And, like unfolded flowers beneath the sea,
Like the man's thought dark in the infant's brain,
Like aught that is which wraps what is to be,
Art's deathless dreams lay veiled by many a vein
Of Parian stone; and, yet a speechless child,
Verse murmured, and Philosophy did strain
Her lidless° eyes for thee; when o'er the Aegean
main

## V

Athens arose: a city such as vision
Builds from the purple crags and silver towers
Of battlemented cloud, as in derision
Of kingliest masonry: the ocean-floors
Pave it; the evening sky pavilions it:
Its portals are inhabited
By thunder-zonèd winds, each head
Within its cloudy wings with sun-fire garlanded—
A divine work! Athens, diviner yet,
Gleamed with its crest of columns, on the will
Of man, as on a mount of diamond, set;
For thou wert, and thine all-creative skill
Peopled, with forms that mock° the eternal dead
In marble immortality, that hill°
Which was thine earliest throne and latest oracle.

## VI

Within the surface of Time's fleeting river
Its wrinkled image lies, as then it lay
Immovably unquiet, and forever
It trembles, but it cannot pass away!
The voices of thy bards and sages thunder
With an earth-awakening blast
Through the caverns of the past:
(Religion veils her eyes; Oppression shrinks aghast:)
A wingèd sound of joy, and love, and wonder,

60 **lidless** because on the watch for reality. 73 **mock** counterfeit. 74 **hill** the Acropolis.



Which soars where Expectation never flew,
Rending the veil of space and time asunder!
One ocean feeds the clouds, and streams, and
dew;
One Sun illumines Heaven; one Spirit vast
With life and love makes chaos ever new,
As Athens doth the world with thy delight renew.

## VII

Then Rome was, and from thy deep bosom fairest,
Like a wolf-cub from a Cadmaean Maenad,°
She drew the milk of greatness, though thy dearest
From that Elysian food was yet unweanèd;
And many a deed of terrible uprightness
By thy sweet love was sanctified;
And in thy smile, and by thy side,
Saintly Camillus° lived, and firm Atilius° died.
But when tears stained thy robe of vestal whiteness,
And gold profaned thy Capitolian throne,
Thou didst desert, with spirit-wingèd lightness,
The senate of the tyrants: they sunk prone
Slaves of one tyrant: Palatinus° sighed
Faint echoes of Ionian song; that tone
Thou didst delay to hear, lamenting to disown.

## VIII

From what Hyrcanian° glen or frozen hill,
Or piny promontory of the Arctic main,
Or utmost islet inaccessible,
Didst thou lament the ruin of thy reign,
Teaching the woods and waves, and desert rocks,
And every Naiad's ice-cold urn,

92 **Like . . . Maenad** See the *Bacchae* of Euripides.—[Shelley's note.] 98 **Camillus** the second founder of Rome. 98 **Atilius** See Horace *Odes* III, 1. 5; commanded Romans in First Punic War. 103 **Palatinus** site of early Rome. 106 **Hyrcanian** coast of Caspian sea.

To talk in echoes sad and stern
Of that sublimest lore which man had dared unlearn?
For neither didst thou watch the wizard flocks
Of the Scald's dreams, nor haunt the Druid's sleep.
What if the tears rained through thy shattered locks
Were quickly dried? for thou didst groan, not weep,
When from its sea of death, to kill and burn,
The Galilean serpent forth did creep,
And made thy world an undistinguishable heap.

## IX

A thousand years the Earth cried, "Where art thou?"
And then the shadow of thy coming fell
On Saxon Alfred's olive-cinctured brow:
And many a warrior-peopled citadel.
Like rocks which fire lifts out of the flat deep,
Arose in sacred Italy,
Frowning o'er the tempestuous sea
Of kings, and priests, and slaves, in tower-crowned majesty;
That multitudinous anarchy did sweep
And burst around their walls, like idle foam,
Whilst from the human spirit's deepest deep
Strange melody with love and awe struck dumb
Dissonant arms; and Art, which cannot die,
With divine wand traced on our earthly home
Fit imagery to pave Heaven's everlasting dome.

## X

Thou huntress swifter than the Moon! thou terror
Of the world's wolves! thou bearer of the quiver,
Whose sunlike shafts pierce tempest-wingèd Error,
As light may pierce the clouds when they dissever
In the calm regions of the orient day!
Luther caught thy awakening glance;
Like lightning, from his leaden lance



Reflected, it dissolved the visions of the trance
In which, as in a tomb, the nations lay;
And England's prophets hailed thee as their queen,
In songs whose music cannot pass away,
Though it must flow forever: not unseen
Before the spirit-sighted countenance
Of Milton didst thou pass, from the sad scene
Beyond whose night he saw, with a dejected mien.

## XI

The eager hours and unreluctant years
As on a dawn-illumined mountain stood,
Trampling to silence their loud hopes and fears,
Darkening each other with their multitude,
And cried aloud, "Liberty!" Indignation
Answered Pity from her cave;
Death grew pale within the grave,
And Desolation howled to the destroyer, Save!
When like Heaven's Sun girt by the exhalation
Of its own glorious light, thou didst arise,
Chasing thy foes from nation unto nation
Like shadows: as if day had cloven the skies
At dreaming midnight o'er the western wave,°
Men started, staggering with a glad surprise,
Under the lightnings of thine unfamiliar eyes.

## XII

Thou Heaven of earth! what spells could pall thee then
In ominous eclipse? a thousand years
Bred from the slime of deep Oppression's den,
Dyed all thy liquid light with blood and tears,
Till thy sweet stars could weep the stain away;
How like Bacchanals of blood
Round France, the ghastly vintage, stood

162–63 **as if . . . wave** the American Revolution.

Destruction's sceptered slaves, and Folly's mitered brood!
When one, like them, but mightier far than they,
The Anarch° of thine own bewildered powers,
Rose: armies mingled in obscure array,
Like clouds with clouds, darkening the sacred bowers
Of serene Heaven. He, by the past pursued,
Rests with those dead, but unforgotten hours,
Whose ghosts scare victor kings in their ancestral towers.

## XIII

England yet sleeps: was she not called of old?
Spain calls her now, as with its thrilling thunder
Vesuvius wakens Aetna, and the cold
Snow-crags by its reply are cloven in sunder:
O'er the lit waves every Aeolian isle
From Pithecusa° to Pelorus°
Howls, and leaps, and glares in chorus:
They cry, "Be dim; ye lamps of Heaven suspended o'er us!"
Her chains are threads of gold, she need but smile
And they dissolve; but Spain's were links of steel,
Till bit to dust by virtue's keenest file.
Twins of a single destiny! appeal
To the eternal years enthroned before us
In the dim West;° impress us from a seal,
All ye have thought and done! Time cannot dare conceal.

## XIV

Tomb of Arminius!° render up thy dead
Till, like a standard from a watch-tower's staff,

175 **Anarch** Napoleon. 186 **Pithecusa** the island of Ischia, near Naples; **Pelorus** a cape in Sicily. 194 **dim West** America. 196 **Arminius** He liberated the Germans from the Roman legions of Varus in 9. A.D.



His soul may stream over the tyrant's head;
Thy victory shall be his epitaph,
Wild Bacchanal of truth's mysterious wine,
King-deluded Germany,
His dead spirit lives in thee.
Why do we fear or hope? thou art already free!
And thou, lost Paradise of this divine
And glorious world! thou flowery wilderness!
Thou island of eternity! thou shrine
Where Desolation, clothed with loveliness,
Worships the thing thou wert! O Italy,
Gather thy blood into thy heart; repress
The beasts who make their dens thy sacred palaces.

## XV

Oh, that the free would stamp the impious name
Of KING into the dust! or write it there,
So that this blot upon the page of fame
Were as a serpent's path, which the light air
Erases, and the flat sands close behind!
Ye the oracle have heard:
Lift the victory-flashing sword,
And cut the snaky knots of this foul gordian word,
Which, weak itself as stubble, yet can bind
Into a mass, irrefragably firm,
The axes and the roads which awe mankind;
The sound has poison in it, 'tis the sperm
Of what makes life foul, cankerous, and abhorred;
Disdain not thou, at thine appointed term,
To set thine armèd heel on this reluctant worm.

## XVI

Oh, that the wise from their bright minds would kindle
Such lamps within the dome of this dim world,
That the pale name of PRIEST might shrink and dwindle
Into the hell from which it first was hurled,
A scoff of impious pride from fiends impure;

Till human thoughts might kneel alone,
Each before the judgment-throne
Of its own aweless soul, or of the Power unknown!
Oh, that the words which make the thoughts obscure
From which they spring, as clouds of glimmering dew
From a white lake blot Heaven's blue portraiture,
Were stripped of their thin masks and various hue
And frowns and smiles and splendors not their own,
Till in the nakedness of false and true
They stand before their Lord, each to receive its due!

## XVII

He who taught man to vanquish whatsoever
Can be between the cradle and the grave
Crowned him the King of Life. Oh, vain endeavor!
If on his own high will, a willing slave,
He has enthroned the oppression and the oppressor.
What if earth can clothe and feed
Amplest millions at their need,
And power in thought be as the tree within the seed?
Or what if Art, an ardent intercessor,
Driving on fiery wings to Nature's throne,
Checks the great mother stooping to caress her,
And cries: "Give me, thy child, dominion
Over all height and depth"? if Life can breed
New wants, and wealth from those who toil and groan,
Rend of thy gifts and hers a thousandfold for one!

## XVIII

Come thou, but lead out of the inmost cave
Of man's deep spirit, as the morning-star
Beckons the Sun from the Eoan wave,
Wisdom. I hear the pennons of her car



Self-moving, like cloud charioted by flame;
Comes she not, and come ye not,
Rulers of eternal thought,
To judge, with solemn truth, life's ill-apportioned lot?
Blind Love, and equal Justice, and the Fame
Of what has been, the Hope of what will be?
O Liberty! if such could be thy name
Wert thou disjoined from these, or they from thee:
If thine or theirs were treasures to be bought
By blood or tears, have not the wise and free
Wept tears, and blood like tears?—The solemn harmony

## XIX

Paused, and the Spirit of that mighty singing
To its abyss was suddenly withdrawn;
Then, as a wild swan, when sublimely winging
Its path athwart the thunder-smoke of dawn,
Sinks headlong through the aërial golden light
On the heavy-sounding plain,
When the bolt has pierced its brain;
As summer clouds dissolve, unburthened of their rain;
As a far taper fades with fading night,
As a brief insect dies with dying day—
My song, its pinions disarrayed of might,
Drooped; o'er it closed the echoes far away
Of the great voice which did its flight sustain,
As waves which lately paved his watery way
Hiss round a drowner's head in their tempestuous play.

Byron

## *The Isles of Greece*

1

The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece,
  Where burning Sappho loved and sung,
Where grew the arts of war and peace,
  Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung!
Eternal summer gilds them yet,
But all except their sun, is set.

2

The Scian and the Teian muse,
  The hero's harp, the lover's lute,
Have found the fame your shores refuse:
  Their place of birth alone is mute
To sounds which echo further west
Than your sires' 'Islands of the Blest.'

3

The mountains look on Marathon –
  And Marathon looks on the sea;
And musing there an hour alone,
  I dreamt that Greece might still be free;
For standing on the Persians' grave
I could not deem myself a slave.

4

A king sate on a rocky brow
  Which looks on seaborne Salamis;
And ships by thousands lay below,
  And men in nations; – all were his!
He counted them at break of day –
And when the sun set, where were they?

5

And where are they? and where art thou,
  My country? On thy voiceless shore
The heroic lay is tuneless now –
  The heroic bosom beats no more!
And must thy lyre, so long divine,
Degenerate into hands like mine?

6

'Tis something, in the dearth of fame,
  Though link'd among a fetter'd race,
To feel at least a patriot's shame,
  Even as I sing, suffuse my face;
For what is left the poet here?
For Greeks a blush, for Greeks a tear.

7

Must we but weep o'er days more blest?
  Must we but blush? – Our fathers bled.
Earth! render back from out thy breast
  A remnant of thy Spartan dead!
Of the three hundred grant but three
To make a new Thermopylae!

8

What, silent still? and silent all?
  Ah no! the voices of the dead
Sound like a distant torrent's fall,
  And answer, Let one living head,
But one arise, – we come, we come!
'Tis but the living who are dumb.

9

In vain – in vain: strike other chords;
  Fill high the cup of Samian wine!
Leave battles to the Turkish hordes,
  And shed the blood of Scio's vine!
Hark! rising to the ignoble call –
How answers each bold Bacchanal!

10

You have the Pyrrhic dance as yet;
  Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone?
Of two such lessons, why forget
  The nobler and the manlier one?
You have the letters Cadmus gave –
Think ye he meant them for a slave?

11

Fill high the bowl with Samian wine!
  We will not think of themes like these!
It made Anacreon's song divine;
  He served – but served Polycrates –
A tyrant; but our masters then
Were still, at least, our countrymen.

Byron "The Isles of Greece"

12

The tyrant of the Chersonese
Was freedom's best and bravest friend;
*That* tyrant was Miltiades!'
O that the present hour would lend
Another despot of the kind!
Such chains as his were sure to bind.

13

Fill high the bowl with Samian wine;
On Suli's rock and Parga's shore,
Exists the remnant of a line
Such as the Doric mothers bore;
And there, perhaps, some seed is sown,
That Heracleidan blood might own.

14

Trust not for freedom to the Franks –
They have a king who buys and sells;
In native swords, and native ranks,
The only hope of courage dwells;
But Turkish force and Latin fraud,
Would break your shield, however broad.

15

Fill high the cup with Samian wine!
Our virgins dance beneath the shade –
I see their glorious black eyes shine;
But, gazing on each glowing maid,
My own the burning tear-drop laves,
To think such breast must suckle slaves.

16

Place me on Sunium's marbled steep,
Where nothing, save the waves and I,
May hear our mutual murmurs sweep;
There, swan-like, let me sing and die:
A land of slaves shall ne'er be mine –
Dash down yon cup of Samian wine!

* * * * *

Thus sung, or would, or could, or should have sung
The modern Greek, in tolerable verse;
If not like Orpheus quite, when Greece was young,
Yet in these times he might have done much worse . . .

GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON (By 1823)

(from *Don Juan*, Canto III)

## THE HIGH VICTORIAN CULTURAL SCENE

These were years of social conflict amidst a tidal wave of reform. As the 1830s progressed it was realised more and more that a sharp break had occurred, that the world before 1790 was a different one, now extremely remote, and that England had rapidly passed from being a mainly rural and mercantile society to one which was predominantly urban and industrial.

All the arts engaged with how to respond and interpret these changes, how to find a new context for politics, one which would not jettison the past. The concern was always with practicalities, caught again and again in the work of the novelists who described the oppression, smoke, grime and misery of the new industrial England.

The new nation's commitment was to individualism, to a deep belief that men should be free, expressed in the doctrine of free trade and a deep dislike of any form of government intervention. In 1846 the Corn Laws were repealed, opening the doors to the import of cheap corn to feed the industrial masses. By 1850 not only had the country survived without a revolution of a kind which had happened in every other country in Western Europe in 1848, but the challenge of the Chartist movement, which demanded the vote for the working classes, had been warded off. The country entered a rare period of two decades of consensus during which prices, wages, rents and profits all rose simultaneously. Upward mobility for those below was possible and the textbook for that was Samuel Smiles's celebrated *Self-Help* (1859). Both the old aristocracy and the middle classes could also meet in a new ideal, the gentleman. The new public schools acted as induction courses for those who wished their children to move up the social scale and join the élite. These were years of buoyancy, balance and stability. Bearing in mind the continuing population explosion from nine million in 1801 to twenty-seven million in 1841 that achievement without a violent upheaval was remarkable.

But that population was assailed by change. The railways and the electric telegraph which went along with it ensured the intrusion of such change into the remotest areas of the island. That tide of communication was to be an irreversible one. Change on such a scale and with such speed, far from fuelling people's fascination with the new, accelerated instead an intense preoccupation with the past. That at least embodied certainty for it had already gone and, moreover, it could be rewritten to accord with every political, religious or cultural standpoint. History suffuses the Victorian age as never before, its architecture, its literature and the visual arts. In history too was writ large the debates of the present. Everyone read Thomas Carlyle's great narrative *The French Revolution* (1837) in which a society was swept away, a text providing in the eyes of the new classes a salutary warning as to what might befall the aristocracy. It was a lesson the latter learned, enabling the existing hierarchical structure to live on. Thomas Babington Macaulay in his *History of England from the Accession of James II* (1849–51) dealt with the events of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 arguing that Britain had had its revolution in the 1640s. He provided the newly expanded electorate with an optimistic and progressive view of the past, one now labelled as the Whig interpretation of history, in which the new nation was seen as a lineal descendant of a series of heroic struggles against autocracy of different kinds across the centuries. The Reform Act was its culmination in the present, an act which once again brought Parliament and people into harmony.

Never before was so much known about the past, nor so much about its art. Traumatised by the present, it is hardly surprising that instead of boldly forging a new style the past was recycled, thereby disguising or ennobling what was new as old. Al-

though the civil war period was to be colonised by factions as discrepant as the radicals and Chartists, as well as by exponents of the Oxford Movement, to justify their causes it was to remain essentially an arena for politics and religion and not culture. Cultural thought was hypnotised by one period only, the Middle Ages. Here was a native alternative to the foreign classical past which had been the essence of aristocratic Georgian civilisation. One of the greatest cycles of romance, the Arthurian legend, was indeed set in Britain so that for Victorian readers Arthur and his knights could be all too easily transposed into being the forebears of contemporary monarchy and knighthood. Until the final decades of the nineteenth century, when academic medieval studies blasted away the rose-tinted spectacles, it remained an infinitely vague period offering escape into an age of certainties of an adaptable kind. For Augustus Welby Pugin the Middle Ages were Christian, Catholic and Gothic, for Tennyson in his *Idylls of the King* (1859–85) they presented a mirror of present moral conflicts, while for a painter like Dante Gabriel Rossetti they offered a sensuous dreamworld of love and beauty.

Thanks to Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) the Middle Ages entered the Victorian age as an epoch when democratic liberties had been asserted against the yoke of Norman autocratic rule, making them an acceptable past to the newly enfranchised electorate. At the same time they could be used to justify aristocratic rule as was done during the 1830s and 1840s when they were seized upon as a prop for those who wished to preserve the old order of things. The architect Augustus Welby Pugin's *Contrasts, or a Parallel between the Architecture of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and Similar Buildings of the Present Day* (1836) was a passionate and biased indictment of the present, looking back to an idealised medieval world, devout, Catholic and caring. It was a view taken up both by Tory radicals and by members of the Oxford Movement with their nostalgia for a pre-industrial, pre-Reformation aristocratic society which had been swept away. For a short period during the 1840s the young Benjamin Disraeli led a 'Young England' Tory group who sought just such a turning back of the clock. A revived updated medieval chivalry was cultivated by a group of Tory aristocrats as an answer to the new commercial, industrialised and mechanised nation. This aristocratic cult of the Middle Ages had its most picturesque manifestation in the famous Eglinton Tournament which the earl of the same name staged in 1839, when participants dressed in armour and period dress to re-enact a medieval joust. It was not until 1850 that the Middle Ages began to be taken over by those who adhered to the opposite end of the political spectrum. Carlyle in his *Past and Present* (1843) stood the earlier view of the Middle Ages on its head and far from linking this period with a benign aristocracy connected it instead with democracy and individualism of a kind brought about by 1832. Gradually the never-never land of the Victorian medievalism began to shift ever leftwards, becoming by the close of the century a fiefdom of nascent socialism under the aegis of the designer William Morris in his *News from Nowhere* (1890).

This was the first age of mass culture, for it embraced all those who up until 1832 had been excluded and in that capacity had cultivated a kind of subculture of protest of their own against the establishment. As a consequence the 1830s and 40s witness a drive, aided by the advent of cheap printing, to popularise a common culture, one which could also draw in the skilled working classes. The cultural role of the aristocracy as leaders and patrons had largely gone, had indeed passed to the newly enriched and enfranchised classes. Nonetheless the thrust was always towards maintaining inclusiveness in a country which delighted in being seen as liberal and proud

of its non-revolutionary status. With such a vision in view the aim seems always to have been to achieve some middle way, some form of compromise, reconciling past and present, reform with tradition, belief in the face of doubt, and romance with the need for the preservation of domestic stability.

And this is where the past played such a vital role, for every class of society could be reunited in sharing common past glories. 'Olden Time' became a golden age, one depicted as the birth of a nation and a people, evidenced in highly dramatic historic events which were recreated in pictures on the walls of the Royal Academy and in illustrations in books and magazines. The Tudor and Stuart periods moved centre

*Olde England apotheosised. The heroic past re-created in the interests of a shared heritage. Yuletide in the great hall at Penshurst Place as depicted in John Nash's highly influential* The Mansions of England in the Olden Time *(1839-49).*

stage, being eras of commercial endeavour when the merit of the self-made was rewarded. Places like the Tower of London and Hampton Court were opened to the public, allowing everyone to see the settings in which such heroic deeds had taken place. In this we are witnessing the birth of cultural tourism. Great houses like Knole and Penshurst, homes of heroes and men of letters, also opened their doors to the thousands who, thanks to cheap day railway excursions, could make the pilgrimage. With this gesture of aristocratic generosity the new nation was brought into what was recast as a shared common cultural heritage.

And notwithstanding evangelical philistinism there was a vast extension in cultural activity. The recently enfranchised classes aspired to the higher culture. The result was more culture of a more varied kind than ever before. Vast numbers went to art exhibitions and to the newly established galleries and museums. One million alone visited the Art Treasures Exhibition in Manchester during its six month run in 1857. Bearing in mind its location and the size of the population it is an astounding attendance figure, eclipsing that of any twentieth century art exhibition.

High Victorian (4)

One of the keys to this expansion was the spread of literacy which went hand-in-hand with a revolution in printing techniques and book and magazine production. The English language was perceived more and more to be the source of the nation's identity. In 1850 a Libraries Act empowered town councils to finance public libraries which would lend out books. Between 1840 and 1870 the annual output of books quadrupled. Even as early as 1820 the sixpenny novel was available and during the same decade a whole raft of popular annuals was launched. In 1832 the publishing entrepreneur Charles Knight launched his *Penny Magazine* which was to sustain a circulation of 200,000. As a result this was an age of words greedily devoured as periodicals kept everyone abreast of virtually everything that was happening across the whole field of human knowledge. Scientists remained committed to popularising and communicating their discoveries and, as a consequence, they had a great impact on figures like George Eliot, John Ruskin, Charles Dickens and Tennyson.

*Camelot re-lived. In 1839 a group of Tory aristocrats led by the Earl of Eglinton re-staged a medieval tournament. The portrait records the earl's appearance on the day.*

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

## RUSKIN AND THE VICTORIAN MEDIEVAL REVIVAL

Opinionated and prudish though he was, Ruskin was the greatest critic in the English language. His powers as a rhetorician told the emergent nation *what* to look at and *how* to look at it. In his case the response to the attacks of science and history on traditional Christianity and institutional religion was a Romantic one. Ruskin cast nature as a reflection of divine truth, asking people to look at the earth and the skies as manifestations of God. His *Modern Painters* (1843–60) set the aesthetic agenda for the period. He resurrected Turner's reputation, then undergoing an eclipse, on the grounds that here was the artist who was able more than any other to penetrate the inner forces of the world of nature and hence divine truth. At the same time science was brought on board with a call for the meticulous observation of nature (of a kind verbally achieved by the poets), a call which was to lead directly to the work of the Pre-Raphaelite painters. This programme went hand-in-hand with a commitment not to the cult of the Old Masters but to the art of the day, thereby accelerating the patronage and collecting of contemporary works by the new middle classes. At the same time this was linked with a rejection of classicality: 'All classicality . . . is utterly vain and absurd, if we are to do anything great, good, awful, religious, it must be got out of our own little island, and out of these very times, railroads and all.'

As a consequence there emerged a stream of contemporary genre painting epitomised by the pictures of William Powell Frith.

But for all Ruskin's commitment to the new he never shed his predilection for the Middle Ages. A new nation called for a new style but Ruskin instead led it backwards, to revive Gothic not only in ecclesiastical architecture but also for secular buildings. In *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53) he went further, and laid the ground for adopting continental styles of Gothic which were by 1900 to spawn their progeny in a whole series of public and commercial buildings. By then his mind had moved on to social issues, his earlier views on art having crumbled in the face of the onslaught of Darwinism. In *Unto This Last* (1860) Ruskin pointed out the gulf between Christianity and the prevailing creed of *laissez-faire* economics. Art and morality for him were inextricably linked, so that he found himself living in a society in which the commercial classes had elevated a doctrine which opposed what he believed to be the first principles of religion. With this Ruskin was treading along a road which led to art and socialism.

In the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* he had already made a passionate attack on modern industrialised society which subjected man to the machine. That attack sowed the seeds for William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement later, but it was a backward-looking polemic, preparing the ground for the rejection by the coming generation of what had made Britain lead the world, an enthusiasm for the machine age. That was now to go into reverse. In the same volume Ruskin was to go on to encourage the revival of the Gothic style on social grounds as one of a moral and deeply religious age. The effect was to determine the architectural style of the Victorian era, for up until then there had been a battle of styles.

By 1830 the flood of material whereby to recreate the past had become a torrent. This happened simultaneously with the country moving into the new era, which threw up a whole range of hitherto unknown building types such as gas works, bus-

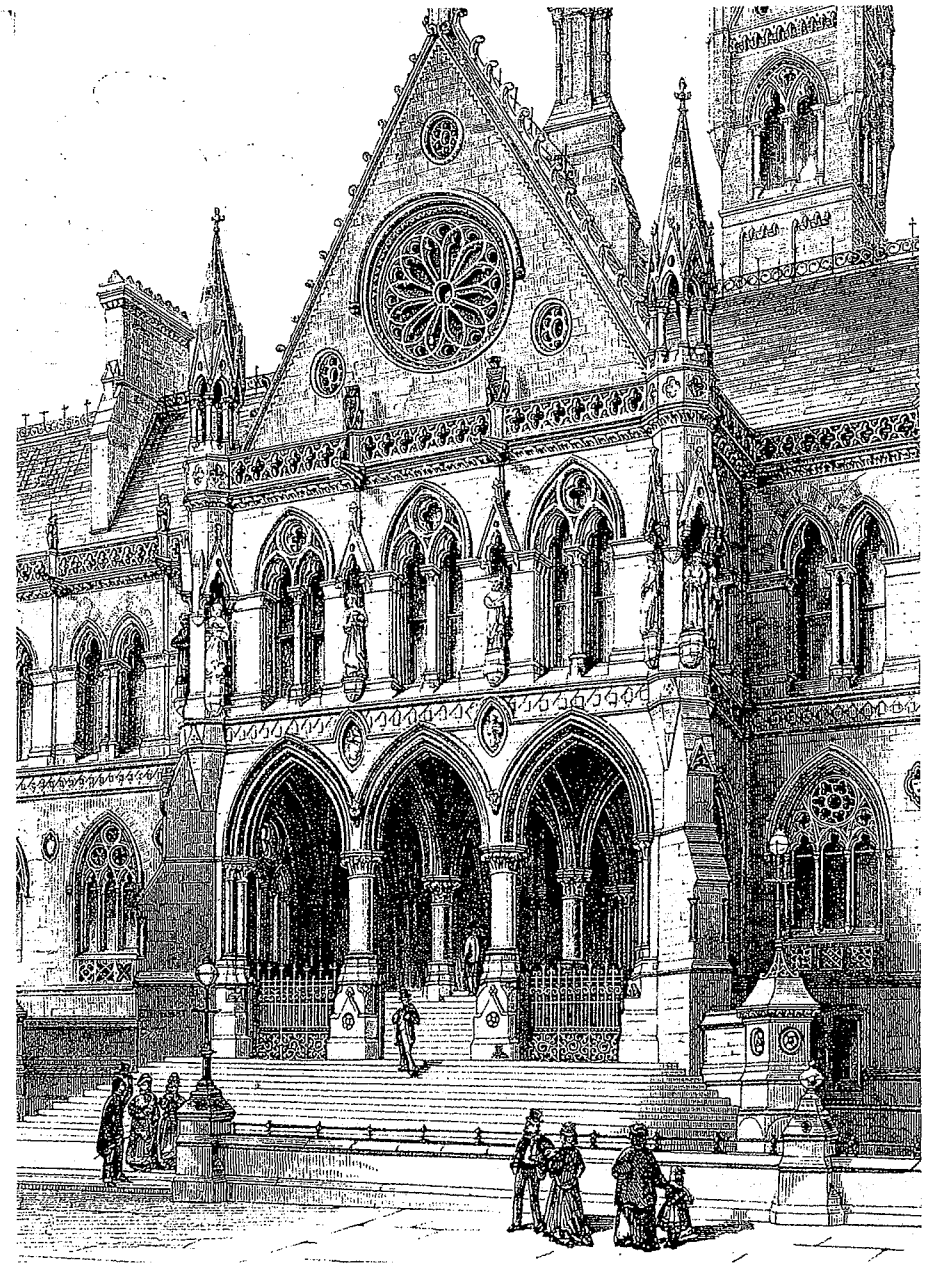
iness offices, insurance companies, banks and factories. In retrospect the only people to respond with buildings to match the change were engineers and not architects. Isambard Brunel's glorious Clifton Suspension Bridge (1836–64) or his Great Western Railway Station at Bristol (1839–40) speak of their times as vividly as does his Paddington Station (1852–54) based on Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace (which will come in the following chapter). Add to them the early iron ships and we have all the elements of a new style fit for an industrialised and mechanised society. But it never happened. Instead such quintessentially modern features as gasworks were transformed into what could look from afar like a Norman castle.

National identity was a strong motive, driving the Gothic style relentlessly forwards. Pugin in his *Contrasts* had cast it as indigenous and one can see the logic of its adoption, a visual parallel to preserving the social hierarchy of an earlier age thereby giving a semblance of continuity and security amidst change. In 1834 the Palace of Westminster burnt down. Here was a chance to build in a style to reflect the advent of the newly enfranchised classes. The 1835 competition, won by Sir Charles Barry, stipulated from the outset that the new Houses of Parliament must be Gothic or Elizabethan, a mandate which was decisive in dressing-up the new in the robes of the past. Barry moreover was to bring in Pugin to work on the interiors of his monumental Gothic pile. The latter was never to let up in his crusade, producing a steady stream of publications proliferating the glories of the Gothic style and giving the architects of the day a deep practical understanding of its construction and ornament. In *An Apology for the Renewal of Christian Architecture in Britain* (1843) Pugin narrowed his taste still further, opting for the fourteenth century Decorated phase of Gothic, a decision which was to result in the building of literally hundreds of churches in the style. Pugin, being Roman Catholic, was naturally viewed with some suspicion by members of the Anglican Oxford Movement, whose churches adopted more often than not what was regarded as an even more insular manifestation of the Gothic, the Perpendicular. Pugin's own most famous church was St. Giles, Staffordshire, which was built at huge cost for the Earl of Shrewsbury.

Although Barry was to go on to build in the classical manner houses like Cliveden, Buckinghamshire (1850–51), the pronouncements of Ruskin tipped the balance the other way. Only a politician of the stature of Lord Palmerston could force George Gilbert Scott to change his winning Gothic design for a new Foreign Office (1856) into the Italian *palazzo* style. Nowhere else in Europe was there such an extraordinary revival, one in which a whole generation of architects suddenly abandoned the centuries-old classical repertory and embarked on rebuilding the Middle Ages. It was not to be devoid of its own idiosyncratic masterpieces. William Butterfield's All Saints, Margaret Street (1849–59), a phantasmagoria of coloured brick, mosaic, marble and polychrome tiles, is one. John Loughborough Pearson's St. Augustine's, Kilburn (1870–97) is another, a building in the French Gothic style with the highest spire in London. Butterfield was to build seventy churches, Pearson seventy-five, and Scott a hundred and forty, excluding his restoration of sixteen cathedrals and three hundred other churches. Scott was to adapt his rejected Gothic Foreign Office scheme for St. Pancras Station (1868–74) and leave his unforgettable imprint on Kensington Gardens in the Albert Memorial (1864–71).

Ruskin 3

At the same time secular Gothic blossomed in the industrial cities which outvied each other in the erection of magnificent town halls, art galleries and museums, and public offices. Alfred Waterhouse's Assize Courts (1859) and Town Hall (1867) for Manchester attired the good burghers of one of the greatest industrial cities of the north in the garb of medieval England revived. This was an architecture which was proudly insular, patriotic and romantic, monuments to the fact that one way to come to terms with the present was to go backwards and relive the past as though no great changes had ever occurred.



*A new medieval city. Alfred Waterhouse's Manchester Assize Courts, 1859, is an essay in Gothic as the national style.*

All the time one senses unprecedented situations demanding new solutions and new initiatives and that the way to deal with these was to reinforce links with the past rather than to sever them. That attitude was ultimately to lead on to the conservation movement later in the century. It was also to affect another great innovatory feature of the Victorian scene, the public park. These were direct responses to the widespread unease felt by urban authorities about the squalor and air of the cities. Green lungs were called for and in 1848 a Public Health Act enabled municipalities to finance what were called 'public walks'. In fact their purpose also became one of social engin-

Ruskin (4)

eering, for in such parks all classes of society could mix and, it was hoped, middle class values would somehow rub off on to the working classes. Typically their prototype again emphasised continuity with the aristocratic past, for it was an adaptation of the eighteenth century private landscape park which was transported and laid out in the inner cities. The formula was that familiar in the work of 'Capability' Brown, a shelter belt of trees around the perimeter with a walk, an irregular Georgian lake and undulating terrain dotted with clumps of trees. On to that formula were superimposed elements familiar from another feature of the Georgian era, the urban pleasure garden: bandstands, pavilions, kiosks and ornamental bridges. Finally there was an overlay of contemporary horticultural taste in the form of conservatories for rare plants, an arboretum, displays of bedding-out plants or a rose garden. Paxton's Sydenham Park, created in 1854 to accommodate the Crystal Palace, offered a menagerie, a panorama, and concerts of classical music, not to mention its famous tableau of dinosaurs.

All over Britain parks began to be laid out in the main by totally anonymous municipal gardeners. They reinforced what was to become a uniquely British passion for the world of nature and horticulture, which was crystallised in the small front and back gardens which were to be one of the most dominant features of urban domestic dwellings. In the prolific writings of the energetic John Claudius Loudon gardening, once the prerogative of the aristocracy and gentry, was adapted for the burgeoning middle classes. *The Suburban Gardener and Villa Companion* (1838) was a major work devoted to small and medium-sized urban gardens. Loudon was also to found the first periodical to deal exclusively with gardening in 1826 and to be a key figure in reviving the formal style.

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

## THE CULT OF CHIVALRY IN THE 19th CENTURY

*Antiquarian handbooks like James Bentham & Brown Willis's *History of Gothic and Saxon architecture in England* (1798), Francis Grose's *Treatise on Armour and Weapons* (1786), Joseph Strutt's *Complete View of the Dress and Habits of the People of England* (1796-97) made distant ages accessible and "real" to the general public.
*Thomas Warton in his *Observations on the Faerie Queen* (1754) suggested that medieval poetry was not inferior to the poetry of antiquity.
*Richard Hurd in his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) claimed the pre-eminence of the Middle Ages over ancient Greece and Rome in terms of heroic vision.
*Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) made available to the general public a large corpus of ballads, sonnets, historical songs and metrical romances.
*George Ellis's *Specimens of Early English Romances in Metre* (1805) brought huge chunks of medieval literature back into general circulation.
***Sir Walter Scott's** *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3) did for Scottish poetry what Percy's had done for the English. Scott's historical poems like *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805, set in the C16), *Marmion* (1807, also set in the C16), *the Lady of the Lake* (1809, set in the C16), *The Lord of the Isles* (1814, set in the C14), *Rokeby* (1813, set in the C17) offered a stylized and simplified version of bygone ages, vividly presented with a host of memorable **Merry England** images (i.e. medieval armour-hung baronial halls, Christmas feastings there with Yule Logs and the Lords of Misrule, morris dancing, maypoles, tilts, tournaments, Richard Coeur de Lion, Robin Hood, Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table etc.). His historical novels, whatever period they cover (not necessarily the Middle Ages), celebrate **virtues associated with feudal, chivalric or old-fashioned societies.** They are full of examples of **bravery, loyalty, hospitality, consideration towards women and inferiors, truth to a given word, respect for rank combined with a warm relationship between different ranks, and a refusal to take advantage of an enemy except in fair fight.** His **heroes** conform to a common type: they are brave, dashing, honourable, proud of their birth, pure-minded, gentle to women and loyal to their masters. He created a type of character which **combined a medieval knight-errant with a modern gentleman.** His novels (notably *Ivanhoe*) suggested desirable standards for gentlemen of all ages. He brought chivalry up to date and popularized a type of character which could reasonably called chivalrous.
* The years of the French wars saw an outbreak of **translations or editions of medieval romances, ballads and chronicles**: 1804 Thomas of Ercledoune's *Sir Tristram,* 1805 Ellis's *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romance*; 1803, 1807, 1808 Southey's translations of three great Spanish romances *Amadis of Gaul, Palmerin of England, Chronicles of the Cid*; 1801 Thomas Johnes's translation of Sainte-Palaye's life of Froissart, 1803-5 his translations of Froissart's *Chronicles*,1807 translations of the chronicles of de Joinville and de la Brocquiere, 1809 of de Monstrelet.
* 1816 two cheap editions of Malory's *Morte Darthur* published; 1817 the de lux quarto edition edited by Southey; 1828 Charles Mill's *History of the Crusades* (fourth edition 1828) and 1825 his *History of Chivalry*, 1830 G.P.R. James's *History of Chivalry and the Crusades.*

* 1800-1820s peak of the craze for building **castles** and collecting **armour** (1789 the first recorded sale of armour at Christie's; by 1817 two rival commercial collections operating in the Gothic Hall in Pall Mall and the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly); 1824 Samuel Rush Meyrick's three-volumed *A Critical Inquiry into Ancient Armour as it existed in Europe but particularly in England from the Norman Conquest to the reign of Charles II* published.

* 1822 **Kenelm Henry Digby's *The Broad Stone of Honour.*** *Rules for the Gentlemen of England* published (enlarged 1823, 1828-29 with the subtitle *The True Sense and Practice of Chivalry,* 1844-48, 1877 5 volumes)

From reading Scott and Southey's Cid
(The truth exact must not be hid),
Favyn and Barbazan's "Ordene",
Lord Berner's Arthur's knightly strain,
The Palmerin of England, too;
What was done there he thought he'd do.
Don Quixote pass'd not through his brain,
But still a Knight he would remain;
Though all the world should recreant prove,
That was the type that he would love ...

In 1825 Digby became a Catholic. He enlarged and partly rewrote his book in order to show that true chivalry and the Catholic church go together and that the Reformation was the cause for the degeneration and decay of chivalry. His 1828-9 version of *The Stone* had 4 parts: *Godefridus* provided a general introduction, *Tancredus* discussed the heroic age of the militant chivalry of the Crusades, *Morus* was an attack on the Reformation, *Orlandus* provided a detailed version of a truly chivalrous character. Digby **brought chivalry up to date, as a code of behaviour suitable for all men** who wished to adopt it. While for Scott chivalry had been a purely medieval phenomenon, for Digby it was **a permanently valid code**, which found a different expression in each age but remained essentially the same all through them. For Digby "knight" and "gentlemen" were interchangeable terms. Digby's virtues of a chivalrous man: **belief and trust in God, generosity, high honour, independence, truthfulness, loyalty to friends and leaders, hardihood and contempt of luxury, courtesy, modesty, humanity and respect for women.** Anyone who had qualities like these was a gentleman, irrespective of birth, though that helped, of course.

"Chivalry is only a name for that general spirit or state of mind which disposes men to heroic and generous actions, and keeps them conversant with all that is beautiful and sublime in the intellectual and moral world. It will be found that, in the absence of conservative principles, this spirit more generally prevails in youth than in the later periods of men's lives, and as the heroic is always the earliest age in the history of nations, so youth, the first period of human life, may be considered as the heroic or chivalrous age of each separate man: and there are few so unhappy as to have grown up without having desired the advantage of being able to enrich their imagination and to soothe hours of sorrow with its romantic recollections ... Every boy and youth is, in his minds and sentiments, a knight, and essentially a son of chivalry. Nature is fine in him ... As long as there has been or shall be young men to grow up to maturity, and until all youthful life shall be dead, and its source withered for ever, so long must there have been, and must there continue to be, the spirit of noble chivalry."

Digby's arguments which proved most influential: 1) character is more important than intellect, 2) cold baths and cold dips help to keep young men sexually pure, 3) aristocrats and working men have a natural affinity between them, while both despise the middle classes, 4) the idea of the "natural gentleman", a peasant, shepherd etc. who has natural dignity but has no desire to rise above his station in life; an equally admirable is the young man of humble birth who rises in society through his ability and is accepted as an equal by gentlemen of birth; the only class of men who are virtually incapable of becoming gentlemen are the prosperous middle-class men, Digby's "churls"; the newly rich middle class men are the supreme enemies of the gentleman, "the savage envious haters of all superiority either of virtue or of rank." 5) he extended the concept of chivalry to classical times. The idea was not new but he helped to set it in general circulation.

* 1839 the **Eglinton Tournament**
* 1840 Queen Victoria marries Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha
  1842 **Bal Costumé** at Buckingham Palace, Albert as Edward III, Victoria as Queen Philippa
* 1842 **Alfred Lord Tennyson** ***The Epic. Morte d'Arthur***

*Why take the style of these heroic times?*
*For nature brings not back the Mastodon,*
*Nor we those times: and why should any man*
*Remodel models?*

***Idylls of the King:***
*Sir Galahad*
1859 *Enid, Vivien, Elaine, Guinevere*
1869 *The Holy Grail, The Coming of Arthur. Pelleas and Ettarre, The Passing of Arthur*
1871 *The Last Tournament*
1872 *Gareth and Lynette*
1885 *Balin and Balan*

King Arthur - "ideal manhood closed in real man", a knight, warrior, king, but also breadwinner, public servant, husband and father; an extraordinary man in ordinary circumstances, a paradigmatic Victorian gentleman.

Tennyson

## *The Lady of Shalott*

*Part 1*

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And thro' the field the road runs by
To many-tower'd Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
Flowing down to Camelot.
Four grey walls, and four grey towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
The Lady of Shalott.

By the margin, willow-veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land
The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
Down to tower'd Camelot:
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers ' 'Tis the fairy
Lady of Shalott.'

*Part 2*

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot:
There the river eddy whirls
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
Goes by to tower'd Camelot;
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two:
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights,
And music, went to Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed.
'I am half sick of shadows,' said
The Lady of Shalott.

*Part 3*

A bow shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield
That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot:
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,
As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode
As he rode down to Camelot.

Tennyson "The Lady of Shalott" (cont.)

From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
'Tirra lirra,' by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
'The curse is come upon me,' cried
The Lady of Shalott.

*Part 4*

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
*The Lady of Shalott.*

And down the river's dim expanse –
Like some bold seër in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance –
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right –
The leaves upon her falling light –
Thro' the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,
Silent into Camelot.
Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
And round the prow they read her name,
*The Lady of Shalott.*

Who is this? and what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,
All the knights at Camelot:
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, 'She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott.'

Walter E. Houghton. The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, (1957) 1985.

Chapter 10

# EARNESTNESS

> Next day [in September 1835] the author of all this hubbub was actually christened. Theobald had proposed to call him George after old Mr. Pontifex, but strange to say, Mr. Pontifex overruled him in favour of the name Ernest. The word "earnest" was just beginning to come into fashion, and he thought the possession of such a name might, like his having been baptised in water from the Jordan, have a permanent effect upon the boy's character, and influence him for good during the more critical periods of his life.
>
> *Butler, The Way of All Flesh* [1]

THE ONE THING, as Macaulay would have put it, which every schoolboy knows about the Victorians is that they were earnest. But what is meant and why they were is less easy to say. A starting point is suggested by the above epigraph from Butler. When a word suddenly comes into fashion to describe a 'good' attitude, it is probably used in protest against some other and well-established attitude which is now discovered to be 'bad'; so that the historical context is more useful than the dictionary for understanding its meaning. If the importance of being earnest was first recognized about 1830—on the threshold of the Victorian era—we can be sure that people had begun to feel a danger or an evil in not being earnest.

The attitude under attack was described by George Eliot in the person of an old gentleman of the pre-Victorian world:

> Old Leisure . . . was a contemplative, rather stout gentleman, of excellent digestion,—of quiet perceptions, undiseased by hypothesis; happy in his inability to know the causes of things, preferring

1. Chap. 18, p. 87.





> the things themselves. . . . He knew nothing of weekday services, and thought none the worse of the Sunday sermon if it allowed him to sleep from the text to the blessing . . . for he had an easy, jolly conscience, broad-backed like himself, and able to carry a great deal of beer or port-wine,—not being made squeamish by doubts and qualms and lofty aspirations. Life was not a task to him, but a sinecure: he fingered the guineas in his pocket, and ate his dinners, and slept the sleep of the irresponsible; for had he not kept up his character by going to church on the Sunday afternoons?

Then follows an illuminating comment:

> Fine old Leisure! Do not be severe upon him, and judge him by our modern standard; he never went to Exeter Hall, or heard a popular preacher, or read "Tracts for the Times" or "Sartor Resartus." [2]

The champions of the modern standard raised their voices at almost the same moment. Exeter Hall, the capitol of Evangelical Puritanism, was opened in 1831 (though the revival had been gaining ground since the French Revolution); the *Tracts for the Times* initiated the Oxford Movement in August of the same year (1833) in which Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* began to appear in *Fraser's Magazine* for November.

Now, patently, old Leisure was not in earnest. He was not, as one would say, taking life seriously. And that means, we see, that intellectually he has no concern whatever with ideas. He goes to church either to sleep or to repeat the great doctrines of the creed without a moment's attention or an ounce of sincere conviction. He would be equally indifferent, we suspect, to political theories or moral philosophies. He is, indeed, *happy* in his inability to know the causes of things. In the second place, he is living as though his life were entirely self-contained. He is quite oblivious to any larger scheme of human destiny, whether natural or supernatural, and to what duties or responsibilities it might entail. His conscience, therefore, is quite easy; and his daily life is devoted to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures.

If old Leisure was not in earnest, those who judged him so severely "by our modern standard" should be the major prophets of earnestness. And with one omission, that is literally the case. "It is not too much to

2. *Adam Bede*, 2, chap. 28, pp. 339–40. In editions where the chapters are consecutively numbered this is chap. 52.

say," remarks a modern scholar, "that, more than any other single factor, the Evangelical Movement in the Church of England transformed the whole character of English society and imparted to the Victorian Age that moral earnestness which was its distinguishing characteristic." [3] This may be true, but when the other factors go unmentioned, we are liable to forget them. To Charles Kingsley, writing in 1851, the "growing moral earnestness" of the age was "in great part owing . . . to the Anglican movement," and he praised its leaders, especially Newman, for having "awakened hundreds, perhaps thousands, of cultivated men and women to ask themselves whether God sent them into the world merely to eat, drink, and be merry." [4] Bagehot and others traced the "gospel of earnestness" to Carlyle and the Carlyleans; [5] while Fitzjames Stephen attributed "the substitution of the word 'earnest' for its predecessor 'serious' " to Thomas Arnold and his Rugby students at the universities.[6] (If George Eliot had said that old Leisure never went to Exeter Hall *or Rugby School*, her list would have been complete; and the additional date would also have been right, for Arnold became headmaster in 1828.) Behind all these prophets lay not only the Puritan tradition or its Wesleyan revival, but quite other forces as well—the sense of crisis, middle-class business, religious doubt.

In these authorities we find the definitions latent in the negatives of George Eliot. To be in earnest *intellectually* is to have or to seek to have genuine beliefs about the most fundamental questions in life, and on no account merely to repeat customary and conventional notions

3. Canon Charles Smyth, "The Evangelical Discipline," in *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*, p. 98.

4. Preface to the fourth ed., *Yeast*, pp. xv–xvi.

5. "Shakespeare," *Works, 1*, 299; "Macaulay," ibid., *2*, 76. Also see the evidence of Morley and Martineau, quoted below, p. 256. With Kingsley's statement about the Tractarians, cf. Froude's about Carlyle (*Carlyle: Life in London, 1*, chap. 11, p. 291): "To everyone who took life seriously, who wished to make an honourable use of it, and could not be content with sitting down and making money, his words were like the morning reveille."

6. Review of "Tom Brown's Schooldays," *Edinburgh Review, 107* (1858), 183. In the 1862 preface to *Alton Locke*, pp. xc–xci, Kingsley attributed much of the "increased earnestness and high-mindedness" at the universities "to the late High-Church movement; much to the influence of Dr. Arnold; much to that of Mr. Maurice; much to the general increase of civilization throughout the country." G. M. Young's association of the word (*Victorian England*, p. 14) with an Elizabethan exuberance that includes scented hair, gleaming jewelry, and resplendent waistcoats seems to me completely mistaken. As I point out below, the ideal of moral earnestness was partly raised *against* dandyism.



insincerely, or to play with ideas or with words as if the intellectual life were a May-game.

> He was one of those who cannot *but* be in earnest; whom Nature herself has appointed to be sincere. While others walk in formulas and hearsays, contented enough to dwell there, this man could not screen himself in formulas; he was alone with his own soul and the reality of things. . . . From of old, a thousand thoughts, in his pilgrimings and wanderings, had been in this man: What am I? What *is* this unfathomable Thing I live in, which men name Universe? What is Life; what is Death? What am I to believe? What am I to do? [7]

To be in earnest *morally* is to recognize that human existence is not a short interval between birth and death in which one fingers as many guineas as possible and eats all the good dinners he can, but a spiritual pilgrimage from here to eternity in which he is called upon to struggle with all his power against the forces of evil, in his own soul and in society. This is the "real" nature of life.

> Life is real! Life is earnest!
> And the grave is not its goal;
> Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
> Was not spoken of the soul.

And that vision entails enormous obligations:

> The predominant characteristic of Dr. Arnold's mind, and that for which above all others we honour him, was his *earnestness*. The idea conveyed by the motto from Schiller, which Carlyle has prefixed to his "Past and Present"—*ernst ist das Leben*—seems to have been, in all its magnificent meaning, perpetually present to his thoughts. Life, in his view of it, was no pilgrimage of pleasure, but a scene of toil, of effort, of appointed work—of grand purposes to be striven for—of vast ends to be achieved—of fearful evils to be uprooted or trampled down—of sacred and mighty principles to be asserted and carried out.[8]

Fundamentally, that conception of life was also held by the Victorian agnostics. Ignore the religious implications, interpret the vast ends as

7. Carlyle, describing Mohammed, *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, Lecture 2, p. 54.

8. W. R. Greg, review of Stanley's *Life*, in *Westminster Review, 42* (1844), 380. Cf. Carlyle, *Past and Present*, Bk. IV, chap. 7, pp. 290–1. The verse above is a stanza from Longfellow's "Psalm of Life."

those of the human race and the grand purposes the building of the Kingdom of Man, and for Arnold one could substitute Mill or George Eliot, Harriet Martineau or John Morley.

Different as they are, both uses of the term have their common denominator. The prophets of earnestness were attacking a casual, easy-going, superficial, or frivolous attitude, whether in intellectual or in moral life; and demanding that men should think and men should live with a high and serious purpose. What Thomas Arnold longed above all things to give his Rugby students was "moral thoughtfulness,—the inquiring love of truth going along with the devoted love of goodness." [9]

How surprised old Leisure would have been to hear a sermon of Arnold's—if he had stayed awake. And how baffled he would have felt to find himself condemned in his old age for a life no one had questioned before. But the change in value judgment is easy to explain. In the 1830's the most sensitive minds became aware that England was faced by a profound crisis. The intellectual world, the Christian Church, and the social order were all in grave peril, to be averted only by the most earnest search for saving ideas and the most earnest life of moral dedication. And yet people were going about their business —their pleasure rather—as if they had nothing to do but to eat, drink, and be comfortable; which seemed to Newman and the Evangelicals, to Carlyle and Thomas Arnold, not to mention Utilitarians and Broad-churchmen and Cambridge Apostles, just about the best possible way to bring on the destruction that was threatening both Church and State.

### 1. *Intellectual Earnestness*

In the background, eighteenth-century rationalism, and in the foreground the passing of Catholic Emancipation, the sharp struggle over the Reform Bill, and the Liberal attack on the Church of England combined, in the early thirties, to shake the security of the English mind. Not only time-honored institutions, but major assumptions in moral and intellectual matters which had been accepted for centuries were suddenly being questioned. Mill proclaimed a state of "intellectual anarchy"; Carlyle talked of an age of doubt in which "Belief, Faith has well-nigh vanished from the world," and the younger generation no longer grows up with any competent theory of the universe, or any definite answers to the questions, "What is man, What

9. Stanley, *Life of Arnold*, chap. 8, p. 116.



are the duties of man?" [10] In the political-economic area problems of the gravest kind—how to alleviate the increasing misery of the industrial and agricultural workers and to resolve the growing conflict between masters and men—were defying solution. To intelligent minds this condition was deeply disturbing, both on personal and on social grounds. They felt it was perilous, for their own stability and that of society, to sail blindfold and haphazard, without rudder or compass or chart.[11] A reconstruction of thought was absolutely imperative. "Clearly enough . . . there *is* want of instruction and light in this mirk midnight of human affairs; such want as probably for eighteen hundred years there has not been." [12] Clearly enough to the prophets but not to anyone else. Society was pursuing its worldly goals of ambition or pleasure in utter indifference to the gravity of the situation. Almost no one was in earnest, at the very moment when earnestness was the first and basic requirement for a re-examination of fundamental ideas. "How have we to regret," moans Carlyle, "not only that men have 'no religion', but that they have next to no reflection; and go about with heads full of mere extraneous noises, with eyes wide-open but visionless,—for most part in the somnambulist state!" [13]

In Mill's correspondence at the time, society is divided into the few "believers" and the many "nonbelievers." In Edinburgh there is only

10. Mill, *The Spirit of the Age*, p. 12; Carlyle, "Characteristics," *Essays*, 3, 29.

11. Cf. Morley, "Carlyle," *Critical Miscellanies, 1*, 137; "One of Mr. Carlyle's chief and just glories is, that for more than forty years he has clearly seen, and kept constantly and conspicuously in his own sight and that of his readers, the profoundly important crisis in the midst of which we are living. The moral and social dissolution in progress about us, and the enormous peril of sailing blindfold and haphazard, without rudder or compass or chart, have always been fully visible to him, and it is no fault of his if they have not become equally plain to his contemporaries. The policy of drifting has had no countenance from him."

12. Carlyle, in Froude, *Carlyle: First Forty Years*, 2, chap. 9, p. 202. The date is 1831.

13. *Past and Present*, Bk. III, chap. 7, p. 174. We begin to see an important link between this chapter and Chaps. 6 and 7 above. In such critical times an earnest attachment to a saving idea or a program of reform can easily lead to dogmatism or/and rigidity, first among the prophets and then presently spreading through the upper and middle classes as the sense of gravity is recognized. See in particular Chap. 7, sec. 1, "Sectarian Fervor," especially the opening paragraph (pp. 162–3), where Thomas Arnold is discussed. The writer referred to there in note 7 goes on to say (ibid.) that Arnold's vehemence of language "was one of the natural effects of his being so much in earnest." Also see the Mill quotation in note 6.

"an *odour* of literature and intellect"; in Glasgow, Liverpool, and the like "little else than the *stench* of trade." London is better, bad though it is, because "there are here, in infinitesimal *proportion* indeed, but in absolute *number* more than a very few, actual *believers;* some, whom I . . . could call *true* believers." In another letter Mill speaks of having hoped "that *despair* was the necessary consequence of having no Belief, in a nation at least, though not always in an individual." But apparently that is true only of the nobler spirits. The mass of the well-to-do classes in France, for example, seem entirely able to "make themselves comfortable without either God or Devil either literal or constructive, and are well satisfied to eat their pudding in quiet." Clearly, a "believer" either has some real convictions or is so disturbed by not having any that he is earnestly seeking for light. He is a "sincere, truth-loving person." The "non-believer" (like George Eliot's Leisure, "not being made squeamish by doubts") is either ignoring all basic questions or is not seriously—that is, not sincerely—concerned about the ideas he professes or discusses.[14]

It is the latter, the man of education who is equipped to think and yet refuses to do so, whom Carlyle and Mill find most irritating. They strike at various manifestations of this fatal indifference to truth. There is the repetition of old ideas, especially in religion, which one no longer believes. This is the "beginning of all immorality, or rather it is the impossibility henceforth of any morality whatsoever," since insincerity is corrupting to the whole character. "I do not wonder," says Carlyle, "that the earnest man denounces this, brands it, prosecutes it with inextinguishable aversion." [15] Still more does he denounce the man who views the intellectual life as a kind of sport in which he shows off his skill in debate or in wit, and defends his lack of earnestness as broad-minded toleration: such a man, for example, as Francis Jeffrey, who lived in the old world of Leisure and continued the skeptical tradition of eighteenth-century thought. Jeffrey found Carlyle too "dreadfully in earnest" because "he could not sit down quietly and enjoy himself 'without a theory of the universe in which he could believe' "; naturally enough, since he himself, never having had any strong beliefs, "thought zeal for creeds and anxiety about positive opinions more and more ludicrous. In fact, he regarded discussions which aimed at more than exercising the faculties and exposing intoler-

14. *Letters, 1,* 38, 73–4, 88.
15. *Heroes,* Lecture 4, p. 122.



ance very tiresome and foolish." [16] But to Carlyle this was intellectual dilettantism, and utterly base and reprehensible at a moment when intellectual earnestness was so badly needed. "Dilettantism, hypothesis, speculation, a kind of amateur-search for Truth, toying and coquetting with Truth: this is the sorest sin. The root of all other imaginable sins. It consists in the heart and soul of the man never having been *open* to Truth;—'living in a vain show.' " [17] This was fiddling while England burned. "The time for levity, insincerity, and idle babble and play-acting, in all kinds, is gone by; it is a serious, grave time. Old long-vexed questions, not yet solved in logical words or parliamentary laws, are fast solving themselves in facts, somewhat unblessed to behold!" [18]

To play with words was just as shameful as to play with ideas. The style of wit, paradox, and epigram, so characteristic of eighteenth-century taste and so natural for a dandy, became intolerable. Apropos of an article by Bulwer Lytton in the *Edinburgh Review* (whose editor from 1802 to 1829 was Francis Jeffrey), Mill wrote to the author:

> I first thought it might possibly be Macaulay's. . . . It has much of the same brilliancy, but not his affected and antithetical style, and above all a perception of truth, which he never seems to have,

16. Froude, *Carlyle: Life in London, 1,* chap. 11, p. 295, and *Carlyle: First Forty Years, 2,* chap. 17, p. 394. Cf. Lydgate's remark about Dorothea Brooke (*Middlemarch, 1,* chap. 10, pp. 124–5): "She is a good creature—that fine girl—but a little too earnest. . . . It is troublesome to talk to such women. They are always wanting reasons."

17. *Heroes,* Lecture 2, p. 73. Both forms of intellectual dilettantism described in this paragraph are brought together in a letter of Clough's for August 17, 1845, *Prose Remains,* p. 99: "I believe there is a vicious habit of poking into intellectual questions merely for the fun of it, or the vanity of it, only not quite so common as people make out. At any rate, taking it easy and acquiescing in anything is much more common."

18. *Past and Present,* Bk. III, chap. 13, p. 209. In his "Historic Survey of German Poetry" (1831), *Essays,* 2, 368, he had said that even "honest Scepticism, honest Atheism, is better than the withered lifeless Dilettantism and amateur Eclecticism, which merely toys with all opinions." Newman had the same complaint to make in a sermon on "Christian Zeal" preached in 1834, *Parochial and Plain Sermons,* 2, 383–4: "Positive misbelief is a less odious state of mind than the temper of those who are indifferent to religion, who say that one opinion is as good as the other, and contemn or ridicule those who are in earnest." And he went on to notice the present tendency "to call Zeal by the name of intolerance, and to account intolerance the chief of sins; that is, any earnestness for one opinion above another concerning God's nature, will, and dealings with man."

> and a genuine love of the True and the Beautiful. . . . I could not help saying to myself, who would look for these qualities in the *Edinburgh Review*? How the readers of that review must be puzzled and bewildered by a writer who actually takes decided views, who is positively in earnest. . . . Among us [at the *Westminster Review*], you would at least find both writers and readers who are in earnest . . . readers by whom what you write would be taken *au sérieux* and not as a mere play of intellect and fancy.[19]

In Carlyle, more "dreadfully in earnest" than Mill (Mill was simply "in earnest"), this attitude reaches an irritable scorn for men like Lamb and Hazlitt:

> How few people speak for Truth's sake, even in its humblest modes! I return from Enfield, where I have seen Lamb, &c. &c. Not one of that class will tell you a straightforward story or even a credible one about any matter under the sun. All must be packed up into epigrammatic contrasts, startling exaggerations, claptraps that will get a plaudit from the galleries! . . . Wearisome, inexpressibly wearisome to me is that sort of clatter; it is not walking (to the end of time you would never advance, for *these persons indeed have no* WHITHER); it is not bounding and frisking in graceful, natural joy; it is dancing—a St. Vitus's dance. Heigh ho! Charles Lamb I sincerely believe to be in some considerable degree insane. . . . His speech wriggles hither and thither with an incessant painful fluctuation, ***not an opinion in it, or a fact, or a phrase that you can thank him for.***[20]

19. *Letters, 1,* 102–4. The date is 1836. Cf. Newman, in Wilfrid Ward, *The Life of John Henry, Cardinal Newman* (2 vols. London and New York, 1912), 2, chap. 30, p. 335: "A man should be in earnest, by which I mean he should write not for the sake of writing, but to bring out his thoughts." According to Mill (*Autobiography,* chap. 4, p. 84) it was because the Benthamites wrote with an "air of strong conviction . . . when scarcely any one else seemed to have an equally strong faith in as definite a creed" that they filled "a greater place in the public mind" of the eighteen-twenties and thirties than they later held after "other equally earnest schools of thought" had arisen in England. Cf. F. D. Maurice's comment on the Utilitarians (*Eustace Conway, 1,* 92–3): "The tone of their conversation, after the indifference and want of all public spirit to which one has been used at the university, was quite inspiring."

20. Froude, *Carlyle: First Forty Years,* 2, chap. 9, p. 209. The italics are mine. Cf. *Past and Present,* Bk. III, chap. 3, p. 151, on the fashionable wit. Cf. Clough, "Look you, my simple friend, 'tis one of those," *Poems,* p. 25.



It is because the times are so urgent and so much in need of helpful opinion or fact from persons who have a "whither" (a serious object in mind in what they do or say), that all wit and humor are identified with "levity, insincerity, and idle babble." Plainly the solemn distaste of the Victorians for any joke that touched on things considered grave or sacred is not to be traced simply to the moral proprieties. A friend of Tennyson's recalled a conversation in which "some one made a remark about the fruit being liable to disagree with himself or others, to which another . . . replied with a jocular remark about 'the disturbed districts,' alluding of course to some disorders apprehended or existing in the centres of industry." Tennyson cut in sharply, with a voice and accent like Dr. Arnold's, "I can't joke about so grave a question." [21] Carlyle cannot joke about *any* question. When Lamb made the mistake of telling him there were just two things he regretted in England's history, "First, that Guy Fawkes' plot did not take effect (there would have been so glorious an *explosion*); second, that the Royalists did not hang Milton (then we might have laughed at them)," one shudders to think of the pained expression which appeared on Carlyle's face. His comment is enough: *"Armer Teufel"* [22]

Finally, the new frame of mind was innately hostile to any literature not seriously—even solemnly—concerned with fundamental questions. Not simply the fashionable novels and light verse which the Minerva Press supplied in abundance, but also the popular work of both Byron and Scott were denounced as "literature of amusement." To Carlyle, Scott was the perfect example of a skeptical dilettante writing simply to entertain "indolent languid men":

> The great Mystery of Existence was not great to him; did not drive him into rocky solitudes to wrestle with it for an answer, to be answered or to perish. . . . One sees not that he believed in anything; nay, he did not even disbelieve; but quietly acquiesced, and made himself at home in a world of conventionalities; the false, the semi-false and the true were alike true in this, that they were there, and had power in their hands more or less. It was well to feel so; and yet not well! We find it written, "Woe to them that

21. Tennyson, *Memoir of Tennyson, 1,* 205. Cf. Ruskin, "The Mystery of Life and Its Arts" (1868), *Sesame and Lilies,* sec. 135, in *Works, 18,* 181: "In time of national distress, of religious trial, of crisis for every interest and hope of humanity —none of us will cease jesting."

22. In Froude (note 20, above), p. 210.

> are at ease in Zion"; but surely it is a double woe to them that are at ease in Babel.

Small wonder Carlyle criticizes the Waverley novels for containing nothing "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for edification, for building up or elevating, in any shape! The sick heart will find no healing here, the darkly-struggling heart no guidance." Clearly, Scott belonged to the easy-going world of old Leisure before the crisis of the thirties. But now "in so extremely serious a Universe as this of ours," in an age "destitute of faith but terrified of scepticism," a speaker must search for "some kind of gospel-tidings." He must be in earnest.[23]

### 2. *Moral Earnestness and the Religious Crisis*

Underlying the sectarian differences between Arnold, Newman, and the Evangelicals, there is a fundamental community of aim which springs from their common indebtedness to John Wesley and the religious movement he initiated in the eighteenth century.[24] All of them attack what they call "nominal" Christianity and the slack or feeble conception of moral life that went with it. William Wilberforce called his important book, often considered the Bible of Evangelicalism, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes, Contrasted with Real Christianity*. On the prevailing system, a man was considered, and considered himself, a Christian if he professed the main doctrines of the creed and was not guilty of any serious vice. "The title implies no more than a sort of formal, general assent to Christianity in the gross, and a degree of morality in practice, but little, if at all, superior to that for which we look in a good Deist, Mussulman, or Hindoo."[25]

23. "Sir Walter Scott" (1838), *Essays*, *4*, 36, 49, 55, 76.

24. See the quotations below from Gladstone in note 26, Clough, pp. 232–3, and Stanley in note 30. There is no satisfactory term to apply to this movement. To call it Evangelical is to introduce a confusion between the movement as a whole and the Evangelical party in the English Church. Puritan is better, but the spirit of piety, reflected in the common designation of "the religion of the heart," marks a clear differentiation from Calvinism, let alone the fact that to call Newman, or even Arnold, a Puritan is rather incongruous. Either the Wesleyan Movement or the Christian Revival would, I think, be better terms (and are sometimes employed in this book), but Evangelical and Puritan have so long been used, and by the Victorians themselves, that I have often adopted them. For a good account of the subject which emphasizes its impact on political and secular life, see Halévy, *England in 1815*, pp. 387–459. There is a useful chapter in Annan's *Leslie Stephen*, pp. 110–29.

25. Chap. 4, sec. 1, p. 109. The first edition came out in 1797.



From Wesley and Whitefield in 1740 to Newman and Arnold in 1830, this was the central evil and not actual disbelief. When Arnold, for example, expressed his fear of an approaching struggle between good and evil "in which there may well happen the greatest trial to the faith of good men that can be imagined," he was not thinking of the spirit of rationalism, and his sermons are not concerned with defending Christian faith. The enemy is the spirit of the world, silently blotting out any true awareness of the Christian destiny of man and the life of moral earnestness it demanded.[26]

That was exemplified, for Wilberforce, in both the upper and middle classes. The aristocracy was not licentious really, or irreligious; it was simply preoccupied with an endless round of amusements—cards, theaters, banquets, hunting. "Christianity," he said, "calls her professors to a state of diligent watchfulness and active services. But the persons of whom we are now speaking, forgetting alike the duties they owe to themselves and to their fellow-creatures, often act as though their condition were meant to be a state of uniform indulgence, and vacant, unprofitable sloth." Complementing this "sober sensuality" was the "sober avarice" and the "sober ambition" of the business and professional world. The successful man was congratulating himself on not being like one who is "a spendthrift or a mere man of pleasure," when all the while he, too, lacked "the true principle of action," and was allowing "personal advancement or the acquisition of wealth" to become objects of supreme desire and predominant pursuit.[27] Even the

26. Stanley, *Life*, chap. 2, p. 42. Cf. Wilberforce's "Introduction," p. iii: "The main object which the writer has in view is, not to convince the sceptic, or to answer the arguments of persons who avowedly oppose the fundamental doctrines of our religion; but to point out the scanty and erroneous system of the bulk of those who belong to the class of orthodox Christians, and to contrast their defective scheme with a representation of what the author apprehends to be real Christianity." Like Arnold, Wilberforce found that "real Christianity" in the Gospels. So did the Tractarians: see R. W. Church, *The Oxford Movement. Twelve Years, 1833–1845* (London and New York, 1891), p. 167. Cf. a passage in Gladstone's essay "The Evangelical Movement," *Gleanings of Past Years, 1843–79* (7 vols. London, 1879), *7*, 222–5: "It was common, in my early days," he says (that is, 1810–30), "for morality to be taught without direct derivation from, or reference to, the Person of Christ"; and he goes on to define the religious movement I am describing as "a great revival of what may roughly be called Gospel-preaching in the English Church, extending far beyond the limits of school or party." This is the basic link, he suggests, which connects the Evangelicals with the Tractarians—and both, I would add, with Arnold and his Liberal disciples.

27. *Practical View*, chap. 4, sec. 2, pp. 128–35. Cf. Hannah More, *Practical Piety; or, the Influence of the Religion of the Heart on the Conduct of the Life*

clergy and the intellectuals, in this worldly environment, were living in "practical" or "virtual" atheism—that is, in "a state of insensibility to things as they really are in God's sight." In his sermon contrasting the spirit of the world with "the spirit which is of God," Arnold explained the charge: "Many of us are very seldom in earnest. By this I mean, that the highest part of our minds, and that which judges of the highest things, is generally slumbering or but half awake. We may go through a very busy day, and yet not be, in this true sense, in earnest at all; our best faculties may, as it were, be all the while sleeping or playing." [28] That is to say, our religious awareness and our moral will are both in abeyance, and our conscience is almost as easy as old Leisure's.

This lamentable state had another and related origin. The worldly spirit was silently obliterating whatever it found alien in the Gospels and retaining only what it could assimilate, so that real Christianity was being transformed into something far less demanding—into what Newman called "The Religion of the Day." In his important sermon on that subject, he exposed the moral slackness of its disciples:

> They argue that it is our duty to solace ourselves here (in moderation, of course) with the goods of this life,—that we have only to be thankful while we use them,—that we need not alarm ourselves,—that God is a merciful God,—that amendment is quite sufficient to atone for our offences,—that though we have been irregular in our youth, yet that is a thing gone by,—that we forget it, and therefore God forgets it . . . that we should not be over serious,—that we should have large views on the subject of human nature,—and that we should love all men.

So defined, the teaching of the day, though partially Christian, is really built upon worldly principle. It pretends to be the Gospel, but it has dropped out one whole side of the Gospel. It includes "no true fear of God, no fervent zeal for His honour, no deep hatred of sin." The conscience, which is "a stern, gloomy principle" telling us "of guilt and of prospective punishment" has been superseded by Shaftesbury's moral

(1811), chap. 18, "Insensibility to Eternal Things," pp. 247–9, 255–8. This was perhaps the most popular textbook of Evangelical ethics.

28. *Christian Life, Its Course, Its Hindrances, and Its Helps*, No. 17, pp. 180–1; and cf. *Sermons, 1*, No. 1, pp. 1–12, and Stanley's *Life*, p. 53, letter of November 20, 1819. The charge of insensibility is frequently made by Newman and the Evangelicals: see Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons, 1*, Nos. 5, 8, 26, pp. 57, 111, 338, 349; Wilberforce, chap. 2, sec. 2, p. 45; Hannah More, *Practical Piety*, chap. 18.



sense ("the love of the beautiful") or Bentham's principle of expedience or utility. Accordingly, as its terrors disappear, "then disappear also, in the creed of the day, those fearful images of Divine wrath with which the Scriptures abound." In short, religion has become "pleasant and easy." It has "no seriousness,—and therefore is neither hot nor cold, but (in Scripture language) *lukewarm*." [29]

Because Newman and the Oxford Movement have been so exclusively identified with Anglo-Catholic doctrine, their central concern with the moral life has been obscured. And because Arnold attacked them both so violently, his fundamental agreement with them has been overlooked. What R. W. Church wrote of the sermons of Newman is equally true (as he himself noted) of Arnold's, and of those of Evangelical preachers like Charles Simeon at Cambridge: "A passionate and sustained earnestness after a high moral rule, seriously realised in conduct, is the dominant character of these sermons. They showed the strong reaction against slackness of fibre in the religious life; . . . the blunted and impaired sense of truth, which reigned with little check in the recognised fashions of professing Christianity; . . . the strange blindness to the real sternness, nay the austerity, of the New Testament." [30]

To be an earnest Christian demanded a tremendous effort to shape the character in the image of Christ. One had to hate the world, the flesh, and the devil, to keep all of God's commandments exactly, and to live "as in the sight of the world to come, as if . . . the ties of this life" were already broken.[31] For such a "frame and temper of mind" the controlling influence is the conscience; for when we set "God in

29. *Parochial Sermons, 1*, No. 24, pp. 312–19; cf. No. 8, pp. 99–100.

30. Church, *The Oxford Movement*, p. 19. Cf. A. P. Stanley, "The Oxford School," *Edinburgh Review, 153* (1881), 310: "What was it again that drew admiring students . . . round Dr. Newman at Oxford? . . . Chiefly the grasp of ethical precepts, the appeals to conscience, the sincere conviction of the value of purity and generosity, in which many of his hearers recognised the reverberations, in a more subtle, though not in a more commanding form, of those stirring discourses which had thrilled them from the pulpit of Rugby." The attribution of this article to Stanley is made by R. E. Prothero and G. G. Bradley, *The Life and Correspondence of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley* (2 vols. New York, 1894), 2, 580. On the ethical impact of the Oxford Movement, note the quotation from Kingsley, above, p. 220, and see in general Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Reading*, chaps. 2 and 3, "The Tractarians" and "The World of Miss Charlotte Yonge."

31. Newman, *Parochial Sermons, 1*, No. 1, pp. 2–3. Cf. Hannah More, *Practical Piety*, chap. 3, p. 54.

Christ before us," as Arnold put it, "then the conscience is awake; then we are in earnest." [82] And this "Puritan" or "Nonconformist" conscience, at crucial war with the world, is highly sensitive and "tender"; so much so that Victorians often speak of sin in accents of utter detestation, sometimes even of horror. There was something in Arnold's "very tone and outward aspect, before which anything low, or false, or cruel, instinctively quailed and cowered. . . . That ashy paleness and that awful frown were almost always the expression . . . of deep, ineffable scorn and indignation at the sight of vice and sin." [83] The reference to "anything low, or false, or cruel" reflects the wide interpretation of sin by the tender conscience; in fact, the smallest faults became serious vices when they were seen as the opening wedge through which the worldly spirit might slide into the soul. "In all that relates to God and to himself, the Christian knows of no small faults. He considers all allowed and wilful sins, whatever be their magnitude, as an offence against his Maker. Nothing that offends *him* can be insignificant. Nothing that contributes to fasten on ourselves a wrong habit can be trifling." That is the Evangelical voice of Hannah More,[84] but Arnold and Newman speak from the same conviction. In the "Epilogue" to *Dipsychus,* Arthur Clough, one of Arnold's most devoted disciples at Rugby, argues with his uncle, who clearly belongs to the pre-Victorian world of George Eliot's Leisure. The poem, says Clough, represents "the conflict between the tender conscience and the world," at which his uncle bursts out: "Consciences are often much too tender in your generation—schoolboys' consciences, too! As my old friend the Canon says of the Westminster students, 'They're all so pious.' It's all Arnold's doing; he spoilt the public schools." Clough protests that Westminster had its Cowper (the Evangelical poet) and that his uncle "must not refer it to Arnold, at all at all. Anything that Arnold did in this direction—"

> "Why, my dear boy, how often have I not heard from you, how he used to attack offences, not as offences—the right view—against discipline, but as sin, heinous guilt, I don't know what beside!" . . .

82. *Christian Life,* p. 187. Cf. a remark in Stanley's *Life,* p. 551, from a letter of April 1, 1840: "It is a real pleasure to be brought into communication with any man who is in earnest, and who really looks to God's will as his standard of right and wrong."

83. Stanley, *Life,* chap. 3, p. 158. For the same attitude in Kingsley, see above, p. 173.

84. *Practical Piety,* chap. 11, p. 142.



> "If he did err in this way, sir, which I hardly think, I ascribe it to the spirit of the time. The real cause of the evil you complain of, which to a certain extent I admit, was, I take it, the religious movement of the last century, beginning with Wesleyanism, and culminating at last in Puseyism. This over-excitation of the religious sense, resulting in this irrational, almost animal irritability of conscience, was, in many ways, as foreign to Arnold a: it is proper to—"
>
> "Well, well, my dear nephew, if you like to make a theory of it, pray write it out for yourself nicely in full; but your poor old uncle does not like theories, and is moreover sadly sleepy." [85]

Plainly Clough's defense amounts to little more than a denial of Arnold's sole responsibility by claiming that the Puritan revival found parallel expression in the Evangelicals and the Oxford Movement.

When the standard of Christian virtue was placed so high and the range and gravity of sin was so great, the Christian life became in literal fact a life of constant struggle—both to resist temptation and to master the desires of the ego. The Victorian conception of warfare as the main business of man was as deeply rooted in the religious as the political and economic order.[86] "Unless you are struggling, unless you are fighting with yourselves, you are no followers of those who 'through many tribulations entered into the kingdom of God.' A fight is the very token of a Christian. He is a soldier of Christ; high or low, he is this and nothing else." [87] His first objective was to beat down the terrible temptations of worldly and fleshly existence. In that struggle no one was more famous than Arnold of Rugby. Even slight acquaintances were "struck by his absolute wrestling with evil, so that like St. Paul he seemed to be battling with the wicked one." [88]

35. *Poems,* pp. 294–6. On the Rugby conscience, see also Leslie Stephen, "Jowett's Life," *Studies of a Biographer,* 2, 127–8.

36. For the latter see above, Chap. 9, secs. 2–5.

37. Newman, *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* (1849), No. 6, reprinted in his *Sermons and Discourses* (*1839–57*), ed. C. F. Harrold, 2, 162.

38. Stanley, *Life,* chap. 2, p. 29. Cf. the quotation from his last sermon, ibid., chap. 10, p. 650: "The real point which concerns us all, is not whether our sin be of one kind or of another, more or less venial, or more or less mischievous in a man's judgment, and to our worldly interests; but whether we struggle against all sin because it is sin; whether we have or have not placed ourselves consciously under the banner of our Lord Jesus Christ, trusting in Him, cleaving to Him, feeding on Him by faith daily, and so resolved, and continually renewing our resolution, to be His faithful soldiers and servants to our lives' end."

Whether successful or not, this is a battle which often appears in Victorian fiction and poetry—dramatized most characteristically perhaps by Thomas Hughes in *Tom Brown at Oxford.*[39]

The complementary form of moral struggle in the conscience was constructive. If the enemy was to be resisted and the soul saved, the armor must be forged beforehand. By an elaborate practice of self-discipline, one had to lay the foundation of good habits and acquire the power of self-control. The day began with a period of self-examination, since only when one knew his "besetting infirmities" and had them constantly in mind could he be ready to deny them.[40] Then followed the actual practice, which was so important one was urged even to make up opportunities of self-sacrifice:

> Rise up then in the morning with the purpose that (please God) the day shall not pass without its self-denial, with a self-denial in innocent pleasures and tastes, if none occurs to mortify sin. Let your very rising from your bed be a self-denial; let your meals be self-denials. Determine to yield to others in things indifferent, to go out of your way in small matters, to inconvenience yourself (so that no direct duty suffers by it), rather than you should not meet with your daily discipline. . . . A man says to himself, "How am I to know I am in earnest?" I would suggest to him, Make some sacrifice, do some distasteful thing, which you are not actually obliged to do (so that it be lawful).

This will not only prove the earnestness of your faith, it will "strengthen your general power of self-mastery" and give you "such an habitual command of yourself, as will be a defence ready prepared when the season of temptation comes."[41] But such a victory over the self required a bitter struggle. "It is a great battle to deny ourselves," wrote Arthur Hallam in 1832, "to abdicate the throne of Self, to surrender

39. See below, p. 354.

40. See Newman, *Parochial Sermons, 1,* Nos. 5 and 18, pp. 67, 232; and Hannah More, "Self-Examination," in *Practical Piety.* There is less asceticism in Arnold.

41. Newman, *Parochial Sermons, 1,* 69–70, from No. 5, "Self-Denial the Test of Religious Earnestness." Cf. More, chap. 6, "Cultivation of a Devotional Spirit." When Ethel May in Charlotte Yonge's *Daisy Chain* (Pt. I, chap. 26, p. 253) says that one should take "the right times for refusing oneself some pleasant thing," Meta Rivers asks, "Would not that be only making up something for oneself?" To which Ethel answers: "No, the Church orders it. . . . I mean one can do little secret things—not read storybooks on those days, or keep some tiresome sort of work for them. It is very trumpery, but it keeps the remembrance, and it is not so much as if one did not heed."



up, not a thought, not an act, not a habit even, but the principle of all thoughts, actions & habits, the principle of self pleasing, which lies fast & deep in the dearest region of our souls. Yet this must be done, or we have not the life of Christ."[42]

It is only within this context that we can understand the severity of parental discipline. So long as the child was too young to practice self-denial, it was plainly the bounden duty of the parent to check the first signs of self-will. Even in circles which had no reverence for John Wesley, his doctrine was approved, "that the wills of the children should be broken,"[43]—mainly by constant use of the rod (spare the rod and spoil the child was a Victorian platitude), but also by more refined modes of torture, like those practiced on young Augustus Hare:

> I had a favourite cat called Selma, which I adored, and which followed me about at Lime wherever I went. Aunt Esther saw this, and at once insisted that the cat must be given up to her. I wept over it in agonies of grief: but Aunt Esther insisted. My mother was relentless in saying that I must be taught to give up my own way and pleasure to others; and forced to give it up if I would not do so willingly.
>
> Hitherto I had never been allowed anything but roast-mutton and rice-pudding for dinner. Now all was changed. The most delicious puddings were talked of—*dilated* on—until I became, not greedy, but exceedingly curious about them. At length *le grand moment* arrived. They were put on the table before me, and then, just as I was going to eat some of them, they were snatched away, and I was told to get up and carry them off to some poor person in the village.

The rationale, written in his mother's journal, was that "the will is the thing that needs being brought into subjection."[44] But we must remember that adults treated themselves in the same way. Sir James Stephen, a leader of the Clapham sect and father of Leslie and Fitzjames, "was inexorably suspicious of pleasure. He drank little; ate the

42. From Letter 13, dated April 28, 1832, in a collection of unpublished letters from Hallam to Emily Tennyson in the Wellesley College Library.

43. E. E. Kellett, *Religion and Life in the Early Victorian Age,* p. 68. Cf. Butler, *The Way of All Flesh,* chap. 5, p. 25; chap. 20, pp. 99–100.

44. Augustus J. C. Hare, *The Years with Mother,* ed. M. Barnes (London, 1952), pp. 27, 43; for other examples, see pp. 26–7, 41–4. This is an abridgment of the first three volumes of Hare's *The Story of My Life* (London, 1896).

lightest of meals; and asking himself once why it was that he continued to take snuff and receiving no satisfactory reply, ceremoniously emptied the box out of the window. 'He once smoked a cigar,' wrote Leslie, 'and found it so delicious that he never smoked again.'" [45] Even on their honeymoon, Sir Guy Morville and his bride Amy, good Anglicans like their creator, Charlotte Yonge, made a "resolution against mere pleasure-hunting"; and when Amy barely escaped a fatal accident on a Swiss mountain they had climbed to enjoy the view, both took it as a solemn warning of God not to break their resolution again.[46]

Only by realizing what a desperate struggle the moral life entailed, both to resist temptation and to train the will, can we do justice to the Victorian taboos, so often and so easily ridiculed: the prohibition of dancing, cards, and the theater; of reading various works of literature, including the comedies of Shakespeare; and of treating anything remotely associated with what was sacred or what was evil with the comic spirit—that is to say, with levity.[47] For when the standard of interior character was so high and the best approximation to it so precariously poised, anything that was not patently innocent or didactic might at the least distract the mind from God and fasten the heart more securely to the world, or at the worst corrupt the soul irredeemably. "Flee from the very shadow of evil," wrote Newman; "you cannot be too careful; better be a little too strict than a little too easy,—it is the safer side." [48] We may say that they played it too safe; or, to use one of the favorite texts of the time, that they made the gate too strait and the way too narrow. But when the spirit of the world was, in fact, laying waste the very life and meaning of the Christian ethic, extreme measures were naturally, if not wisely, taken. There is a remark in one of Newman's sermons

45. Annan, *Leslie Stephen*, p. 14. Cf. the quotation from a tract against smoking, cited by Arnold, "Emerson," *Discourses in America* (London, 1885), pp. 200–1: "Smoking . . . is liked because it gives agreeable sensations. Now it is a positive objection to a thing that it gives agreeable sensations. An earnest man will expressly avoid what gives agreeable sensations."

46. *The Heir of Redclyffe*, chap. 30, p. 380. Aunt Esther Hare, who was the chief instrument of Augustus' discipline, was as hard on herself as she was on him: see *The Years with Mother*, p. 43.

47. See below, pp. 357–8, and also Thomas Arnold's significant attack on comedy in *Christian Life*, No. 17, pp. 183–7. The topic is treated by Maurice J. Quinlan, *Victorian Prelude*, chap. 10, "Censors and Expurgators." This book is a useful study of the moral impact of the Wesleyan movement.

48. *Parochial Sermons*, 1, No. 3, p. 38. Cf. Hannah More, *Practical Piety*, chap. 6, pp. 83–4.



which might well have been addressed to Lytton Strachey and his twentieth-century disciples: "Keep in mind all along that we are Christians and accountable beings, who have fixed principles of right and wrong, *by which all things must be tried*, and have religious habits to be matured within them, *towards which all things are to be made subservient*." [49]

Finally, the inner life of Christian discipline is the clue to another Victorian phenomenon which now seems so strange, the endless concern with self-improvement. Modern psychology has led us to focus on what we are, not what we should be; and the collapse of the religious tradition with its fixed principles of right and wrong has left us looking rather for a basis than a ceiling for our lives.[50] At the most charitable we find Ruskin's advice to the young dated: "Remember that every day of your early life is ordaining irrevocably, for good or evil, the custom and practice of your soul. . . . Now, therefore, see that no day passes in which you do not make yourself a somewhat better creature: and in order to do that, find out, first, what you are now. Do not think vaguely about it; take pen and paper, and write down as accurate a description of yourself as you can, with the date to it." [51] That might have stood on the title page of *The Daisy Chain*, for Charlotte's Yonge's novel is a study of success and failure in the improvement of character. Even the children themselves are constantly pointing out their faults to one another and exhorting one another to conquer them—*now*, so that later they may have strength to resist the Goliath of evil. Their father, of course, has set the pattern. As Dr. May finishes reading the story of David to Tom and Blanche, he asks:

> "Can you tell me how we may be like the shepherd-boy, David?"
> "There aren't giants now," said Tom.
> "Wrong is a giant," said his little sister.
> "Right, my white May-flower, and what then?"
> "We are to fight," said Tom.
> "Yes, and mind, the giant with all his armour may be some great thing we have to do; but what did David begin with when he was younger?"
> "The lion and the bear."

49. *Parochial Sermons*, 2, 376, from No. 30, "The Danger of Accomplishments." The italics are mine.

50. V. S. Pritchett, *The Living Novel* (London, 1946), p. 80.

51. Preface to *Sesame and Lilies* (1871 ed.), sec. 8, in *Works*, 18, 37–8.

> "Aye, and minding his sheep. Perhaps little things, now you are little children, may be like the lion and the bear—so kill them off—get rid of them—cure yourself of whining or dawdling, or whatever it be, and mind your sheep well," said he, smiling sweetly in answer to the children's earnest looks as they caught his meaning, "and if you do, you will not find it near so hard to deal with your great giant struggle when it comes."

The heroine Ethel, with the aid of Margaret's counsel, recognizes her lion and bear to be untidiness and impatience, and begins to wrestle with these "greatest hindrances to her doing anything good and great. Though she was obliged to set to work so many principles and reflections to induce herself to wipe a pen or to sit straight on her chair, that it was like winding up a steam-engine to thread a needle, yet the work *was* being done—she was struggling with her faults, humbled by them, watching them, and overcoming them." [52]

That this concern with self-improvement was not limited to Anglicans or Evangelicals calls attention to a significant fact: the creed of earnestness pushed its way beyond church walls into the community at large. Its ideals penetrated into the homes—and consciences—of half-believers and outright agnostics. This was partly because men retained the ethical fervor of the childhood belief they had discarded.[53] But it was not merely a matter of ingrained habit. In the seventies Mallock noticed that in spite of the growing denial of all religious dogmas, *"and in the places where it has done its work most thoroughly,* a mass of moral earnestness seems to survive untouched." [54] Intellectual radicalism produced a frightened clinging to conservative morals, especially at a time when agnosticism was under attack for its supposed tendency to destroy the moral life. On a famous occasion when George Eliot mentioned the three words which had so long been "inspiring trumpet-calls of men,—the words *God, Immortality, Duty—*" she "pronounced, with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the *first,* how unbelievable was the *second,* and yet how peremptory and absolute the *third.*" [55] It is partly because

52. Pt. I, chap. 10, pp. 87, 91. Cf. Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship,* pp. 67–9.

53. J. A. Symond's father is a good example: Brown, *Life of Symonds,* p. 14. Other illustrations are given by Annan, *Leslie Stephen,* pp. 198, 318.

54. *Is Life Worth Living?* p. 188. The italics are mine.

55. Reported by Frederick Myers, "George Eliot," *Essays: Modern* (London, 1885), pp. 268–9. Cf. David Masson, "The Poems of Arthur Hugh Clough," *Macmillan's Magazine, 6* (1862), 322: "Many of the most daring sceptics in matters



the first two words have lost their meaning that the third is given such passionate affirmation, in her novels and in contemporary society. Many people alive today can remember the atmosphere of the later Victorian home: "We were a Victorian household, and, in spite of an almost militant agnosticism, attached without the smallest tinge of scepticism or hypocrisy to the ideals of the time: duty, work, abnegation, a stern repression of what was called self-indulgence, a horror and a terror of lapsing from the current code." [56]

### 3. *Moral Earnestness and the Social Crisis*

The early Victorians lived under the shadow of revolution. The combination on the one hand of radical-democratic propaganda and acute distress among both agricultural and industrial workers, and on the other of Tory repression or Liberal inaction produced a condition which was steadily threatening between 1815 and 1848, and periodically violent. It became a commonplace to think of the nation as divided against itself between the Rich and the Poor, and to dread the possibility of an English explosion as terrible as that in France.[57] To Carlyle and Thomas Arnold, as to most of their contemporaries, the basic cause of the situation was not economic but moral; and, therefore, though political reform might do something to ease the tension, the fundamental cure lay in a reform of character, the character of the landed and moneyed aristocracy. Any remedy of "the fearful state in which we are living," wrote Arnold, would require "the greatest triumph over selfishness" which man had ever achieved; and Carlyle, finding no real cure in "a Morrison's Pill, Act of Parliament, or remedial measure," called for "a radical universal alteration" of our whole "regimen and way of life." [58]

For at present the landed aristocracy was not only pursuing a selfish life of pleasure, shooting pigeons in the hunting season and going gracefully idle in Mayfair during the London season (the world of the dandies in Regency society and in the novels of Bulwer Lytton and Disraeli, with its gospel of Dilettantism); it was also

of theology have been strict and even fanatical in their conformity to the established ethics"; and he goes on to cite Clough as an example: "Even when he doubted in theology most, he was firm and orthodox in his creed as to what is moral, noble and manly."

56. Olivia [Dorothy Strachey Bussy], *Olivia* (London, 1949), p. 13.

57. Cf. above, Chap. 3, sec. 1.

58. Stanley, *Life,* pp. 514–15, from a letter of September 25, 1839; Carlyle, *Past and Present,* Bk. I, chap. 4, pp. 23–4.

charging high rents and maintaining the Corn Laws, at once indifferent to the suffering of the poor and to the lessons of France during 1789–94.[59] In the middle class the gospel of Mammonism, which included a pious belief in laissez-faire, had only one moral command: to pay the worker the exact sum covenanted for. That done, the rich mill owner was free to pursue his career of "making money, fame, or some other figure in the world," and the worker was free to carry on the single-handed struggle to keep himself alive without benefit of government aid—which, as Carlyle dryly remarked, might be freedom "to die by want of food." [60] The world had thus become a fancy bazaar to the aristocracy and a warehouse to the middle class, but to neither was it "a mystic temple and hall of doom," with resulting obligations and duties.[61]

As that implies, the ultimate source of the selfishness corrupting society and spelling revolution seemed to Carlyle exactly the same thing the Puritan leaders called nominal Christianity:

> To speak in the ancient dialect, we "have forgotten God." . . . We have quietly closed our eyes to the eternal Substance of things, and opened them only to the Shows and Shams of things. We quietly believe this Universe to be intrinsically a great unintelligible PERHAPS; extrinsically, clear enough, it is a great, most extensive Cattlefold and Workhouse, with most extensive Kitchen-ranges, Dining-tables,—whereat he is wise who can find a place! All the Truth of this Universe is uncertain; only the profit and loss of it, the pudding and praise of it, are and remain very visible to the practical man. . . .
>
> Man has lost the *soul* out of him. . . . This is verily the plague-spot; centre of the universal Social Gangrene, threatening all modern things with frightful death.[62]

In one word, man has no moral earnestness. He must realize once more the real nature of human existence, poised between two eternities. Then he will rediscover his soul and his conscience; then

59. See *Past and Present*, Bk. III, chap. 8, "Unworking Aristocracy," and Bk. IV, chap. 6, "The Landed." Carlyle's remark (Bk. III, chap. 3, p. 150) on "the impotent, insolent Donothingism in Practice and Saynothingism in Speech" brings together the lack of both moral and intellectual earnestness in the aristocracy.

60. Ibid., Bk. III, chap. 2, "Gospel of Mammonism": see especially pp. 145–7. The last remark is from Bk. III, chap. 13, p. 219.

61. "Characteristics," *Essays*, 3, 31.

62. *Past and Present*, Bk. III, chap. 1, pp. 136–7.



he will recognize that he has "Duties . . . that are alone great, and go up to Heaven and down to Hell," duties to serve God and society in his rank and calling.[63] And so, the end of Dilettantism, the end of Mammonism, and the salvation of the country!

Arnold too, called for the introduction of Christian principles into men's social and civil relations,[64] but Arnold, as we know, was deeply concerned with a religious revival, as were Newman and the Evangelicals, for quite a different reason: because the worldly spirit was threatening not the state of society but the state of Christendom. The appeal for moral earnestness by the Puritan leaders was religious and not social in motivation. Their central aim was to make men good Christians—that is, real instead of nominal Christians—that their immortal souls might be saved. But they were aware that in doing so, they would be making men good citizens—that society might be saved. In this way the social need for moral earnestness gave fresh impetus to the Christian revival and increased its influence.

This, indeed, had been true years earlier at the time of the French Revolution. Up to that date any strong religious fervor had been largely limited to the lower classes, to whom the Wesleyan movement had appealed almost exclusively. But now, when social revolution seemed to be the fruit of atheism and immorality, piety became fashionable. Gladstone remembered hearing "persons of great weight and authority" attribute "a reviving seriousness" in religion among both the clergy and the upper classes of lay society "to a reaction against the horrors and impieties of the first French Revolution in its later stages." [65] In this context Wilberforce was able to add a new and forceful argument for Evangelicalism. Writing in 1797, he could point out that if nominal Christianity were to continue, it must lead to the very catastrophe witnessed "in a neighboring country," where "several of the same causes . . . have at length produced their full effect"; whereas real Christianity would "root out our natural selfishness," which is the "mortal distemper of political communities":

> In whatever class or order of society Christianity prevails, she sets herself to rectify the particular faults, or, if we would speak more distinctly, to counteract the particular mode of selfishness to which that class is liable. Affluence she teaches to be liberal

63. Ibid., Bk. I, chap. 4, p. 26; chap. 6, p. 34; Bk. II, chap. 6, pp. 66–7, from which the quotation is taken; Bk. III, chap. 15, pp. 228–30.

64. The references are given below in note 67.

65. "The Evangelical Movement" (above, note 26), p. 219.

> and beneficent; authority to bear its faculties with meekness, and to consider the various cares and obligations belonging to its elevated station as being conditions on which that station is conferred. . . . Those in the humbler walks of life . . . she instructs, in their turn, to be diligent, humble, patient: reminding them that their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties, and contentedly to bear its inconveniences. . . . Such are the blessed effects of Christianity on the temporal well-being of political communities.[66]

This also was Arnold's point of view when, with anxious memories of Arthur Young's travels in France in 1789 and 1790, he recognized that the Christian revival he desired on religious grounds would also "expose the wickedness of that spirit which maintains the game laws, and in agriculture and trade seems to think that there is no such sin as covetousness," and thus would introduce a saving moral earnestness into men's civil relations.[67] Newman was less concerned with the social crisis, but he was well aware that the times were dangerous and that "the especial political evils of the day" had their root "in that principle, which St. Paul calls the root of all evil, the love of money"—for which the countermovement of Christianity was the only corrective.[68] It is thus clear that the critical character of the age and in particular the fear of revolution, first in the 1790's and again from 1819 to 1848, provided an environment which gave the Christian revival some of its motivation and much of its appeal. When this indirect result is taken into account, along with its direct effect (illustrated in Carlyle), the social crisis is seen to have contributed as much, I think, as the religious crisis—perhaps even more—to the formation of moral earnestness.

### 4. *Work*

Except for "God," the most popular word in the Victorian vocabulary must have been "work." It was, of course, the means by which some of the central ambitions of a commercial society could be

66. *Practical View of Christianity*, chap. 6, pp. 296, 308–10. See in general: Quinlan, *Victorian Prelude*, chap. 3, "Reform or Ruin," and V. Kiernan, "Evangelicalism and the French Revolution," *Past and Present, 1* (1952), 44–56.

67. Stanley, *Life*, chap. 6, pp. 242–3; cf. pp. 249–50, 251–2, letters of November 1830 and December 24, 1830.

68. *Parochial Sermons, 2*, Nos. 28, 31, pp. 356–7, 392.



realized: money, respectability, and success. But it also became an end in itself, a virtue in its own right. All of Dr. Arnold's children were brought up on the precept, "'*Work*.' Not, work at this or that —but, Work."[69] Other children heard a biblical injunction that was endlessly repeated: "Work while it is called Today, for the night cometh when no man can work." By the same token idleness was inexcusable. Ruskin's comment on Millais' painting "Mariana in the Moated Grange" is straight to the point: "If the painter had painted Mariana at work in an unmoated grange, instead of idle in a moated one, it had been more to the purpose—whether of art or life."[70] Even among the landed gentry idleness required an explanation: "Sir Michael had gone to his dressing-room to prepare for dinner after a day of lazy enjoyment; that is perfectly legitimate for an invalid."[71]

This did not mean that one was never to relax. Allowance was made for recreation, in the literal sense that ties it to the pattern of work. Thomas Arnold, on vacation in the Italian lakes, must resist the temptation "to bring one's family and live here . . . abandoning the line of usefulness and activity" which he has in England; he must remember that recreation is intended only "to strengthen us for work to come."[72] Or, in a variation of the same idea, Ruskin thinks playful rest entirely justified "during the reaction after hard labour, and quickened by satisfaction in the accomplished duty or perfected result."[73]

The glorification of work as a supreme virtue, with the accompanying scorn of idleness, was the commonest theme of the prophets of earnestness; for the full meaning of a life of work was identical in outward action (apart from the internal discipline of the character) with a life of moral earnestness. W. R. Greg, writing on what Carlyle had done for his age, concluded:

> He has infused into it something of his own uncompromising earnestness. He has preached up the duty and the dignity of WORK, with an eloquence which has often made the idle shake

69. Thomas Arnold the Younger, *Passages in a Wandering Life* (London, 1900), p. vi.

70. "Notes on Millais," *Works, 14*, 496.

71. M. E. Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (2 vols. Leipzig, 1862), *2*, chap. 9, p. 164.

72. Stanley, *Life*, appendix D, sec. 5, pp. 700–1.

73. *Stones of Venice, 3*, chap. 3, sec. 75, in *Works, 11*, 193.

> off their idleness, and the frivolous feel ashamed of their frivolity. He has proclaimed, in tones that have stirred many hearts, that in toil, however humble, if honest and hearty, lie our true worth and felicity here below. "Blessed is the man who has found his work," he somewhere says: "let him ask no other blessedness." [74]

These various meanings of the term and their connection with earnestness, first learned by Carlyle in his Puritan home, are brought out more explicitly by Newman in a sermon that starts from the question, "Why were we sent into the world?" Was it merely "to live for ourselves, to live for the lust of the moment . . . without any aim beyond this visible scene? . . . What a contrast is all this to the end of life, as it is set before us in our most holy Faith!" For there we learn that "we are not here, that we may go to bed at night, and get up in the morning, toil for our bread, eat and drink, laugh and joke, sin when we have a mind, and reform when we are tired of sinning, rear a family and die." We are not here, that is, to live like George Eliot's Leisure. On the contrary, "every one who breathes, high and low, educated and ignorant, young and old, man and woman, has a mission, has a work." [75] The word "mission" is important. A Christian was not only to work (as opposed to being idle), but to work in the right spirit—that is, with the sense of having a purpose or mission for which he had special gifts and to which he was dedicated: the service of God in his secular calling. And by doing so, he also served himself because he developed his god-given talent, to the end that he might not be charged at the day of reckoning with the unlit lamp or the ungirt loin. The students at Rugby saw in Arnold a man whose work "was founded on a deep sense of its duty [to God] and its value [to the individual]." From his precept and example they learned "an humble, profound, and most religious consciousness that work is the appointed calling of man on earth, the end for which his various faculties were given, the element in which his nature is ordained to develope itself, and in which his progressive advance towards heaven is to lie." It was that, and not

74. W. R. Greg, "Kingsley and Carlyle," *Literary and Social Judgments*, *1*, 171. The quotation is from *Past and Present*, Bk. III, chap. 11, p. 197.

75. Newman, *Sermons and Discourses*, ed. C. F. Harrold, 2, 153, 155. This sermon, called "God's Will the End of Life," is an excellent statement of the Christian-Victorian theory of work, and is pointedly directed against the worldly, unearnest life of the time. It first appeared in *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations*, 1849.



any mere injunction to work, which the Rugby sons of the gentry found so impressive in the master's teaching. "Every pupil was made to feel that there was *a work for him to do*—that his happiness as well as his duty lay in doing that work well. Hence an indescribable zest was communicated to a young man's feeling about life; a strange joy came over him on discovering that he had the means of being useful." [76] For the upper classes in the thirties, as for old Leisure, this was a novel idea. They had always imagined that "life was not a task . . . but a sinecure." [77]

Such a misapprehension leads directly to the wide gate and the primrose path. For "leisure is the occasion of all evil" and Satan finds work—of a kind—for idle hands to do. Idleness is thus not only a sin because it is an abrogation of God's will, and especially reprehensible in the case of Dives, with his sensual enjoyment of the luxuries of wealth; it is also a dangerous opportunity to take "the first step in the downward path which leads to hell." Work, therefore, has the further value of being a safeguard against temptation—and all the better if it is constant. The man who keeps busy every hour, doing all the duties of his social and family life, "is saved a multitude of sins which have not time to get hold upon him." [78]

Finally, if everyone had his particular work, he also had one in common with all other Christians, a spiritual mission or calling to serve God in His eternal warfare with Satan. To that end he was to set before the world a high example of the Christian spirit: by his conversation, by a scrupulous fulfilment of all his duties, and by helping to carry forward the great battle against social evil and suffering. "Do we not know," asked Arnold in one of his sermons in *Christian Life*, " . . . that there is an infinite voice in the infinite sins and sufferings of millions which proclaims that the contest is raging around us; that every idle moment is treason; that now it

76. Bonamy Price in Stanley, *Life*, chap. 2, pp. 37–8.

77. Cf. James Martineau, "Dr. Arnold," a review of Stanley's *Life, Essays, Reviews, and Addresses* (4 vols. London, 1890), *1*, 63–4: "His general theory of his office may be stated thus:—the peculiar character of the *English gentleman* being assumed as an historical datum, the aim of education should be to penetrate and pervade this with a spirit of Christian self-regulation. He was aware how great was the revolution implied in the accomplishment of this end; that moral heroism must take the place of feudal independence; devout allegiance, of personal self-will; respect for faithful work, of the ambition for careless idleness; manly simplicity and earnestness, of gentlemanly *poco-curanteism* . . ."

78. The quotations are from Newman, *Parochial Sermons*, *8*, No. 11, p. 166.

is the time for unceasing efforts; and that not till the victory is gained may Christ's soldiers throw aside their arms, and resign themselves to enjoyment and to rest?" [79] For the upper classes that broad mission centered, in Evangelical minds as well as in Arnold's, on the object for which Wilberforce, among others, had founded the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor. An enormous amount of private charity complemented the long series of Parliamentary measures (prison reform, sanitation, the slave trade, factory acts, mine acts, laws for the prevention of cruelty to children and animals, etc.), and in both fields, a primary motivation was the service of God.[80]

But not the only motivation. Philanthropy and legislation might also serve the cause of social order and lessen the threat of revolution. Indeed, the Puritan doctrine of work would never have been stressed so much, I think, had the prophets not felt that aristocratic idleness had to be exorcized if society were to be saved. The fate of the Idle Aristocracy and therefore of the country fills Carlyle with despair. "A thinking eye discerns ghastly images of ruin, too ghastly for words; a handwriting as of MENE, MENE." And so, "be counselled," he tells them, "ascertain if no work exist for thee on God's Earth; if thou find no commanded-duty there but that of going gracefully idle? Ask, inquire earnestly, with a half-frantic earnestness." They will soon learn that the very possession of the land obliges them "to furnish guidance and governance to England" and to manage their estates, improving the soil and caring for the men who are now "ploughing, ditching, day-drudging; bare of back, empty of stomach, nigh desperate of heart." [81] When Arnold made such a tremendous effort to convince the sons of the gentry that each had "his work and mission in the world" which it was his bounden duty to do, he was thinking almost as much about the needs of England as those of their immortal souls. One of his Rugby sermons leaves no doubt of it. "I know," he says, "and you know also . . . that neglect and selfish carelessness on the one side [that of the Rich], have led to suspicion and bitter hatred on the other [that of the Poor]," so that both classes have come to think of one another as natural enemies. Consequently,

79. *Christian Life*, No. 6, pp. 60–1.

80. For a convenient summary, see Canon Smyth's essay "The Evangelical Discipline," in *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*, pp. 97–104.

81. *Past and Present*, Bk. III, chap. 7, p. 173; chap. 8, pp. 176, 178; Bk. IV, chap. 6, p. 284.



men of wealth and rank [like ourselves] must learn to "instruct, relieve, and improve . . . those who, from poverty and ignorance, have great need that relief and instruction should be given them." Otherwise, "God will soon come and smite the earth with a curse." [82]

The writer, too, in so critical a time had his work to do. On no account was he to live a life of aesthetic pleasure; for the sense of crisis created a literary duty and an artistic conscience. One recalls the attraction Tennyson felt for the Palace of Art and the effort he made, under Apostolic influence, to bring his poetry to bear on the problems of the age. But with uneven success, as the ambiguity of "The Palace of Art" suggests. "Alas for me!" he said to Hallam, "I have more of the Beautiful than the Good!" To which Hallam replied, "Remember to your comfort that God has given you to see the difference. Many a poet has gone on blindly in his artist pride." [83] A generation later Ruskin confessed he felt "tormented between the longing for rest and for lovely life, and the sense of the terrific call of human crime for resistance and of human misery for help"; and he presently found that he could not paint or read or look at minerals, or do anything else he liked, "because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where I know it not, which no imagination can interpret too bitterly." Therefore, he would do what he could (in his later political and economic work) "to abate this misery." [84] As with moral earnestness in general, the gospel of work, rooted in Puritanism, was preached with special vigor in a period so desperately in need of social action and intellectual guidance.

In the middle class, where the Puritan tradition was strong, the religious theory of work was a commonplace, but all of its main features were the natural requirements or the natural aims of an industrial society and would have been adopted, in a secular form, regardless of any Christian influence. The arraignment of idleness, the value of work for the development of the individual, and the sense

82. *Sermons*, 2, No. 31, pp. 331–2.

83. *Memoir of Tennyson*, 1, 81. Cf. Carlyle's criticism of Scott, above, p. 227, Kingsley, *Alton Locke*, chap. 1, pp. 2–3, and his criticism of Arnold's *The Strayed Reveller*, in *Fraser's Magazine*, 39 (1849), 578–9 (attributed to him by Thorp, *Kingsley*, p. 192): "What has he taught us? . . . When the world is heaving and moaning in the agonies, either of a death-struggle, or a new birth-hour . . . is he . . . content to sit and fiddle while Rome is burning?" He goes on to complain that Arnold is "taking no active part in God's work."

84. Letter written in 1863, *Works*, 36, 450; *Fors Clavigera*, 1, Letter 1 (1871), in *Works*, 27, 13.

of a mission both to serve society in one's particular calling and to further the larger destinies of the human race, were almost as much the ideals of business as of Protestantism.

In commercial society, needless to say, idleness is a vice. It is the unforgivable—economic—sin. A writer in *Fraser's* for January 1851, celebrating the vast increase of manufacturing, commerce, and wealth, found indications "full of promise for the future, that idleness, whether in the higher or lower classes, will not be much longer tolerated—that it will expose the rich man to contempt, and the poor man to punishment." [85] The contempt for the "unworking" aristocrat which the bourgeois invariably feels is evident in *Past and Present:*

> Is there a man who pretends to live luxuriously housed up; screened from all work . . . he himself to sit serene, amid down-bolsters and appliances, and have all his work and battling done by other men? And such man calls himself a *noble*-man? . . . Here *he* sits; professes, not in sorrow but in pride, that he and his have done no work, time out of mind. It is the law of the land, and is thought to be the law of the Universe, that he, alone of recorded men, shall have no task laid on him, except that of eating his cooked victuals, and not flinging himself out of window.[86]

Plainly, this *noble*-man is nothing but a parasite, living on the work of others; and Carlyle is expressing the outraged sense of injustice—and perhaps the envious scorn—which the workers of the world feel for those whom they support. By middle-class mores all men must work, or at any rate they must have worked in the past (before retirement) for what they possess.

85. Vol. 43, 14. In like manner the view of recreation noted above (p. 243) is as much a business as a religious view. With the Arnold and Ruskin quotations given there (illustrating the principle laid down by Wilberforce, *Practical View of Christianity*, chap. 7, sec. 1, p. 346), cf. Macaulay's comment on Sunday in his speech on the Ten Hours Bill (Trevelyan, *Life of Lord Macaulay*, 2, 157 n.): "While industry is suspended, while the plow lies in the furrow, while the Exchange is silent, while no smoke ascends from the factory, a process is going on quite as important to the wealth of nations as any process which is performed on more busy days. Man, the machine of machines, the machine compared with which all the contrivances of the Watts and the Arkwrights are worthless, is repairing and winding up, so that he returns to his labors on the Monday with clearer intellect, with livelier spirits, with renewed corporal vigor."

86. Bk. III, chap. 8, p. 179. Cf. Bk. III, chap. 12, p. 202, and Bk. IV, chap. 6, p. 283.



Work is also—in another parallel with religious teaching—the means by which one develops his natural talents and by which his advance toward human perfection can be measured. The struggle to transform natural resources into the finished product, to outdistance one's competitors in the market, or to manage a great concern, demands, and therefore inevitably develops, certain moral and intellectual faculties which come to be thought of as the whole of virtue. "Whatsoever of morality and of intelligence; what of patience, perseverance, faithfulness, of method, insight, ingenuity, energy; in a word, whatsoever of Strength the man had in him will lie written in the Work he does. To work: why, it is to try himself against Nature, and her everlasting unerring Laws; these will tell a true verdict as to the man." And Carlyle goes on at once to speak of cotton spinning, and presently of John Bull and his "railways, fleets and cities." In another passage, where the same industrial qualities are mentioned, Carlyle adds, in words one cannot imagine on the lips of Arnold or Newman, "All these, *all virtues*, in wrestling with the dim brute Powers of Fact, in ordering of thy fellows in such wrestle, *there and elsewhere not at all*, thou wilt continually learn." [87]

One virtue in particular, especially dear to Puritanism, was developed by this discipline—self-denial. When his father died, John Thornton in *North and South* had to leave school and support the family by working in a draper's shop for fifteen shillings a week. "My mother managed so that I put by three out of these fifteen shillings regularly. This made the beginning; this taught me self-denial." Now, when he is a wealthy mill owner, he credits his success to "the habits of life which taught me to despise indulgences not thoroughly earned" and explains the failure of others to climb the ladder as "the natural punishment of dishonestly-enjoyed pleasure, at some former period of their lives. I do not look on self-indulgent, sensual people as worthy of my hatred; I simply look upon them with contempt for their poorness of character." [88] This has precisely the moral flavor of evangelical Christianity, yet it is derived from economic necessity and the will to succeed. Was it an Evangelical who wrote, "To abstain from the enjoyment which is in our power, or to seek distant rather than immediate results, are among the most painful [and necessary] exertions of the human will"? The distant results might have been the enjoyment of heavenly salvation, but in

87. Ibid., Bk. III, chap. 5, pp. 158, 160; chap. 11, p. 198. The italics are mine.
88. Mrs. Gaskell, chap. 10, pp. 97–8.

point of fact they were commercial success and the author was the political economist, Nassau Senior.[89]

Furthermore, surprising as it may seem, the industrial conception of work included the idea of a mission. Manufacturers and workers, it was often said, were engaged in a vast crusade to subdue nature for the benefit of man and thus to strengthen England and further the progress of civilization. No doubt this worthy purpose in its pure form never existed outside the minds of writers like Macaulay, Carlyle, or Kingsley. But many a businessman with one eye on making a fortune sincerely imagined that he was also serving a great cause. Mrs. Gaskell, who had studied Manchester at first hand and knew many of its businessmen, created a mill owner who boasted of the personal power he had attained but also called manufacturers like himself "the great pioneers of civilisation." And it is her experience which is reflected by Margaret Hale's discovery of something large and grand in the interests of the Milton capitalists. "There was much to admire in their forgetfulness of themselves and the present, in their anticipated triumphs over all inanimate matter at some future time, which none of them should live to see." [90]

Moreover the idea of progress, though often limited to material advance, had a wider meaning, as we know, and one which gave all men, not just industrial leaders and workers, a high sense of mission: to take part in the great march and struggle of mankind up from barbarism to civilization. Under the running title of "Life 'a Soldier's Battle'" (Arnold's phrase, we remember, for the *Christian* life), Samuel Smiles, the popular author of *Self-Help*, described the "constant succession of noble workers"—cultivators of the soil, inventors, manufacturers, artisans, poets, philosophers and politicians, all working together to carry society forward to still higher stages.[91] *Past and Present* closes with the inspiring image: "Ploughers, Spinners, Builders; Prophets, Poets, Kings; Brindleys and Goethes, Odins and Arkwrights; all martyrs, and noble men, and gods are of one grand

89. *Political Economy* (first ed. 1836; London, 1872), p. 59.

90. *North and South*, chap. 15, p. 145; chap. 20, pp. 193–4. This suggests that Plugson of Undershot with his noble social purpose—in addition to his ignoble desire to be a millionaire—is not a figment of Carlyle's imagination: see *Past and Present*, Bk. III, chap. 12, p. 208.

91. *Self-Help*, chap. 1, p. 25. This book was a popular summation of industrial ethics for the working class, preaching in simple phrases with illustrative anecdotes the same Puritan-business virtues which Carlyle extolled in Carlylese. There is a useful essay on Smiles by Asa Briggs in *Victorian People*.



Host; immeasurable; marching ever forward since the beginnings of the World. The enormous, all-conquering, flame-crowned Host, noble every soldier in it; sacred, and alone noble." [92] That exalted conception of history gave life a meaning and a significance for the Victorians which we can only envy, and endowed them, for all their anxieties, with a hopeful and buoyant energy that we have never known. "Be inspired," cries Gladstone, brought up under the twin influences of Evangelicalism and business, "with the belief that life is a great and noble calling; not a mean and grovelling thing that we are to shuffle through as we can, but an elevated and lofty destiny." [93]

The Victorian gospel of work, derived from both its religious and economic life and preached the more earnestly because the idea of crisis and the idea of progress both called for dedicated action, found further support from an unexpected quarter. As the difficulties of belief increased, the essence of religion for Christians—and for agnostics the "meaning of life"—came more and more to lie in strenuous labor for the good of society. That was not only a rational alternative to fruitless speculation but also a practical means of exorcizing the mood of ennui and despair which so often accompanied the loss of faith. For these reasons, a religion of work, with or without a supernatural context, came to be, in fact, the actual faith of many Victorians: it could resolve both intellectual perplexity and psychological depression.

Here again Carlyle is the major prophet, for he himself, with the help of Goethe, had discovered the therapy of work in his own struggle with doubt. In *Sartor Resartus*, the desperate mood of Teufelsdröckh is a reflection of his own experience in the "black years" after 1818. But he recognized that the same distress had afflicted Goethe and Byron, and many of the Romantics. *Werther* was the expression of

92. Bk. IV, chap. 8, p. 298. In Mill's essay "Theism," *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 256, the same idea is given a formulation that brings it very close to the religious conception of Christ's soldiers fighting against sin and misery: "A battle is constantly going on, in which the humblest human creature is not incapable of taking some part, between the powers of good and those of evil, and in which every even the smallest help to the right side has its value in promoting the very slow and often almost insensible progress by which good is gradually gaining ground from evil, yet gaining it so visibly at considerable intervals as to promise the very distant but not uncertain final victory of Good." Also, cf. his "Inaugural Address at St. Andrews," *James & John Stuart Mill on Education*, p. 177.

93. Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, 1, 184.

"that nameless Unrest, the blind struggle of a soul in bondage, that high, sad, longing Discontent, which was agitating every bosom" and had driven Goethe "almost to despair." The counterpart in England was "Byron's life-weariness, his moody melancholy, and mad stormful indignation." *Sartor Resartus* was Carlyle's effort to make Byron the last of "the Sentimentalists" who "raged and wailed," by preaching the philosophy he had learned from Goethe's later novel, *Wilhelm Meister:* "For the problem which had been stated in *Werter* [and in "The Everlasting No"], with despair of its solution, is here [and in "The Everlasting Yea"] solved." By opening your Goethe, you can close your Byron.[94]

Starting from a sudden upsurge of protest and defiance—this I will *not* believe, that the universe is a mechanism and man a human automaton—Teufelsdröckh goes on to recover his faith by finding God immanent in nature, or felt in the heart at moments of exaltation when one is filled with love and pity; from which he argues that the voice of conscience is a god-given mandate, saying, *"Work thou in welldoing"*—that is, master the selfish desire for personal happiness and lead a life of dutiful labor. But for all this the chapter ends on quite another note, for the simple reason that Carlyle could not believe in this religious philosophy with any steady conviction. He did not *dis*believe it, often he *did* believe it, but more often he was swept by renewed doubts of any supernatural reality whatever and thrown back again into the Wertherian-Byronic mood. In the very year that *Sartor* was published, he wrote in his journal:

> Wonderful, and alas! most pitiful alternations of belief and unbelief in me.
>
> For the last year my faith has lain under a most sad eclipse; I have been a considerably worse man than before.
>
> Oh for faith! Truly the greatest "God announcing miracle" always is faith, and now more than ever. I often look on my mother (nearly the only genuine Believer I know of) with a kind of sacred admiration. Know the worth of Belief. Alas! canst thou acquire none? [95]

94. "Goethe," *Essays, 1,* 217, 218, 224. For the conscious linking of Teufelsdröckh with Werther and Byron, see *Sartor,* Bk. II, chap. 6, title and pp. 156–7. The famous injunction to substitute Goethe for Byron is in chap. 9, p. 192.

95. Froude, *Carlyle: First Forty Years,* 2, chap. 14, pp. 330, 345; chap. 15, p. 354. Although he later spoke in the *Reminiscences,* p. 282, of having conquered "all my scepticisms, agonising doubtings" in the year 1825 (i.e. before he started *Sartor*), he went on at once to say: "I had, in effect, gained an immense victory; and, *for a number of years,* had, in spite of nerves and chagrins, a constant inward happiness . . . which *essentially* remains with me still, *though far oftener eclipsed,* and lying deeper down, than then." The italics are mine. Even in the chapter "The Everlasting Yea," when he refers to the struggle for belief "in an Atheistic Century" (p. 184), he admits that to me "was given, if not Victory, yet the consciousness of Battle, and the resolve to persevere therein."



In such circumstance the one way he *could* acquire a faith was pragmatically: by proving its truth in experience.

This principle is announced at the start of the final section. Since "all Speculation is by nature endless, formless, a vortex amid vortices," it is only by an "indubitable certainty of Experience" that conviction can "find any centre to revolve round, and so fashion itself into a system. Most true is it, as a wise man teaches us, that 'Doubt of any sort cannot be removed except by Action.' " [96] But not any action: an unselfish action, something one can call a duty. "Let him who gropes painfully in darkness or uncertain light," he continues, " . . . lay this other precept well to heart, which to me was of invaluable service: *'Do the Duty which lies nearest thee,'* which thou knowest to be a Duty! Thy second Duty will already have become clearer." If duty here refers to small and immediate tasks, in the next paragraph it takes on a larger and general meaning applicable to life as a whole: "The Situation that has not its Duty, its Ideal, was never yet occupied by man." The Ideal is not a romantic dream of personal happiness incapable of realization, but a goal, a life purpose, toward which one can strive with all his energy. It is the highest potential attainment which, given the outward conditions and circumstances of life, any individual with a particular talent could hope to reach by concentrated effort and struggle.[97] To discover that Ideal and then to pursue it is not only to do one's duty (the word points the contrast with any egoistic striving for personal happiness), but also to win "Spiritual Enfranchisement" for the vital energies of life, so long dammed up and paralyzed by doubt and indecision. Hence the final exhortation which climaxes the chapter:

> I too could now say to myself: Be no longer a Chaos, but a World, or even Worldkin. Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it, in God's name! 'Tis the utmost thou hast in thee: out with it, then. Up,

96. *Sartor,* Bk. II, chap. 9, pp. 195–6. The wise man is Goethe. The quotations that follow are on pp. 196–7.

97. See Bk. II, chap. 4, p. 119.

> up! Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called Today; for the Night cometh, wherein no man can work.

Out of its context, who would not suppose that this was the Sunday sermon of an Evangelical preacher? or, still more likely, the daily chant of the Captains of Industry to their hands? Puritanism, business, and doubt met together to write the gospel of work. In this passage the moral—and psychological—value, it should be noticed, lies not in what one actually produces but in struggling with all one's might to achieve the utmost one has in him to produce. This is perfectly calculated to answer the sense of futility—the what-can-I-accomplish-anyway feeling—which is integral to the mood of despondency. And when the creative challenge is added, the sick soul is ready to respond to the "Up, up!"

Although this ethic could stand alone, as we shall see, Carlyle links it to his religious faith by the pragmatism which argues that the gospel of work will prove its credentials and show by practice that the mandate of conscience, *"Work thou in Welldoing,"* is God-given. The argument, I think, was mainly psychological. By immersing himself in action, conceived as the pursuit of any immediate duty or of the larger work he was best fitted to do, he could quiet his inner anxiety (the reiterated imperatives of the final paragraph —Produce! Produce!—have a note that is almost frantic) and gain a sense of health and well-being. Then, in that happier state of mind he could feel that really all was well; and surely there was a God; and obviously this ethical creed which gave him peace was His will. That last conclusion was all the easier to draw since the ethic of work which he found in Goethe was so similar to the ethic he had learned in his Puritan home.

Against this background we can readily understand why idleness for Carlyle was something worse than a sin. It was "perpetual despair." [98] For it opened the door not to evil temptations, as it did for Newman and the Evangelicals, but to "self-listenings, self-questionings, impotently painful dubitations, all this fatal nosology of spiritual maladies, so rife in our day." [99] No wonder he praised the religion of the monks for being free from "a diseased self-introspection, an

98. *Past and Present*, Bk. III, chap. 11, p. 196.

99. *Life of Sterling* (1851), Pt. I, chap. 1, p. 6. For examples of Carlyle struggling against this disease, see Froude, *Carlyle: First Forty Years*, 2, chap. 4, pp. 81–2, and *Letters, 1826–1836*, pp. 313–14.



agonising inquiry." [100] Their duties were clear; above all, their supreme duty to work. Indeed, "properly speaking, all true Work is Religion: and whatsoever Religion is not Work may go and dwell among the Brahmins, Antinomians, Spinning Dervishes, or where it will; with me it shall have no harbour." This exaggerated statement of the ancient maxim *Laborare est Orare*, which had been emphasized by the Puritan moralists of the Reformation, occurs in the chapters "Labour" and "Reward" in *Past and Present*,[101] where the final message of "The Everlasting Yea" is expanded and cast into a simpler form. After the opening paragraph speaks of idleness as "perpetual despair," and the next announces that "the latest Gospel in this world is, Know thy work and do it," the central passages follows:

> It has been written, "an endless significance lies in Work"; a man perfects himself by working. Foul jungles are cleared away, fair seedfields rise instead, and stately cities; and withal the man himself first ceases to be a jungle and foul unwholesome desert thereby. Consider how, even in the meanest sorts of Labour, the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony, the instant he sets himself to work! Doubt, Desire, Sorrow, Remorse, Indignation, Despair itself, all these like hell-dogs lie beleaguering the soul of the poor dayworker, as of every man: but he bends himself with free valour against his task, and all these are stilled, all these shrink murmuring far off into their caves. The man is now a man. The blessed glow of Labour in him, is it not as purifying fire, wherein all poison is burnt up, and of sour smoke itself there is made bright blessed flame! [102]

100. *Past and Present*, Bk. II, chap. 4, p. 60.

101. Specifically in Bk. III, chap. 12, p. 200.

102. Bk. III, chap. 11, p. 196. Cf. Bk. I, chap. 6, pp. 37–8.

103. Cf. the paragraph just below this (pp. 197–8), where Goethe's "Doubt, of whatever kind, can be ended by Action alone" is again quoted, and the action is plainly industrial. This is also true, I think, of the conclusion to "The Everlasting Yea" (quoted just above), since Carlyle must have had business in the back of his mind at least when he chose the term "Produce" instead of "Work" or "Labor" or "Toil." A little earlier (Bk. II, chap. 4, p. 118) he had spoken with satisfaction of a new era of "Industrialism and the Government of the Wisest." The passage

Seem'd but a dream of the heart,
Seem'd but a cry of desire.
Yes! I believe that there lived
Others like thee in the past,
Not like the men of the crowd
Who all round me to-day
Bluster or cringe, and make life
Hideous, and arid, and vile;
But souls temper'd with fire,
Fervent, heroic, and good,
Helpers and friends of mankind.[107]

Clearly, they are still a dream of the heart and a cry of desire.

The truce from cares which the Victorians found in contemplating the hero is a truce from the cares of living in a world where one feels an acute sense of weakness, whether engendered by indecision and enervating analysis (of abstract ideas or personal distress) or by the cramping pressure of "fate and circumstance." The reaction is psychological and nostalgic. But hero worship was equally indebted—and in the same minds, as we have seen, notably in the case of Arnold—to a reaction against the same general environment which was didactic and positive; which sought to meet the moral needs of a period of doubt and bourgeois democracy by exalting the hero, whether in history or in legend. It was because the heroic image could serve so ambiguously as message and as compensation that it won so conspicuous a place in the Victorian imagination.

107. "Rugby Chapel," lines 145–61.

Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870. New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, (1958) 1985.

## Chapter 13

# LOVE

Love for the maiden, crown'd with marriage, no regrets for aught that has been,
Household happiness, gracious children, debtless competence, golden mean.

*Tennyson* [1]

*The Angel in the House*—there in the title of Coventry Patmore's famous poem is the essential character of Victorian love (though not its only form in the period): the passion that was very much tempered by reverence and confined to the home—that is, to potential or actual marriage—and the object that was scarcely mortal. Otherwise love was not love but lust. This conception looks like a curious blending of Protestant earnestness and Romantic enthusiasm, with a strong assist from chivalric literature (as ready a source for woman worship as for hero worship). But seeds explain nothing apart from the receptive soil. The circumstances of Victorian society made bliss connubial; and, indeed, even apart from love, decreed the exaltation of family life and feminine character.

### 1. *Home, Sweet Home*

At the center of Victorian life was the family. Its ritual is well known: the gathering of the whole household for family prayers, the attendance together at church on Sunday morning, the reading aloud in the evenings, the annual family vacation. On the living-room table lay family magazines and the family photograph album. Since women have always been concerned with the home, this special development in the Victorian period must be attributed to a reorientation of the masculine attitude. In the eighteenth century the coffee house had

1. "Vastness," stanza 12.

often been the center of man's social life. There he smoked, dined, wrote letters, discussed politics and literature, and got drunk. A manual for gentlemen, written in 1778, urged them to beware "of thinking domestic pleasures, cares, and duties, beneath their notice." [2] The radical change which occurred in the next century was recorded and partly explained by Mill in 1869:

> The association of men with women in daily life is much closer and more complete than it ever was before. Men's life is more domestic. Formerly, their pleasures and chosen occupations were among men, and in men's company: their wives had but a fragment of their lives. At the present time, the progress of civilization, and the turn of opinion against the rough amusements and convivial excesses which formerly occupied most men in their hours of relaxation—together with (it must be said) the improved tone of modern feeling as to the reciprocity of duty which binds the husband towards the wife—have thrown the man very much more upon home and its inmates, for his personal and social pleasures: while the kind and degree of improvement which has been made in women's education, has made them in some degree capable of being his companions in ideas and mental tastes.[3]

Better education was hardly a factor before the fifties, but the reaction against convivial excesses and the greater sense of duty may be traced to the Evangelical revival. Moreover, life became more domestic than it had been earlier because of the mere existence of large families. The improvement in medical knowledge and standards of sanitation, reducing infant mortality, and the general ignorance of contraceptives (because information lay under the severest social and legal restraints) increased the size and complicated the problems of the home. Men were required to give far more time and attention to the business of the family; and in the middle class that necessity was reinforced by ambition. Now that work had become the means not simply of maintaining a family but of raising it on the social ladder, fathers were preoccupied with getting their sons into the "best" colleges at Oxford and Cambridge or setting them up in a good profession, and marrying their daughters to gentlemen of birth.[4]

2. See H. V. Routh, *Money, Morals and Manners as Revealed in Modern Literature*, chap. 10, "The Idea of Home," p. 143, where the quotation may be found.

3. *The Subjection of Women*, chap. 4, p. 540.

4. Cf. Mr. Vincy's remark in *Middlemarch, I*, chap. 13, p. 173: "It's a good British feeling to try and raise your family a little: in my opinion, it's a father's duty to give his sons a fine chance." Cf. Mrs. Craik, *John Halifax, Gentleman*, chap. 29, p. 412. See, in general, above, Chap. 8, sec. 1.



But none of this goes to the root of the matter, for the greater *amount* of family life and thought would not in itself have created "that peculiar sense of solemnity" with which, in the eyes of a typical Victorian like Thomas Arnold, "the very *idea* of family life was invested." [5] That idea was the conception of the home as a source of virtues and emotions which were nowhere else to be found, least of all in business and society.[6] And that in turn made it a place radically different from the surrounding world. It was much more than a house where one stopped at night for temporary rest and recreation—or procreation—in the midst of a busy career. It was a place apart, a walled garden, in which certain virtues too easily crushed by modern life could be preserved, and certain desires of the heart too much thwarted be fulfilled. Here is Ruskin's definition in *Sesame and Lilies:*

> This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in. But so far as it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods . . . so far as it is this, and roof and fire are types only of a nobler shade and light,—shade as of the rock in a weary land, and light as of the Pharos in the stormy sea;—so far it vindicates the name, and fulfils the praise, of Home.[7]

The final metaphors of shade and light underscore the dual character of the Victorian home and reflect its psychological and ethical appeals. It was both a shelter *from* the anxieties of modern life, a place of peace where the longings of the soul might be realized (if not in fact, in imagination), and a shelter *for* those moral and spiritual values which the commercial spirit and the critical spirit were threatening to destroy, and therefore also a sacred place, a temple.

5. Stanley, *Life of Arnold*, chap. 4, p. 205. The italics are mine.

6. Cf. Routh, *Money, Morals and Manners*, p. 142.

7. "Of Queens' Gardens," sec. 68, in *Works, 18*, 122. This lecture of Ruskin's is the most important single document I know for the characteristic idealization of love, woman, and the home in Victorian thought.

The peace it promised was partly, to vary Ruskin's metaphor, that of a rock in the midst of a rushing stream. As most traditional beliefs and institutions on which stability depends were being questioned or transformed, the Victorian clung the harder to the oldest of all traditions and stressed its ordered hierarchy and daily ritual. Here at any rate was something firm to stand on. But this, I think, was largely unconscious. The conscious association of family life with security took another form. The home became the place where one *had* been at peace and childhood a blessed time when truth was certain and doubt with its divisive effects unknown. In the "strange ways of feeling and thought" that in later life enveloped Pater's child in the house and left him isolated and alone, he felt "the wistful yearning towards home." [8] So did the skeptic in Froude's essay on homesickness, who looked back to what was literally a paradise:

> God has given us each our own Paradise, our own old childhood, over which the old glories linger—to which our own hearts cling, as all we have ever known of Heaven upon earth. And there, as all earth's weary wayfarers turn back their toil-jaded eyes, so do the poor speculators, one of whom is this writer, whose thoughts have gone astray, who has been sent out like the raven from the window of the ark, and flown to and fro over the ocean of speculation, finding no place for his soul to rest, no pause for his aching wings, turn back in thought, at least, to that old time of peace—that village church—that child-faith—which, once lost, is never gained again—strange mystery—is never gained again—with sad and weary longing!

Plainly nostalgia of this kind helped to idealize the Victorian home.[9]

A more important factor, working to the same end, was the impact of modern business. In the recoil from the City, the home was irradiated by the light of a pastoral imagination. It could seem a country of peace and innocence where life was kind and duty natural.

8. *Miscellaneous Studies. A Series of Essays* (New York, 1900), p. 154.

9. *The Nemesis of Faith*, p. 116; and cf. a similar passage quoted above, p. 86. The "essay" is on pp. 108–17. The nostalgia was felt not only by the "speculators" but also, as Froude implies, by "earth's weary wayfarers." The rapid increase of emigration to the colonies brought the homesickness of the exile into many a letter. In the same essay, Froude wrote (p. 110): "Far round the earth as their life callings may have scattered men, here is their treasure, for here their heart has been"; and here they often return as if to tie up the "broken links" so that the family may go together to "the long home where they shall never part again."



> For something that abode endued
> With temple-like repose, an air
> Of life's kind purposes pursued
> With order'd freedom sweet and fair.
> A tent pitch'd in a world not right
> It seem'd, whose inmates, every one,
> On tranquil faces bore the light
> Of duties beautifully done.[10]

In a sermon of Baldwin Brown's, women are told to remember the need of "world-weary men" and therefore to "pray, think, strive to make a home something like a bright, serene, restful, joyful nook of heaven in an unheavenly world." [11]

In the home so conceived, man could recover the humanity he seemed to be losing. Under the intense pressure of competitive life, he felt more and more like a money-making machine, or a cog in the vast mechanism of modern business. He was haunted, as Routh has said, by a specter staring back at him in the mirror, a hard-faced, dwarfish caricature of himself, unpleasantly like the economic man.[12] His emotions of pity and love seemed to be drying up; he was losing the sense of relatedness as superiors, inferiors, and equals were becoming actual or potential enemies. But in the home he might escape from this inhuman world, at least for part of every day (which was all he wanted). He might feel his heart beating again in the atmosphere of domestic affection and the binding companionship of a family. It is significant that when Carlyle described the world of big business, he called it "a world alien, not your world . . . not a home at all, of hearts and faces who are yours, whose you are" and said that to live in it was to be "without father, without child, without brother." [13] But the hour strikes and all that is lost may be found again: "When we come home, we lay aside our mask and drop our tools, and are no longer lawyers, sailors, soldiers, statesmen, clergymen, but only men. We fall again into our most human relations, which, after all, are the whole of what belongs to us as we are ourselves, and alone have the key-note of our hearts. There our skill, if skill we have, is exercised with real gladness on

10. Patmore, "The Angel in the House," Bk. I, end of Canto I, *Poems*, p. 69. Cf. Bk. II, Canto III, opening poem, p. 154.

11. *Young Men and Maidens. A Pastoral for the Times* (London, 1871), pp. 38–9.

12. *Money, Morals and Manners*, pp. 141, 147–8.

13. *Past and Present*, Bk. IV, chap. 4, p. 274. Cf. above, Chap. 3, start of sec. 6, on economic isolation.

home subjects. . . . We cease the struggle in the race of the world, and give our hearts leave and leisure to love." [14]

Or at a lower social and economic level, one escapes from a cold, domineering Scrooge to the freedom and warmth of the family hearth. Mark Rutherford was simply a more intellectual Mr. Wemmick when he cultivated a deliberate dissociation of his personality so that his "true self" should not be stained by contact with the self that was subjected to the petty spite and brutal tyranny of an office. Then on the stroke of seven he could become himself again: "I was on equal terms with my friends; I was Ellen's husband; I was, in short, a man." And he goes on to speak of happy evenings reading aloud with his wife.[15] Small wonder the Victorian home was sentimentalized. In the reaction from a heartless world, the domestic emotions were released too strongly and indulged too eagerly. Indeed, it may be only by the unabashed display of feeling that one can prove unmistakably to all the world, himself included, that he has a heart. Barnes Newcome knew his audience when he lectured at the Athenaeum on Mrs. Hemans and the poetry of the affections:

> A public man, a commercial man as we well know, yet his heart is in his home, and his joy in his affections: the presence of this immense assembly here this evening; of the industrious capitalists; of the intelligent middle class; of the pride and mainstay of England, the operatives of Newcome; these surrounded by their wives and their children (a graceful bow to the bonnets to the right of the platform), show that they, too, have hearts to feel, and homes to cherish; that they, too, feel the love of women, the innocence of children, the love of song! [16]

The Victorian home was not only a peaceful, it was a sacred, place. When the Christian tradition as it was formally embodied in ecclesiastical rites and theological dogmas was losing its hold on contemporary society, and the influence of the pastorate was declining, the living church more and more became the "temple of the hearth." [17] This was

14. Froude, *The Nemesis of Faith*, pp. 112–13.

15. *Mark Rutherford's Deliverance*, chap. 8, pp. 106–7. Mr. Wemmick is Mr. Jagger's clerk in Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

16. Thackeray, *The Newcomes*, chap. 66, pp. 687–8.

17. Cf. G. K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (New York, 1936), p. 20, speaking of the Victorians: "Theirs was the first generation that ever asked its children to worship the hearth without the altar." He went on to say that "this was equally true, whether they went to church at eleven o'clock . . . or were reverently agnostic or latitudinarian."



not entirely a metaphor. By the use of Christian Platonism, the home was sanctified. As it was a sacred place for Ruskin because its roof and fire were types of a nobler shade and light, so for Baldwin Brown it was made by God, like the first man, "after a divine original." [18] To Kingsley all domestic relations were "given us to teach us their divine antitypes [God the Father, Christ the husband of the one corporate person the Church, and all men children of the same Heavenly Father]: and therefore . . . it is only in proportion as we appreciate and understand the types that we can understand the antitypes." He was even ready to imply that a bachelor was at some disadvantage: "Fully to understand the meaning of 'a Father in Heaven' we must be fathers ourselves; to know how Christ loved the Church, we must have wives to love, and love them." And to be religious, especially for a woman, we must do good in those simple everyday relations and duties of the family "which are most divine because they are most human." [19] In this way the moral authority and inspiration of the church was being transferred to the home without any apparent break with the Christian tradition.

For the agnostics, also, the home became a temple—a secular temple. For them the family was the basic source of those altruistic emotions they relied upon to take the place of the Christian ethic. It was there, they thought, that all who had thrown off the trammels of superstition might learn the "sentiment (1) of *attachment*, comradeship, fellowship, (2) of *reverence* for those who can teach us, guide, and elevate us, (3) of *love* which urges us to protect, help, and cherish those to whom we owe our lives and better natures." [20] No doubt one might, in fact, learn quite different things, as Mill pointed out, but in its best forms he too recognized the family as "a school of sympathy, tenderness, and loving forgetfulness of self." [21] As such, it was the foundation for the Religion of Humanity. These generous sentiments, once learned in the home, might be extended later to the human race and the future of civilization.[22]

18. *The Home Life: in the Light of Its Divine Idea*, p. 8.

19. Kingsley, *Letters and Memories*, *I*, 166, 222, 361–2 (unabridged ed., *I*, 190, 255, 431).

20. Frederic Harrison, lecture on "Family Life," *On Society* (London, 1918), p. 33. The lecture was given in 1893, but the point of view goes back at least to the sixties: see the next notes.

21. *The Subjection of Women*, chap. 2, p. 469.

22. This paragraph, it will be noticed, is closely related to a passage in Chap. 11, "Enthusiasm," pp. 271–2, above. Harrison, Mill, and George Eliot, like most of the agnostics who advocate a Religion of Humanity in some form or other, were

But whether a sacred temple or a secular temple, the home as a storehouse of moral and spiritual values was as much an answer to increasing commercialism as to declining religion. Indeed, it might be said that mainly on the shoulders of its priestess, the wife and mother, fell the burden of stemming the amoral and irreligious drift of modern industrial society.

### 2. *Woman*

Of the three conceptions of woman current in the Victorian period, the best known is that of the submissive wife whose whole excuse for being was to love, honor, obey—and amuse—her lord and master, and to manage his household and bring up his children. In that role her character and her life were completely distinct from his:

> Man for the field and woman for the hearth;
> Man for the sword, and for the needle she;
> Man with the head, and woman with the heart;
> Man to command, and woman to obey;
> All else confusion.

Against that conservative view, spoken by the Prince's father in Tennyson's poem,[23] the Princess Ida represents the most advanced thought. She is the "new woman," in revolt against her legal and social bondage (and against the boredom of life in homes where servants and nurses now do all the household chores), and demanding equal rights with men: the same education, the same suffrage, the same opportunity for professional and political careers. Ida's passionate oration closes with a prophecy which Tennyson hardly imagined would come true:

> Everywhere
> Two heads in council, two beside the hearth,
> Two in the tangled business of the world,
> Two in the liberal offices of life,
> Two plummets dropt for one to sound the abyss

partly indebted for their ideas on the family (and therefore also on woman) to Auguste Comte's *Système de politique positive, ou traité de sociologie, instituant la religion de l'humanité* (4 vols. Paris, 1851–54). For a convenient summary by Comte himself see *A General View of Positivism*, translated by J. H. Bridges (London, 1865), chap. 4, "The Influence of Positivism upon Women."

23. *The Princess* (1847), Pt. V, lines 437–41. See John Killham, *Tennyson and "The Princess": Reflections of an Age* (London, 1958) for an illuminating account of the whole question.



> Of science and the secrets of the mind;
> Musician, painter, sculptor, critic, more.[24]

Between these two poles there was a middle position entirely characteristic of the time in its mediation between conservative and radical thinking. By all means let us remove the legal disabilities and give "more breadth of culture"; but higher education is unwise, the vote is dubious, and professional careers are dangerous. For after all woman is *not* man; she has her own nature and function in life, not inferior to his but entirely different; and the only test to apply to the "woman question" is simply, "Does this study or this activity help or injure her womanhood?" That is Tennyson's stand, expounded by the Prince and Ida at the close of the poem. Together they

> Will clear away the parasitic forms
> That seem to keep her up but drag her down—
> Will leave her space to burgeon out of all
> Within her—let her make herself her own
> To give or keep, to live and learn and be
> All that not harms distinctive womanhood.
> For woman is not undevelopt man,
> But diverse.

Let be with the proud watchword of "equal,"

> seeing either sex alone
> Is half itself, and in true marriage lies
> Nor equal, nor unequal. Each fulfils
> Defect in each.[25]

What is meant by "distinctive womanhood" and what defect in man the woman should fulfill are only implied by Tennyson. The answers are spelled out in Ruskin's important lecture "Of Queens' Gardens" in 1865. There he begins by rejecting the notion both that woman is "the shadow and attendant image of her lord, owing him a thoughtless and servile obedience," and that she has a feminine mission and feminine rights that entitle her to a career in the world like man's. Her true function is to guide and uplift her more worldly and intellectual mate: "His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adven-

24. Ibid., Pt. II, lines 155–61. Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Reading*, chap. 16, gives a good sketch of "The New Woman," with many illustrations from contemporary literature.

25. *The Princess*, Pt. VII, lines 253–60, 283–6.

ture, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision." Although this lofty theory had been gaining ground through the 1850's, Ruskin is aware that he is challenging the ordinary assumptions of male superiority and command. He marshals his evidence. In Shakespeare and Scott, in Dante and Homer, women are "infallibly faithful and wise counsellors"; and by their virtue and wisdom men are redeemed from weakness or vice. Then, with their role defined, he proceeds at once to his description of the home, since it is women so conceived who make it a temple and a school of virtue. The more reason, therefore, to keep it a walled garden. While the man in his rough work must encounter all peril and trial, and often be subdued or misled, and always hardened, "he guards the woman from all this; within his house, as ruled by her, unless she herself has sought it, need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence." [26]

This woman worship, as it came to be called in the sixties, was as much indebted to the need for fresh sources of moral inspiration as it was to Romanticism in general. In a sketch by Lancelot Smith, the hero of Kingsley's *Yeast* (made, it should be noted, when his only bible was Bacon), Woman was portrayed walking across a desert, the half-risen sun at her back and a cross in her right hand, "emblem of self-sacrifice." In the foreground were scattered groups of men. As they caught sight of this "new and divine ideal of her sex,"

> the scholar dropt his book, the miser his gold, the savage his weapons; even in the visage of the half-slumbering sot some nobler recollection seemed wistfully to struggle into life. . . . The sage . . . watched with a thoughtful smile that preacher more mighty than himself. A youth, decked out in the most fantastic fopperies of the middle age, stood with clasped hands and brimming eyes, as remorse and pleasure struggled in his face; and as he looked, the fierce sensual features seemed to melt, and his flesh came again to him like the flesh of a little child.

The drawing is entitled "Triumph of Woman." [27] Other writers emphasized a more specific mission in more mundane terms: to counteract the debasing influence on religion as well as morals of a masculine life preoccupied with worldly goods and worldly ambitions. Mrs. Sara Ellis, whose *Daughters of England, Wives of England,* and *Women of England* were standard manuals, brought that argument to bear directly on the "Behaviour to Husbands." Since the life of men, especially businessmen, is tending, she said, to lower and degrade the mind, to make its aims purely material, and to encourage a selfish concern for one's own interests, a wife should be supremely solicitous for the advancement of her husband's intellectual, moral, and spiritual nature. She should be "a companion who will raise the tone of his mind from . . . low anxieties, and vulgar cares" and will "lead his thoughts to expatiate or repose on those subjects which convey a feeling of identity with a higher state of existence beyond this present life." [28] Indeed, the moral elevation of man became so closely identified with this feminine duty that a moralist like Baldwin Brown in his sermons called *The Home Life* was ready to blame women for the deterioration of men under the hardening influence of business. They have themselves succumbed to mean desires for money and family position; or they have been seduced by the ridiculous phantom of woman's rights when their true power, the birthright they would sell for a mess of pottage, is the "power to love, to serve, to save." But many, thank God, are still faithful to their trust: "I know women whose hearts are an unfailing fountain of courage and inspiration to the hard-pressed man, who but

26. "Of Queens' Gardens," sec. 68 in *Works, 18,* 111–22. With the last remark cf. George Eliot in "Amos Barton," *Scenes of Clerical Life, 1,* chap. 7, p. 85: "A loving woman's world lies within the four walls of her own home; and it is only through her husband that she is in any electric communication with the world beyond." In *Silas Marner* the bad habits of Godfrey and Dunstan Cass are attributed mainly to their growing up in a home without a mother (chap. 3, pp. 30–1), and Godfrey longs to marry Nancy Lammeter because she "would make home lovely" and help him conquer his weakness of will (chap. 3, pp. 39–41)—which is exactly what she does effect after the marriage (chap. 17, pp. 207–8).

27. Chap. 10, pp. 148–50. Kingsley was one of the leading exponents (along with Ruskin, Tennyson, Patmore, and—more moderately—George Eliot) of this view of woman. See his statement in 1870 (*Letters and Memories, 2,* 283: unabridged ed., 2, 330): He will continue, he says, "to set forth in every book I write (as I have done for twenty-five years) woman as the teacher, the natural and therefore divine guide, purifier, inspirer of the man."

This woman worship was not, of course, universal. It is less likely to be found among "earnest" Victorians than "enthusiastic" Victorians. It is conspicuously absent from Macaulay, Carlyle, Trollope, and both the Arnolds, and from Mill as a general principle (Mrs. Taylor is a very special case!). In "Emancipation—Black and White," (1865), *Science and Education,* pp. 68–9, Huxley protested against "the new woman-worship which so many sentimentalists and some philosophers are desirous of setting up."

28. *The Wives of England. Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations* (London, 1843), pp. 99–100.

for them must be worsted in life's battle . . . and who send forth husband or brother each morning with new strength for his conflict, armed, as the lady armed her knight of old, with a shield which he may not stain in any unseemly conflicts, and a sword which he dares only use against the enemies of truth, righteousness and God." Like the hero, the angel in the house serves, or should serve, to preserve and quicken the moral idealism so badly needed in an age of selfish greed and fierce competition.[29]

This accounts (as Brown's remark would suggest) for the wide hostility to her emancipation. Feminist claims to intellectual equality with man and to the same education and professional opportunity were attacked by liberals—let alone conservatives; partly, no doubt, to forestall competition, but much more to prevent what they honestly believed would mean the irreparable loss of a vital moral influence. Lancelot Smith is the more eager to assert his mental superiority over Argemone, the heroine of *Yeast* (who imagined there was no intellectual difference between the sexes), and at the same time to look up to her "as infallible and inspired" on all "questions of morality, of taste, of feeling," because he longs to teach her "where her true kingdom lay,—that the heart, and not the brain, enshrines the priceless pearl of womanhood." [30] Even a perfectly commonplace writer like Edwin Hood calls a chapter of *The Age and Its Architects* "Woman the Reformer" and begins by announcing: "The hope of society is in woman! The hope of the age is in woman! On her depends mainly the righting of wrongs, the correcting of sins, and the success of all missions," and goes on, therefore, to condemn the utterly mistaken tendency now growing up to encourage women to enter professional and political careers.[31] All this is touched with melodramatic and sentimental exaggeration, but many intelligent women—George Eliot, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Mrs. Lynn Linton, Beatrice Potter Webb, for example—viewed with uneasiness or apprehension any emancipation of their sex which would weaken its moral influence by distracting attention to the outside world or by coarsening the feminine nature itself.[32]

29. Brown, pp. 23–5. For the hero, see above, pp. 316–18. Other reasons for exalting the role and character of woman are dealt with below, in sec. 4 on "Love."

30. Chap. 10, pp. 143–5.

31. Pages 393, 400. The particular sins woman is to correct (pp. 393–4)—revolution, prostitution, and atheism—are major anxieties of the period. For prostitution, see below in this Chapter, sec. 3.

32. The main document is "An Appeal against Female Suffrage," *The Nineteenth Century*, 25 (1889), 781–8, signed by about 100 women, including Mrs. T. H. Huxley, Mrs. Leslie Stephen, Mrs. Matthew Arnold, Mrs. Walter Bagehot, and Mrs. Arnold Toynbee, as well as all of those cited in the text except George Eliot. For her, see Cross' *Life*, 3, 346, in his summary of her character and ideas. There is an account of this "Appeal" by Beatrice Webb, *My Apprenticeship*, pp. 302–4.



However conceived, the Victorian woman was not Venus, nor was meant to be. If it was only the feminists who rejected love—and often dressed accordingly—their more conservative sisters were not exactly objects of desire. Their sexual attraction was kept under wraps, many and voluminous. To employ it, except obliquely, was to run the risk of being considered "fast." Victorian ideas about sex were—very—Victorian.

### 3. *Sex*

In the Victorian home swarming with children sex was a secret. It was the skeleton in the parental chamber. No one mentioned it. Any untoward questions were answered with a white lie (it was the great age of the stork) or a shocked rebuke. From none of his elders—parent, teacher, or minister—did the Victorian child hear "so much as one word in explanation of the true nature and functions of the reproductive organs." [33] This conspiracy of silence was partly a mistaken effort to protect the child, especially the boy, from temptation (initially from masturbation, which was condemned on grounds of health as well as morals), but at bottom it sprang from a personal feeling of revulsion. For the sexual act was associated by many wives only with a duty and by most husbands with a necessary if pleasurable yielding to one's baser nature: by few, therefore, with an innocent and joyful experience. The silence which first aroused in the child a vague sense of shame was in fact a reflection of parental shame,[34] and one suspects that some women, at any rate, would have been happy if the stork had been a reality.

At school the knowledge acquired by the boy (most girls, it would seem, knew nothing before their marriage night) came to him in whispers and in a form which confirmed his first impression that sex was something nasty. When he reached puberty, the elders finally spoke,

33. *The Science of Life*, p. 9. Some letters to the author by Ruskin were reprinted in *Arrows of the Chace*, in *Works*, *34*, 526–31. In what follows I have drawn, in part, on this illuminating pamphlet.

34. George Eliot (*Middlemarch*, *1*, chap. 15, 195) speaks of Lydgate being brought up with "a general sense of secrecy and obscenity in connection with his internal structure."

vaguely but pointedly, about "uncleanness" of body and mind. Parental letters echoed what he heard in sermons. Although learning is important, wrote Patmore to his son, other things are more so: to be honest "and to be *pure,* (you know what I mean). . . . When the other boys say and do dirty things (as many boys at all great schools will) remember those words of Jesus Christ, 'The pure in heart shall see God'—that is to say they will go to heaven." [85] And he might well have mentioned—many parents did—the source of Galahad's famous strength. As this implies, premarital continence for men (it was, of course, *de rigueur* for women) was an ideal which was widely held; and though more honored in the breach, no doubt, than in the observance, it was at any rate honored to an extent unknown in the past. Tom Brown at Oxford, attracted by the charms of a barmaid, reacts in a way which his eighteenth-century predecessors would have thought ridiculous. He tries to fight down the temptation. In Hughes' comment, the symbolism of the storm, the metaphors of evil spirits and still small voice, wild beast and true man, are the typical notes of the Victorian struggle for chastity:

> We have most of us walked the like marches at one time or another of our lives. . . . Times they were of blinding and driving storm, and howling winds, out of which voices as of evil spirits spoke close in our ears—tauntingly, temptingly whispering to the mischievous wild beast which lurks in the bottom of all our hearts. . . .
>
> And all the while . . . was there not the still small voice—never to be altogether silenced by the roarings of the tempest of passion, by the evil voices, by our own violent attempts to stifle it—the still small voice appealing to the man, the true man, within us, which is made in the image of God—calling on him to assert his dominion over the wild beast—to obey, and conquer, and live? [86]

To keep body and mind untainted, the boy was taught to view women as objects of the greatest respect and even awe. He was to think of them as sisters, whether they lived in palaces or "in the cold sepulchre of shame." [87] He was to consider nice women (like his sister and his

35. Derek Patmore, *The Life and Times of Coventry Patmore* (London, 1949), p. 110.
36. Chap. 15, p. 183.
37. E. P. Hood, *The Age and Its Architects,* p. 396. Cf. Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera,* Letter 81, in *Works,* 28, 81.



mother, like his future bride) as creatures more like angels than human beings—an image wonderfully calculated not only to dissociate love from sex, but to turn love into worship, and worship of purity. An English lady like Mrs. Pendennis, with her "tranquil beauty . . . and that simplicity and dignity which a perfect purity and innocence are sure to bestow," was the "most complete of all Heaven's subjects in this world" and therefore the most wholesome influence one could possibly have. For in such "angelical natures there is something awful, as well as beautiful, to contemplate"; at their feet "the wildest and fiercest of us must fall down and humble ourselves, in admiration of that adorable purity which never seems to do or to think wrong." [88] This patterned reaction could be so instilled into a sensitive boy like Frederick Robertson that he could feel even marriage to be a kind of desecration: "The beings that floated before me, robed in vestures more delicate than mine, were beings of another order. The thought of one of them becoming mine was not rapture but pain . . . At seven years old, woman was a sacred dream, of which I would not talk. Marriage was a degradation. I remember being quite angry on hearing it said of a lovely Swede—the loveliest being I ever saw—that she was likely to get married in England." Robertson was far from laughing at such romantic feelings. He knew from his own experience that they could "keep a man all his youth through, before a higher faith has been called into being, from every species of vicious and low indulgence." [89] But of all women in the world, the most pure—and the most useful as a sanction for adolescent chastity—was Mother. Every young Victorian heard his father's voice sounding in his conscience, "Remember your dear, good mother, and never do anything, think anything, imagine anything she would be ashamed of." In that way filial love, already increased in the Victorian family by the repression of sexual emotions, was exaggerated in the cause of moral censorship and control. What still exists in the debased form of "mommism" is found in the Prince's description of his mother in *The Princess:*

> No angel, but a dearer being, all dipt
> In angel instincts, breathing Paradise,
> Interpreter between the gods and men,
> Who look'd all native to her place, and yet
> On tiptoe seem'd to touch upon a sphere

38. Thackeray's novel, chap. 2, in *Works,* 2, 13.
39. Brooke, *Life of F. W. Robertson,* p. 53.

> Too gross to tread, and all male minds perforce
> Sway'd to her from their orbits as they moved,
> And girdled her with music. Happy he
> With such a mother! faith in womankind
> Beats with his blood, and trust in all things high
> Comes easy to him, and tho' he trip and fall
> He shall not blind his soul with clay.[40]

It goes without saying that after marriage, quite as much as before, the Victorian ethic made fidelity the supreme virtue and sexual irregularity the blackest of sins. For a man to be called a moral person came to mean, almost entirely, that he was "not impure in conduct." Adultery, especially in the case of a wife, and no matter what the extenuating circumstances, was spoken of with horror. A "feeble and erring woman" became, in fact, a social outcast.[41]

This ethic of purity—which remained in full force until Freud and the disrupting effect of war on moral standards and the widening knowledge of contraceptives combined about 1920 to undermine its prestige, though not to end its influence—was accompanied by a phenomenon which is notorious: Victorian prudery. The term has come to be used loosely and broadly to cover all efforts to conceal the facts of life: the demand for expurgated editions of English classics, the drawing up of indexes of books or authors not to be read, especially by girls, the powerful condemnation (and hence in effect prohibition) of any candid treatment of sex in literature, the insistence that conversation be impeccably proper, even to the point of banning any words which could conceivably carry a sexual suggestion, and the chilling disapproval of the slightest approach to levity—all this is called prudery, and treated today with ridicule. But much of it, however silly and unwise, was quite free from what alone deserves the charge, namely, an affectation of purity which is basically insincere.[42] Most of it was simply an excessive censorship intended to protect and support the code of chastity, or to prevent the embarrassment of looking at

40. Pt. VII, lines 301–12. Cf., for another example, Kingsley's passage in "Heroism," *Sanitary and Social Essays*, pp. 247–8, where he finds the diseased world wholesome to him "because, whatever else it is or is not full of, it is at least full of mothers."

41. The phrases quoted are from W. R. Greg, who expresses the criticism of a small and liberal minority: "False Morality of Lady Novelists," *Literary and Social Judgments, 1*, 136–7.

42. I therefore deal with prudery in Chap. 14, "Hypocrisy": see pp. 408–9 and 419.



what was felt to be shameful. Consider, for example, the censorship of literature by a person like Charlotte Brontë, certainly no prude—indeed, the object of some strong criticism for the freedom with which she spoke of sex. She has recommended a list of poets to a correspondent who wanted advice, and then continues: "Now don't be startled at the names of Shakespeare and Byron. Both these were great men, and their works are like themselves. You will know how to choose the good, and to avoid the evil; the finest passages are always the purest, the bad are invariably revolting; you will never wish to read them over twice. Omit the comedies of Shakespeare and the 'Don Juan,' perhaps the 'Cain,' of Byron, though the latter is a magnificent poem."[43] The fear of Shakespeare is also found in the young George Eliot, who thought "we have need of as nice a power of distillation as the bee, to suck nothing but honey from his pages."[44] The best solution, perhaps, was expurgation; and most Victorians read the plays in Thomas Bowdler's *Family Shakespeare*.[45]

The ban on levity has the same origin. Levity is what Queen Victoria found "not amusing." It is light treatment of serious things, especially sexual evil. Thomas Arnold was as famous as his queen for the "startling earnestness with which he would check in a moment the slightest approach to levity"—which is likely to arouse some levity of our own unless we recall his acute and painful sense of the immorality (dirty jokes, masturbation, even sodomy) that existed in the public schools.[46] Charlotte Brontë, with Branwell in her mind, found Thackeray's lecture on Fielding very painful.

> Had Thackeray owned a son, grown, or growing up, and a son, brilliant but reckless—would he have spoken in that light way of courses that lead to disgrace and the grave? . . . I believe, if only

43. Mrs. Gaskell, *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, chap. 7, p. 85. The date is 1834.

44. Cross, *George Eliot's Life, 1*, 38, in a letter to Miss Lewis, March 16, 1839.

45. There is an interesting essay on censorship and the Victorian novel by Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*, pp. 54–73. Mrs. Tillotson argues that the high points of squeamishness were the twenties and the sixties, which agrees with my findings. (For the sixties, see below, pp. 367–8.) But the general attitude runs right through the age, as her sources (pp. 60–2) and mine (just cited and others that follow) both show. Also see Christie, *The Transition from Aristocracy, 1832–1867*, pp. 77–87.

46. Stanley, *Life of Arnold*, chap. 3, p. 122. For his sense of evil in the school, see chap. 3, pp. 99, 153, 155; chap. 5, pp. 235 and 238, letters dated June 28 and August 24, 1830; and for the general state of affairs in the public schools as late as the 1870's, see the pamphlet *The Science of Life*, pp. 9–11.

> once the prospect of a promising life blasted on the outset by wild ways had passed close under his eyes, he never *could* have spoken with such levity of what led to its piteous destruction. . . . The true lover of his race ought to devote his vigour to guard and protect; he should sweep away every lure with a kind of rage at its treachery.[47]

It follows that the alliance of levity and seriousness which appeals so strongly to the modern sensibility could only be distressing to the Victorians, or, at best, an inexplicable combination of disparates. Nothing seemed to Ruskin "more mysterious in the history of the human mind than the manner in which gross and ludicrous images are mingled with the most solemn subjects in the work of the Middle Ages"; and although some examples may be excused, others "are clearly the result of vice and sensuality." Specifically, how shall we account for a man like Chaucer, in the very midst of thoughts of beauty, "pure and wild like that of an April morning," inserting "jesting passages which stoop to play with evil?" or for that tendency to degenerate in later centuries into "forms of humour which render some of quite the greatest, wisest, and most moral of English writers now almost useless for our youth?" [48]

The whole campaign, whether prudish or honestly protective, was wrong-headed enough, no doubt, since sexual passion is not to be controlled by concealment and censorship. But the effort was natural enough at a time when so white a purity was demanded that only extreme measures seemed capable of preserving it from taint or corruption. Thackeray might satirize prudery, but he was ready enough to praise *Punch* because it contained nothing unfit for little boys at school to read, or for women to enjoy without blushing: "We like that our matrons and girls should be pure." [49] No doubt, wrote Leslie Stephen, "prudery is a bad thing," but it is not so bad as the prurience of Sterne, the laxness of Fielding, the unwholesome atmosphere of Balzac.[50]

47. Mrs. Gaskell, *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, chap. 26, pp. 381–2.

48. *Stones of Venice*, 3, chap. 3, sec. 70, in *Works*, *11*, 189; *Lectures on Art*, No. I, sec. 14 (and cf. 15 on Shakespeare), in *Works*, *20*, 29–30. Ruskin's remarks suggest, I think, what Matthew Arnold meant, or partly meant, when he criticized Chaucer, in "The Study of Poetry," for lacking "high seriousness."

49. *The Book of Snobs*, chap. 13, in *Works*, *6*, 347; "Two or Three Theatres at Paris," *Punch*, *16* (1849), 75, reprinted in *Works*, *6*, 151.

50. Annan, *Stephen*, p. 228.



There is, of course, no mystery about the primary source of the ethic of purity and the social taboos that accompanied it. The Evangelical revival in a middle class now strong enough to impose its mores on society, and all the more determined to do so because of its disgusted reaction against the license of the Regency, is the crucial factor.[51] And when the family was treasured so highly, a code that would protect its integrity from centrifugal temptation would be doubly welcomed. But neither explanation accounts for the unmistakable note of horror and fear that runs through so many of the texts I have quoted. One gets the impression that the frame of mind which was shaped by Puritan and family influence must have been acerbated by something new and dangerous in the environment. There must have been immediate signs that the sexual impulse was threatening to overflow the traditional dykes; signs so ominous that men felt it could be checked only by the most severe and repressive code. As we look more closely at Victorian life, we can see good cause, theoretical and actual, for a frightened reaction, and one which not only intensified the demand for chastity, the severe punishment for extramarital relations, and the program of censorship, but also promoted a new attitude toward love.

The first source of worry was the popularity of what was pointedly called "the literature of prostitution." All through the period the violence with which Balzac, Sue, and George Sand—and toward its end Gautier, Baudelaire, and Zola—were condemned reveals something much more than an outraged Puritan conscience.[52] It betrays the fear of their influence. The potential perils of such literature were felt and analyzed as early as 1819 in Hannah More's *Moral Sketches:* "Such fascinating qualities are lavished on the seducer, and such attractive graces on the seduced, that the images indulged with delight by the

51 See above, Chap. 10, sec. 2, especially pp. 236–7; and the reference there to Quinlan's book in note 47. Thackeray's lecture "George the Fourth" (1861) is an excellent index to the Victorian view of the Regency, combining a solemn attack on the king, the court, and the dandies with reiterated praise of purity, love, and domesticity. "What is it to be a gentleman?" he asks in the final paragraph (*Works*, *7*, 710). "Is it to have lofty aims, to lead a pure life, to keep your honour virgin; to have the esteem of your fellow-citizens, and the love of your fireside; to bear good fortune meekly; to suffer evil with constancy; and through evil or good to maintain truth always?" Whoever has these qualities "we will salute as gentleman."

52. There is a convenient survey by C. R. Decker, *The Victorian Conscience* (New York, 1952), but as the title implies, Decker traces the hostility entirely to the Evangelical movement. George Brimley, *Essays*, p. 233, speaks of French novels as "the properly styled 'literature of prostitution.'"

fancy, carry on the reader imperceptibly to a point which is not so far from their indulgence in the act as some imagine." Moreover, the violation of the seventh commandment is often "reduced to a venial fault, for which the irresistibleness of the temptation is shamelessly, but too successfully pleaded." Nor is that the extent of the evil. She could, she says, give actual instances where the reading of French fiction has led to the breach of solemn vows, and she thinks it highly probable, therefore, that it has contributed to the alarming increase of divorce. This, no doubt, is to reason too closely, but most Victorians would have thought such results all too possible and been ready enough to agree with Hannah More's demand for the forcible exclusion of such literature from family reading.[53] But in spite of—or perhaps because of—reiterated attacks of this kind, in sermons and tracts and periodical reviews, French novels in the thirties were on sale in the most respectable London bookstores and finding their way into the circulating libraries—"nay, into *ladies' book clubs*"; and in the fifties a familiar acquaintance with even the worst class of French fiction was commonly displayed in the best society.[54] Matthew Arnold, for all his admiration of France and of George Sand, came to speak of the insidious attraction of the French ideal of *l'homme sensuel moyen* and the French worship of the goddess of Lubricity:

> That goddess has always been a sufficient power amongst mankind, and her worship was generally supposed to need restraining rather than encouraging. But here is now a whole popular literature, nay, and art too, in France at her service! stimulations and suggestions by her and to her meet one in it at every turn. . . . M. Renan himself seems half inclined to apologise for not having paid her more attention. . . . "Nature," he cries, "cares nothing about chastity." What a slap in the face to the sticklers for "Whatsoever things are pure"!

The sticklers are the saving remnant dedicated to combating the unsoundness of the majority. They must stand fast, and maintain that "the worship of the great goddess Lubricity . . . is against nature,

53. "Unprofitable Reading," *The Works of Hannah More* (11 vols. London, 1853), *11*, 111–14. Cf. G. H. Lewes, *The Life and Works of Goethe* (first ed. 1855; London and New York, 1908), p. 523: "If we in this nineteenth century often carry our exclusion of subjects to the point of prudery, that error is a virtue compared with the demoralising license exhibited in French literature."

54. "French Novels," *Quarterly Review, 56* (1836), 66; and Brimley, *Essays*, p. 233.



human nature, and that it is ruin." [55] Clearly, if Arnold's belief in the virtue of chastity was derived from his father and the Christian revival, the passionate emphasis he gave it sprang from his fear of French contamination.

A second source of anxiety was the philosophy, and to some extent the open practice, especially in America, of what was called free love. The theory was first formulated by the Utopian socialists, from Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Shelley to Fourier, Owen, and the Saint-Simonians, as a protest against the institution of marriage as it then existed. Shelley began his note on free love in *Queen Mab* (1813): "Not even the intercourse of the sexes is exempt from the despotism of positive institution." As in the old political order, here too there was no freedom or equality, and therefore no happiness. For "love withers under constraint: its very essence is liberty: it is compatible neither with obedience, jealousy, nor fear: it is there most pure, perfect, and unlimited, where its votaries live in confidence, equality, and unreserve." But equality was a far cry from the social and legal arrangements then existing between husband and wife; and liberty to escape from an unhappy marriage was almost impossible. Shelley shouts his defiance of the established order: "A husband and wife ought to continue so long united as they love each other: any law which should bind them to cohabitation for one moment after the decay of their affection would be a most intolerable tyranny, and the most unworthy of toleration. . . . Love is free: to promise for ever to love the same woman is not less absurd than to promise to believe the same creed." [56]

It follows that if marriage is to be retained, divorce for incompatibility must be accepted, legally and socially; or if marriage is abolished, some new "system of license," to use Fourier's alarming phrase, should be established whereby mutual love, publicly acknowledged, should constitute the sole requirement for living together—a system actually put into practice in some of the Fourierist communities in the United States. Among the later Saint-Simonians, led by Enfantin, the principle of "the rehabilitation of the flesh" (from its disparagement in Christian thought) was, indeed, pushed to a point where it justified

55. "Numbers," *Discourses in America* (London, 1885), pp. 40–1, 56–7. This attitude toward France had appeared in 1873 in *Literature and Dogma:* see note 63, below.

56. *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (New York, 1933), pp. 796–7. As usual Shelley is here indebted to Godwin: see H. N. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin, and Their Circle* (New York and London, 1913), pp. 138–40.

"men and women giving themselves to several without ceasing to be united as a couple." [57] No English socialist went so far, but Shelley talked of the fanatical idea of chastity excluding young men from the society of modest and accomplished women, and thus promoting prostitution; and Robert Owen, besides advocating freedom of divorce at the will of either party, defined chastity as sexual intercourse with affection.[58]

Though not socialists, the "friends of the species" who gathered in the thirties around W. J. Fox, the Unitarian minister—among them Harriet Taylor and John Mill—were ardent critics of marriage; and the institution was subjected to hostile analysis in a series of essays, by Fox and William Adams, in the Unitarian periodical, *The Monthly Repository*.[59] Moreover, when Fox and Eliza Flower practiced what they advocated, Mrs. Fox's complaint to her husband's congregation precipitated an open battle over the claims of free love and fidelity. Carlyle, faithfully reflecting public opinion, spoke with disgust of "a flight of really wretched-looking 'friends of the species' [he mentions Mill, Mrs. Taylor, and Fox], who (in writing and deed) struggle not in favour of Duty being *done*, but against Duty of any sort almost being *required*. A singular creed this; but I can assure you a very observable one here in these days." [60] It was also observable, a little later, in the households of John Chapman, George Henry Lewes, and Thornton Hunt; and George Eliot became the outstanding exponent, in the public mind, of the doctrine of free love.[61] Then, in the very year of her union with Lewes, 1854, appeared a work by Dr. G. R. Drysdale called *The Elements of Social Science: Physical, Sexual, and Natural*

57. Henri, Comte de Saint-Simon, *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. F. M. H. Markham (Oxford, 1952), p. xxxviii.

58. Shelley, *Works*, p. 798; Owen's definition of chastity is quoted by Mill: F. A. Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, pp. 74, 291 n. 3.

59. See Packe's chapter entitled "Friends of the Species" in his *Life of Mill*, pp. 115–54; Francis E. Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent: the Monthly Repository, 1806–1838* (Chapel Hill, 1944), pp. 369–71; and Mill's essay in Hayek, chap. 3, "On Marriage and Divorce."

60. *Letters, 1826–1836*, pp. 464–5. Names there omitted are supplied by Hayek, p. 82. In the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), pp. 24–5, Carlyle publicly inveighed against the spread of French theories of enfranchisement which, among other things, would abolish the old sacrament of marriage in favor of a "new Sacrament, that of *Divorce*, which we . . . spout-of on our platforms."

61. Joan Bennett, *George Eliot* (Cambridge, 1948), pp. 45–6, 65. For the liberal view of love in Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, which George Eliot translated in 1854, see Gordon S. Haight, *George Eliot & John Chapman* (New Haven, 1940), pp. 80–1.



*Religion*, in which the author argued that "if a man and a woman conceive a passion for each other, they should be morally entitled to indulge it, without binding themselves together for life," and supplied a fairly detailed account of the best methods for doing so without contracting children. This was not an obscure medical treatise; it went through twelve editions in the next twenty years.[62] By the middle seventies Matthew Arnold, after noticing the growing violation of the seventh commandment, went on to say: "Not practice alone is against the old strictness of rule, but theory; we have argumentative systems of free love and of re-habilitation of the flesh. Even philosophers like Mr. Mill, having to tell us that for special reasons they had in fact observed the Seventh Commandment, think it right to add that this they did, 'although we did not consider the ordinances of society binding, on a subject so entirely personal.'" To Arnold this freedom was but the mask of bondage. Anyone who believes the theory of free love is like the man who believes the harlot when she says, "stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. . . . He knows not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell." [63]

Meanwhile the theory was widely publicized in the novels of George Sand (who had come under Saint-Simonian influence) and was thus brought forcibly into the general consciousness. People who had never heard of Fourier or Enfantin, of Fox or Drysdale, were well aware of what Carlyle called "a *new* astonishing Phallus-Worship, with universal Balzac-Sand melodies and litanies . . . with its finer sensibilities of the heart, and 'great satisfying loves,' . . . and universal Sacrament of Divorce." [64] In 1840, with an unctuous irony that now sets our teeth

62. For the quotation, 1872 ed., p. 368. Drysdale was a socialist and a Neo-Malthusian who saw what he preached as an important means toward a happier and healthier society. His protest on pp. 1–8 against exalting the intellect over the body illustrates the socialist "rehabilitation of the flesh." On the subject of birth control (pp. 346–53), he is in the line that runs from Francis Place and Mill in the twenties to Bradlaugh and the Neo-Malthusian League in the seventies: see J. A. Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood*, chaps. 2, 10.

63. *God and the Bible* (first ed., 1875; New York, 1895), chap. 3, p. 133. I have supplemented Arnold's quotation from *Proverbs* 9:18 by adding 9:17, which he obviously had in mind. The quotation from Mill is from his *Autobiography*, chap. 7, p. 194. Cf. a similar passage in *Literature and Dogma*, chap. 11, pp. 322–5, where Arnold again cites the insidious influence of France (cf. note 55 above).

64. *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, No. 2, pp. 81–2; and cf. p. 80. Carlyle has merged (perhaps deliberately because he saw no real distinction between them) the serious attack on marriage and the sympathy with extramarital lovers in George Sand

on edge, Thackeray described "Madame Sand's . . . eloquent attack on marriage, in the charming novel of 'Indiana'."

> What a tender suffering creature is Indiana; how little her husband appreciates that gentleness which he is crushing by his tyranny and brutal scorn; how natural it is that, in the absence of his sympathy, she, poor clinging confiding creature, should seek elsewhere for shelter; how cautious should we be, to call criminal—to visit with too heavy a censure—an act which is one of the natural impulses of a tender heart, that seeks but for a worthy object of love.

In *Valentine* young men and maidens are accorded "the same tender licence"; in *Lélia* we have "a regular topsyturvyfication of morality, a thieves' and prostitutes' apotheosis."[65] And this was the foreign writer everyone had heard of and almost everyone was reading. No wonder her name was "for many years 'a word of fear' in British households."[66]

Finally, the major reason why sex was so frightening to the Victorians was the glaring fact that gave practical edge to the theoretical dangers of French novels and social theories—that sexual license in England not only existed on a large scale but seemed to be increasing. In 1867 Francis Newman wrote in *Fraser's Magazine:* "That libertinism of the most demoralizing character flourishes in London, in Paris, and in New York, cannot be a secret; nor that it is confined to no grade of society. But alas, the chief cities do but impress the imagination more, by the scale of the evil." The reference is partly to prostitution, which will be considered in a moment, but it is also to adultery and seduction. Newman goes on to remark that what makes the evil more intractable is that the offenders often appeal to "a theory upheld by earnest persons of both sexes, hitherto wholly guiltless of transgression against the received moralities," a theory that has arisen on both sides of the Atlantic "concerning 'free love,' which, however variously applied, in every case would supersede marriage." Those who invoke it do so sometimes because they honestly consider sexual union a private affair with which the state has no right to interfere, but more often as an excuse for the free indulgence of passion. The "Parisian licentiousness" of our upper ten thousand (the world of *Vanity Fair*) shows that "their 'free love' from the very first deliberately intends to abandon the loved object, as an inconvenience and an obstacle to ambition."[67] The attitude was not limited to the upper ten thousand. A recurrent theme in the Victorian novel is the seduction of lower-class girls by the Henry Bellinghams and Arthur Donnithornes, the J. Steerforths and Barnes Newcomes.[68] In 1857 Dr. William Acton said that no one acquainted with rural life would deny that seduction was "a sport and a habit with vast numbers of men, married . . . and single, placed above the ranks of labour."[69] Among Oxford undergraduates the prevailing mores were somewhat higher:

> Adultery and Seduction, they avowed, were utter scoundrelism. It was needless to say a word more about them. *At least* (said one) if a gentleman *did* seduce a poor girl, at any rate he ought not to abandon her, but to make her an allowance, to look after her now and then; to maintain her child, if he had one by her; in short, he must honourably take the consequences of his own act. Nevertheless, on the whole, they did not approve of seduction. A

(see the next note) with the neutral presentation of free, in the sense of illicit, love in Balzac. This essay is primarily aimed at the cult of benevolence (see above, Chap. 11, sec. 2); but the love of Man and the love of woman—a woman—both belonged to the radical-liberal tradition, and are found together in Shelley, the Saint-Simonians, and the "Friends of the Species," as well as George Sand. Carlyle's full text reads: "with its finer sensibilities of the heart, and 'great satisfying loves,' with its sacred kiss of peace for scoundrel and hero alike, with its all-embracing Brotherhood, and universal Sacrament of Divorce."

65. "Madame Sand and the New Apocalypse," *The Paris Sketch Book*, in *Works*, 5, 189–91. Her actual position is well summed up in a passage from *Jacques* (Paris, 1857), Pt. I, Letter 6, p. 36, which was called to my attention by Gordon Haight of Yale. Jacques writes to Sylvia: "Je n'ai pas changé d'avis, je ne me suis pas réconcilié avec la société, et le mariage est toujours, selon moi, une de plus barbares institutions qu'elle ait ébauchées. Je ne doute pas qu'il ne soit aboli, si l'espèce humaine fait quelque progrès vers la justice et la raison; un lien plus humain et non moins sacré remplacera celui-là, et saura assurer l'existence des enfants qui naîtront d'un homme et d'une femme, sans enchaîner à jamais la liberté de l'un et de l'autre."

66. F. W. H. Myers, *Essays: Modern* (London, 1885), pp. 71–2. There is some account of the frightened reception of George Sand in Decker, *The Victorian Conscience* (above, note 52). A general study of her reputation and influence among the Victorians has still to be written. I have the impression that she was the most widely read of all foreign authors except perhaps Goethe. The whole subject of free love in Victorian life and thought would make a valuable monograph. The only connected treatments I have found are: "The Free Love System," *The Living Age*, 2d ser. *10* (1855), 815–21, and the article by Robert Briffault in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, where there is a short bibliography.

67. "Marriage Laws," reprinted in his *Miscellanies*, 3, 222–3, 235–6.

68. Other novels that deal with this subject are cited by Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Reading*, p. 356.

69. *Prostitution, Considered in Its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects*, p. 175.

> man could not exactly put the woman back where she had been. It was really a shame to spoil a girl's after-chances. But as to Fornication, that was quite another thing. A man found a woman already spoiled; he did not do her any harm, poor creature! [70]

What these texts imply is more than confirmed by statistics. In a single year (1851) 42,000 illegitimate children were born in England and Wales; and on that basis it was estimated that "one in twelve of the unmarried females in the country above the age of puberty have strayed from the path of virtue." [71]

The context of these remarks by Acton and Newman is prostitution, since the fallen woman, made an outcast by the Victorian code of purity, had little else to turn to for support. But seduction was only one of many factors leading through the middle nineteenth century to the alarming increase of what came to be called "The Great Social Evil." The growth of industrial cities providing a cover of secrecy, the starvation wages of women at the lowest economic level, the maintenance of large armed forces, and the social ambition which required the postponement of marriage until a young man could afford to live like a gentleman were important causes. By 1850 there were at least 50,000 prostitutes known to the police in England and Scotland, 8,000 in London alone.[72] In the sixties Taine reported that in the Haymarket and the Strand "every hundred steps one jostles twenty harlots" and called prostitution "the real plague-spot of English society." [73] Beginning about 1840 and rapidly increasing after 1850, a long series of books and articles brought the problem into the open [74] and drove home the points explicitly made by two writers on the subject: that "the prevalence of this vice tends, in a variety of ways, to the deterioration of national character,—and to the consequent exposure of the nations among whom it abounds to weakness, decline, and fall"—and

70. F. W. Newman, "Remedies for the Great Social Evil" (1869), *Miscellanies*, 3, 275. Cf. Mr. Tryan's life at college, in George Eliot, "Janet's Repentance," *Scenes of Clerical Life*, 2, chap. 18, pp. 109–11. Acton, pp. 168–9, refers to "the ruinous effects of a college career on fathers and sons."

71. Acton, p. 18.

72. "Prostitution," *Westminster Review*, 53 (1850), 475.

73. *Notes on England*, p. 86; and cf. pp. 44–6.

74. From only a brief search for bibliography, I found 16 books and 26 articles on prostitution published in England and Scotland between 1840 and 1870, and there must have been many more. In comparison the publication during the previous thirty years (1810–40) was very slight.



that unless it were dealt with promptly from many angles of attack, "the patient will be extinct before the disease is eradicated." [75]

One approach to the problem is found in an article entitled "Prostitution" in the *Westminster Review* for 1850. Although not sanguine about the results, the author thought something might be accomplished if licentious literature were excluded from the curriculum and boys brought up with "the same watchful attention to purity" that was given to girls.[76] In Newman's tract "Remedies for the Great Social Evil" a series of pointed questions addressed to young men is intended to give practical support to the thesis that if they were chaste, the pernicious trade of the harlot would not exist: could they bear to have their mothers and sisters know what they were doing? did they want to become hypocrites and liars? was it "just in a man to expect in a wife an antenuptial chastity, if he do not come chaste to her"? should he not feel self-degraded by what "he would regard as self-degradation in her"? Furthermore, since "the School Classics perniciously inflame passion in boys and young men," as do "many approved English poems, plays, sculptures, and paintings," all such temptations should be as rigidly barred from them as they are from girls. Newman turns with something like suppressed rage on anyone who dares call him a prude. "With eight thousand harlots in London alone, what utter nonsense is such talk! It is clear that many of us are early and profoundly corrupted: no one can tell how small a spark may cause explosion." That remark should be kept in mind by anyone tempted to

75. Ralph Wardlaw, *Lectures on Female Prostitution* (Glasgow, 1842), quoted in William Logan, *The Great Social Evil* (London, 1871), p. 114; and Acton, pp. viii–ix. Cf. John S. Smith, who begins his *Social Aspects* (1850), pp. 1–38, by reminding an age given to self-congratulation that the greatest nations of the past have ultimately fallen, and that the only possible way for England to avoid that fate is to avoid its causes as revealed in history, and ends his chapter on immorality, pp. 75–6: "The whole array of history, speaking through Greece, Rome, France, Charles II courts, and George Barnwell ballads, is there to proclaim that, of all the plagues that human sin creates to scourge itself, there is none so paralyzing to the individual body and mind, so disastrous to the national safety, and poisonous to the High and the True in man, as immorality." For other evidence of a frightened awareness of sexual immorality in England, see Macaulay, "Leigh Hunt" (1841), *Critical Essays*, 4, 361; Bagehot, *Physics and Politics* (1872), No. 5, in *Works*, 4, 571; Mallock, *The New Republic* (1877), pp. 41–2; and Morley, quoted on the next page.

76. *Westminster Review*, 53 (1850), 479. The author of this important article (pp. 448–506) was W. R. Greg: see the Bibliography below, under his name.

ridicule Victorian "prudery" wholesale, or to trace it simply to middle-class Evangelical morality.[77]

In 1866 John Morley wrote a review of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* which has come to be a classic example of the Nonconformist conscience at its worst. "No language is too strong," he said (and showed it in nearly every sentence), "to condemn the mixed vileness and childishness of depicting the spurious passion of a putrescent imagination, the unnamed lusts of sated wantons." For here was a poet "tuning his lyre in a stye," grovelling "among the nameless, shameless abominations which inspire him with frensied delight," and much more to the same purpose. But in the midst of this tirade, Morley paused to say that if Swinburne were simply "a rebel against the fat-headed Philistines and poor-blooded Puritans who insist that all poetry should be such as may be wisely placed in the hands of girls of eighteen, and is fit for the use of Sunday schools, he would have all wise and enlarged readers on his side. . . . It is a good thing to vindicate passion, and the strong and large and rightful pleasures of sense, against the narrow and inhuman tyranny of shrivelled anchorites." But no, what Swinburne has done is to "set up the pleasures of sense in the seat of the reason they have dethroned"; or, more pointedly still, he has crammed his book "with pieces which many a professional vendor of filthy prints might blush to sell." [78] The man who wrote that review was no prude and no Puritan. He was simply a very typical Victorian terrified, as he said elsewhere, by "the most awful influx the world ever saw of furious provocatives to unbridled sensuality and riotous animalism." [79]

To re-read the *Idylls of the King* against this background of fear, bred by French literature, theories of free love, and the acute awareness of "unbridled sensuality," is to realize at once the full implications of Tennyson's description of the poem as an "old imperfect tale, new-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul." [80] For the poem is the study of how a society founded on the highest moral ideals, above all,

77. Newman, "Remedies for the Great Social Evil," pp. 276–7. Other writers make the same case for censorship for the same general reason: see Acton, *Prostitution*, p. 168, and the author of *The Science of Life*, pp. 17–18. We have here the reason for the increase of "prudery" in the sixties which Mrs. Tillotson (see above, note 45) notices without explanation.

78. *Saturday Review*, 22 (August 4, 1866), 145–7.

79. Quoted by F. W. Hirst, *Early Life & Letters of John Morley* (2 vols. London, 1927), *1*, 10.

80. "To the Queen," published as an epilogue in the 1872–73 edition of Tennyson's works, lines 36–7.



that of purity, is gradually undermined and corrupted by adultery and fornication. In the central speech which concluded the first edition of 1859, King Arthur reminds the guilty Guinevere of the vow his knights had taken:

> 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 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. . . .

"And all this throve," he says, "before I wedded thee." But

> 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! [81]

Furthermore, from these sins of the flesh sprang other sins—murder, deceit, disloyalty, atheism—until the Table Round was ultimately broken by civil war and the victory of the barbarians in the last great battle in the west. The final word is spoken by Arthur:

> For I, being simple, thought to work His will,
> And have but stricken with the sword in vain,
> And all whereon I lean'd in wife and friend
> Is traitor to my peace, and all my realm
> Reels back into the beast, and is no more.[82]

Again and again that conclusion is anticipated. In "Merlin and Vivian" the magician who gained his wisdom because

> he kept his mind on one sole aim,
> Nor ever touch'd fierce wine, nor tasted flesh,
> Nor own'd a sensual wish,

81. "Guinevere," lines 465–8, 471–4, 484–90.

82. "The Passing of Arthur," lines 22–6.

is seduced and betrayed by the harlot of the court. And though he denies Vivian's calumnies against the knights—no one is stainless except Arthur, and "is he man at all?"—the best Merlin can say is that all were "brave, and many generous, and some chaste." [83] In "Pelleas and Ettarre" the young knight who has sent his friend Gawain to press his suit finds him in the willing arms of Ettarre; and presently, when he remarks to Sir Percivale that Ettarre is as false as Guinevere is true, is dumbfounded by the astonished expression on Sir Percivale's face:

> And he shrank and wail'd,
> "Is the Queen false?" and Percivale was mute.
> "Have any of our Round Table held their vows?"
> And Percivale made answer not a word.
> "Is the King true?" "The King!" said Percivale.
> "Why, then, let men couple at once with wolves." [84]

In "The Last Tournament," pointedly called "The Tournament of the Dead Innocence," the hero Tristram, who has wedded easily and all as easily left his bride to take another Isolt for mistress, sings the new philosophy of love:

> New life, new love, to suit the newer day;
> New loves are sweet as those that went before.
> Free love—free field—we love but while we may.

How ridiculous, he cries, for Arthur to have tried to bind "free manhood" with inviolable vows. "The wide world laughs at it. . . . We are not angels here nor shall be. . . . My soul, we love but while we may." One can hardly escape reading the message of the Red Knight to the King as Tennyson's own speech of bitter disillusion to an age whose ideal of purity seems to be nothing but a hypocritical mask to hide its sensuality:

> Tell thou the King and all his liars that I
> Have founded my Round Table in the North,
> And whatsoever his own knights have sworn
> My knights have sworn the counter to it—and say
> My tower is full of harlots, like his court,
> But mine are worthier, seeing they profess
> To be none other than themselves—and say

83. Lines 624–6, 779, 815; and see the whole passage, lines 689–836.
84. Lines 521–6.



> My knights are all adulterers like his own,
> But mine are truer, seeing they profess
> To be none other; and say his hour is come,
> The heathen are upon him, his long lance
> Broken, and his Excalibur a straw.[85]

If this picture of the decline and fall of a civilization was largely the expression of Tennyson's somber observation of contemporary life,[86] it was also—inevitably, coming from the mouth of the poet laureate—a horrible warning. The didactic intention of stemming the tide, or trying to, is manifest in the introduction of two moral lessons, two cures, one might say, for the disease. The first is the reaffirmation, in the strongest possible terms, of the code of purity, embodied in the lives of a few knights and ladies—notably Arthur and Galahad, Enid and Elaine—and expounded with all its anathemas by the King himself in the speech to Guinevere. There, after quoting the knightly vow,

> To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
> To love one maiden only, cleave to her,

he pronounces judgment upon the Queen in tones far more Victorian than Celtic:

85. Lines 279–81, 690–98, 77–88. With Tristram's distortion for sensual reasons of the doctrine of free love, compare F. W. Newman's statement, four years earlier, on p. 365 above. Between the early *Idylls* and those of the late sixties stands the "Lucretius," written in 1865. Its central theme is the erotic effect of the love potion given Lucretius by his wife. But to imagine that Tennyson was trying "to imitate the libertinism and daring of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*" is preposterous. On the contrary, he talks the language of Morley's review: see lines 52–5, 156–63. Lucretius (lines 164 ff.) says of his erotic dreams that like crowds in an hour of civic tumult, they bear the keepers down and throng "far into that council-hall where sit the best and stateliest of the land." It is the council-hall of Camelot—and Westminster. And so, since (lines 219–22, 231–2),

> . . . now it seems some unseen monster lays
> His vast and filthy hands upon my will,
> Wrenching it backward into his, and spoils
> My bliss in being. . . .
> Why should I, beastlike as I find myself,
> Not manlike end myself?

The same monster laid his hands on Arthur's court and thwarted Arthur's will.

86. Cf. S. C. Burchell, "Tennyson's 'Allegory in the Distance,'" *PMLA*, 68 (1953), 418–24. Burchell rightly brings forward other sources of Tennyson's despair, especially the pride, greed, and selfishness of a commercial society. All I claim is that sexual immorality is the central evil in Tennyson's mind.

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.

As he departs, Arthur (who remarks in passing that he "was ever virgin save for thee") cannot so much as take her hand, since his own flesh, "here looking down on thine polluted, cries, 'I loathe thee.'" And Guinevere herself, bowed in bitter repentance, completely concurs in his judgment, even to the admission that

The shadow of another cleaves to me,
And makes me one pollution.[87]

It is only by keeping vividly in mind the merging influence of the Puritan revival, the exaltation of the family, and the acute fear of sex, that an age like ours, which sets no great value on chastity and views marriage as a problem in adjustment and forbearance between equals, can tolerate this passage, or avoid finding Arthur more of an insufferable prig than an ideal man.

The second cure for the disease of the age also appears in this central speech of the poem. Arthur knows no greater power, he says, of keeping down "the base in man" than "the maiden passion for a maid."[88] From the fear of sex we pass directly to the exaltation of love.

### 4. *Love*

At the house party in Mallock's *New Republic,* one subject of discussion is love. "I know a little of the love poetry of this and of other times," remarks Mr. Allen, "and the poetry of this has always seemed to me far—far the highest. It has seemed to me to give the passion so much more meaning, and such a much greater influence over all life." He is thinking especially, he says, of two contemporary poets:

87. "Guinevere," lines 509–19, 550–4, 613–14.
88. Lines 474–7.



Shakespeare may of course have exhibited the working of love more powerfully than they; yet I am sure he could never have conceived its meaning and its nature so deeply. No heroine of his could have understood Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese;* nor any hero of his her husband's love lyrics. What seems to me the thing so peculiarly modern, is this notion of love as something which, once truly attained, would, as Browning says,

make Time break,
Letting us pent-up creatures through
Into Eternity, our due.[89]

This is to make love not only the supreme experience of life but its end and object—the very means by which the soul is saved. The fullest statement is in "Cristina," written well before Browning met Elizabeth Barrett:

Doubt you if, in some such moment,
As she fixed me, she felt clearly,
Ages past the soul existed,
Here an age 't is resting merely,
And hence fleets again for ages,
While the true end, sole and single,
It stops here for is, this love-way,
With some other soul to mingle?

Else it loses what it lived for,
And eternally must lose it;
Better ends may be in prospect,
Deeper blisses (if you choose it),
But this life's end and this love-bliss
Have been lost here.

The "moment" is the critical moment when the lover meets his soulmate, the one person in the wide world who was made for him or her, made to be loved forever, here and hereafter. After finding one's affinity, to draw back, like Cristina, out of timidity or apathy or any consideration of "the world's honours," is failure in life. Success is to seize the predestined moment and to love on, even if love is unrequited (as here), even if the beloved is dead—always to be faithful until, in

89. Pages 240–1. This is Mallock's own opinion: cf. *Is Life Worth Living?* p. 103.

heaven, the perfect union is achieved or renewed. This extraordinary conception, though often expressed more moderately, is found in many other Victorian poets, notably Tennyson, Patmore, and Rossetti. And in hundreds of novels—for in fiction, too, what seemed modern at the time was the same preoccupation. In the work of Scott, as Ruskin and Bagehot observed, love and marriage had been viewed as simply constituents of human happiness. Now, in the modern novel, they had often become its sole object, the most important business of life.[90]

Literature, of course, and especially the literature of love, is not a transcript of reality. But it is significant that Taine cited Major Dobbin, the lover of Amelia in *Vanity Fair*, who waited fifteen years without hope because for him there was but one woman in the world, as representative of what he had observed in England—but not in France. "Many do not marry in consequence of a thwarted inclination, and continue to live with their eldest brother. . . . One who was mentioned to me, very distinguished, was supplanted by a titled rival; during two years apprehensions were felt for his reason. He went to China and to Australia; at present he occupies a high post, he has been made a baronet, he presides over important business, but he is unmarried." [91] It is fair to say, I think, that the woman who insisted, for all Carlyle's growling, that men and women were born "for the chief purpose of falling in love, or being fallen in love with" was a rather typical Victorian.[92]

90. Ruskin, "Fiction, Fair and Foul," sec. I, par. 21, in *Works, 34*, 284–5; Bagehot, "The Waverley Novels," *Works, 2*, 199–201. Even Trollope, for all his common sense, seems to approve of Johnny Eames' resolve in *The Small House at Allington* (first ed. 1864; 8 vols. New York, 1898), *1*, chap. 4, p. 49, that once having loved Lily Dale, "it behoved him, as a true man, to love her on to the end" even though she should refuse to marry him; and he seems to agree with Lady Julia (*3*, chap. 15, p. 230) when she says to him after Lily's refusal, "To have loved truly, even though you shall have loved in vain, will be a consolation when you are as old as I am." Cf. Tennyson, *Maud*, part 1, sec. xi; *In Memoriam*, No. 27, though he is there thinking of his love for Arthur Hallam.

91. *Notes on England*, pp. 96–7. Cf. Yeats' attitude toward Maude Gonne, *The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats* (New York, 1938), pp. 341, 368. Taine might equally have cited Squire Dale and Lord De Guest in *The Small House at Allington* (see previous note), *2*, chap. 13, pp. 197–8: "The story of their lives had been so far the same; each had loved, and each had been disappointed, and then each had remained single through life."

92. Froude, *Carlyle: Life in London, 1*, chap. 8, p. 216. Cf. Ruskin, "Fiction, Fair and Foul," p. 284 n. The only essay I know on Victorian love (and this is limited by the special approach of the book) is by Joseph Wood Krutch in *The Modern Temper* (New York, 1929), chap. 4, "Love—or the Life and Death of a Value."



The whole attitude is exactly what we call Romantic, and it was, in fact, a direct inheritance from Romanticism: partly from its naturalism, which found the instincts good and appealed to the feelings or the heart as the supreme guide to conduct and wisdom; partly from its idealism, whether Platonic or chivalric. The study of Victorian love is the study of how this tradition, embodied mainly in the works of Rousseau, Shelley, and George Sand, was domesticated under the powerful influence of Evangelical and family sentiment, and then emphasized, as a protection against, or a solution for, some major concerns of the time: sensuality, the marriage market, the painful mood of baffled thought, and the decline of religious faith.

In the literature of love written in the forties and fifties there occurs a persistent note of reconstruction. It takes the form of antithesis. Love is not something carnal and evil to be ashamed of but something pure and beautiful; it is not a temptation to be struggled against but a great ethical force which can protect men from lust and even strengthen and purify the moral will; it is not an experience limited to courtship but continues throughout life, animating husband and wife no less than the lover and his lass. The motivation is obvious. If men are to be saved from the sensuality that threatens society, love must be distinguished from sex and given its rightful place and influence within the code of purity. When Sir Guy Morville in *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853) discovers that Amy is the being he had dreamt of, the one woman he would love forever, Charlotte Yonge stops to point out: "Sternly as he was wont to treat his impulses, he did not look on his affection as an earthborn fancy, liable to draw him from higher things, and, therefore, to be combatted; he deemed her rather a guide and guard whose love might arm him, soothe him, and encourage him." [93]

The leaders of this new orientation were Kingsley and Patmore; its principal manifestoes *Yeast* (1851) and *The Angel in the House* (1855, 1856).

93. Chap. 13, p. 179.

Tennyson

## *The Epic*

At Francis Allen's on the Christmas-eve –
The game of forfeits done – the girls all kiss'd
Beneath the sacred bush and past away –
The parson Holmes, the poet Everard Hall,
The host, and I sat round the wassail-bowl,
Then half-way ebb'd: and there we held a talk,
How all the old honour had from Christmas gone,
Or gone, or dwindled down to some odd games
In some odd nooks like this; till I, tired out
With cutting eights that day upon the pond,
Where, three times slipping from the outer edge,
I bump'd the ice into three several stars,
Fell in a doze; and half-awake I heard
The parson taking wide and wider sweeps,
Now harping on the church-commissioners,
Now hawking at Geology and schism;
Until I woke, and found him settled down
Upon the general decay of faith
Right thro' the world, 'at home was little left,
And none abroad: there was no anchor, none,
To hold by.' Francis, laughing, clapt his hand
On Everard's shoulder, with 'I hold by him.'
'And I,' quoth Everard, 'by the wassail-bowl.'
'Why yes,' I said, 'we knew your gift that way
At college: but another which you had,
I mean of verse (for so we held it then),
What came of that?' 'You know,' said Frank, 'he burnt
His epic, his King Arthur, some twelve books'–
And then to me demanding why? 'Oh, sir,
He thought that nothing new was said, or else
Something so said 'twas nothing – that a truth
Looks freshest in the fashion of the day:
God knows: he has a mint of reasons: ask.
It pleased me well enough.' 'Nay, nay,' said Hall,
'Why take the style of those heroic times?
For nature brings not back the Mastodon,
Nor we those times; and why should any man
Remodel models? these twelve books of mine
Were faint Homeric echoes, nothing-worth,
Mere chaff and draff, much better burnt.' 'But I,'
Said Francis, 'pick'd the eleventh from this hearth,
And have it: keep a thing, its use will come.
I hoard it as a sugar-plum for Holmes.'
He laugh'd, and I, though sleepy, like a horse
That hears the corn-bin open, prick'd my ears;
For I remember'd Everard's college fame
When we were Freshmen: then at my request
He brought it; and the poet little urged,
But with some prelude of disparagement,
Read, mouthing out his hollow oes and aes,
Deep-chested music, and to this result.

## *Morte d'Arthur*

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonnesse about their Lord,
King Arthur: then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
On one side lay the Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.
  Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep – the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made, –
Tho' Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more – but let what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro' the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In those old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword – and how I row'd across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king:
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere:
Watch what thou seëst, and lightly bring me word.'
  To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
'It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro' the helm.
A little thing may harm a wounded man.
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee wold.'
  So saying, from the ruin'd shrine he stept
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

Morte d'Arthur (2)

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.
Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.'
To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
'Thou hast betray'd thy nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem'd
Thy fëalty, nor like a noble knight:
For surer sign had follow'd, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again
As thou art lief and dear, and do the thing
I bad thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.'
Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix'd in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud,
'And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?
What harm, undone? deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumours of a doubt? but were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, "King Arthur's sword, Excalibur
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills."
So might some old man speak in the aftertime
To all the people, winning reverence.
But now much honour and much fame were lost.'
So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.
Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'
To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
'Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow'd of the power in his eye
That bow'd the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.'
Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush-beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the northern sea.
So flash'd and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.
Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
'Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?'
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho' I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I look'd again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.'

Morte d'Arthur (3)

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
'My end draws nigh; 'tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.'
So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro' his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words,
Then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O'er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro' the place of tombs.
But, as he walk'd, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh'd the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, 'Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.'
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk'd,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him like a goad.
Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels –
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.
Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream – by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold – and from them ros
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.
Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge,'
And to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter'd casque, and chafed his hands,
And call'd him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against his brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the wither'd moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash'd with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls –
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the dais-throne – were parch'd with dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix'd with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
So like a shatter'd column lay the King;
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro' the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.
Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere,
'Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole ROUND TABLE is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.'
And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seëst – if indeed I go –
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly, but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

Morte d'Arthur (4)

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

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Here ended Hall, and our last light, that long
Had wink'd and threaten'd darkness, flared and fell:
At which the Parson, sent to sleep with sound,
And waked with silence, grunted 'Good!' but we
Sat rapt: it was the tone with which he read –
Perhaps some modern touches here and there
Redeem'd it from the charge of nothingness –
Or else we loved the man and prized his work;
I know not: but we sitting, as I said,
The cock crew loud; as at that time of year
The lusty bird takes every hour for dawn:
Then Francis, muttering, like a man ill-used,
'There now – that's nothing!'drew a little back,
And drove his heel into the smoulder'd log
That sent a blast of sparkles up the flue
And so to bed; where yet in sleep I seem'd
To sail with Arthur under looming shores,
Point after point; till on to dawn, when dreams
Begin to feel the truth and stir of day,
To me, methought, who waited with a crowd,
There came a bark that, blowing forward, bore
King Arthur, like a modern gentleman
Of stateliest port; and all the people cried
'Arthur is come again: he cannot die.'
Then those that stood upon the hills behind
Repeated – 'Come again and thrice as fair;'
And, further inland, voices echoed – 'Come
With all good things, and war shall be no more.'
At this a hundred bells began to peal,
That with the sound I woke, and heard indeed
The clear church-bells ring in the Christmas morn.