler too than I;
And treat their loathsome hurts and heal mine own;
And so wear out in almsdeed and in prayer
The sombre close of that voluptuous day,
Which wrought the ruin of my lord the King.'

She said: they took her to themselves; and she
Still hoping, fearing 'is it yet too late?'
Dwelt with them, till in time their Abbess died.
Then she, for her good deeds and her pure life,
And for the power of ministration in her,
And likewise for the high rank she had borne,
Was chosen Abbess, there, an Abbess, lived
For three brief years, and there, an Abbess, past
To where beyond these voices there is peace.

Tennyson

Sir Galahad

My good blade carves the casques of men,
  My tough lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten,
  Because my heart is pure.
The shattering trumpet shrilleth high,
  The hard brands shiver on the steel,
The splinter'd spear-shafts crack and fly,
  The horse and rider reel:
They reel, they roll in clanging lists,
  And when the tide of combat stands,
Perfume and flowers fall in showers,
  That lightly rain from ladies' hands.

How sweet are looks that ladies bend
  On whom their favours fall!
For them I battle till the end,
  To save from shame and thrall:
But all my heart is drawn above,
  My knees are bow'd in crypt and shrine:
I never felt the kiss of love,
  Nor maiden's hand in mine.
More bounteous aspects on me beam,
  Me mightier transports move and thrill;
So keep I fair thro' faith and prayer
  A virgin heart in work and will.

When down the stormy crescent goes,
  A light before me swims,
Between dark stems the forest glows,
  I hear a noise of hymns:
Then by some secret shrine I ride;
  I hear a voice, but none are there;
The stalls are void, the doors are wide,
  The tapers burning fair.
Fair gleams the snowy altar-cloth,
  The silver vessels sparkle clean,
The shrill bell rings, the censer swings,
  And solemn chaunts resound between.

Sometimes on lonely mountain-meres
  I find a magic bark;
I leap on board: no helmsman steers:
  I float till all is dark.
A gentle sound, an awful light!
  Three angels bear the holy Grail:
With folded feet, in stoles of white,
  On sleeping wings they sail.
Ah, blessed vision! blood of God!
  My spirit beats her mortal bars,
As down dark tides the glory slides,
  And star-like mingles with the stars.

When on my goodly charger borne
  Thro' dreaming towns I go,
The cock crows ere the Christmas morn,
  The streets are dumb with snow.
The tempest crackles on the leads,
  And, ringing, springs from brand and mail;
But o'er the dark a glory spreads,
  And gilds the driving hail.
I leave the plain, I climb the height;
  No branchy thicket shelter yields;
But blessed forms in whistling storms
  Fly o'er waste fens and windy fields.

A maiden knight – to me is given
  Such hope, I know not fear;
I yearn to breathe the airs of heaven
  That often meet me here.
I muse on joy that will not cease,
  Pure spaces clothed in living beams,
Pure lilies of eternal peace,
  Whose odours haunt my dreams;
And, stricken by an angel's hand
  This mortal armour that I wear,
This weight and size, this heart and eyes,
  Are touch'd, are turn'd to finest air.

The clouds are broken in the sky,
  And thro' the mountain-walls
A rolling organ harmony
  Swells up, and shakes and falls.
Then move the trees, the copses nod,
  Wings flutter, voices hover clear
'O just and faithful knight of God!
  Ride on! the prize is near.'
So pass I hostel, hall, and grange;
  By bridge and ford, by park and pale,
All-arm'd I ride, whate'er betide,
  Until I find the holy Grail.

BROWNING

Porphyria's Lover

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me – she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself for me for ever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:
So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!

My Last Duchess: Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace – all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men, – good! but thanked
Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
– E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

BROWNING

Love Among the Ruins

1

Where the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles,
  Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
  Half-asleep
Tinkle homeward through the twilight, stray or stop
  As they crop –
Was the site once of a city great and gay,
  (So they say)
Of our country's very capital, its prince
  Ages since
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far
  Peace or war.

2

Now, – the country does not even boast a tree,
  As you see,
To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills
  From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
  Into one)
Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
  Up like fires
O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
  Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march on nor be pressed,
  Twelve abreast.

3

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
  Never was!
Such a carpet as, this summer time, o'erspreads
  And embeds
Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
  Stock or stone –
Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe
  Long ago;
Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame
  Struck them tame;
And that glory and that shame alike, the gold
  Bought and sold.

4

Now, – the single little turret that remains
  On the plains,
By the caper overrooted, by the gourd
  Overscored,
While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
  Through the chinks –
Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time
  Sprang sublime,
And a burning ring, all round, the chariots traced
  As they raced,
And the monarch and his minions and his dames
  Viewed the games.

5

And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eve
  Smiles to leave
To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
  In such peace,
And the slopes and rills in undistinguished grey
  Melt away –
That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
  Waits me there
In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul
  For the goal,
When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless, dumb
  Till I come.

6

But he looked upon the city, every side,
  Far and wide,
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'
  Colonnades,
All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts, – and then,
  All the men!
When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
  Either hand
On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
  Of my face,
Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
  Each on each.

7

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
  South and North,
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
  As the sky,
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force –
  Gold, of course.
Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
  Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
  Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
  Love is best!

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

"Sonnets from the Portuguese"

43

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
  I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
  My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
  Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
  I love thee freely, as men strive for right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
  In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
  With my lost saints, – I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! and, if God choose,
  I shall but love thee better after death.

THE RELIGIOUS QUESTION IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

TIME and EVOLUTION

Tennyson: "It is not the poetical imagination, but bare Science that every day more and more unrolls a greater Epic than the Iliad; the history of the World, the infinitudes of Space and Time! I never take up a book of Geology or Astronomy but it strikes me." (*Parnassus*)

Charles Lyell: "Worlds are seen beyond worlds immeasurably distant from each other, and beyond them all, innumerable other systems are faintly traced on the confines of the visible universe." (*Principles of Geology*, 1830-33)

Time and **space**, the "terrible muses" of **geology** and **astronomy**, combined to open up dizzying perspectives which seemed to dwarf mankind and its history, calling in question the consolations of religion and the optimism inherited from the Romantics.

Arnold: A man becomes aware of his life's flow
And then he thinks he knows
The hills where his life rose,
And the sea where it goes. (*The Buried Life*)

The **fossils**, mineralized remains of dead organisms preserved in the layers of stratified rock formations, gathered by enthusiastic country gentlemen and and displayed in the cabinets were a subversive presence since they told of a universe infinitely older than the Book of Genesis seemed to allow. The **biblical tradition** gave as the year of creation **4004 BC**. The successive layering of sediment took the geologist back millions of years. The fact that the petrified creatures found on cliff faces were marine animals spoke of enormous upheavals in the earth's surface.

Tennyson: There rolls the deep where grew the tree.
O earth, what changes hast thou seen!
There where the long street roars, hath been
The stillness of the central sea. (*(In Memoriam)*

The remains were of the now extinct species, which caused uneasiness in a civilization which believed that God would abandon nothing that he had made. They were also evidence against the single act of creation in Genesis and for a much older universe in which species had grown up and become extinct, in a gradual progression from simple to more complex forms.

At the time much energy in popular scientific writing went into **attempts to reconcile the evidence of the rocks with what was called the 'Mosaic Cosmogony'**, the account of the origin of the world in Genesis, without destroying the authority of the Bible as Revealed Truth. Cf. Baron Cuvier, in his *Essay on the Theory of the Earth* (1812) proposed that the present state of the earth's surface was the series of global cataclysms, accompanied by floods, of which Noah's flood was the last; after each catastrophe there had been an advance in the complexity of organisms.

The age of the earth might be disputed but the scientific establishment insisted on the **fixity of the species:** the species were fixed, the product of individual acts of Divine Creation. The loss of that certainty, the acceptance of the possibility of the mutability or transmutation of the species, opened the door to seeing mankind in naturalistic terms as the inheritor of the animals rather than the angels.

Before 1850 the theory of "evolution" was 'transformist'; Jean-Baptist Lamarck: the tendency of living organisms to develop into more complex forms through a peaceful evolution.

Around 1860 European geologists and archaeologists made the crucial breakthrough into human pre-history. In 1858 geologists excavating a cave near Torquay discovered stone tools beside the bones of extinct animals, proof that human beings had lived there in the remote past. In the 1860s **anthropology** as the study of the origins and development of humankind emerged as an independent discipline.

Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) replaced for the intellectual community the **'degenerationist'** myth of human origins in the Bible by a **'progressionist'** myth based on the idea of progress.

In the C19 **history** had **a design and a purpose**. All theories of history prescribed inevitable, progressive development. (e.g. Hegel's idea of history as a dialectic: the incompleteness of one period (thesis) breeding a reaction against its particular conditions in the next (antithesis) leading either to a synthesis of the two or to a further antithesis (thesis-antithesis-synthesis forming a triad) or Saint-Simon's "organic" and "critical" phases leading to a "Golden Age").

Arnold: Wandering between two worlds, one dead
The other powerless to be born (*Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse*)

For many Victorians the "organic" phase of Christianity had ended and they were living in a "critical" phase with no hope of witnessing the "Golden Age".

The **linear model** of development: civilization followed an arrow's path of development, onward and upward, but as archaeology showed, they also declined and passed away (Macaulay's *History of England from the Accession of James II*). The **cyclical model**: each successive civilization could be seen as contributing something to the growing revelation of a divine purpose in history (Carlyle *The History of the French Revolution*).

Both for Darwin and the historians individuals and groups are passive rather than active participants in their destinies. Carlyle's Time-Spirit and Darwin's Natural Selection are indifferent to influence by individual decision.

CHURCHES

In 1851 a **national survey of people's church-going habits** showed that out of a population of 18 million in England and Wales, on a particular Sunday in March, 5,292,551 attendances at the Church of England churches, 383,630 at Roman Catholic and 4,536,264 at the main Nonconformist churches were recorded. When allowances were made for those who could not be expected to attend, it appeared that the figure of church attendance was 5 million souls short of what could reasonably be expected. Conclusion: a vast missionary field at home, the **Church of England** has to adapt its medieval, pre-industrial, parish structure to meet changed conditions (vast slum areas in new industrial towns with no church etc.), low attendance due to neglect of ritual, emotional tepidity, worldliness, fear of "enthusiasm".

In the neglected new industrial towns and cities of the north and midlands **Dissent** had taken root and dominated local culture. The survey liste **30 different varieties of Nonconformity** and in combination their membership outnumbered that of the Established Church. **"Old Dissent"** comprised those groups with a long historical experience of resisting religious conformity (the Congregationalists, the Baptists, the Presbyterians, the Quakers etc.) and who had been in a state of respectable decline until Methodism came along. Methodism, the **"New Dissent"** was instrumental in bringing along **the evangelical revival.** Starting with John Wesley's conversion in 1738, by 1800 **Evangelicals** were operating within the Church of England and **evangelicals** in Methodist and other Nonconformist churches.

Methodism began as a movement within the Church of England, but the importance it gave to the role of the itinerant lay preacher, and the consequent disregard of parish boundaries in pursuit of fresh souls to convert, meant that separation was a constant threat and duly took place after John Wesley's death in 1791. Anglican evangelicalism became respectable and influential when it started to make converts among high society and the upper middle classes at the end of the C18 century. Evangelicalism, most often associated in Victorian literature with the joyless Sunday, temperance and the disapproval of pleasure, was attractive to converts because it offered the joy of the assurance. John Wesley was an Arminian and believed in **the availability of grace to all**. The Anglican God remained inaccessible behind the clockwork universe of Newtonian physics. The Methodists's suffering God of the Gospels could be reached if the Christian was prepared to acknowledge the depravity of mankind and throw himself on the mercy of God promised in Christ's atoning sacrifice. The result was an experience of almost **miraculous release from sin**, to be replaced by the knowing "assurance" of salvation. The conversion, the "great change", was at the heart of evangelical religion and it issued in the "seriousness" of manner and deportment which distinguished the convert. The Evangelical contribution to C19 culture was not primarily intellectual but moral and emotional, and can be seen in great public campaigns against slavery or child labour, and perhaps most enduringly in the middle-class home, the nursery of Victorian values. The appeal of evangelical faith to the middle classes was partly that it offered a refuge from the world. The period of its expansion within the Church of England, from about 1780 and 1830, was a time of foreign wars, revolutionary thought, and rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. There was security in a faith which gave assurance of salvation in the world to come, and **a rule of daily life that encouraged stabilising qualities of self-discipline, hard work, sobriety, temperance of speech.** These qualities also suited well to success in business and so drew the Evangelical into the sphere of worldliness, laying him open to the charge of hypocrisy. Thus one stereotype of Victorian culture is the successful evangelical clergyman or businessman, preaching the claims of another world while enjoying the fruits of this one.

Roman Catholicism experienced a steady growth. While Anglicans and Nonconformists fought bitterly over the Protestant flock, Catholicism was the main beneficiary of Irish immigration and the dramatic conversions of prominent Anglo-Catholics like Cardinal Newman. The restoration of Catholic bishops to England in 1850 made national organisation possible for the first time since Reformation.

By 1890 Catholicism seemed in a healthier state denominationally that other Churches. Anglicanism had held its own only by abandoning, stage by stage, the legal privileges it once enjoyed as the State Church, and fighting in the open market for new members – a struggle in which it enjoyed a considerable advantage through its national parish network. But Nonconformity lost some of its ground when there were fewer and fewer Establishment restrictions to dissent from, and as a Scripture-based religion it lost even more from the rise of historical biblical criticism.

OXFORD MOVEMENT

The evangelical revival was a religion of the gospel and the sermon. The Oxford Movement **rediscovered the sense of the meaning of Church authority and ritual**. The attraction here was the **emphasis on piety and conscience** and one of the decisive factors was the impact of Romanticism on imagination purified by

evangelical discipline. Newman credited Scott's novels with awakening a feeling for the past, the writings of Wordsworth and Coleridge reaffirmed the mystery of the universe and our dealings with it, and the presence of this mystery in the human heart, so undermining the pretensions of rationalism.

Oxford in the 1830s and 40s was lethargic, exclusive and intellectually narrow. Dissenters and women were not allowed in, science was not taught (all emphasis being laid on Greek and Latin texts), its dons could not marry if they did not want to lose their fellowships which resulted in a fretful monasticism not conducive to creating a normal social atmosphere. It was a thoroughly introverted community, socially, sexually, intellectually, theologically and this explains the surprisingly painful and extreme reaction to Church reform in the 1830s (basically administrative reforms redistributing money within the Church).

John Henry Newman, **Robert Wilberforce** and **Hurrell Froude**, all at one time fellows of Oriel, brought an evangelical severity to their High Church definition of the nature of the Church of England, and an evangelical sense of mission to defending it from state interference. They found a mentor and figurehead in **John Keble**, the Oxford Professor of Poetry between 1831 and 1841and author of a collection of devotional poetry, *The Christian Year* (1827) which rivalled Tennyson's *In Memoriam* as the poetic bestseller of the age. Their nominal leader in Oxford was **E. B. Pusey**, Professor of Hebrew, who spent two years in Germany and came back determined to save England from the perils of rationalism. Newman was the real leader, though, an energetic publicist for the group's views and an inspiring preacher from the pulpit of St Mary's. Taking a leaf (literally) from the Evangelicals' book, they published a series of tracts attacking the apostasy of the state in presuming to apply "liberal" – i.e. rationalising and pluralistic – doctrines to the management of the Church, from which early grew their more enduring achievement: **the reaffirmation of the Church's historical and spiritual identity** in what they saw as a heretical age. They were called "**Tractarians**" by their friends and "**Puseyites**" by their enemies.

The Oxford Movement was not a movement in the modern sense of having an explicitly formulated "programme" of action. It was a group of youngish, like-minded dons responding to a time of political crisis and in the process developing a fresh conception of the Church and of what devotional practice in it might be. They were not in any sense a clerical intelligentsia nor did they meant to be, their ideal was the by then slightly antiquated one of the unworldly High Church vicar ministering faithfully to a rural and implicitly south-of-England parish, like Keble at Hursley. They just faced the questions their elders had forgotten to ask: where *did* authority in the Anglican Church lie and how could it be recovered in an age of liberalism? The answers took them back to the Elizabethan *via media*, the historical settlement by which Anglicanism retained Catholicism while avoiding the Calvinist extremes of the Reformation; and back to the seventeenth-century tradition of patristic scholarship, the study of the Church Fathers, and sacramental worship.

Recovering this "Catholic" tradition in the church was essential to the Tractarian enterprise because it reopened the choked channels, as they saw them, leading back to the origins of Christianity. A Church that could claim direct descent from the Apostles had a historical security which Dissenters lacked; its sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, were conduits of grace flowing from the Fountainhead. Again and again in his writings Newman stressed the *reality* of what he worshipped. There was "a visible Church, with sacraments and rites which are the channels of invisible grace", whereas evangelical religion had no such resources to survive the

corrosive activity of the mind. The trouble with recovering the Catholic heritage of the Church is that it involved playing down and even criticising the Reformation, which inevitably brought upon the Tractarians the **charge of Popery**. Nothing did more harm to their cause than the posthumous publication of Froude's *Remains* in 1838, where this most intemperate member of the group was revealed as having a hatred of the Reformation and a morbid taste for private mortification. Once their opponents got wind of such practices as scourging, fasting, genuflexion, auricular confession, the label of effete Romanising began to stick.

The Tractarians looked for support from the decisions of the Church Fathers and studied them carefully; "getting back to the Fathers" is a constant refrain in Newman's life, but their aims were not legalistic: they wanted **to raise the sacramental awareness of their contemporaries out of the desire to restore mystery, a deeper reverence, to a religion in danger of being thinned out by too exclusive attention to the Bible and the Word.**

Tractarianism as a movement lasted from 1833 to 1841, when Newman's ill-fated and ill-judged Tract XC, arguing the hospitality of the Anglican 39 Articles to Catholic interpretation, brought it to an end in a storm of controversy. His subsequent conversion to Rome in 1845 seemed to confirm what his opponents had always claimed about the movement. But Keble and Pusey and others remained within the Church, and their devotional legacy had lasting influence. By recovering and reinterpreting an all but lost Anglo-Catholic tradition, they opened up a seam of spirituality which has enriched the Church ever since. If their self-conscious ritualism was an offence to many, it also stirred depths of spiritual energy in others, inspiring them to found monastic religious communities dedicated to prayer, teaching and work among the destitute of society. Their intellectual achievement was almost entirely backward-looking and untouched by German influences, but by reviving the tradition of patristic scholarship they made the historic Church available again as a potential source of authority, to counterbalance a gospel religion becoming vulnerable to biblical criticism and a traditional naturalistic deism under challenge from contemporary science.

BIBLICAL HISTORY

Archeological excavations and the study of ancient civilizations (the deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphics and Babylonian cuneiform writings etc.) opened up a new library of near-Eastern antiquity and scholars discovered that there were many and uncomfortable similarities between the mythologies of these pagan religions and the sacred texts of Judaeo-Christianity. The material remains of Egypt and Babylon were also uncomfortable reminders of how little was known of the Old Testament world. (The Greeks and Romans were familiar through long scholarship and thus unthreatening.)

Hitherto, scholarship had stopped short of examining Christianity historically. The Old and New Testaments were not history, they belonged to the realm of revelation.

The German biblical scholars of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, influenced by the Enlightenment discovery of history and by an important distinction made by the founding-father of biblical criticism, **Johann Semler** (1725-91), between "theology", the dogmas of the Church derived from the Bible, and "religion", the historical experience of the individuals which had inspired the writing of Scripture. It was this second, empirical reality which was the origin of religious inspiration, and

the way to reach it was by approaching the Bible in a spirit of historical enquiry and examining the surviving records in a spirit of scientific criticism (i.e. analysis). There was a **"lower criticism"** concerned with establishing the original form of the text, as far as this was possible, and **a "Higher Criticism"** concerned with the questions of date, authorship, source, influence, literary form, and interpretation. The aim of both was to recover the living reality of religious experience behind the surface of the canon.

The historicising activities of the German critics and those influenced by them took various forms. **Wilhelm Gesenius** (1786-1842) put the study of the Hebrew language on a proper historical footing, thereby making it available as a tool of interpretation. One of his pupils, the American **Edward Robinson** (1794-1863), was inspired by his teaching to visit Palestine where he identified many of the ancient sites and compiled an ecclesiastical geography of the Holy Land; he also discovered, as many after him were to do, how relatively unchanged everyday life was there. **J.G. Eichhorn** (1752-1827) drew attention to similarities between the Creation and Deluge stories in classical and biblical narrative, using the word "myth" for the first time to describe them – stories which were records not so much of actual happenings as of the religious consciousness of pre-scientific people, symbolic narratives which expressed their spiritual conceptions of the universe. "Myth" was the most contentious of Higher Critical terms: that an episode in the Bible could be both fictional (i.e. unsupported by history and science) and true to the existential needs of primitive people, and that this false belief could also be a true embodiment of genuine religious insights, was too much to ask of people who feared that any further surrender of Christianity to history must end in atheism. So when **David Friedrich Strauss** (1808-74) used the term extensively in his life of Christ, ***Das Leben Jesu*** (1835) – the English translation by George Eliot was published in 1846 – there was a predictable outcry. Strauss's life of Jesus was the first to draw upon the work of German scholars; accepting their view of miracles and of the unreliability of the gospel narratives, he pressed on to uncover the historical Jesus. This Jesus was entirely human, a great prophet and teacher around whose life and death Messianic hopes had gathered. The fact that these hopes were illusory did not, to Strauss, invalidate Christianity, for the ethical teachings remained, as well as the profound symbolic truth about human destiny expressed in Christ's life and death.

In Britain, a liberal Anglican clergyman and historian **Henry Hart Millman** (1791-1868) had written *History of Jews* (1829) which for the first time treated the Hebrews historically, as an ancient people to be approached with the same dispassionateness that classical scholars expected from their histories. Millman had some acquaintance with German scholarship. George Eliot's friend **Charles Hennell** (1809-50) seems to have had none, which makes his *An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of Christianity* (1838) all the more remarkable, since he arrived at Strauss's naturalistic interpretation of the life of Jesus independently. Hennell's work made little impact in Britain but was translated into German and published there with a preface by Strauss.

Most Victorian did not read Strauss and begin to doubt Revelation. They knew of the Higher Criticism as an avalanche that was gathering in distant mountains, as something discussed in reviews and debated by clergymen, but brought home as an idea in its relation to developments in geology. The vastness of the geological time-scale was the setting for their reading of the Old and New Testaments, and this new time-scale had disturbing implications for the security of the traditional explanations.

History, science and religion interpenetrate. It was not science itself but **science interpreted *as history*** which upset the traditional cosmology. A new scientific consciousness, in various forms, was eroding the traditional bases of belief.

CRISIS OF FAITH

First phase – 1840s – moral doubts

Objections to Christianity overwhelmingly *moral* rather than scientific, objections to certain key doctrines – the Atonement, hell, everlasting punishment, original sin – a God who required the obedience of his creatures on those terms was a God who did not deserve worshipping, a primitive, barbaric Deity of whom Herbert Spencer wrote in his *Autobiography*:

> I had not at the time [c. 1840] repudiated the notion of a deity who is pleased with the singing of his praises, and angry with the beings he has made when they fail to tell him perpetually of his greatness. It had not become manifest to me to me how absolutely and immeasurably unjust it would be that for Adam's disobedience (which might have caused a harsh man to discharge his servant), all Adam's descendants should be damned, with the exception of a relatively few who accepted the "plan of salvation" which the immense majority never heard of. Nor had I in those days perceived the astounding nature of the creed which offers for profoundest worship, a being who calmly looks on while myriads of his creatures are suffering eternal torments."

What happened for this generation was, in part, that an elevated conscience and humanitarianism met the optimism of an age of reform to create a new mood of possibility. Expectations of reform suddenly made it possible to challenge Christianity's pessimistic view of human nature and the element of fear which had been one of its chief means of control. In this context it became possible to think the unthinkable and say the unsayable, and in doing so to feel the authenticity of what Tennyson called **"honest doubt"**. There is another side of **melancholy and loss**, Arnold's "eternal note of sadness" occasioned by the receding "Sea of Faith" amidst "confusing alarms of struggle and flight / Where ignorant armies clash by night." (*Dover Beach*)

> Froude (1870): The present generation which has grown up in an open spiritual ocean, which has got used to it and has learned to swim for itself, will never know what it was to find the lights all drifting, the compasses all awry, and nothing left to steer by except the stars. In this condition the best and bravest of my own contemporaries determined to have done with insincerity, to find ground under their feet, to let the uncertain remain uncertain, but to learn how much and what we could honestly regard as true, and believe that, and live by it. Tennyson became the voice of this feeling in poetry; Carlyle … in prose.

Second phase – after Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) – loss of faith, agnosticism

The increasing plausibility and comprehensiveness of a scientific, materialist explanation of reality, and the crucial breakdown of the traditional distinction between mankind and nature replaces the mood of energy and optimism by marked **feelings of disinheritance**, by **resentment** at the biological trap mankind now found itself in and by a compensating **lyrical stoicism**. The word defining the new mood, agnosticism, (coined in 1869) is negative, defining a state of "not-knowing" .

Huxley: When I reached intellectual maturity and began to ask myself whether I was an atheist, a theist, or a pantheist, a materialist or an idealist, a Christian or a freethinker, I found that the more I learned and reflected the less ready was the answer, until at last I came to the conclusion that I had neither art nor part with any of these denominations except the last. The one thing in which most of these good people were agreed was the one thing in which I differed from them. They were quite sure that they had attained a certain "gnosis" – had, more or less successfully, solved the problem of existence; while I was quite sure that I had not, and had a pretty strong conviction that the problem was insolvable. And with Hume and Kant on my side, I could not think myself presumptuous in holding fast by that opinion

Victorian agnosticism based itself on the assertion that, since nothing verifiable can be known about God, the only honest position was one of "not-knowing", reverent or otherwise. The agnostics did not dispute other people's right to hold Christian beliefs, as an atheist might; they merely disputed the precision with which Christians purported to hold their definitions of deity and the rigour with which they enforced them as dogma.

(For further details see, if you wish, Robin Gilmour. The Victorian Period. The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1830–1890. Longman, 1996.)

ARNOLD

The Buried Life

Light flows our war of mocking words, and yet,
Behold, with tears mine eyes are wet!
I feel a nameless sadness o'er me roll.
Yes, yes, we know that we can jest,
We know, we know that we can smile!
But there's a something in this breast,
To which thy light words bring no rest,
And thy gay smiles no anodyne.
Give me thy hand, and hush awhile,
And turn those limpid eyes on mine,
And let me read there, love! thy inmost soul.
Alas! is even love too weak
To unlock the heart, and let it speak?
Are even lovers powerless to reveal
To one another what indeed they feel?
I knew the mass of men concealed
Their thoughts, for fear that if revealed
They would by other men be met
With blank indifference, or with blame reproved;
I knew they lived and moved
Tricked in disguises, alien to the rest
Of men, and alien to themselves – and yet
The same heart beats in every human breast!

But we, my love! – doth a like spell benumb
Our hearts, our voices? must we too be dumb?

Ah! well for us, if even we,
Even for a moment, can get free
Our heart, and have our lips unchained;
For that which seals them hath been deep-ordained!

Fate, which foresaw
How frivolous a baby man would be –
By what distractions he would be possessed,
How he would pour himself in every strife,
And well-nigh change his own identity –
That it might keep from his capricious play
His genuine self, and force him to obey
Even in his own despite his being's law,
Bade through the deep recesses of our breast
The unregarded river of our life
Pursue with indiscernible flow its way;
And that we should not see
The buried stream, and seem to be
Eddying at large in blind uncertainty,
Though driving on with it eternally.

But often, in the world's most crowded streets,
But often, in the din of strife,
There rises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge of our buried life;
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
In tracking out our true, original course;
A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart which beats
So wild, so deep in us – to know
Whence our lives come and where they go.
And many a man in his own breast then delves,
But deep enough, alas! none ever mines.
And we have been on many thousand lines,
And we have shown, on each, spirit and power;
But hardly have we, for one little hour,
Been on our own line, have we been ourselves –

Hardly had skill to utter one of all
The nameless feelings that course through our breast,
But they course on for ever unexpressed.
And long we try in vain to speak and act
Our hidden self, and what we say and do
Is eloquent, is well – but 'tis not true!
And then we will no more be racked
With inward striving, and demand

Of all the thousand nothings of the hour
Their stupefying power;
Ah yes, and they benumb us at our call!
Yet still, from time to time, vague and forlorn,
From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
As from an infinitely distant land,
Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
A melancholy into all our day.
Only – but this is rare –
When a beloved hand is laid in ours,
When, jaded with the rush and glare
Of the interminable hours,
Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
When our world-deafened ear
Is by the tones of a loved voice caressed –
A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
And hears its winding murmur; and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.

And there arrives a lull in the hot race
Wherein he doth for ever chase
That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
An air of coolness plays upon his face,
And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
And then he thinks he knows
The hills where his life rose,
And the sea where it goes.

ARNOLD

Dover Beach

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.
Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegaean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

To Marguerite

We were apart; yet, day by day,
I bade my heart more constant be;
I bade it keep the world away,
And grow a home for only thee;
Nor feared but thy love likewise grew,
Like mine, each day, more tried, more true.

The fault was grave! I might have known,
What far too soon, alas! I learned –
The heart can bind itself alone,
And faith is often unreturned.
Self-swayed our feelings ebb and swell –
Thou lov'st no more; – Farewell! Farewell!

Farewell! – and thou, thou lonely heart,
Which never yet without remorse
Even for a moment didst depart
From thy remote and sphered course
To haunt the place where passions reign –
Back to thy solitude again!

Back! with the conscious thrill of shame
Which Luna felt, that summer-night,
Flash through her pure immortal frame,
When she forsook the starry height
To hang over Endymion's sleep
Upon the pine-grown Latmian steep.

Yet she, chaste queen, had never proved
How vain a thing is mortal love,
Wandering in Heaven, far removed.
But thou has long had place to prove
This truth – to prove, and make thine own:
'Thou hast been, shalt be, art, alone.'

Or, if not quite alone, yet they
Which touch thee are unmating things –
Ocean, and clouds, and night, and day;
Lorn autumns and triumphant springs;
And life, and others' joy and pain,
And love, if love, of happier men.

Of happier men – for they, at least,
Have *dreamed* two human hearts might blend
In one, and were through faith released
From isolation without end
Prolonged; nor knew, although not less
Alone than thou, their loneliness.

To Marguerite, in Returning a Volume of the Letters of Ortis

Yes: in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live *alone*.
The islands feel the enclasping flow,
And then their endless bounds they know.

But when the moon their hollows lights,
And they are swept by balms of spring,
And in their glens, on starry nights,
The nightingales divinely sing,
And lovely notes, from shore to shore,
Across the sounds and channels pour;

Oh then a longing like despair
Is to their farthest caverns sent;
For surely once, they feel, we were
Parts of a single continent.
Now round us spreads the watery plain –
Oh might our marges meet again!

Who ordered, that their longing's fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cooled?
Who renders vain their deep desire?
A God, a God their severance ruled;
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea.

Hopkins

God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;[1]
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed.[2] Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for[3] all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

1877 1918

1. Hopkins explained this image in a letter: "I mean foil in its sense of leaf or tinsel. . . . Shaken gold-foil gives off broad glares like sheet lightning and also, and this is true of nothing else, owing to its zigzag dints and creasings and network of small many cornered facets, a sort of fork lightning too."
2. E.g., from the crushing of olives.
3. Despite.

[No Worst, There Is None]

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder wring.
Comforter, where, where is your comforting?
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?
My cries heave, herds-long;[1] huddle in a main, a chief-
woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and sing—
Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked "No lingering! Let me be fell: force[2] I must be brief."
O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our small
Durance[3] deal with that steep or deep. Here! creep,
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all
Life death does end and each day dies with sleep.

1885 1918

Hopkins (2)

[Carrion Comfort][1]

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee,[2]
Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man
In me ór, most weary, cry *I can no more.* I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be.

But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
Thy wring-world right foot rock?[3] lay a lionlimb against me?
scan
With darksome devouring eyes my bruisèd bones? and fan,
O in turns of tempest, me heaped there; me frantic to avoid
thee and flee?

Why? That my chaff might fly; my grain lie, sheer and clear.
Nay in all that toil, that coil,[4] since (seems) I kissed the rod,
Hand rather,[5] my heart lo! lapped strength, stole joy, would
laugh, chéer.
Cheer whom though? The Hero whose heaven-handling flung
me, fóot tród
Me? or me that fought him? O which one? is it each one?
That night, that year
Of now done darkness I wretch lay wrestling with (my God!)
my God.

1885 1918

[Thou Art Indeed Just, Lord]

Justus quidem tu es, Domine, si disputem tecum; verumtamen justa loquar ad te: Quare via impiorum prosperatur? &c.[1]

Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.
Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end?

Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,

Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes[2]
Now, leavèd how thick! lacèd they are again
With fretty chervil,[3] look, and fresh wind shakes

Them; birds build—but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

1889 1918

1. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" (Jeremiah 12.1). The Latin was Hopkins's title.
2. Thickets.
3. A kind of parsley.

THE LATE VICTORIAN CULTURAL SCENE

Sir Edward Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance Marches Nos. 1 and 2* had their first London performance at a Promenade Concert on 23 October 1901. They were conducted by the future Sir Henry Wood who wrote of the occasion as follows:'I shall never forget the scene at the close of the first of them – the one in D major. The people simply rose and yelled. I had to play it again – with the same result; in fact they refused to let me get on with the programme . . . Merely to restore order, I played the march a third time.'

What the audience had just heard in the trio section of that first *March* was one of the greatest melodies in the history of English music, one which the King Emperor Edward VII, who had come to the throne that year, suggested should have words added so that it could be sung. Elgar was to insert this new arrangement, made by royal command, into his *Coronation Ode* which was eventually performed at Sheffield in the October of the following year. Ever since, 'Land of Hope and Glory' has assumed the mantle of a second national anthem. The tune is hymn-like in its solemnity, and the verses extol British glories, celebrating the island's dominion over land and sea in what, by then, had become an empire eclipsing that of ancient Rome, embracing a fifth of the world's land mass and some four hundred million people. Neither two catastrophic world wars, nor the loss of that empire, nor a saga of almost continuous decline in the fortunes of the country, has done anything to dislodge the popularity of that anthem. Almost a century later it is still sung with fervour and much waving of Union Jacks on every last night of the Promenade Concerts at the Albert Hall.

And yet in reality this music was composed and first performed at the very moment when the glory, if not the hope, was already fading fast. The forty years from 1870 to 1910 are decades to which one attaches the word transition. On the surface they were years of triumph, optimism and seeming certainty. But beneath the surface pageantry and splendour lurked something rather different, a malignant and eroding cancer containing forces which were irrevocably to change the entire structure of British society, and along with it the arts. After 1870 the great Victorian boom years were over and interests which up until then had held people together began to diverge. Agriculture went into sharp depression, and foreign competition in the field of manufacture became a progressive reality. The Franco-Prussian war revealed the military might of the newly-formed German Empire, whose navy was equally to challenge British supremacy on the seas. At home militant trade unions began to assert their stranglehold, engendering fear in the middle classes of revolution from below. In 1890 the first Trades Union Congress was held and the struggle of labour against capital became increasingly bitter, culminating in the years of industrial turmoil either side of 1910. Socialist ideas began to permeate areas of the educated middle classes and by the turn of the century there was an active Labour Party. Women, too, were on the move, demanding a new status in society and, in 1903, the suffragette movement entered its militant phase.

If there was turbulence below, above, the centuries-old political and social powers of the aristocracy were to be dramatically eroded, not only by the economic disaster of the agricultural depression but by a further extension of the franchise in 1884–85 which finally severed the connection between the vote and property owning. The vote was now given to the male working class. Even more catastrophic was the advent of a new system of death duties in 1894. The deleterious effects of this were exacerbated in 1909 when income tax rose to one shilling and ninepence in the pound and a sup-

ertax was imposed on those with an annual income in excess of £3,000 p.a. Finally, in 1910–11, came the passing of the Parliament Act which curtailed the right of veto on legislation of the House of Lords. This signalled the final demise of aristocratic political power after centuries; and with it went centuries of patronage of the arts.

Already by the 1880s great country houses began to be closed or let to save money, giving rise to a series of sales dispersing their contents. Ostensibly these years remain fixed in the imagination as decades which witnessed a final efflorescence of aristocratic culture, resembling in retrospect a rose whose petals are about to fall. That efflorescence was to pinpoint something else which was to be a unique feature of British twentieth century cultural life, the survival and transmission of the appreciation of that aristocratic tradition, so much so that by the 1980s it had become part of a classless heritage cult. Unlike the rest of Europe there was to be no sweeping revolution rendering anything aristocratic suspect. In fact the very acquiescence of the aristocracy in their declining political and social role in society progressively ennobled their lifestyle as an ideal. That path towards the apotheosis of country house culture, in which the very building itself was to be cast as a potent emblem of all that was best in the country's identity, had already begun to be formulated as early as 1910 in E. M. Forster's novel *Howards End*.

This is a period of quite extraordinary complexity during which the infrastructure of the old order was still firmly in place but at the same time the forces which were to change it were everywhere in evidence. Both strands deeply affected the arts which were also in transition, for the paths were already being forged which led to the final explosion of modernism (to which I will come in the following chapter) in all its varied forms onto the scene in the years immediately after 1910. That movement had its roots back in the 1880s with the consequence that virtually every art form by the turn of the century was to have its obverse and reverse, the world of the establishment and that of the forces setting out to challenge and transform it. The success or otherwise of that challenge, either to overthrow the existing scheme of things or to be accommodated within it, set a pattern which was to be a dominant one in the arts for the rest of the century. But in the decades down to 1910 and the Great War in 1914 other topics were to affect the arts even more immediately.

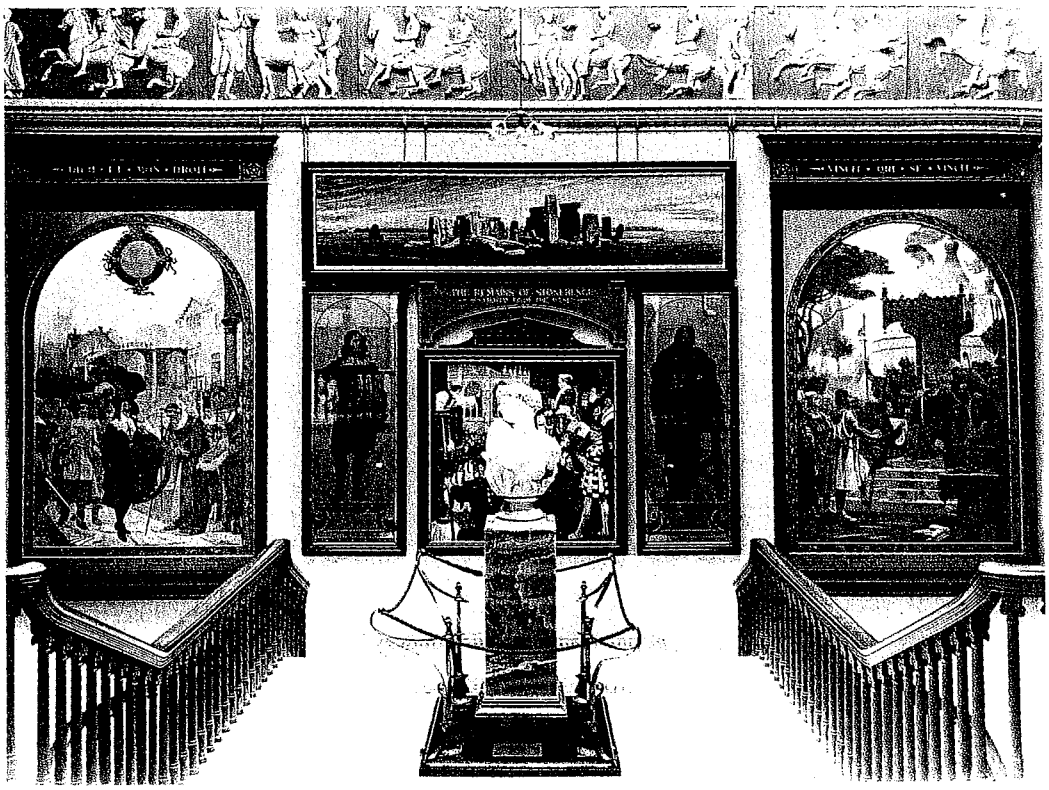
One of these was the Empire itself. By the year of Edward VII's coronation a small island had seemingly been transformed into a world-wide state on a scale matching the German and Russian Empires and the U.S.A. The Golden and Diamond Jubilees of Queen Victoria in 1887 and 1897 fed the newly enfranchised populace with images of cavalcades through the London streets of the Empire's many peoples come to pay homage to the Queen Empress. The Empire's success was rooted in a belief in individual effort, sobriety and high moral probity. In its heyday those involved exuded both a sense of security and confidence in the superiority of the British as a race, and of their way of life and culture as something worthy to be exported around the globe. The results are still there for us to see from India to Australia, from South Africa to New Zealand. The Empire reinforced the old hierarchy and its cult of the civic virtues at the very moment when they were under attack from socialism and suffragettes. Imperialism suffused the arts, whether in the form of the triumphal music of Elgar or the light-hearted operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, whether in the visions of life in imperial Rome painted by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema or in the swagger portraits of aristocrat or *nouveau riche* by John Singer Sargent, whether in the literary works of

Late Victorian 3

Rudyard Kipling or in Sir Aston Webb's great set-pieces of ceremonial architecture. It was during the decades before 1910 that the grand imperial tableau of Admiralty Arch, the Mall, the Victoria Memorial and the new façade of Buckingham Palace, with its balcony for regal epiphanies, was put in place. Splendid it may be and indeed still is, but it is difficult not to concede that what so much art of this period is about is style without substance, a style achieved not by looking forwards but by digging ever deeper into the dressing-up box of the past. But the continuing potency of the theme of Empire should never be underestimated. It was not to be a spent force for decades and indeed was to run its course into the 1940s, a rallying cry to which all classes of society could equally respond. In addition, for the establishment, loyalty to the Empire was one means whereby to keep at bay the forces of socialism.

One effect of the cult of Empire was to reinforce British cultural isolationism. Instead of the Grand Tour travellers voyaged to outposts of Empire, taking their insular culture along with them. Increasingly the Continent, and especially France, was viewed with suspicion and contempt. The result of this was that Britain became intellectually isolated from major new movements in the arts like the new realism permeating French fiction in the works of authors such as Zola and Balzac, or the achievements of the great Russian novelists Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, the new dramas of Ibsen and the works of the French Impressionist painters. In England the establishment regarded the novels of Zola as poison, the Lord Chamberlain kept Ibsen off the stage and the Royal Academy exercised a stranglehold on the visual arts of a kind amounting to censorship. Such attitudes to innovation from abroad were only confirmed when those who did respond, like the writer and playwright Oscar Wilde or the graphic artist Aubrey Beardsley, were seen as the living embodiments of depravity.

Forces of disruption. Decadence and incipient depravity stalk in Aubrey Beardsley's The Toilet of Salome, *1894, an illustration for Wilde's text. On the lower shelves of the dressing table appear 'forbidden' books, de Sade's* Fêtes galantes *and Zola's* Nana.



Art for the masses reaches the regions. The first floor landing of the Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, in the 1890s.

Now that the working classes had the vote the middle classes pursued with even greater vigour their aim of framing them in their own image. That was to be an ongoing saga through the century. Instead of being excluded, the proletariat was to be drawn into the existing structure of things, including the arts. The creation of museums and galleries is an index of this mission: Birmingham (1867), Liverpool (1877), Leicester (1885) and Leeds (1888). In 1871 the Albert Hall opened and a year later Penny Subscription Concerts began 'to enable all classes to enjoy music'. The working week contracted to five and a half days, with the half-day being a Saturday, and one or two weeks of holiday also became a norm. The middle classes never viewed art as solely the prerogative of the élite but rather as a potential cement to the newly emerging social structure. Their sense of social responsibility resulted not only in the provision of museums but libraries, theatres and concert halls, and went on to embrace innovative architectural projects for better working class housing such as the garden city. At the same time the urban working classes began to take on a more complex profile in terms of their own cultural activities which embraced the brass band, the choral society, the dance hall and by 1910 the cinema.

Education was seen as one way of averting working class anarchy in the aftermath of the first major franchise extension of 1867, a view signalled in Matthew Arnold's book *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). The 1870 Education Act, which laid down the provision of elementary education for everyone, was aimed at achieving precisely that, plus a work-force which would be able to respond to what was clearly an era of accelerated change in working practices. Universal literacy opened the floodgates of the popular press and in 1896 Alfred Harmsworth, later Lord Northcliffe, founded the *Daily Mail*. At the same time popular magazines like *Tit-Bits* (1881), which achieved a circulation of 800,000, were launched. For the educated classes new reproduction processes resulted in a similar mushrooming of magazines, this time profusely illus-

trated, thanks to the invention of the half-tone block. All the time the communications revolution was moving at an ever-increasing pace with the invention of the phonograph in the 1870s, to be followed by the telephone and the car. The latter, during these decades an élite symbol, was to herald the invasion of the countryside in a manner that could never be matched by the railway. The town was now able to make its presence felt in the remotest hamlet.

In Britain, unlike the rest of Europe, the Industrial Revolution had been carried through with the active participation of the aristocracy. That meant the existing structure of society remained in place, indeed, via the public school system, it was able to filter its values to the newly emergent classes. The result was that the up and coming generation began increasingly to look down on industry, trade, science and the world of business, opting rather for an aristocratic-gentry life-style with the attributes of country house, garden and park, the cultivation of style, the pursuit of leisure and political service rather than overt sordid money-making and entrepreneurship.

That distaste for industry and the city had found its initial aesthetic voice in Ruskin, and accounts for the fact that a quintessentially urban age produced so little art mirroring the fact. What Ruskin could not have foreseen was that his hatred for what industrialisation had done would be taken over and attached to a growing social and political force, the working class. In this the designer, poet and writer William Morris was to be the pivotal figure, moving to a viewpoint which cast the middle classes as 'irredeemable' and that 'the cause of Art is the cause of the people'. Art and political ideology were for the first time yoked with consequences which have reverberated through to the present. Morris's achievements within the arts and crafts were to range over book design, weaving, furniture, stained glass, gardens, architecture and painting. What set his contribution apart was his linking of it to the cause of socialism. In 1883, having studied the writings of Karl Marx, Morris joined the Socialist Democratic Federation, leaving it a year later to set up the Socialist League. Morris was a political radical attacking the existing industrial and commercial system, arguing that factory production was not only ruining the environment but debasing men and their products. The irony was that his solution lay not in reforming that system but by putting the clock back, creating what was in effect an élitist cottage craft movement whose inspiration lay in the countryside and the vernacular artefacts of its past. This turning against the city and industry therefore permeated both the top and bottom of the social and political spectrum.

If this fixation with the country heralded one direction for the arts, the Aesthetic Movement heralded another. In this, the gaping void left by the absence of God in the aftermath of Darwinism was to be filled by a cult of art and life. The source was France and the first enunciation of the phrase 'Art for Art's sake' occurred in an article by the poet Swinburne on Baudelaire. The Aesthetic Movement's greatest exponent was Walter Pater, and its textbook was to be his *The Renaissance* (1873), in which the human mind was cast as 'a solitary prisoner of its own dream of a world', Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* was presented as symbolic of a contemporary consciousness which is weighed down by a multiplicity of knowledge ('She is older than the rocks among which she sits . . .'), and where the notorious concluding passage seemed to encourage every reader to hedonism and indulgence in every experience, however transitory. Inevitably it was an aesthetic programme deeply appealing to a new generation reacting strongly against the commercialism of their parents. Pater's work gave them their credo, one which was distrustful of systems and theories and stressed instead the importance of sensation and impression of a kind above all sublimated in

the worship of Art and Beauty. It had another attraction, for just as Ruskin had firmly bonded art to morality, Pater, equally as firmly, dissolved it. The resulting figure was the aesthete, typified by the dandified Oscar Wilde with his green carnation and W. S. Gilbert's satirical Bunthorne in *Patience* (1881).

The Aesthetic Movement had a predecessor of a kind in the Pre-Raphaelites but the notion of effecting artistic change by way of initiating some new group of people animated by a set of common principles was to result in the bewildering succession of movements and groups which was to run through the twentieth century. But such phenomena had another aspect to them. With the advent of democracy they provided a vehicle for those who wished to preserve caste of some form. Social hierarchy was gradually to be dissolved and replaced by one which was far more intangible, that of style and taste.

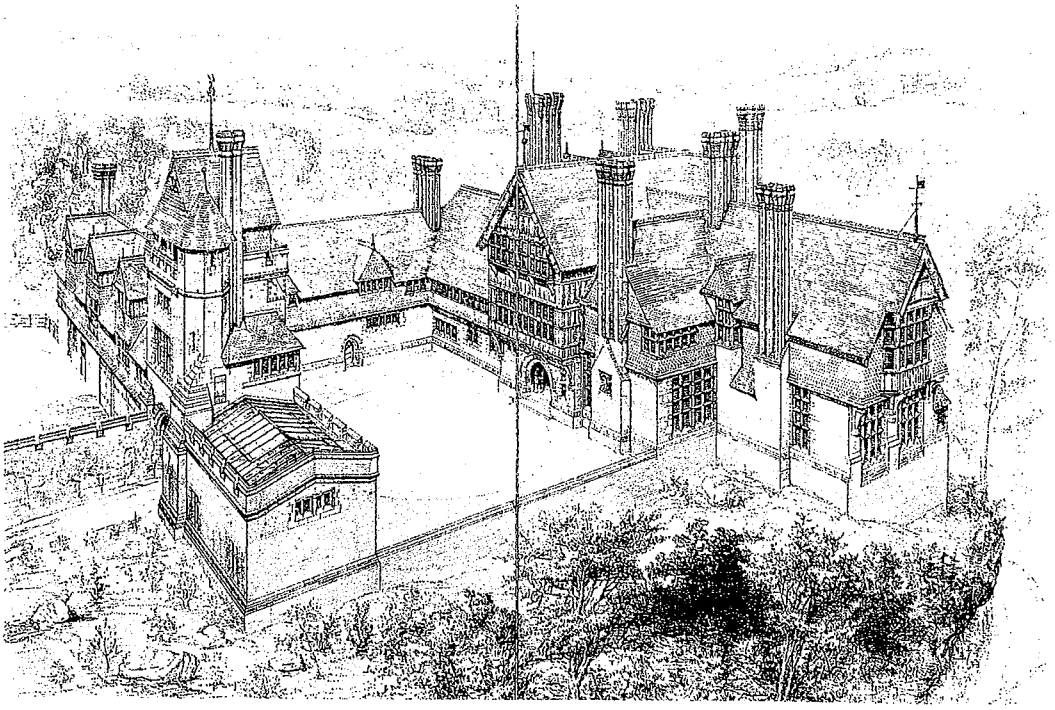
That was one way of preserving caste. Another was to turn to the past. More and more its artefacts came to be viewed as evidence of an earlier age which had better values. The obsession with antiques, caught in its infancy in Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill, now intensified. Evidence for that is found in three major events, whose purpose was the preservation of the past, which took place during the last three decades of the nineteenth century: the formation, under the aegis of William Morris, of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877), the Ancient Monuments Act (1882), and the setting up of the National Trust (1895). Less and less was written about change and progress and more and more about old manor houses, churches, villages and towns which were billed as the quintessence of 'Old England'.

One way to meet the threat posed by the advent of the newly literate classes was to look back and regenerate what was now cast as a traditional culture which had been obliterated by the triumph of capitalist industrialisation. The lost true English culture, it was argued, needed to be recaptured in order to revitalise the nation. As the urban scene and its brutalised masses were viewed as a ghastly blight, country folk and their customs, earlier condemned as immoral, profane and often outright cruel, were extolled. The fact that the rural ideal, which was patriarchal, hierarchical and condescending to women, was a retrogressive one was bypassed. In the 1890s folklore emerged as a subject for serious study with, in 1898, the formation of the Folk Song Society which was to have significant implications for the future of music.

This was the middle classes reinventing Merry England. From either side of the political divide the rural ideal worked. For socialists it brought back an idealised rural way of life destroyed by Victorian capitalism; for those on the right it apotheosised what had been an aristocratic society. What all this ensured was that the fundamental vision of England was to remain a pastoral arcadian one which it had been since the Elizabethan age, albeit with different glosses put upon it. Englishness was seen to reside in her green and pleasant land dotted with villages and manor houses. Two world wars, far from eroding the myth, only strengthened it. It is still there.

This, of course, explains the conservatism of so much British art from the vernacular of the Arts and Crafts Movement of the 1880s to today's mock Tudor suburban houses. The English way of life was no longer to be seen as a monument to perpetual

Late Victorian (7)



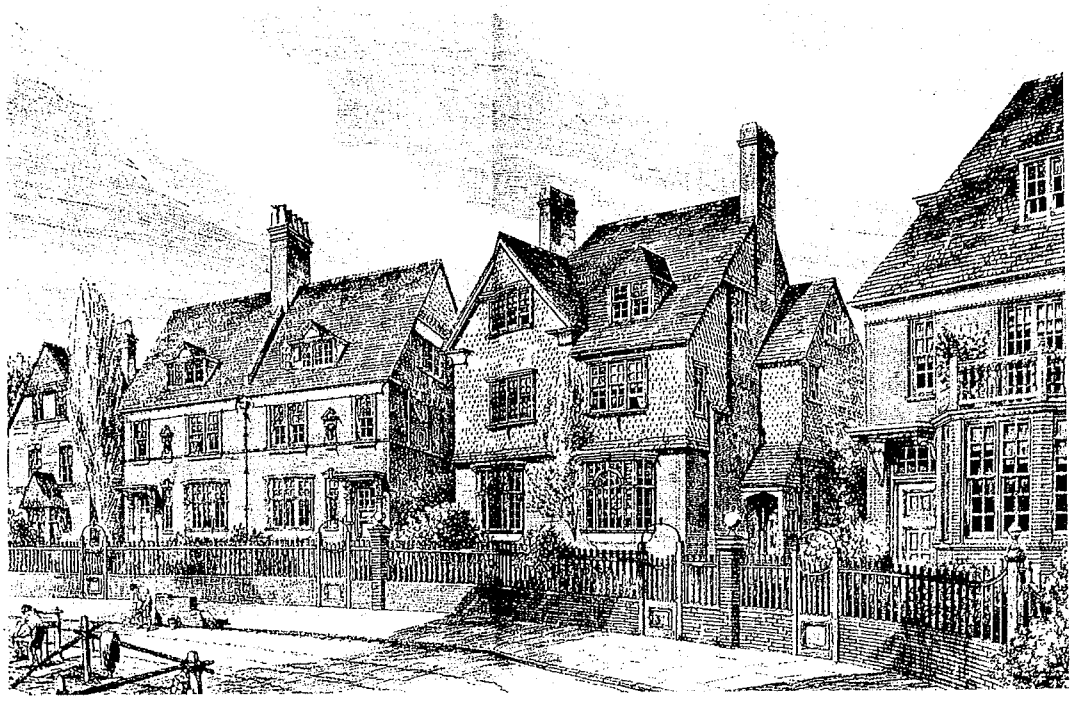
Norman Shaw's seminal re-creation of the vernacular of Tudor and Stuart England. Leys Wood, Kent, 1868.

change and innovation, happy to embrace every technological discovery, but, rather, to reside in an unchanging stability, a preoccupation with the maintenance of the status quo and a deep reverence for the past. In this way ruralism was created as a compensating image for city dwellers. The countryside was presented through all the resources available to early twentieth century media as a timeless vision, a paradise regained.

Virtually throughout the arts there was this yearning for the past. Not, one might add, a grand aristocratic past but, rather, gentry and yeoman. Nowhere is this more evident than in architecture. Architects recreated the past as a world of pre-industrial simplicity, 'quaint' and 'old-fashioned', whose point of reference was the small manor house, farmhouse or cottage of Tudor and early Stuart England. Houses were no longer built to look new but old, being irregular, discreet and tucked away into the folds of a landscape which they no longer sought to dominate. Existing dilapidated or ruined old buildings suddenly became deeply desirable. Instead, as in the past, of demolishing them and building from scratch, they were restored, enlarged and modernised, but in a way which avoided any loss to their aura of venerable antiquity. Both these houses and the new ones built for the recently affluent professional classes fuelled what was recognised as a revolution in domestic architecture in terms of comfort and living style. By the first decade of the twentieth century the English house was hailed as the island's unique contribution to contemporary architecture. Hermann Muthesius, technical attaché to the German Embassy in London, wrote in his book on *The English House* (1897): 'There is nothing as unique and outstanding in English architecture as the development of the house . . .'

The architect Richard Norman Shaw was to dominate this revival between 1870 and his death in 1912. He began his practice in the 1860s, developing an 'Old English' country house style, typified by Cragside, Northumberland (1869–85), a rambling, picturesque mélange full of incident, with massive tiled roofs and soaring chimney stacks. During the 1870s Shaw was to become the exponent of warm red-brick

'Queen Anne'; in the following decade he moved on to Georgian. In a stunning series of houses, above all Leys Wood, Kent (1868), he gave the emerging classes a setting for their new way of life, houses which exuded old world charm, romance and wit. Within, ceilings could be both high and low, rooms could be of contrasting sizes, both grand and intimate, there were changes of level and a plethora of handsome leaded windows allowed the light to stream in.



'Sweetness and Light'. Norman Shaw's designs for houses for Bedford Park, 1877, established a vernacular suburban style.

Simultaneously, William Morris's friend Philip Webb also turned to the English vernacular, starting his career with Morris's famous Red House, Bexley Heath (1860), a setting for the artist's friends to decorate. His masterpiece was Clouds, Wiltshire (1881–86, rebuilt after a fire 1889-91), in which Victorian gloom and clutter was banished in favour of a more relaxed informality, the interior mainly white or of unstained wood, colour being only in the form of superb Morris textiles. Clouds was to be one of the most influential houses of the age.

This was a golden era of house-building with a long list of eminent contributors including W. R. Lethaby and C. R. Ashbee, who both started their careers under Shaw, C. F. A. Voysey, Ernest Newton and Reginald Blomfield. In ecclesiastical architecture there was also a return to Englishness, to that sturdy insular style called Perpendicular. North of the Border, too, there was a parallel vernacular revival in the work of Robert Lorimer, an admirer of Morris, who looked back to Scottish castle architecture. Lorimer was committed to the Arts and Crafts Movement as was Charles Rennie Mackintosh who combined his vernacular enthusiasm with a rare response to continental Art Nouveau and *japonaiserie*. His Glasgow School of Art (1897–1909) was to be unique. Mackintosh was to leave no native followers but his influence on the continental mainland was to be major.

The imperial theme could not go unadorned and in the Edwardian decade it made its presence felt in a return to monumental classicism in commissions like Sir Aston Webb's new façade for Buckingham Palace (1913), the Victoria Memorial (1913) and Admiralty Arch (1911). E. W. Mountford's Old Bailey (1907) assembled a mixture of influences resulting in an inflated Palladian style which was to spread

through the country in the form of banks, offices and other institutions. This feeling of overblown splendour was to tip over even into ecclesiastical architecture in Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's Anglican cathedral in Liverpool, nominally Gothic but in spirit baroque, which was begun in 1904 and only finished, albeit in truncated form, in 1976.

But if one had to choose Elgar's equivalent in architecture it would have to be Sir Edwin Lutyens who was to remain in practice until his death in 1944. In the years before the outbreak of war in 1914 Lutyens was to build the last great wave of country houses, ones which married modern order and convenience with a reassuring 'ancient' style drawing on a mélange of historical periods. Unassertive and relaxed and perfectly controlled, no-one has surpassed them for the architect's attention to every detail, or his eye for telling incident and delicacy of texture, often making use of old bricks and weathered timber. Houses like The Deanery, Sonning (1899–1902) are works of art, often enhanced by Lutyens's unique alliance with the great plantswoman and garden designer, Gertrude Jekyll. Lutyens provided her with the architectural setting in the form of pergolas, paths, flights of steps and terracing which stretched to form a series of rooms flowing outwards from the house. This built structure Jekyll would soften with planting of a rare sophistication made with a painter's eye. Again, as in the case of architecture, the impulse was to go backwards, the plants being those regarded as 'Old English' cottage ones and the style as Tudor or Stuart. Lutyens and Jekyll to a degree defined garden style for the century. Just before 1914 Lutyens was commissioned to lay out the new imperial capital of Delhi including the viceroy's house. When that was finished Lutyens stood revealed as one of the greatest classical architects in the country's history. Alas, it was too late, for he had been trained to build for a world which vanished in the Great War. In 1908 Asquith was to be the first prime minister without a country house, a benchmark of the end of a civilisation. Lutyens, like Elgar but more so, was tragically to outlive his age.

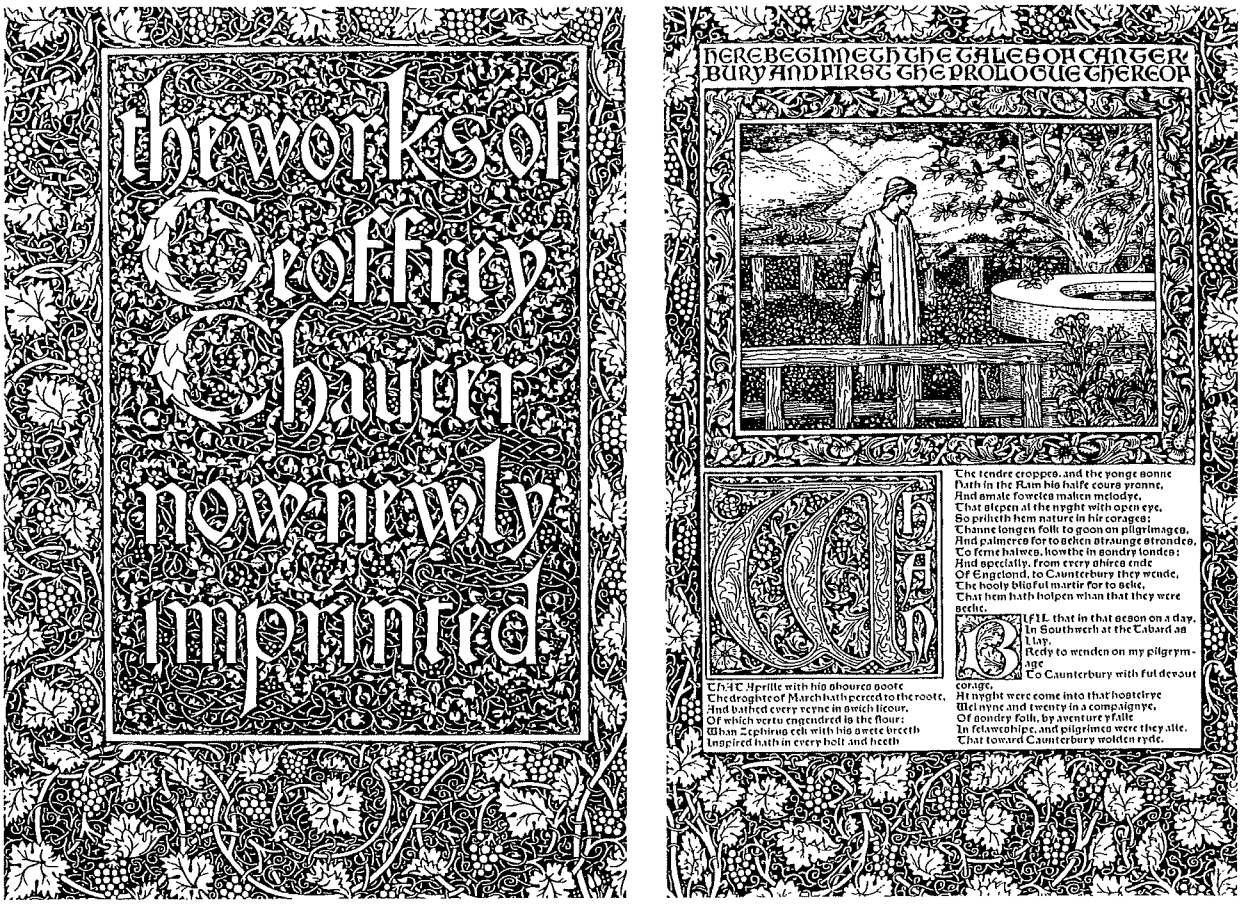
This deep yearning for a mythical past Englishness pervaded music with a parallel sense of longing. 'Public opinion must be raised,' George Bernard Shaw, in his role as music critic, wrote in 1919, 'to the need for providing in England the conditions in which it will be possible for Englishmen after a lapse of two centuries, once more to express themselves in genuinely British music . . . ' These decades witness a conscious search for just such a new music which would be recognisably English. In that quest literature, both past and present, the landscape and the rediscovery of earlier music were all to play their part. It was accepted that as the essential nature of English culture was literary, therefore any renaissance had to be rooted in the language. The search for a lost rural England beats as strongly in music as in any of the other arts. The editing and publication of the rich heritage of Tudor, Elizabethan and Stuart music as well as the recovery of folk-song were also to have a profound effect.

Many of the artists involved in the new movements were tinged with, or committed to, socialism, a factor which was to become of great significance as the new century developed. There began to emerge a seeming alliance, however ill-defined, between the avant-garde and reformist politics. Up until now what those who practised within the arts believed politically was of no consequence but as the franchise became ever more inclusive the arts would inevitably in the long run be drawn into the political arena. So far they survived from day to day solely in terms of nineteenth century *laissez-faire* economics, sinking or swimming in the market-place. A man like Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree was running what was in effect a nascent National Theatre without subsidy. The cost was crippling, but it was still an age of cheap labour. The idea of state involvement had hardly surfaced. Although in 1868 the State had made the unprecedented gesture of an annual grant of £500 to the Royal College of Music, when, later, Sir Henry Tate offered his art collection to the National Gallery the negotiations became so protracted that after a Liberal government offered him a site on Millbank he went on to build the gallery himself. But the atmosphere was changing. In 1879 when the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre opened in Stratford-upon-Avon the idea that a national theatre should be built began to be aired. It was to take until 1976 to materialise, but all these small incidents were signs that change was in the air and that in a new century of mass democracy art, government and politics were to become inextricably intertwined.

The origins of that intertwining were inexorably bound up with the revolt against industrialism embodied in the Arts and Crafts Movement. William Morris's attack on factory production set in motion a huge nostalgia for a revised or re-invented vernacular. For Morris this meant not only a recovery of vanishing skills wiped out by the factory, but also the reassertion of social and humanitarian values. So what was a stylistic movement carried as part of its baggage an implied commitment to a reorganisation of society, one in which capitalist values would be expunged and an inherent vision of beauty accessible to Everyman stand revealed. Morris clothed this essentially secular Utopian vision with language which re-echoes the mood of prophecy of the 1650s. In an address on *The Beauty of Life* (1880) he spoke of 'the victorious days when millions of those who now sit in darkness will be enlightened by an art made by the people and for the people, a joy to the maker and the user.'

A deep moral earnestness was therefore always to lie behind all the design movements in Britain during the twentieth century and that we owe to Morris. And it was not only on this that Morris set the agenda, for the pre-industrial vernacular he extolled was that of the farmhouse, the cottage and the barn. These were cast as uncorrupted and pure, peasant art unsullied by either the aristocracy or the middle classes. They were also seen as quintessentially English and in this Morris and his followers were, as we have seen, at one with those at the other end of the political spectrum who also saw Englishness as residing in the countryside. What is so fascinating is the difference of application of Morris's ideals on the continent as against in his own country. Abroad, his fundamental tenets of truth to materials, utility and beauty were immediately applied to mass manufacture. Here, in sharp contrast, they set in motion a revival of handcrafted artefacts. More, they were to ensure that any attempts to raise standards of design in factory production were always to start from a craft basis.

What he also left as a legacy was that all design movements should be collective. That started with Morris in the 1860s when Philip Webb built the Red House, the interior of which his friends filled with furniture, textiles, embroideries, stained glass, ceramics and painted effects. That initial essay in interior decoration transformed



The Kelmscott Chaucer, issued June 1896. The crowning achievement of William Morris's collaboration with Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

itself into corporate form with the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in 1861. Twenty-six years later it moved to Oxford Street offering furniture, fabrics and wallpapers designed to give any house a look for what was seen as the dawn of a new and more artistic age. The decade of the 1880s saw the principles which were to dominate design in the new century put in place, those which set store by functional efficiency and fitness-for-purpose. Design indeed took on all the attributes of a moral crusade preached with almost evangelical fervour. Democracy and beauty for all were billed as allies and simplicity and practicality seen as a birthright.

During the 1880s the Arts and Crafts Movement mushroomed like some new religious sect. In 1884 a group of young men in Norman Shaw's office set up the Art Workers' Guild, thus institutionalising the new craft ideal. Its aim was to bring craftsmen and architects together. Four years later an annual Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society was established with the brilliant designer for the decorative arts, Walter Crane, as its first president. In the same year, 1888, C. R. Ashbee formed the Guild of Handicraft, whose members were to produce some of the Movement's most outstanding furniture, silver and jewellery. This was an organisation strongly committed to the new socialism and, in 1902, in order to fulfil this mission, over a hundred of its members moved to Chipping Campden in the Cotswolds to form some kind of ideal community. The experiment proved a disaster and folded six years later. So it is that

Late Victorian 12

the two decades 1890 to 1910 mark the high tide of the Arts and Crafts Movement, one which equally spread to the regions. In 1890 the Birmingham Guild of Handicraft was created. Finally the Movement's message was taken into the art educational system. In 1896 the Central School of Arts and Crafts opened, providing what was the most progressive education and training in design in Europe. At the Royal College of Art W. R. Lethaby was appointed first Professor of Design, thus reinforcing the notion that handicraft was its basis.

A wall hanging designed for Morris & Co. by John Henry Dearle, c.1895. Such items were purchased as kits and reflect the high standard of amateur needlework.

The Movement effected what was a revolution in living style by a whole swathe of the educated middle classes. That revolution had already begun under the impulse of aestheticism in the 1870s. The home was now apotheosised as the house beautiful, a temple to art. These interiors were filled with artefacts in the vernacular, Old England recreated. Throwing out their grandparents' clutter, such people embraced what was seen to be a new form of classless simple life, filling their rooms instead with honest oak furniture, craft pottery and embroidery, as well as fabrics and wallpapers covered with formalised patterns based on the flowers and leaves of Old England. Understatement and reticence were married to what was a quintessentially insular quirkiness and fantasy to produce a quite unique style.

The Movement, with all its socialist zeal, was seen in the end by one of its fervent advocates to have been an illusion. C. R. Ashbee wrote in the aftermath: 'We have made of a great social movement, a narrow and tiresome little aristocracy working with great skill for the very rich.' What the Movement also failed to answer was the fact that what the factories produced, which they condemned, sold. Out of that was to spring another never-ending twentieth century refrain, the education of the masses in what was regarded by a minority as good taste. More important than all of this was W. R. Lethaby's realisation that a totally new direction was urgently called for. In 1910 he wrote: 'We have passed into a scientific age, and the old practical arts, produced instinctively, belong to an entirely different era.' Lethaby firmly believed that a machine-made object should look precisely that. This was a step forward in recognising the realities of the new century, but the crafts were to remain firmly on the agenda.

(For further details, see, if you wish, Roy Strong 'The Spirit of Britain')

AESTHETICISM & DECADENCE

Origins of the movement:

- **1860s**, Oxford, Thomas Hill Green expounded Hegel's doctrine, his disciple is Walter Pater
- **1860s, Algernon Charles Swinburne** (following **Theophile Gautier**'s teaching **"Art for art's sake"** and **Baudelaire** came to question the Utilitarian principle that art has a moral purpose**. Art should serve no religious, moral or social end save itself**.
- His friend and mentor **Dante Gabriel Rossetti** was **a living embodiment of a life devoted wholly to art.**
- **John Ruskin**'s writings (*Modern Painters*, 1843, 1846, 1856, 1860 explored Truth, Beauty, Imagination, Representation and Nature. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture, The Stones of Venice*: all aesthetic considerations are directed towards morality. R's method taught Victorians how to see and analyse the sublimity of Nature and Art (a combination of scientific enthusiasm and a semi-religious wonder at the marvels of the world). R hated industrialization and urbanity which he contrasted with the Middle Ages, seeking to make the social order more humane.
- Walter Pater developed his teaching further. His method of appreciation and elegant style learnt from Ruskin.
- Dissatisfaction, pessimism of the mid-century and dissatisfaction with Utilitarianism led the way towards **hedonism**.
- The victory of Prussia over France in 1870-71 and the consequent German predominance on the Continent dampened in England the liberal cosmopolitan spirit. **A wave of pessimism and materialism** spreading across the Channel from defeated France swept many men of letters into **an aesthetic isolation** from practical life and retreat into the attitude of "art for art's sake".
- **Walter Pater** (1839-1894), Conclusion to ***Studies in the History of the Renaissance*** (1873): "Analysis goes a step farther still, and assures us that those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is. To such a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down. /.../ Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest, some mood or passions or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive for us, - for that moment only. **Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end**. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a varigated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in thei purest energy? **To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame**, to maintain this ecstacy, is success in life. /.../ While all melts under our feet, we may well catch at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face

of one's friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening."

- **Religion of Art**: vogue for a brief lyric poem recording the fleeting moment of experience (Paterian moment becomes the "image" of imagists and the "epiphany" of Joyce); a taste **for ritual living divorced from religious commitment** (Pater, alarmed at the interpretation of his doctrine, wrote *Marius the Epicurean*)
- Pater's most famous follower **Oscar Wilde**, the aesthete par excellence, a legend of pure style, the symbol of the period. W believed, in the manner of French art criticism, that tone, line and mass counted in a painting, not literariness; **art should be only beautiful** ("Art is perfectly useless!"). Poems become **word-paintings** recording Paterian moments. *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891) – the most typical novel of "decadence" – the protagonist's search for rare sensations and acceptance of Pater's doctrines without the moralistic concessions.
- **Aubrey Beardsley and the Rhymers' Club, *The Yellow Book***, Art Nouveau/Jugendstil
- Aesthetes a minor but dedicated group of artists, more concerned with withdrawal from life than living it. Their lyrics pursue the Paterian moment, their models are the Elizabethans and Paul Verlaine. Their muses are often prostitutes and music hall dancers from London and Paris:

  Ernest Dowson (1867-1900) – an exquisite technician within a narrow range, heavily influenced by Swinburne, the Latin poets of antiquity and the French symbolists. Shared with his fellow Rhymers' Club members the pursuit of beauty, verbal sensation, the haunting cadence and cultivated langour. His late night drinking, combined with tuberculosis led to an early death.

  A.E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), morbid toying with death, the pathos of unreturning time

Swinburne

Poeta Loquitur°

If a person conceives an opinion
That my verses are stuff that will wash,
Or my Muse has one plume on her pinion,
That person's opinion is bosh.
My philosophy, politics, free-thought!
Are worth not three skips of a flea,
And the emptiest of thoughts that can be thought
Are mine on the sea.

In a maze of monotonous murmur
Where reason roves ruined by rhyme,
In a voice neither graver nor firmer
Than the bells on a fool's cap chime,
A party pretentiously pensive,
With a Muse that deserves to be skinned,
Makes language and metre offensive
With rhymes on the wind.

A perennial procession of phrases
Pranked primly, though pruriently prime,
Precipitates preachings on praises
In a ruffianly riot of rhyme
Through the pressure of print on my pages:
But reckless the reader must be
Who imagines me one of the sages
That steer through Time's sea.

Mad mixtures of Frenchified offal
With insults to Christendom's creed,
Blind blasphemy, schoolboylike scoff, all
These blazon me blockhead indeed.
I conceive myself obviously some one
Whose audience will never be thinned,
But the pupil must needs be a rum one
Whose teacher is wind.

In my poems, with ravishing rapture
Storm strikes me and strokes me and stings:
But I'm scarcely the bird you might capture
Out of doors in the thick of such things.
I prefer to be well out of harm's way
When tempest makes tremble the tree,
And the wind with omnipotent arm-sway
Makes soap of the sea.

Hanging hard on the rent rags of others,
Who before me did better, I try
To believe them my sisters and brothers,
Though I know what a low lot am I.
The mere sight of a church sets me yelping
Like a boy that at football is shinned!
But the cause must indeed be past helping
Whose gospel is wind!

All the pale past's red record of history
Is dusty with damnable deeds;
But the future's mild motherly mystery
Peers pure of all crowns and all creeds.
Truth dawns on time's resonant ruin,
Frank, fulminant,° fragrant, and free:
And apparently this is the doing
Of wind on the sea.

Fame flutters in front of pretension
Whose flagstaff is flagrantly fine:
And it cannot be needful to mention
That such beyond question is mine.
Some singers indulging in curses,
Though sinful, have splendidly sinned:
But my would-be maleficent verses
Are nothing but wind.

[For freedom to swagger and scribble,
In a style that's too silly for school,
At the heels of his betters to nibble,
While flaunting the flag of a fool,
May to me seem the part of a poet,
But where out of Bedlam is he
Who can think that in struggling to show it
I am not at sea?]

[I may think to get honour and glory at
The rate of a comet of star,
By maligning the Muse of a Laureate,
Or denouncing the deeds of a Czar.
But such rollicking rhymsters get duly
(As schoolboys at football say) shinned,
When their Muse, as such trollops will truly,
Sails too near the wind.]

1918

Poeta Loquitur "The Poet Speaks"; the greatest *deliberate* self-parody in the language, not published until after Swinburne's death. The last two (extra) stanzas were transcribed by Cecil Lang.

Pater "The Renaissance"

Conclusion

Λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει[1]

To regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought. Let us begin with that which is without—our physical life. Fix upon it in one of its more exquisite intervals, the moment, for instance, of delicious recoil from the flood of water in summer heat.[2] What is the whole physical life in that moment but a combination of natural elements to which science gives their names? But these elements, phosphorus and lime and delicate fibres, are present not in the human body alone: we detect them in places most remote from it. Our physical life is a perpetual motion of them—the passage of the blood, the wasting and repairing of the lenses of the eye, the modification of the tissues of the brain by every ray of light and sound—processes which science reduces to simpler and more elementary forces. Like the elements of which we are

1. "Heracleitus says, 'All things give way; nothing remains.'" Plato, *Cratylus* 402 A, Pater's translation. Heraclitus was a Greek philosopher of about 500 B.C. At the heart of his thought was the doctrine of perpetual flux; he held fire to be the basis of all material existence. The sense of flux, of the impermanence of things, which Pater in his opening sentence says is characteristic of the 19th centuryy, may be thought of as a consequence of the great acceleration of historical and scientific research, both of which emphasized the idea of process and change.

2. What Pater asks us to consider is simply what it feels like to plunge into a cool stream on a hot day!

composed, the action of these forces extends beyond us; it rusts iron and ripens corn. Far out on every side of us those elements are broadcast, driven by many forces; and birth and gesture and death and the springing of violets from the grave are but a few out of ten thousand resultant combinations. That clear, perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours, under which we group them—a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it. This at least of flame-like our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways.

Or if we begin with the inward world of thought and feeling, the whirlpool is still more rapid, the flame more eager and devouring. There it is no longer the gradual darkening of the eye and fading of colour from the wall,—the movement of the shore-side, where the water flows down indeed, though in apparent rest,—but the race of the mid-stream, a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought. At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action. But when reflexion begins to act upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like a trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions—colour, odour, texture—in the mind of the observer.[3] And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further; the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the indi-

Pater (2)

vidual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.[4] Analysis goes a step farther still, and assures us that those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is. To such a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down. It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off—that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves.[5]

Philosophiren, says Novalis, *ist dephlegmatisiren, vivificiren.*[6] The service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit is to rouse, to startle it into sharp and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive for us,—for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame,[7] to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well catch at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy of Comte, or of Hegel,[8] or of our own. Philosophical theories or ideas, as points of view, instruments of criticism, may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us. 'Philosophy is the microscope of thought.' [9] The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience, in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some abstract theory we have not identified with ourselves, or what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us.

One of the most beautiful passages in the writings of Rousseau is that in the sixth book of the *Confessions,* where he describes the awakening in him of the literary sense. An undefinable taint of death had always clung about him, and now in early manhood he believed himself smitten by mortal disease. He asked himself how he might make as much as possible of the interval that remained; and he was not biassed by anything in his previous life when he decided that it must be by intellectual excitement, which he found just then in the clear,

Pater (3)

fresh writings of Voltaire.[10] Well! we are all *condamnés,* as Victor Hugo says: we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve—*les hommes sont tous condamnés à mort avec des sursis indéfinis:* we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among 'the children of this world,'[11] in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion—that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake, has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.

1873 1873, 1888

Wilde

Symphony in Yellow

An omnibus across the bridge
Crawls like a yellow butterfly,
And, here and there, a passer-by
Shows like a little restless midge.

Big barges full of yellow hay
Are moved against the shadowy wharf,
And, like a yellow silken scarf
The thick fog hangs along the quay.

The yellow leaves begin to fade
And flutter from the Temple elms,
And at my feet the pale green Thames
Lies like a rod of rippled jade.

Impression du Matin

The Thames nocturne of blue and gold
Changed to a Harmony in grey:
A barge with ochre-coloured hay
Dropped from the wharf: and chill and cold

The yellow fog came creeping down
The bridges, till the houses' walls
Seemed changed to shadows and St Paul's
Loomed like a bubble o'er the town.

Then suddenly arose the clang
Of waking life; the streets were stirred
With country wagons; and a bird
Flew to the glistening roofs and sang.

But one pale woman all alone,
The daylight kissing her wan hair,
Loitered beneath the gaslamps' flare,
With lips of flame and heart of stone.

Dowson

[Cynara]

Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae[1]

Last night, ah, yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine
There fell thy shadow, Cynara! thy breath was shed
Upon my soul between the kisses and the wine;
And I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
  Yea, I was desolate and bowed my head:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

All night upon mine heart I felt her warm heart beat,
Night-long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay;
Surely the kisses of her bought red mouth were sweet;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
  When I awoke and found the dawn was gray:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

I have forgot much, Cynara! gone with the wind,
Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,
Dancing, to put thy pale, lost lilies out of mind;
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,
  Yea, all the time, because the dance was long:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

I cried for madder music and for stronger wine,
But when the feast is finished and the lamps expire,
Then falls thy shadow, Cynara! the night is thine;
And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,
  Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire:
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion.

1891, 1896

Housman

XXXV

On the idle hill of summer,
  Sleepy with the flow of streams,
Far I hear the steady drummer
  Drumming like a noise in dreams.

Far and near and low and louder
  On the roads of earth go by,
Dear to friends and food for powder,°
  Soldiers marching, all to die.

East and west on fields forgotten
  Bleach the bones of comrades slain,
Lovely lads and dead and rotten;
  None that go return again.

Far the calling bugles hollo,
  High the screaming fife replies,
Gay the files of scarlet follow:
  Woman bore me, I will rise.

XL

Into my heart an air that kills
  From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
  What spires, what farms are those?

That is the land of lost content,
  I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
  And cannot come again.

Theatre was to undergo a somewhat similar renaissance. Although hugely popular throughout the nineteenth century it had been shunned by the polite classes who patronised the opera. Theatre was given over to sensation and spectacle to lighten the lives of the working classes. With the departure of the upper classes the sophistication of Georgian drama was rendered obsolete, as an urban working class craved escape in the form of exotic melodramas and scenic spectacle. As a consequence the technical side of theatre developed, with the addition of fly galleries, trapdoors and gaslight. At the same time acting became stylised and broad of gesture, producing a succession of actors in the grand heroic manner: John Philip Kemble and his brother Charles, Edmund Kean and William Charles Macready. The ever-adaptable Shakespeare was transformed into a vehicle for pageantry as the quest to recreate accurately the historic past conquered the stage. Theatres multiplied when the old licensed system broke down in the 1830s and 1840s. What appeared on stage was now conditioned by a new Censorship Act (1843), giving the Lord Chamberlain absolute powers over the theatre. The result was that anything remotely sensitive in the way of religion, politics or sex was kept firmly off the stage.

And then, as was the case with music, the atmosphere changed in the 1870s. Although it was to take a generation, the upper classes were slowly wooed back to the stage, essentially by a new kind of theatrical figure, the actor-manager. That movement was begun by Squire and Marie Bancroft at the Prince of Wales Theatre in the 1860s. As the rougher elements in the audience were drawn off to the newly emergent music halls, polite society was attracted by a seating hierarchy of stalls and dress circle, and by a series of plays by Tom Robertson acted within minutely observed drawing-room box sets. Gradually the multiple bills inherited from the eighteenth century gave way to the presentation of a single play on at hours in accord with the demands of polite society. In 1880 the Bancrofts moved to the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, which epitomised this new sophisticated elegance of milieu. By then auditoriums had shrunk in size in response to a new type of drama, the well-made play.

Another actor-manager, George Alexander, was to undertake a similar exercise at St. James's Theatre, finding in Arthur Wing Pinero and Oscar Wilde writers who could both portray and attract society. Between 1891 and 1914 St. James's, under Alexander's management, became the most fashionable theatre in London, staging plays which called for a new and more naturalistic style of acting which gradually rendered the mid-Victorian histrionics crude by comparison.

In this way the scene was set for the two decades up to 1910 becoming the golden age of society drama. It was a renaissance which shared with other arts a backwards look, this time to the theatre of the Restoration era which similarly housed a drama aimed at only a small select circle of the king and his cronies. In the case of Edwardian drama that circle was admittedly larger, consisting of the ten thousand or so who made up what was deemed as society. The plays indeed worked from that premise, one in which the audience sat looking at itself on stage. The theme of these plays was society, how to get into it and, once in it, how to stay there or avoid exclusion. It was accepted and generally expected that everything on stage would uphold the established consensus in respect of religion and morals, the established social structure and imperial supremacy. In this sense such plays became a kind of social ritual in which the audience saw the status quo affirmed. Nonetheless what was demanded of theatre was to an extent very different from what was asked of a

novel. The prime consideration was always that any audience should feel entertained.

As theatre became an arm of the establishment those who had achieved this were suitably honoured, both Squire Bancroft and George Alexander being knighted in the 1890s. The theatre thus became respectable and indeed acting became a career which it was now possible for a gentleman to consider. It not only became a career but a profession for the first time, one which demanded formal training. In 1904 the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art was founded followed, five years later, by the Central School of Speech and Drama. To become a playwright equally attained a new status and in addition became profitable. The 1887 Berne Convention on copyright and the 1891 American Copyright Act ended the piracy of plays and meant that they could be safely published. As royalties began to flow, writing plays became once more an attractive proposition to the world of letters.

Wilde and Pinero established a new kind of adult drama in the 1890s. Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) was billed as a 'New and original play of modern life' and inaugurated a series by him which revived the theatre of wit for the first time since the age of Congreve. Most of his plays are about women with a past, distressed wives and distraught husbands. The plots creak, turning on things like a misplaced letter or a fan, but Wilde used them as a vehicle for his epigrams. As a result the really interesting characters are the peripheral ones. In *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) he created one of the greatest masterpieces of comedy in what was an inversion of the values of normal society drama.

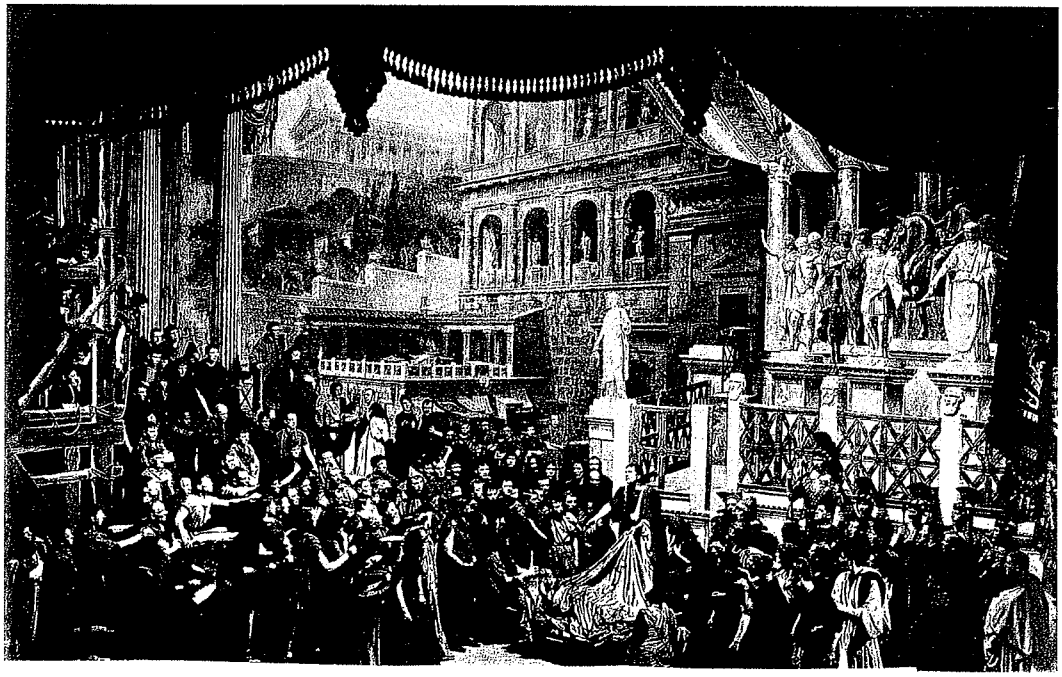
Unlike Wilde, Arthur Wing Pinero learned his craft the hard way, emerging to prominence in the 1880s with a series of farces, including *The Magistrate* (1885), taking up again the kind of mad world of Ben Jonson. Gradually Pinero found it possible within the confines of censorship to evolve a new kind of play, one which responded as far as was possible to the challenge of Ibsen, 'a drama based wholly on observation and experience . . . [which] . . . illustrates faithfully modern social life.' *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (1893) crossed new boundaries, putting on stage the dilemma of a man of the world who had married a woman with a past who in the end commits suicide. The effect on the audience was electric. Later Pinero was to move on to tragedy in *Iris* (1901) and *Mid-Channel* (1909). In *Trelawny of the 'Wells'* (1898) he was to pay poignant tribute to the world of the theatre of his youth which his own work had replaced. Dying in 1934, like Elgar and Lutyens he was to outlive his era.

If the well-made society drama reassured its audience that all was well with their world, so too did the pageantry of a great Shakespeare production or a romantic melodrama under the aegis of Sir Henry Irving. Irving was the late Victorian equivalent of Garrick, turning the Lyceum Theatre, which he took over in 1878, into a temple of Thespis. Irving brought glamour and a sense of occasion to every production, fine-tuning them so that they attracted both a select and a popular audience. His sensational success in *The Bells* (1871) made him overnight the leading actor of the age, noted for his bold effects. In Ellen Terry he discovered an actress whose interpretation of Shakespeare's heroines has never been equalled. In contrast to the box-set plays of Wilde and Pinero this was pictorial theatre on the grand scale, dense, realistic and mysterious, in which the heroic past unfolded itself before the audience's eyes in every detail.

Society drama. Mrs Patrick Campbell as Paula Tanqueray with George Alexander in The Second Mrs Tanqueray, *1893.*

This tradition was to be continued down to the outbreak of the Great War in the productions of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. He built Her Majesty's Theatre (1891) and from 1905 offered an annual Shakespeare season in

Theatrical pictorialism on the grand scale. The forum scene in Herbert Beerbohm Tree's production of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, *1911.*



which romantic realism was carried to new heights of illusion with aberrations like live rabbits on stage in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream.*

These were the official faces of late Victorian and Edwardian theatre but, far more than was the case with either architecture or music, there was pressure for change. Increasingly the educated and socially conscious classes wanted a form of drama which fully responded to Ibsen and explored social issues of a kind vetoed by the Lord Chamberlain's Office. The only means whereby this could be done was by way of the club, for such stagings could be deemed private, therefore falling outside his jurisdiction. In 1891 the Independent Theatre Club was founded to stage plays of literary and artistic worth. On 13 March Ibsen's *Ghosts* was performed. The leading critic of the day voiced the view of the establishment in condemning the play as an 'open drain'.

It was George Bernard Shaw who was the first playwright to begin to explore these new horizons. Before 1914 only two of his plays ever reached the public stage, the others being performed for the Independent Theatre Club and latterly for another club at the Royal Court Theatre where no less than eleven of his plays were put on between 1904 and 1911. The earliest, *Widowers' Houses* (1892), sent shock waves but not nearly as many as did *Mrs Warren's Profession* (1898), which dealt with the unmentionable subject of profits from prostitution. A whole spate of plays followed, including *Candida* (1898), *Man and Superman* (1903) and *Pygmalion* (1912). All of them explored the relationship of the sexes in what was a rapidly changing society by means of a revival of the elegance and wit of Restoration comedy. In these plays Shaw utilises the formula of the well-made society play to his own end, adapting it to satirise and attack conventional middle class ideas. Many of the plays can still hold the stage today thanks to their comic effect, but his characters remain unreal, not flesh and blood but ideas in human form. Once Shaw abandoned his comic talent for sermonising and political writing that hold slipped. Although he was to live until 1950, and was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1925, he was a spent force in the theatre after *Heartbreak House* (1919) and *Saint Joan* (1923).

Shaw was not alone. Others followed him in the exit from the drawing-room, daring to tackle forbidden themes. John Galsworthy's plays like *Strife* (1909) explored the factory, the office and the prison cell: Harley Granville-Barker's, among them *The Voysey Inheritance* (1909), exposed the rottenness which so often lay concealed beneath the shallow façade of established respectability. The early plays of Somerset Maugham crossed the same barriers, as the wicked were seen no longer to be punished by the time the curtain fell, and doubts over religion began to be openly expressed by characters on stage.

The sense of attack on the established theatre by the new drama set off a move in the opposite direction towards escapism. J. M. Barrie purveyed whimsy to his public whether it was *Quality Street* (1912), a slight Regency costume drama, or *Peter Pan* (1904) whose subtext in retrospect is now viewed as disturbing. The enthusiasts for the new drama in fact belonged to a narrow educated middle class élite. The mainstream of Edwardian theatre depended on spectacle, on the continuing popularity of romantic melodrama, and also on a new genre, the musical comedy. George Edwardes at the Gaiety Theatre from the 1870s onwards was to transform this rudimentary form into the acme of elegant froth, leisurely, lavish and ingenuous.

Harley Granville-Barker was not only a dramatist of distinction but the first man to be a new kind of figure in the theatre, the producer-director, the man who coordinated every part of a production from its design to the delivery of the lines, movement on stage and lighting. At exactly the same time that Irving and Tree were dazzling audiences with untold visions of Old England an alternative approach to Shakespeare production was also underway, a movement in which Granville-Barker played a major part. It was one which restored primacy to the text and was pioneered by William Poel who formed the Elizabethan Stage Society in 1894. He supervised performances of Shakespeare, reconstructing the type of stage that the plays would originally have been performed upon. Though in one sense this can be seen as a modernist impulse, it was also a quest for Old England,