ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE PERIOD OF THE
GREAT REFORM BILL

By

John Alistair Clarke

Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy
University College London
1991
ABSTRACT

This thesis is arranged in four chapters. Chapter One describes some of the political, intellectual and literary characteristics of the age of the Great Reform Bill (roughly the period from 1820 to 1835). It studies in particular how the rapidly changing political situation, in part influenced by utilitarian thinking, absorbed interest away from imaginative literature, and how this resulted in new strains and tendencies in the literature of the period.

The scene thus having been set, subsequent chapters consider the influence of the reform climate on some specific contemporary writers, who have been chosen for the ways in which they illustrate some of the themes identified in Chapter One. Chapter Two focusses on Thomas Love Peacock, and considers his view that artists should become socially involved, and shows how his own novels - which fictionalise contemporary political debate - themselves embody this view. It concludes with an analysis of Peacock's novel The Misfortunes Of Elphin, a political novel in which quietism of the Lakeland writers is criticised.

Chapter Three compares the views of two writers - S.T. Coleridge and the poet Richard Hengist Horne - on what should be the proper relationship between writers and the emerging modern state, and shows the extent to which those
views were conditioned by contemporary political events.

The fourth and last chapter is a study of the works of the Sheffield poet Ebenezer Elliott, perhaps the most popular poet of the 1830's. His Corn Law Rhymes and other poems are an extreme example of poetry being employed to further specific political objectives. The chapter also demonstrates how and why Elliott's contemporaries regarded him as the key literary figure of the 1830's.
CONTENTS

Chapter One: The Spirit Of The Age 1-38
Notes 39-47

Chapter Two: Thomas Love Peacock
And Political Reform 48-70
Notes 71-73

Chapter Three: Writers And Governments:
S.T. Coleridge and
R.H. Horne 74-105
Notes 106-112

Chapter Four: Ebenezer Elliott, The
Corn Law Rhymer 113-160
Notes 161-169

Bibliography 170-183
An age of disquietude and doubt—of the removal of time-worn landmarks and the breaking-up of the hereditary elements of society—old opinions, old feelings—ancestral customs and institutions are crumbling away, and both the spiritual and temporal worlds are darkened by the shadow of change. (1)

So wrote Edward Bulwer in 1833, at the end of a decade of unprecedented social and political change: a decade which had started in an atmosphere of political repression and had ended with the passing of the Great Reform Bill; a decade which saw the decline of old-style aristocratic government and the beginnings of modern parliamentary democracy; a decade in which the last fatal duel was fought in England, and the first steam train appeared; a decade which saw the deaths of Blake, Byron and Shelley, but the births too of Rossetti and Matthew Arnold, Walter Bagehot and Lewis Carroll.

Of course, every period in history can claim to be an age of change, of transition. But in England in the 1820's and 1830's this sense of movement and of change was felt especially strongly, so much so that a man in 1835 could look back twenty years and feel he was looking back to a long-lost world. In this opening chapter, I attempt to
identify first, some of the principal intellectual changes in the reform period, and second some of the period's more marked literary characteristics. Subsequent chapters elaborate on some of the themes identified through a closer study of some individual writers and works.

---

i. "The age then is one of destruction..." (2)

To understand something of the character of the reform period, it is helpful to go back a little earlier, to the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. The conclusion of war had seen, throughout much of Europe, the restoration of monarchical and aristocratic rule. It saw too, for a time, a severe reaction against any movement which was thought to threaten the social stability which rulers longed for after twenty troubled years. In England, exhaustion with the war, a fear of Jacobinism and a desire above all for stability fostered among the ruling class a mood of conservatism immediately after 1815, a mood which explains the relative ease with which the government could persuade parliament to adopt repressive measures such as the suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1817, and the Six Acts of 1819. Other European governments adopted similar measures (Austria, for example, which closely paralleled Britain with its repressive Carlsbad decrees ordered by Metternich).
The mood of conservatism did not last long, however. Indeed, it held within it the seeds of its own destruction, for it was simply not possible after 1815 for the ruling classes of England - and Europe - to return to their old ways without challenge. The war had called upon the patriotism - and the pockets - of the English people, or as one contemporary writer put it:

The war had at least made it necessary to take into account the opinions of larger classes. An appeal to patriotism meant that some regard must be paid to...the people at large. (3)

Even during the war period, the patriotism of the British public could not mask fully the growing discontent. An article in Tait's Magazine noted that "the poor labourers, indeed, though they shouted "Billy Pitt for ever!", and "Damn the frog-eating French!", felt that all was not right for them". (4). Once the war was over, and continental politics no longer occupied the public's attention, one could no longer disregard indefinitely the growing domestic problems. Harriet Martineau remarked that with the end of the war, the public's attention naturally turned to domestic issues, especially political reform. "The English nation had now come out of a war; and, by the very constitution of the human mind, some great general aim must be presented for it to work up to" (5). In a similar vein the publisher Charles Knight noted that the public's absorption in continental political events had diverted attention from
increasingly pressing social issues, but that this could not be expected to last (6).

Thus, after 1815, the fragile unity of the wartime quickly gave way as England entered a period of economic and social distress, largely occasioned by the war, but which the government seemed initially unwilling or unable to remedy. Strikes, social unrest, protests over taxation, and anger at the excesses and corruption of the establishment were met at first with repression, while early suggestions that government should reform itself were either ignored or simply squashed. John Stuart Mill, one of the most influential political thinkers in the age of reform, described the post-war atmosphere as follows -

When the fears and animosities accompanying the war with France had been brought to an end, and people had once more a place in their thoughts for home politics, the tide began to set towards reform. The renewed oppression of the Continent by the old reigning families, the countenance apparently given by the English Government to the conspiracy against liberty called the Holy Alliance, and the enormous weight of the national debt and taxation occasioned by so long and costly a war, rendered the government and parliament very unpopular. (7)

Thus, dislike and distrust of the government and the traditional ruling establishment built up over the first few years of the peace, and despite the government's initial attempts to suppress criticism, few of its institutions escaped attack.
One of the first major public outrages arose over the 1819 "Peterloo massacre" - the brutal suppression of peaceful demonstrators by government troops - and this was soon followed by outrage at the passing of the so-called Six Acts legislation aimed at quelling dissent. Frequent exposures of official corruption - the buying of support through pensions, sinecures and livings, and the misuse of public funds - also fanned the flames of public discontent with the government.

More fundamentally however, the aristocratic traditions and institutions of monarchical government were ill-suited to deal with the host of new social questions and problems which emerged after the end of the war and during the 1820's. The shift from a wartime to a peacetime economy created new economic opportunities, and allowed the development of new industries and new kinds of social and industrial organisation, all of which needed a different structure of government and new economic and bureaucratic policies to deal with them. The writer Francis Jeffrey pinpointed this new climate when he wrote in 1825 that, notwithstanding the economic problems that succeeded the war, a space had been opened for resources to be directed towards new industrial development. "The sudden termination of a long and universal war, has shut up so many old, and opened so many new channels to industry and commercial enterprise that it is in the interests of all to consider how capital and labour can be employed to the best
Old style Whig and Tory aristocrats were perhaps unprepared or badly equipped for such changes. They had regarded social distress and economic downturns as evils entirely divorced from politics and beyond the powers of politicians to control. They were at a loss when confronted with the arguments of political economists, free-traders and industrialists opposed to traditional mercantile economic policies, or who saw as outdated the bias in favour of agricultural and landed interests. They were at a loss when confronted with new industrial towns, borough councils and public works and they felt threatened by the new industrial and commercial wealth and its modern ways of doing things. Above all they were unhappy at the thought of political power passing from their traditional supporters amongst the rural gentry to the unrepresented townships. Such ways of thinking obviously had to change if they were not to become obsolete.

The English aristocracy - whether in government or out of it - also suffered a loss of prestige and influence in the 1820's. Even during the Regency, the behaviour of Prince George and his courtiers had often appalled more sober minded leaders of society. "I wish", wrote Lord Grey to Lord Holland in 1808, "that the Prince had a little more feeling of what is due to the dignity of his own situation, for it must be confessed that the persons who surround him very
materially contribute to diminish the respect of the public." (9) Grey had in mind courtiers like the egregious Lord Yarmouth, later characterised as Lord Steyne in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, and as Monmouth in Disraeli's *Coningsby*.

The tone set by the Regency continued into subsequent decades. Respect for the aristocracy declined further over the "Mrs Clarke" affair (the promotion of military officers for sexual favours by a former mistress of the son of George III), and the Duke of Cumberland's alleged murder of his valet. These two incidents whetted public appetite for upper class scandal, which was almost fed to surfeit during the trial of Queen Caroline in 1820. The trial aroused national sympathy for the Queen, who was seen to have been ill-treated by a corrupt court, and was now being tried by a House of Lords determined to find her guilty, and prompted an outpouring of popular indignation against the monarch and the aristocracy. (10)

William Cobbett successfully presented the trial as a paradigm of the struggle between the interests of the people and the undeserved power and wealth of the ruling classes. During the trial he published an attack on the aristocracy entitled "A Peep At The Peers", which gave "all their names alphabetically, and stating against each name, all the sums of money which they and the several branches of their family received out of the taxes". Cobbett reckoned he sold 200,000...
copies of this book (11). The same year saw the publication of the popular Black Book, Or Corruption Unmasked which, according to James Mill, "provided the data for the statement so often made in the course of the Reform agitation, that less than two hundred persons (members of the Aristocracy) returned two thirds of the House of Commons" (12).

Spurred on by such publications, slandering the aristocracy soon became the sport of the popular press, and did a great deal to arouse indignation against it. Bulwer Lytton commented that "by the mere details of vulgar gossip, a great wholesale principle of indignation at the privileged order has been at work", while Blackwoods Magazine in 1831 commented that "There is a natural jealousy in the middling orders of their superiors...nothing can demonstrate the prevalence of this feeling so strongly as the...columns of the popular newspapers filled with invectives against the higher orders" (13).

The fashionable novels of the 1820's, with their descriptions of the hypocrisy and vulgarity pervading high society, also played their part. Lytton for example was to remark that "few writers ever produced so great an effect on the political spirit of their generation as some of these novelists, who, without any other merit, unconsciously exposed the falsehood, the hypocrisy, the arrogant and
vulgar insolence of patrician life. Read by all classes, in every town, in every village, these works...could not but engender a mingled indignation and disgust" (14). The poet R.H. Horne noted the same phenomenon, as did others.

As Byron was to hear during his enforced exile, the mores and fashions of the aristocracy of the Regency were passing out of date, as a growing educated middle-class moved from being fascinated by aristocratic society to being disgusted by it. The 1820's marked perhaps the turning point at which the middle-classes - in modern language - gained the initiative, and it was frequently noted at the time that they, and not the aristocracy, had become superior in both educational attainments and in political understanding. The reformer Edward Wakefield, for example, was but one commentator who noted that "towards the end of the war, when a new generation had grown up, the middle class were better instructed than the highest class, and the charm of aristocracy had gone (15).

The Established Church, one of the other great pillars of the state, also came under increasing attack during the course of the 1820's. The Anglican church in the early nineteenth century was, to many minds, intellectually lax, politically reactionary and administratively corrupt. Evangelicalism apart, its economic interests and a strongly entrenched Toryism bound it closely to the interests of aristocratic government, and there was widespread resentment
over the social privileges of its clergy, many of whose wealthier members held several sinecures and rarely fulfilled their pastoral duties. Its prestige was to suffer greatly in these years, partly through its inability to reform itself, and partly due to the energetic social and educational reforms pursued by the Methodists and other dissenting sects which gained them a large following in particular in the new industrial regions.

Criticism of the Church was levelled particularly at its misuse of temporalities. The words of one columnist in the Monthly Repository in 1832 is typical: "the higher clergy's disproportionate revenues arrest the public eye, and furnish a perpetual butt for the shafts of infidelity and disaffection..." (16). The Church's political allegiance to the Tory party was also the subject of frequent adverse comment and damaged its reputation. The rejection of the second reform bill by Bishops in the House of Lords dealt a massive blow to the standing of the Established Church. "You may consider the fate of the Church as sealed", wrote John Stuart Mill, "the first brunt of public indignation has fallen upon the Prelacy" (17). W.J. Fox, the editor of the Monthly Repository, commented hopefully on this that "the conduct of the bishops has accelerated that revision of the establishment and correction of abuses which it was intended to postpone...a modification, if not the destruction, of the political character of the Church, [is] evidently at no great distance" (18). Harriet Martineau was to recall that
after the bishops' rejection of the Bill, "for many months it was not safe for a bishop to appear in public in any article of sacerdotal dress", such was their unpopularity (19).

ii. "the spirit of self-examination is aroused...

Thus, as the 1820's ran their course, the traditional institutions of government - the Monarchy, the aristocracy, parliament and the church - came increasingly under attack because of their inability to meet the expectations of a rapidly changing society, and the concomitant demand for political and social reform. For John Stuart Mill, the reform movement began around 1820 when the radical M.P. Joseph Hume started his campaign to identify misuse of public funds: "the movement which gave existence to the Reform Bill, dates in reality from the period when Mr Hume commenced his memorable exposures of the almost inconceivable profligacies of our public expenditure" (20).

Signs of a shift towards liberalism began to appear in 1821 when the government lifted its ban on public debates, although it was still in that year a crime to discuss post-1800 political questions in public. By 1823 however reform sentiment in the country was already sufficiently strong to influence the behaviour of many members of parliament. Coleridge remarked in that year that "Many votes are given for reform in the House of Commons, which are not honest."
While it is well known that the measure will not be carried in parliament, it is as well to purchase some popularity by voting for it" (21).

The year 1825 witnessed the first major reform with the repeal of the laws against combination, brought about largely by the efforts of Joseph Hume and Francis Place. A further significant change occurred with the incapacitation of Lord Liverpool, the Prime Minister, in 1827, and the emergence of more modern-thinking and politically moderate politicians like Robert Peel and William Huskisson at around the same time. Sidney Smith was later to remark that "from the beginning of the century to the death of Lord Liverpool, was an awful period for anyone who ventured to maintain liberal opinions. He was sure to be assailed with all the Billingsgate of the French Revolution" (22).

With the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829, the pace of reform quickened immeasurably. Coleridge commented that the Act "was, in effect, a Surinam toad; and the Reform Bill, the Dissenters' admission to the Universities, and the attack on the Church, are so many toadlets, one after another detaching themselves from their parent brute" (23). By 1831, just four years later, the process by which reformers had gained respectability rather than just notoriety was virtually complete. Blackwoods Magazine wittily observed in that year that "Not many years are gone, when such was the credit of reformers, that if, by
accident, a person of that description called at the house of a gentleman, his butler failed not to count the spoons upon his departure. Now we all see him sitting on the Treasury Bench” (24). The latter is a reference to Lord Grey’s appointment of the reformer Henry Brougham as Chancellor in January 1831.

Naturally, some conservative figures lamented what they considered to be the wholesale destruction of old institutions. The influential Tory member of parliament, Sir James Walsh, for example, noted in consternation that:

the props and fastenings which sustain and secure the machine of the state seem gradually loosening ... the stability of British institutions, the foundation of our national glory and our national pre-eminence, have sustained a shock which ... even they may not be able to withstand (25).

Some went much further, even to the point of attributing a series of natural disasters in the 1820’s and 1830’s - the eruption of Vesuvius, earthquakes in Yorkshire and Persia, the destruction of Valparaiso by flood, the cholera epidemic that swept England in 1832 - to the upheavals caused by radicalism.

A more thoughtful and understandable concern to men like Sir James Walsh, however, was whether anything positive or permanent was being erected to replace the institutions about to be demolished. England in the 1820’s and 1830’s seemed to many to be an anarchy of different opinions and theories as to how society should be re-organised, none of
which offered a really satisfactory basis on which to build. Thomas Carlyle in 1829 scoffed at the proliferation of sects, each with its own dogma, its own slogans, even its own monthly or quarterly magazine to act as a vehicle for its views, that clamoured for attention in the 1820’s - the political economists, the utilitarians, the historical radicals, the metaphysical radicals, the Coleridgean conservatives, the Owenite socialists, the Whigs, the reactionary Tories, the Unitarians, the Methodists, the Evangelicals. Harriet Martineau wrote of the difficulty at this time of determining “what great principle of those afloat, should preponderate as to determine the government of the country” (27), while John Stuart Mill called it the “age of loud disputes and weak convictions”, and noted the sudden weakening of old attachments to established opinions. (28).

On a more positive note however, Mill, Carlyle and a few other writers were able to recognise that the very absence of any single cohesive body of thought, and a certain amount of intellectual anarchy, might be a fundamental characteristic of a period of transition. Society was still in the process of discovering its new intellectual requirements, and in the absence of a common creed, innumerable ideas and opinions naturally jostled for attention. A conceptual basis for such a transitional process was provided by the French philosopher Auguste Comte, whose positivist philosophy was studied and
publicised in the 1820's by Mill. Comte had distinguished two alternating phases in the historical growth of any society: "organic" phases, characterised by a common system of beliefs, and an accepted apparatus of institutions, succeeded by "critical" phases, in which the organic order broke down under new social and economic pressures, and society entered a period of instability characterised by the absence of common belief, scepticism, dissent and the sundering of social bonds. Mill and others believed, a la Comte, that precisely such a process was underway in England in the 1820's and 1830's.

From finding an intellectual rationale for the period's apparent confusion, it is perhaps but a small step to regarding it as constituting a form of progress in itself. J.S. Mill suggested that "the times are very favourable for starting new opinions ... especially any which hold out hopes of extensive good" (29). Bulwer Lytton observed with pleasure that "the spirit of self-examination is aroused ... the agitation of thought is the beginning of truth" (30), while James Mill wrote that "the very ideal of progressiveness implies not indeed the rejection but the questioning of all established opinions" (31).

For men of a liberal cast, the spirit of the age expressed itself most typically in this sudden growth of
self-interest and self-enquiry, which in itself helped to
break down prejudices and to allow truth to be found. It was
thus that discussion and debate were almost inevitably
associated, in the 1820's, with radicalism or liberalism.
"It was considered liberal to listen to consider, and to
speechify in return", recalled one conservative writer, "and
thus the folly spread and settled" (32). The gradual
loosening up of restrictions on press freedom and public
debate in the early 1820's opened up a flood of discourse and
speculation on the direction society was taking, not only
among the most highly educated but, thanks to the spread of
education, amongst the population as a whole. One
commentator noted in astonishment that:

Changes which involve the fortunes of
thousands - the permanence of our form of
government - the happiness of our whole
population - the rank of our country among
nations, are made the subjects of everyday
talk, and our minds are familiarised with the
idea of them (34).

In short, one sees during the course of the 1820's a society
which was becoming increasingly interested in its own
condition. "Men", commented J.S. Mill, "have begun to think
that these times are, or are destined to be, distinguished
in a very remarkable manner from the times which have
preceded them" (35). The words come from Mill's influential
series of articles entitled "Spirit Of The Age" (1831), just
one of a host of essays, articles and books of this period
which attempt to describe or analyse the age's intellectual
make-up. Hazlitt's The Spirit Of The Age (1825), James
Mill's *Essay on Government* (1828), Carlyle's *Signs Of The Times* (1829), William Cobbett's *History Of The Regency And Reign Of King George The Fourth* (1830), and Bulwer Lytton's *England And The English* (1833), are but some of the many and varied examples of this new spirit of enquiry, which one might reasonably describe as the beginnings of a modern sociological interest in the condition of England. It is an important characteristic of the age of reform, and one which, as will be seen, has significant consequences for the imaginative literature of the period.

Accompanying this growing interest in self-examination was a predilection for studying the past in order to understand better the present. This aspect of historiography is of course not new, but it was employed with a renewed vigour in the age of reform. "The idea", suggested Mill, "of comparing one's own age with former ages, or with our notion of those which are yet to come, never before was itself the dominant idea of any age" (36). Mill, as was seen, employed the historical theories of Auguste Comte as a means to explain the present, and other writers followed suit. The study of history became less an end in itself than, increasingly, the means by which to interpret and lend perspective to present day events. Others went further. The writer W.J. Fox, for example, argued in the 1820's that reading historical novels was the key to understanding social evolution, and that one could learn much from the past (37), while others suggested that the study of other
contemporary societies could assist an understanding of one's own society - the aim, indeed, of much of the travel writing of the period. "Intelligent investigation into past ages, and intelligent study of foreign countries ... are beginning at length to be turned into some account", one journal typically observed (38).

The growing propensity to draw upon history as a means to illuminate the present and, perhaps even more important, the impulse to explain society's progress in terms of wider historical processes is a fundamental, if complex, characteristic of the reform period. It indicates, perhaps, the shift in the nineteenth century away from abstract theories about the nature of society in favour of social theories that were capable of being tested: in this case that could be measured against the experience of earlier ages - or indeed of other societies.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the evolution of society as a whole, the ability to conceive of "society" as a single, grand entity, subject to historical patterns, seems also to emerge strongly in this period, indicative possibly of the waning of an era which stressed individualism, and of social theories centred upon the individual man, and the beginning of an age in which mass organisation and the rapid growth of large populations and provincial urban communities necessarily led to a more sociological approach to political and cultural problems.
The impact of these complex shifts in attitude on the literature of the 1820's and 1830's was not insignificant. For one, it may have encouraged a perception that literature should be the expression or embodiment of broader historical processes, as against more individualistic notions of literary creation and literary value. From that point it is perhaps not a great step to what one might call a more "Victorian" conception of the writer as one who writes within, on behalf of, and about society, and who is formally more conscious of his social role as a writer and the obligations it entails.

A second, and more demonstrable effect of the changing intellectual climate may however be reflected in the common view, from the mid-1820's onwards, that literature - and in particular imaginative literature - was entering a period of decline as a result of the pressure to be socially relevant. It is to this phenomenon that I now turn.

iii. "the domain of intellect ... is a dead flat".

What was the state of English literature in the age of the great reform bill - the period, say, from the death of Byron in 1824, to the accession of Queen Victoria in 1837? Some commentators felt that in an age of transition, and with the break up of long established institutions and beliefs, imaginative literature was bound to suffer. John Stuart Mill, surveying the literary scene in 1832, found
himself agreeing with Auguste Comte that:

the perfection of aesthetic creation requires as its condition a consentaneousness in the feelings of mankind, which depends for its existence on a fixed and settled state of affairs (39),

while Samuel Taylor Coleridge, at around the same time, was equally convinced that the times were unpropitious for art:

Alas! Revolutionary times are times of general demoralisation ... in England the same spirit was curbed in by the moral sense, afterwards there followed times of repose, and the Muses began to show themselves. But now ... the depravity of the spirit of the times is marked by an absence of poetry (40).

As a general point, Coleridge and Mill were perhaps not wholly justified in considering periods of revolution or unrest hostile to artistic creation. With the benefit of hindsight, one can observe that the whole turbulent course of European history from the 1780's to the 1820's saw the creation of some of the finest English literature - including of course that of the young Coleridge himself - demonstrating that art can thrive in times of struggle and uncertainly as it can in times of hellenic confidence.

In the early 1830's however, it certainly did appear that the climate of reform was unusually unpropitious for artistic creation. From Don Juan, published in 1824, until the publication of Tennyson's early Poems in 1833 - a period of almost ten years - the literary horizon is (again, partly with the benefit of hindsight) unremittingly gloomy,
unrelieved by any important artistic landmark. One is hard pressed to point to any imaginative literature of real value produced in these years. The two most popular poets of the period, Robert Montgomery and Ebenezer Elliott (the latter is discussed in Chapter Four), are today virtually unheard of and even less frequently read. Montgomery, whose epic religious poem *The Omnipresence Of The Deity* (1828) ran to sixteen editions in two years (bought presumably by Evangelical reader), wrote verse of a quality that prompted the young Elizabeth Barrett to comment that her dog Flush was a better poet (41). Today, the remark seems, if anything, a little hard on the dog, for indeed Montgomery’s poetry is by modern day standards unremarkable (and was so considered not many years after its publication.) Ebenezer Elliott, the “Corn Law Rhymer”, was a somewhat more accomplished poet, able at times to express the experiences of the working classes with an admirable directness and honesty. But he too was something of an eight-day wonder, seized upon by a literary establishment desperate to fall on any writer who, in a barren time, seemed to offer even the slightest sign of originality. In fiction and drama, the field was similarly devoid of talent.

How does one account for this absence of good literature? Where had all the writers gone? Of the great writers we now label as “Romantic”, the younger generation of Keats, Shelley and Byron were all dead by 1824, a sudden and unexpected loss which could not easily be replaced. The
older generation of writers - Wordsworth (moving, admittedly, into a period of esteem and popularity), Coleridge and Scott - had all in various ways suffered some exhaustion of their imaginative resources. Coleridge, whose spring had been the first to run dry, had long since abandoned poetry for religious and philosophical rumination. There were to be no rising literary stars until Tennyson, Dickens and Browning in the mid-1830's.

Although the death of three major poets in the space of under four years would seem to account pretty conclusively for the decline of poetry in the second half of the 1820's, there has always lingered the suspicion, ever since Shelley blamed a philistine world for the premature death of Keats, that the rising materialism of the time, represented in particular by the utilitarian movement, was somehow responsible for killing off culture; that utilitarian thinking with its supposed emphasis on practicality and getting things done, necessarily smothered art that was designed to be appreciated as an end in itself.

Was there any truth in this popular supposition, or is it based on a rather crude conception of what utilitarianism and its influence were? The question cannot be answered simply. It is true, certainly, that by the middle of the 1820's utilitarian ideas were beginning to bite. What at the close of the Napoleonic wars had been a small intellectual elite, critical and radical, and with its intellectual roots digging down into the Enlightenment, was by the late 1820's
an amorphous general influence, a force pushing for social reform, and upholding commerce, a "great moral steam-engine" in the language of the time. Over the period the movement lost something in intellectual purity, but what it lost it also gained in terms of broadening its appeal and sphere of influence, evolving from being just another one of Carlyle's "sects" to in effect a new orthodoxy.

Though the common claim that utilitarianism was hostile to poetry and to the life of the imagination was often based on a misinterpretation of its arguments, there is no doubt that the mechanistic philosophy of the utilitarians - the conception of the mind as a largely passive receptor of experiences, devoid of any innate imaginative faculty - did lead to its undervaluing of imaginative processes, like poetic creation, or indeed religious sentiment. Following on from this, the conviction that men could be made better mainly if institutions were improved naturally led the utilitarians to underestimate the possibility of moral improvement through inward reform, and to emphasise instead the importance of practical changes in the way society was run.

Such an attitude lies behind the utilitarians' call for literature to be useful, and to address itself to serious social issues rather than to reflect the - in their view - dilettantism of the aristocracy. Because as long as art remained the preserve of the entrenched ruling elites - so
went the utilitarian argument - it would impede the effort to change society. Such convictions lay behind the utilitarians' frequent attacks on writers like Walter Scott for his allegedly Tory vision of society - shown in his admiration for chivalry and hierarchy - and on Byronism for its backward-looking morbidness in an age which demanded a more positive and modern response from every writer. With the inevitable simplification of utilitarian ideas as the message was spread throughout the 1820's, it is not difficult to understand how such essentially well-meaning and ideologically progressive arguments could be interpreted as a hostility to art itself.

The utilitarians' efforts in the educational field were also regarded by some as detrimental to the development of higher culture. The utilitarians had recognised early on that the education of the working and lower middle classes was the necessary prerequisite of their gaining the political power which they would need to achieve reforms. Under the slogan of "knowledge is power", the March of Mind made major inroads into working class education, through the setting up of mechanics' institutes and workers' evening schools, and through the dissemination of political and scientific tracts by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.

On occasions the utilitarians' educational methods drew a poor response from the working classes they were meant to benefit. Working class writers sometimes criticised the SDUK
as they did the evangelical Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, which in some ways it curiously resembled - of being irrelevant or inimical to working class needs. William Bridges Adams, for example, accused the SDUK of assuming a "patronising style of language towards those whom they considered as poor, ignorant workmen", and of teaching useless facts: "they wish to know why a large number of them are reduced to a short supply of food; and others are starved to death; and they are furnished with an essay on the mode of cultivating sugar or coffee in the West Indies" (42). Take also for example the words of a worker delegate to the "Poor Man's Parliament" which assembled in London in 1834: "The march of intellect is a glorious thing, and sure to progress. But this is not owing to the Society for the Confusion of Knowledge. You may shove a turnip down a cow's throat, but we are not to be crammed. Our progression is by our having learned to think for ourselves about our own affairs" (43). William Cobbett similarly maintained that the SDUK was a middle-class organisation whose educational policy, in particular the teaching of Malthus and political economy, was geared primarily to adapt the labouring classes to an industrial civilisation and to accept the inevitability of their lowly position in life.

Another criticism of the SDUK, though from a different source, derived from fear that the diffusion of knowledge among the working classes would breed in them revolutionary ideas. A large section of the middle class viewed with
dismay the SDUK’s approach, which with its godlessness and emphasis on the need for political reform seemed calculated to inspire revolutionary sentiment amongst the lower classes. Peacock satirised such attitudes in his novel *Crotchet Castle* in his portrait of the Rev. Folliott, and old-style Tory churchman fearful of the consequences of a superficially educated working class:

> [the march of mind] has marched into my rick-yard, and set my stacks on fire, with chemical materials, most scientifically compounded ... my house has been broken open on the most scientific principles. All this comes of education (44).

Both the *Quarterly Review* and *Blackwood’s* also regularly ran pieces on the dangers and disadvantages of secular education, and on the consequences of breeding discontent amongst the working class. Notwithstanding these criticisms, however, it cannot be denied that the utilitarians assisted enormously in the political education of the English population in the years leading up to the passing of the reform bill. The realisation also grew with time that the education of the poorer classes was conducive to peaceful rather than to violent reform.

There continued to remain however one aspect of the diffusion of knowledge which troubled some intellectuals. Was there not a risk, they asked, that the diffusion of knowledge might lead to its dilution? And would it not be better to encourage quality in thought and literature,
rather than just quantity? Or as one poet of the day put it:

Give me the table spread with wholesome food,
Where few the meats, but every one is good.
Our bookish feast is now a gaudy waste,
Startling the eye, but palling on the taste (45).

Though welcoming the march of mind, some worried that its concentration on subjects like political economy and the natural sciences was to neglect the development of man's spiritual side, while the simplification of ideas to make them comprehensible to ordinary people would in the end result in a universal lowering of intellectual standards. "There is need" wrote J.S. Mill at the height of his reaction away from utilitarianism,

that the march of mind should raise up new spiritual notabilities ... I sometimes think that instead of mountains and valleys, the domain of intellect is about to become a dead flat, nothing greatly above the general level, nothing very far below it. It is curious that this particular time, should be the precise time at which everybody is cackling about the progress of intelligence and the spread of knowledge. I do believe that intelligence and knowledge are less valued now, except for purposes of money-making, than at any time (46).

One finds very similar sentiments expressed by Carlyle, Lytton, and frequently by conservative periodical journals like the Quarterly Review. Ironically, the growing popularity of monthly and quarterly magazines was often seen by some commentators as evidence of the utilitarians' suffocation of serious literature, even though the Westminster Review - the vehicle of utilitarian thought -
was late on the scene, first appearing only in 1824. Lytton, for example, held mixed feelings over the value of the review magazines, considering that they had tended to entice the best writers away from more permanent achievements. "The dimness and scantiness of isolated works on politics, criticism, and the belles lettres" he wrote, "may be found exactly in proportion to the brilliancy of this new focus [i.e. the review magazines] and the rapidity with which it attracted to itself the talent and knowledge of the time ... precious was the cargo wasted upon vessels which sunk forever in a three-month voyage ... what might Jeffrey and Sydney Smith, in the vigour of their age, have produced as authors, if they had been less industrious as reviewers?" (47). Coleridge took an even more critical stance, describing for example the *Edinburgh Review* as "flat and flippant ... pretends to thinking and never requires or excites thought" (48). He had on the other hand a subscription to *Blackwood's*, whose articles he regularly praised and referred to in his own writings. Sydney Smith, whose talent Lytton thought wasted, held however a more positive view of the educational value of the reviews, arguing that "one great use of a review, indeed, is to make men wise in ten pages who have no appetite for a hundred pages" (49).

Claims that English culture was being homogenised or debased - and being debased in particular by the utilitarians - were thus heard with increasing frequency
over the period. The death of Byron in 1824 was often taken as the cue for the close of an era of grand individualism, and the ushering in of an age of mediocrity, characterised by middle-class morality, bustling practicality, and pedestrian art. "When Byron passed away", wrote Lytton, "the feeling he had represented craved utterance no more. With a sigh we turned to the actual and practical career of life. Insensibly acted upon by the utilitarians, we desired to see Utility in every branch of intellectual labour" (50). Hazlitt in The Spirit Of The Age also made comparable comments on Byron's death, suggesting it marked the death knell of the cult of extreme individuality which Byron had personified (51).

In the end however, it is not easy to prove or to disprove the thesis, put forward at different times by Carlyle, Mill, Coleridge, Lytton and others, that the materialistic philosophy and aggressively practical bent of the utilitarians was positively damaging to literary activity. What does seem true, however, is that somehow, during the reform period, a shift towards more practical attitudes, an attitude of scepticism, and a stronger desire to demonstrate the social usefulness of literature did seem evident. Inextricably bound up with, and often lying behind these attitudes was, as suggested earlier, the development of a more sociological outlook amongst many intellectuals and writers, and a corresponding decline in
individualistic values. Utilitarianism was but an element in this complex of attitudes - in part a cause, but also in part the result of, and response to them. The growth of a more practical sensibility was a more all-pervasive phenomenon than utilitarianism, and its impact was certainly felt on the literature of the period, particularly in the years when reform sentiment was at its height. It is to this that I now turn.

iv. "Adieu to abstractions...

England in the 1820's and 1830's was still learning from the lessons provided by the French Revolution a generation before. The failure of the Revolution's ideals in the terror of the 1790's had led, in Britain, to a reaction against abstract notions of the Rights of Man, and the rule of pure Reason, which over time had turned into a scepticism about, even a distrust of, political theory and speculation in general. English politicians were encouraged to deny the relevance of any ideals to politics: a reaction which, thirty years later, had still not spent itself.

Political life in the 1820's and 1830's thus became notorious for its lack of principle or intellectual depth. In Parliament, the pettiness of debates, and the similarity in ideas between Whigs and Tories was frequently observed, and the lack of any commanding or visionary political leader remarked upon. Blackwood's Magazine in 1830 bemoaned the
the fact that:

we have no man now before the public, who is
pointed out by his rank, and at the same time,
by commanding powers, as a minister matched
with the times (52),

while Coleridge, from his eyrie in Highgate, looked down
upon Westminster and saw nothing but "talents without
genius; a swarm of clever, well informed men, an anarchy of
minds". "O, it is most melancholy. Well said Solomon, where
no vision is, the people perisheth" (53). The reality,
concluded one senior politician, was that parliament was
without men "whose habits of mind naturally led them to the
examination of abstruse subjects". The House of Commons was
not "the proper theatre of speculative theory" (54). John
Sterling, in 1826, put the question "why does not a prophet
arise among this great people?", and in his tale "The Last
Of The Giants" wrote of a giant no longer able to live in a
world inhabited by puny men, a tale Sterling described as a
parable of the absence of heroism and leadership in the
present day (55).

What was true of politicians was equally true of writers
and the reading public. Since the French Revolution, said
Lytton: :

we have been very little alive to all
speculative innovations in ... politics.
Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, have been
received with suspicion, and dismissed without
examination. They were known to be innovators,
and that was enough (56).

- 31 -
while Mill observed the growth of a more practical political spirit amongst the English in the first decades of the century:

the public mind was ... with constantly increasing intensity, engrossed not with the theories of government, but with the exposure of practical abuses. The Cartwright school of reformers died out, and others of a more "practical" kind succeeded, who bade adieu to abstractions (57).

Alexis de Tocqueville, visiting England in the 1830's, made similar observations, remarking on the inability of the English to think on a theoretical level, and contrasting their solid pragmatism with the speculative character of the French (58).

When this distaste for speculation merged with the growing commercial spirit of the early nineteenth century, to which was added the utilitarians' zeal for practical reforms, the consequences, not only for political life but for literature too were notable. Serious writers like Mill and Carlyle claimed to feel themselves more and more isolated from a mainstream culture which cared little for poetry or philosophy; which did not care because it did not think they had anything to contribute to the practical reform of society. "I feel more knowing, more seeing", wrote Mill, "every increase of insight carries with it the uncomfortable feeling of being separated more and more widely from almost all other human beings" (58).

Others spoke of a growing gulf between the life of
thought and that of practical action. The young conservative thinker John Sterling wrote a series of essays, for example, to demonstrate how the great men of the past had been both thinkers and men of action, and he called for a modern leader to emerge who could embody both qualities (60). A debate grew up over the relative virtues of the "Ancients", who had been able to combine thought with practical action, and the "Moderns" who could not (61). In his novel Eugene Aram (1832), Bulwer Lytton portrayed a man whose abstract speculations made him unfit for public life, an image of the philosopher which Peacock portrayed — albeit in a more light hearted fashion — in his work also, drawing in particular on popular images of Coleridge (62). The poet Richard Horne was another of many who contrasted the respect shown by the ideological French to their thinkers with England's neglect of them, writing that "England is the place for a man of genius to die in; France for him to live in" (63). Another poet, Allan Cunningham, when asked what was the influence of men of genius on modern life, replied simply "they have none" (64). Aspects of this theme are explored further in Chapter Two.

Not all writers, of course, painted such a gloomy picture; much depended on one's political standpoint. For each writer who bemoaned society's lack of interest in poetry and philosophy, at least one other blames the poet or the philosopher for being too elitist or obscure, and calls upon him to adapt his message to the spirit of the times. If
we tend to listen more to men like Carlyle, Mill and Coleridge, it is perhaps only because history has shown them to be the more lasting thinkers of the period, whose writings are more persuasive, and who express themselves more memorably. But there were many in the 1820's and 1830's who welcomed the public pressure on writers to become more useful. The radical W.J. Fox, for example, noted approvingly in the mid-1820's the speed with which many writers were adapting themselves to new public taste:

writers ... have descended from the high ground of theory into the broad field of practical utility. Or, if they theorise, it is not on the origin of society and the rights of man, but on the principles ... of political economy. The degree of interest felt in them by the public is the great regulator of our studies.

"The study", he added, "is no longer a hermitage in the wilderness" (65). Bulwer Lytton, ever the arbiter of literary trends, counselled that "a poet who aspires to reputation must be adapted to the coming age" (66). In like vein, the young Winthrop Mackworth Praed satirised the new breed of poet when he wrote:

Take back the lute! I make no claim
To inspiration or to fame ...
I read political economy,
Voltaire and Cobbett and Gastronomy.
I never feel poetic mania.
I gnaw no laurel with Urania (67),

while W.B. Adams asked, "do not politics and political economy enter into every portion of the whole business of life? ... it is to these things that honest writers should

- 34 -
constantly turn the attention of the public" (68). Writers like Coleridge and Wordsworth were correspondingly berated for their inability or refusal to adapt either the content or the style of their works to make them more understandable (69).

As the 1820's progressed, society's growing absorption in political questions started to have a significant impact on literary activity. As the spirit of reform grew, it seemed that the reading public had less and less time for literature that was not closely tied to the progress of reform. Fox noted with delight that "there is a dash of politics in almost every production" (70). John Sterling observed in 1828 that "works of political economy are the only books that find favour", and expressed some guilt at indulging in the writing of poetry when he should have been more engrossed in politics (71).

Looking around him, Sterling would indeed have seen a preponderance of literary works on contemporary political and economic subjects, from Elliott's Corn Law Rhymes and Moore's Odes On Corn. Cash. Catholics, as well as his Paper Money Lyrics, to Harriet Martineau's Tales Of Political Economy, from the political poems of Praed to D'Israeli's Revolutionary Epick. Lytton and Galt, middle-brow novelists with a good eye to sales, were careful to include current political themes in their novels of the early 1830's, while the more erudite Peacock evolved a whole fictional style out
of the presentation of the political questions of his age. Even the novelists of the so-called "silver fork" school started to weave a greater amount of political drama and controversy into their portrayals of upper class life. Well before the appearance of Disraeli's *Coningsby* (1844), writers like Robert Plumer Ward, Theodore Hook, and Mrs Gore were using political figures in their books, and introducing their readers to a political milieu. Though in the early fashionable novels politics was rarely presented in a serious way, certain themes did start to emerge. Stories woven around the disappointed statesman became common, such as Ward's Tremaine who finds political wrangling too tough for his sensitive spirit; or Bulwer's Godolphin who is haughtily opposed to political life. In her novel *The Hamiltons. Or Official Life in 1830*, Mrs Gore provides a good study of a political placeman, while the early 1830's saw a number of novels which present elections and election campaigns as central episodes - signs perhaps of a deepening interest in political subjects, as well as a more critical view of the nature of politicians.

Thus Carlyle, arriving in London in 1831 with his manuscript of *Sartor Resartus*, found that "no bookseller will publish anything but a political pamphlet in the present state of excitement. In fact, literature is suspended" (72). Bulwer Lytton predicted that unless English drama started to address political ideas it would soon wither away, and prefaced an 1831 collection of his poems
with the acknowledgement that "at a moment unpropititious to poetry" he could not expect to sell many copies. In England And The English he similarly remarked that "the political agitation of the times is peculiarly unfavourable to the arts; when people are busy, they are not eager to be amused" (73). Horne noted that poetry had been "of late years almost absorbed in politics, commerce" (74), and Allan Cunningham that by 1834 "poetry had at last almost ceased to attract" (75). It was not until the fever of the reform bill agitation had died down that poetry could re-emerge from this unpropititious climate, and even then, the earliest works of Tennyson and Browning were - as if in reaction - either almost wilfully obscure or hedged about with doubts about the poet's proper social role.

--oo0oo--

To conclude, one can suggest a number of elements which taken together may explain at least in part the literary lean years between the mid-1820's and the mid-1830's. First, the death of Keats, Shelley and Byron within a short space of time robbed English literature of three of its finest poets. Secondly, the popular front of the utilitarian movement, against the backdrop of a more complex shift in emphasis away from "Romantic" individualism to a more sociological approach to literature, combined to impress upon writers the importance of being socially engaged and of practical value. Lastly, though related with the foregoing,
the intense political excitement leading up to the passage of the great reform bill served to divert the reading public away from imaginative literature, and encouraged writers to take up political themes with an unforeseen vigour.

The next three chapters attempt to build upon and illustrate at least some of the ideas touched upon in this introductory chapter. Chapter Two studies the political literature of Thomas Love Peacock: one example of the way in which writers of the period could introduce contemporary political questions into their work. Chapter Three looks at the theories of two poets - Coleridge and Horne - on the proper responsibilities of governments to their writers: theories which show a new realisation of the state’s powers, rights and duties in the post-Napoleonic era. It also illustrates the unavoidable politicisation of art in the period. The last chapter looks at the work of the Sheffield poet Ebenezer Elliott: the paradigm of the "useful" poet, and perhaps the first poet of industrial England.
CHAPTER ONE: NOTES


2. ibid. vol II, p. 167.


10. This is not to say of course that Queen Caroline was universally liked. Though her situation attracted popular support, she did nothing herself to increase respect for
her class. The radical Francis Place found her "Vulgarly familiar and commonplace in her language and deportment", and noted that "Royalty was judged of by the Queen, and aristocracy by the noblemen and the ladies in her suite, and both fell amazingly in the estimation of the people". G. Wallas, *The Life of Francis Place*. London, 1898. p. 151.


23. Table Talk, p. 164. Entry for 14 June 1834.


32. For J.S. Mill, for example, the idea of truth arising out of such a dialectical process became a central theme of On Liberty (1859). It originated in his own participation in debating societies in Cambridge in the early 1820's. In 1831 he wrote to John Sterling that "in the present age of transition, everything must be subordinate to freedom of enquiry". Letter of 20-22 October 1831. Collected Works vol. XII. p. 77.


34. Walsh. op.cit. p.78.


39. The words come from Mill's book Auguste Comte and Positivism (1864), but Mill was expressing similar sentiments in his letters to Carlyle and Sterling in the late 1820's and early 1830's.

40. "Conversation Between S.T.C. and John Frere". Cornhill


51. The Spirit Of The Age. 1825. p. 181. The point was also made often that with the death of Byron, middle class fascination with the immorality of the aristocracy tipped
over into disgust. Byron, while he lived, had kept the two in balance. Macaulay, for example, wrote of the puritanical reaction against Byron that "Society, capricious in its indignation, as it had been capricious in its fondness, flew into a rage with its froward and petted darling" "Byron". Edinburgh Review, June 1830. Repr. in Literary Essays Contributed To The Edinburgh Review, by Lord Macaulay. 1913. pp. 157-9.


54. Sir James Walsh. op. cit. p. 104.


60. "Shades Of The Dead". Athenaeum. 1829. Essays And Tales Of John Sterling. 1848. vol. I. p.58
61. See for example the article "On The Development Of Genius". Monthly Repository VI. August 1832.


A subject which merits much further study is the way that a writer's literary style was often taken as an indication of his political sympathies. A writer who wrote plain, easily understood English was not unsurprisingly regarded as more "democratic" than one who wrote more complex prose. The former writer was more likely to be aiming at a less educated, but wider audience than the latter. Writers like John Clare, Horne Tooke, Paine, Wordsworth and Cobbett had all contributed on the popular
side to the debate over proper language, placing emphasis on common usage and the spoken word, as opposed to the more conservative Johnsonian standards of correctness. (In the 1820's of course, Wordsworth was more commonly considered a difficult poet, the democratic tendencies of the Lyrical Ballads being considered firmly a thing of the past).

Interestingly Bentham was often criticised for the difficulty of his style which rendered the propagation of his ideas difficult. One calls to mind Hazlitt's immortal remarks: "he writes a language of his own, that darkens knowledge. His works have been translated into French - they ought to be translated into English". (Hazlitt. The Spirit Of The Age. 1825. p.25).

70. Fox, "Men And Things In 1823". p.9.


72. "Carlyle intends staying in town all winter ... his object was to treat with booksellers about a work which he wishes to publish, but he has given this up for the present, finding that no bookseller will publish anything but a political pamphlet in the present stage of excitement". Letter of J.S. Mill to John Sterling, October 20, 1831. Letters Of John Stuart Mill, ed. H. Elliott. 1910. p. 7.

73. Preface to The Siamese Twins, 1831. p. iv. England And


75. Cunningham, op. cit. p. 119
CHAPTER TWO
THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK AND POLITICAL REFORM

It was suggested in the previous chapter that the age of the reform bill - roughly the mid-1820's to the mid-1830's - was marked by a degree of indifference to imaginative literature. Men of the time were growing increasingly absorbed by the processes of political and social change going on all about them, and this, together with the subtle changes in attitudes towards literature brought about by utilitarianism, created at times a rather stony soil for literature to flourish.

It was noted also in the last chapter that another prominent characteristic of the age of reform was its enthusiastically enquiring spirit. It was a period in which conventional wisdoms were questioned, institutions and dogmas challenged, a period of intellectual excitement and uncertainty. It was an age of transition in which, as John Stuart Mill put it, "a whole host of ideologies and opinions jostled for recognition and supremacy".

Among the writers of the period, few captured its spirit, or reflected its concerns, as accurately as the novelist and essayist Thomas Love Peacock. A firm believer that art should serve a social purpose, Peacock continually sought to exemplify this ideal in his own work. And through his
novels, written largely around political themes, Peacock both reflected the period's interest in political questions, and himself made a modest contribution to the political debate.

This chapter looks briefly at the political ideas expressed in Peacock's work, and relates them to the political climate of the time. It also seeks to show how Peacock's literary approach is representative of the age of transition. The aim of the chapter, as with subsequent chapters, is to illustrate how the writer in some way expresses, or provides a focal point for, some of the more prominent literary and intellectual concerns of the reform period.

Thomas Love Peacock, novelist, classical scholar and friend of Shelley, began his literary career with the publication of a novel entitled Headlong Hall, in 1816. This was quickly followed by a second novel, Melincourt, in 1817, and a further novel Nightmare Abbey the following year. Of the three only the last is still read. A fourth novel, Maid Marian, was also started in 1818, but work on it was shelved due to Peacock's acceptance in early 1819 of a post in the India Office in London, which left him with little time for literary pursuits. Maid Marian finally came out in 1822.
Throughout the 1820's, while working at India House, Peacock wrote regular articles on literary topics for the liberal reviews, and built up his reputation as a serious writer as much on these as on the novels for which he is now better known. Two more novels, The Misfortunes of Elphin and Crotchet Castle (his best known work) appeared in 1829 and 1832 respectively, spanning the years in which reform fever was at its height.

Most of Peacock's novels follow a similar scheme - the gathering, usually in a country house setting, of a miscellaneous cast of characters, often based on real-life personages, or exhibiting in an extreme form - as a Jonsonian humour - the attitudes or political prejudices associated with certain well known writers and intellectuals of the day. The novels generally follow a loosely dramatic structure, in which diverting dialogue interchanges with various amusing incidents, within which is mixed a good deal of social and political satire. One or two novels, for example Maid Marian and the Misfortunes of Elphin, adopt a more conventional fictional form, but one in which again the narrative is shot through with satire and contemporary social commentary.

Before turning to look at Peacock's novels it is useful to try to understand what were his aims in writing fiction. In an article on the French comic romance, written for the London Review in 1835 (1), Peacock shed light upon
the kind of literature that he considered had influenced his own novels, and the ideals and aims to which his own writing was directed. In the article he expresses his belief that "comic fiction in the tradition of Rabelais, Swift and Voltaire" had "contributed greatly to the securement of freedom of conscience and freedom of enquiry". Such a tradition had exposed abuses, contributed to the forum of debate, and in so doing had emphasised the social commitment of the artist.

Broadly speaking, these were Peacock's own goals. As we have seen earlier, one of the more notable social developments of the 1820's was the emergence of a greater spirit of enquiry, of debate and argument, the testing and challenging of assumptions. Peacock hoped through the medium of his own comic and satiric fiction to contribute to this new-found spirit.

One of the failings of contemporary literature, in Peacock's opinion, was that it had not addressed itself to the pressing intellectual and political issues of the age; it had become socially irrelevant. As early as 1820 Peacock had said as much in one of his better-known essays, entitled The Four Ages of Poetry. Having charted the decline of culture from its zenith in classical Greece, Peacock characterises the present day as an Age of Brass, and the bulk of contemporary poetic activity as "degenerate" and out of touch with the living problems and issues of modern life.
While the historian and the philosopher are advancing in, and accelerating, the progress of knowledge, the poet is wallowing in the rubbish of departed ignorance, and raking up the ashes of dead savages to find gewgaws and rattles for the grown babies of the age. (2)

Modern poetry, in other words, has become trivial, its subject matter appealing to no more than the superficial taste of unthinking people, as if there were no such things in existence as mathematicians, astronomers, chemists, moralists, metaphysicians, historians, politicians and political economists.

Peacock's attack is launched particularly at what he felt to be the archaic nature of Robert Southey's poetic subjects and sources, at Byron's exoticism, at Coleridge's legendary abstruseness, and at the utter irrelevance of minor poets such as the highly popular Barry Cornwall. Above all, Peacock singles out for criticism - perhaps rather unfairly - what he regards as the childish vulgarity and deliberate primitivism of much of Wordsworth's poetry. Reading Wordsworth, he asserts, "can never make a philosopher or a statesman, nor in any class of life a useful or rational man". Wordsworth, claims Peacock, is no more than a "morbid dreamer"; his art no more than "the cant of fictitious sentiment".

The tone of The Four Ages of Poetry is sometimes hard to gauge. Does Peacock really mean what he says about Wordsworth? Is his assault wholly serious? At times,
Peacock seems to veer away into parodying supposed utilitarian attitudes to poetry in his repeated cry for a more didactic art, one that can act as a vehicle for contemporary ideas. Where does he really stand?

To understand Peacock's tone and intention in the article is to understand the man himself. It is ever worth remembering that Peacock was a classical scholar of some distinction, whose ideal society was that of ancient Greece, and whose theories on literature were infused with his hellenic ideals. Broadly speaking, for Peacock literature should serve society and contribute to its development. He should be, in Shelley's words "the unacknowledged legislator of mankind". There should be no separation between the life of thought and the life of action: the artist should not only be a thinker, but a man of action too. Peacock's complaint - and it is genuine - in *The Four Ages of Poetry* is that much modern literature has failed totally to live up to these high ideals, and has by turning its back on society become irrelevant.

He was to make a similar point in a letter to Shelley written later in the same year, in which he lamented the devaluation of modern poetry:

> the truth, I am convinced, is that there is no longer a poetical audience among the higher class of minds; that moral, political and physical science have entirely withdrawn from poetry the attention of all whose attention is worth having. (3)
In other words, by divorcing itself from reality, poetry has ceased to be an endeavour serious enough to command the attention of, and to influence society. Peacock continually urged Shelley to adapt his poetry to the needs of modern readers in order to regain their attention. As it was, intelligent people had ceased to read poetry, most of which now catered for more vulgar tastes. (4)

This is not to say however that Peacock took a narrowly utilitarian view of the social function of literature. He did not. The article is not an attack on poetry itself, but an attack on bad contemporary poetry. As the article’s parody of Benthamite criticism suggests, Peacock was wryly conscious that in urging literature to take on a greater social role, one could easily slip into the philistinism attributed to extreme utilitarians. This was equally unwelcome. Instead one should aim for a balance between the two extremes, avoiding both artistic insouciance on the one hand, and utilitarian dogma on the other. Peacock’s striving for a golden mean is implicit in his literary technique which - like that of Swift - continually slides between one extreme of ironic or parodic voice and another, without directly revealing the writer’s own position.

In life, no less than in his work, Peacock’s relationship with the utilitarians was deeply ambivalent. He had known, and loved, its founder Jeremy Bentham, and, as an official at India House, he was in daily contact with
James Mill, who was one of his colleagues there. A member of Mill's small social circle, Peacock, together with John Stuart Mill, would accompany the utilitarian on his daily walks. The relationship, if respectful, was however rather uneasy, and it appears that Peacock disliked many aspects of Mill's character. (5)

Despite the occasionally parodic tone of The Four Ages of Poetry, the criticism in it of the Lakeland poets was taken largely at face value, while the article was considered sufficiently of the utilitarian stamp to provoke Shelley's famous reply to it in his Defence of Poetry.

Through his own novels Peacock tried to exemplify his belief that writers had a responsibility to direct their art to a social purpose. All of his novels are concerned with contemporary political, social and cultural issues, and aim, through a generally light-hearted satire, to expose pretension and offer a balanced liberal perspective on the men and ideas of the day.

In Nightmare Abbey, his first novel of any stature, Peacock fictionalises the contemporary literary debate between Byronic or Gothic morbidity, and the sunnier, neoclassical spirit in English literature, with which Peacock himself tended to identify. The novel derives much incidental humour at the expense of Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and other writers and books. More important perhaps, Peacock evolves in this novel a semi-dramatic
structure of uninterrupted dialogue, in which he presents the exchange of ideas between characters who exist merely as mouthpieces for their own dogmas. Such a technique, if odd in a novel, was quite in keeping with the tradition of Swift and Voltaire, in whose work

the characters are abstractions, or embodied classifications, and the implied or embodied opinions the main matter of the work,

and after which Peacock tried to model himself.(6)

In _Maid Marian_ (1822), a novel on the Robin Hood legend, Peacock is again preoccupied with current political and social questions, though this time he uses a more conventional narrative form. Concerning the novel, Peacock wrote to Shelley

I am writing a comic romance of the Twelfth Century, which I shall make the vehicle of much oblique satire on all the oppressions that are done under the sun. (7)

Though not published until 1822, the novel was in fact begun in 1818, when Peacock was living in the village of Marlow, Buckinghamshire, close by Shelley, and was in regular contact with him and with the radical journalist Leigh Hunt, another member of the Shelley circle. Partly because of the company he was keeping, and also the highly tense political situation in 1818, Peacock's political interests were running high. In _Maid Marian_ he deliberately chose the mediaeval setting as a means to criticise the conservative or Burkean idealisation of the middle ages. As
a historical source he drew largely upon Ritson's 1795 collection of ballads on the Robin Hood legend, itself a Jacobinical and anti-Burkean book. The reactionary ideologies of legitimacy and the divine right of monarchs are personified in the rapacious Kings, barons and monks who populate the novel, while Peacock also makes great play of the contemporary debate over the so-called "Norman yoke" imposed over the free Anglo-Saxon people, an oft-used parallel for the resumption of power by continental despots after the fall of Napoleon, and used as well to challenge the legitimacy of aristocratic power in early nineteenth-century England. In 1818, with the government establishment moving into one of its most reactionary periods, and with the serious curtailment of civil liberties as social unrest spread throughout the country, Peacock's subject matter was potentially explosive.

It was less controversial however by 1822, when Peacock again found time to work on the novel after four years in the India Office. Four years on, the political impetus and urgency surrounding the enterprise had evaporated. Shelley, who had done so much to fire Peacock's enthusiasm to write, had gone abroad, and at home the repressive political atmosphere of the previous five years had begun to ease off. As a result, the novel appears to lack inspiration, and the satire tends to be insipid and often only incidental. The critic Marilyn Butler, in her biography of Peacock (8), has demonstrated how Peacock always relied
heavily on articles in the major quarterly reviews as
source material for the intellectual issues debated in his
novels, and she has suggested that Peacock's inability to
find appropriate material for *Maid Marian* may have further
weakened the political content of the novel.

Nonetheless, the novel does have its moments, in
particular a very stinging attack on the poet laureate
Robert Southey, for having jettisoned his democratic
beliefs in favour of the Tory establishment. Southey,
personified as the court bard Harpito

was always ready, not only to maintain the cause of
his master with his pen, and to sing his eulogies to
his harp, but to undertake, at any moment's notice
any kind of courtly employment, called dirty work by
the profane, which the blessings of civil government,
namely, his master's pleasure, and the interests of
social order, namely, his own emolument, might require.
(9).

The above passage suggests Peacock's strength of feeling
against writers like Southey who have changed their
political colours in the hope of preferment. Similar
attacks on Southey appear elsewhere in several of Peacock's
articles and essays.

A somewhat more successful, and certainly more complex,
novel, was *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1828), a tale set in
early Christian Wales, and deriving much of its content
from early Welsh myth and history. The story concerns the
fortunes of the Welsh Kingdom of Caregigion over the course
of two generations, the exile of the good prince Elphin by evil nobles, and the eventual return of the country to good rule through the efforts of Elphin's son Taliesin.

Read at one level the novel is no more than a simple tale of good versus evil, in a quaint historical setting. It contains however a good deal of carefully crafted allegory on contemporary political events, as well as a somewhat oblique commentary on the present state of English poetry. On these two counts the novel repays some fairly close study.

The central symbol of the novel is a large sea-wall which surrounds the Kingdom, and prevents the sea from flooding and destroying the fertile plain. The maintenance of this wall - by which Peacock means the English constitution - has been entrusted to a lazy and corrupt nobility intent on pursuing only their own pleasures. The language used by the aristocrats of Caredigion in justifying their neglect of the sea-wall recalls exactly the tone of the Tory establishment falling back on half-baked Burkean arguments for opposing political reform:

That the embankment is old, I am free to confess; that it is somewhat rotten in parts, I will not altogether deny. Our ancestors were wiser than we: they built it in their wisdom; and, if we should be so rash as to try to mend it, we should only mar it. (10)

Their neglect and misrule eventually result in the destruction of the wall by an all-consuming tidal flood.
As a musician in the Welsh court expresses it,

Destruction strikes with want and scorn,
Presumption, from abundance born.

With the flood, the corrupt courts are swept away,
suggesting the fate awaiting a ruling oligarchy impervious
to growing cries for a more just rule. Peacock's subject -
and it was clear to his readers - is essentially the fate
dealt to the ancien regime by the French revolution.

The novel then moves forward through a generation,
describing the birth, education, and eventual rule of
Prince Taliesin, who restores peace and harmony to the
troubled kingdom, and thus averts the need for a second
revolution. Peacock's message, in effect - and again it
would be clearly understood by his readership - is that the
Church and State establishment in England, at the start of
what was to be several years' of struggle for political
reform, would do well not to ignore the lessons provided
them by 1789. And if there were any doubt that the novel is
intended as a satirical critique of the Tory establishment,
Peacock introduces characters closely modelled on Canning,
Wellington, and other figures closely identified with the
English ancien regime of the early nineteenth century.

A subsidiary theme of The Misfortunes of Elphin concerns
the social role of the poet. Hitherto overlooked, it is
arguably the most thorough, and certainly the most
interesting exploration of a theme which was never far from
Peacock's mind. Early on in the story Peacock satirises the
kind of romantic poet who lacks any social commitment at all. Gwythno, the King of Caredigion, under whose reign the kingdom and constitution are left to decay, is also a poet. But he is depicted as an ineffectual bard, whose surfeited imagination renders him incapable of acting usefully in the real world:

Gwythno...found the business of governing too light a matter to fill up the vacancy of either his time or his head, and took to the more solid pursuits of harping and singing.

With the kingdom about to be overwhelmed by flood, Gwythno is discovered, Nero-like, wrapped up in "a rapturous and abstracted state of poetical inspiration" from which it is impossible to disturb him. Peacock's admittedly mild satire is directed primarily at poets like Coleridge and Wordsworth, whom he felt had abnegated their political and social responsibilities by their retreat from public life, and by their introspective and quietist attitudes. But in the image of the poet as an ineffectual dreamer, there is also more than a hint of Keats, whom Peacock would have known of through among other things mutual friends like Shelley and Leigh Hunt.

An alternative to Wordsworthian solitude is offered by the example of Prince Elphin. At the beginning of the novel the young prince-poet looks down upon his kingdom in a way, and using a language, which strongly - and perhaps deliberately - brings to mind Wordsworth's poem "Tintern
Abbey." From the high prospect he sees

the trees, that in the distance thickened into
woods; the wreaths of smoke rising from them,
marking the solitary cottages, or the populous
towns.

But where in Wordsworth's poem the viewer is drawn into an
introspective state, Elphin's eye is drawn instead to the
"peopled plain", and from there to his recognition of "how
much life and human happiness was intrusted to his rule".
Peacock takes the Wordsworthian situation and turns it on
its head, using it to emphasise not the poet's aloofness
from the ordinary world, but the necessity of his
responsibility towards it.

The most important character in The Misfortunes of
Elphin is not however the eponymous hero, but his son
Prince Taliesin, who is first discovered as a baby drifting
in a coracle on the river, and is brought to Elphin's
house. The discovery recalls that of Moses and, like Moses,
Taliesin comes to be both the thinker and the leader, who
not only rises, over the course of the novel, to become the
greatest bard in Wales, but is also a prophet, a sniffer-
out of things rotten in the state, and a man of action. He
finds ways of solving the political problems of Wales,
overthrows authoritarian rule, prevents war and, Moses-like,
leads his hitherto unfortunate people back to prosperity.
Pitted against Taliesin in his struggle are a number of
court bards of the Southey-type that we have met before,
who prostitute their art in order to prop up the corrupt
court and improve their positions.

Embedded in the story of Taliesin are a number of at times rather cryptic allusions to Coleridge and to his poem "Kubla Khan." It is difficult to follow at times the precise significance - if any - of these references, but one can get a general sense from them of what Peacock is intending to communicate. Chapter Five of the novel, which relates the discovery of Taliesin, carries as its epigraph the last four lines of Coleridge's great poem -

Weave a circle round him thrice
And close your eyes with holy dread;
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drank the milk of paradise

Thus from the very outset Peacock is inviting some connection to be made between Taliesin and the prophetic poet of "Kubla Khan".

The following chapter, entitled "The Education of Taliesin" describes the education of the prince by Welsh druids. In doing so it draws upon some of the popular prejudices against Coleridge's involvement with German transcendentalism which, to the uninformed, signified obscurity, subjectivity, symbolism, in fact all the faults that the writings of Coleridge were supposed to exhibit:

That Taliesin was thoroughly initiated in these mysteries is evident from several of his poems, which have neither head nor tail ...

The comic jibe would be familiar - even to the very
language used - to any follower of the literary scene in the 1820's.

Both the sentiments and the language of "Kubla Khan" are evoked again in one of Taliesin's poems, "Song of the Wind", a prophetic song in which Taliesin, as he mounts his challenge against authoritarian rule, predicts war and the destruction of the Kingdoms if they fail to reform themselves (11). Again, Peacock is inviting the connection to be made between the prophetic Taliesin and the prophetic poet of Coleridge's poem.

To what purpose? It is possible to read The Misfortunes of Elphin as an argument for social commitment in literature. It can be argued that through the figure of Taliesin - the poet leader - Peacock is stressing that contemporary poets should again become leaders, men of vision, rather than escapists like Coleridge, Wordsworth or Keats, or sycophants like Southey. In the troubled England of 1829, the artist's duty is to take a lead in fighting injustices and in guiding society towards enlightenment.

Though these are certainly ideas Peacock wanted to express in The Misfortunes of Elphin, it would however be mistaken to read the novel as a straightforward exposition of a single theory: Peacock is rarely so unequivocal. Nor does he preach. The novel can equally well be regarded as the presentation of alternative views about the value and function of art, in which Peacock is essentially describing
the different paths open for any artists to take. In this novel, as in most of his others, he is as interested in the presentation of issues as he is in making value judgements.

With Crotchet Castle (1831), Peacock's artistry reaches its height. He adopts in this novel a by-now familiar format - the random collection of characters at a country house, each one of whom argues or debates his own intellectual prejudice. Chapter Five of the novel, entitled "Characters", describes in turn each of the novel's cast - Mr MacQuedy the political economist, Mr Skionar (a Coleridge-figure), Mr Chainmail the Burkean mediaevalist, Reverend Folliott the Tory High Churchman, and numerous others. As in previous books, each of the characters is offering up or is the embodiment of a particular ideology. One could describe the novel almost as a rendering in fictional form of Hazlitt's Spirit of the Age: a gallery of figures who between them illustrate the period's intellectual diversity. Different chapters are devoted to the discussion of various contemporary issues, such as the implications of the "March of Mind" (itself a Hazlitt phrase), or the debate between Ancients and Moderns, between Christianity and Paganism, and the morality of commercial wealth. All were issues of contemporary interest, and all of them drawn in some way from the pages of the quarterly review magazines, where they were being constantly discussed and debated.
Peacock also uses the occasion to allude to the immediate political situation in England. At the end of the novel, the polite gathering of intellectuals and eccentrics is rudely interrupted by a militant working class mob who batter at the door of the country house. The episode is clearly intended to evoke the so-called “Captain Swing” riots of late 1830, when angry, half-starved labourers took to machine-breaking and arson in the most violent stage of the drive towards political reform. With the arrival of the mob, the dinner-party breaks up in fear and confusion, the characters’ high-sounding views on political reform suddenly forgotten as they rush to escape. Peacock is taking a light-hearted swipe at the faintheartedness of so many middle-class liberal reformers when faced with the reality of working class violence in 1830.

It is perhaps not coincidental that whereas in Nightmare Abbey, written in 1818, the focus was mainly on aesthetic and cultural issues, by the time of Crotchet Castle, perhaps, along with Melincourt, the most similar novel to Nightmare Abbey, Peacock’s interest has turned more to political questions. Such a change in emphasis is quite in keeping with the literate classes’ deepening absorption in political affairs through the course of the 1820’s. Peacock is in this sense very much a man of the times, reflecting directly the preoccupations of the age.

Nor is it coincidental that Peacock’s two periods of greatest creative activity were also the most dramatic
years of the first half of the century: the troubled years 1816-1818, and the climactic years of the reform bill, 1829-1832. One should thus not be surprised that a writer who consciously sought in his work to dramatise the main intellectual movements and events of his time — even going so far as to revert to the quarterly review magazines for material and quotations — should have received the strongest stimulus to write from the two periods which were throwing up the greatest number of questions about both art and society.

A parallel was drawn earlier between Peacock and Hazlitt, suggesting that the presentation and interplay of contemporary ideas in Peacock's fiction merited comparison with Hazlitt's aim, in *The Spirit of the Age*, to demonstrate the great intellectual diversity of the age through portraits of its leading thinkers. In this respect too Peacock is very much a man of his time, who reflected very closely that "spirit of the age". Like many of his contemporaries — John Stuart Mill is one who immediately springs to mind — Peacock was enthralled by the sheer diversity of opinions and ideologies jostling for attention in a period of restless intellectual ferment. The words of the pompous Mr Crotchet in *Crotchet Castle*:

> the sentimental against the rational, the intuitive against the inductive...the romantic against the classical; these are great and interesting controversies, which I should like to see satisfactorily settled,
should never be taken to be Peacock's own sentiments. In fact nothing could be further from the truth. Peacock seeks not so much to settle questions in his work, as to pose them; he seeks not conclusions but open-endedness, and is as much interested in the process of debate as in its results. Such an intention lies behind his chameleon-like literary technique, in which the true colours of the novelist are often disguised beneath ever-shifting ironies.

At the very end of Crotchet Castle all the characters in the novel join together to sing a song, the theme of which is that "art can conquer arms". Peacock wishes to close his novel with a last comment on his own art, an art which can itself "conquer arms", an art which through the use of irony, through the questioning of conventional beliefs and prejudices, and the deflation of pomp, could illuminate, or defuse some of the more heated political controversies of the age. If Peacock has an overriding aim in his novels, it is not to promote any of the narrow ideologies espoused by his characters, but to seek truth from cant, and through a dialectical technique imply a golden mean.

Peacock's demonstration that fiction could be a suitable vehicle for the presentation of immediate political and intellectual issues was greatly welcomed by liberal and utilitarian commentators. The Westminster Review, for
example, applauded the way that *The Misfortunes of Elphin* had made contact with pressing political questions, adding that Peacock had done a service in writing a kind of imaginative literature that made one think:

> whatever stimulates activity of mind is always ultimately salutary, and this is true in respect to literature as to departments more immediately connected with social well-being,

wrote the reviewer. (12). Many other contemporary critics, however, failed to understand Peacock's work. Most early reviews of *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, for example, missed altogether its ironic relevance to current events. A reviewer in the *Literary Gazette* was led to observe that -

> the author draws a humorous picture of the olden times, contrasting them with our improved and enlightened epoch. (13)

Other reviewers found offputting Peacock's intermingling of fact and fiction, finding it at times detrimental to such things as continuity of narrative and structure. Of Peacock's novels, the *Athenaeum* remarked that

> in none...does the story excite our interest: the different incidents are well told, but their nature and connection are such that one seldom appears to have been produced by another. (14)

The lack of rounded characterisation in Peacock's novels was also criticised, as was his highbrow wit and highly intellectual allusions, which were often such as to preclude understanding by all but a minority who were in
the know. In 1822 Peacock had written to Shelley urging him to popularise his style:

The poetry of your Adonais is very beautiful; but when you write you never think of your audience. The number who understand you, and sympathise with you, is very small. If you would consider who and what the readers of poetry are, and adapt your composition to the depth of their understandings and the current of their sympathies, you would attain the highest degree of poetical fame. (15)

Given the incomprehension with which many greeted Peacock's work, his advice to Shelley might equally have applied to himself. Given that so much of his work explored questions surrounding the social purpose and relevance of literature, it must have been somewhat galling for Peacock to have been so frequently misunderstood. One is left finally to consider the irony of a writer who argued for the social responsibility of art, and who often tried in his own work to exemplify this, yet who failed to communicate this to all but the very few.
CHAPTER TWO : NOTES


5. It appears that Peacock basically disliked Mill, but because of their close working relationship, and their mutual love of Bentham, he was careful to refrain from overtly expressing that dislike. Peacock disliked in particular Mill's coldness and sourness, as well as some aspects of utilitarian thought and political economy. Peacock was against the introduction of paper money, but he avoided publishing his satirical paper money lyrics, first written in 1825-6, until 1837, after Mill's death, to avoid giving offence. He also withheld in a similar way a satirical attack on Brougham, and a scathing verse parody, written in 1827, of the Latin inscription on the foundation stone of University College London.

71
There is no shortage of good anecdotal material on the Peacock - Mill relationship. When the editor of the newspaper The Globe and Traveller asked Peacock "when I know Mill well, shall I like him - will he like what I like and hate what I hate?" Peacock replied "No, he will hate what you hate, and hate everything you like". (Calidore and Miscellanea, ed. Richard Garnett. London 1891. pp. 17-18.).

There is also this rather gory anecdote related by Grant Duff concerning the dissection of Jeremy Bentham's body at University College London: "Mr Peacock talked to me today at much length about Jeremy Bentham, with whom he had been extremely intimate - dining with him tete-a-tete, once a week for years together. He mentioned... that when experiments were being made with Mr Bentham's body after his death, Mr James Mill had one day come into his (Mr Peacock's) room at the India House and told him that there had exuded from Mr Bentham's head a kind of oil, which was almost unfreezable, and which he conceived might be used for the oiling of chronometers which were going into high altitudes. "The less you say about that, Mill" said Peacock, "the better it will be for you; because if the fact once becomes known, just as we see now in the newspapers advertisements to the effect that a fine bear is to be killed for his grease, we shall be having advertisements to the effect that a fine philosopher is to be killed for his oil". Grant Duff. Notes from a Diary 1851-1872. London, 1897. Vol I, p.60. Entry for November 10, 1853. See also Works, vol 1., as well as

6. The quotation is from Peacock's essay "French Comic Romances". *Works*, vol. 9, p. 256.


9. *Maid Marian*. *Works*, vol. 3, p. 88 (2) (vol. 3 is numbered 1-149, then 1(2) - 180(2).


11. "the whispers of the wind, bring rumours of war". The lines recall the line "ancestral voices prophesying war" in "Kubla Khan".


The early nineteenth century saw a vigorous debate about the role of the artist or the intellectual in society, and the proper nature of his relationship with governments or the State. Questions such as what useful contribution artists could or should make towards social progress, what duties governments had to support them and thus to foster the spiritual life of the nation, and from which sources the artist or intellectual could expect remuneration for his work, were of intense interest to contemporary writers, and increasingly so as the century progressed. The present chapter considers two writers who addressed themselves to this subject: the poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Hengist Horne.

It would be hard to find two writers more different. One is a major writer, the other a minor one; one at the end of his life, the other just embarking on his literary career; one a "philosophical Tory", the other a new breed of liberal social reformer. But between them they expressed, and stimulated others to express, a whole variety of attitudes about the state's support of writers, and with an equal emphasis on political as on aesthetic considerations which seems highly characteristic of the age of reform.

As a starting point for this debate, one can perhaps do
no better than to go back to the economist Adam Smith, whose influential *An Inquiry Into The Nature and Causes of The Wealth Of Nations* (1776) contains one of the first modern expositions of the role of the writer in a modern economy. In his classic definition of productive activity, Smith argued that "service" activities, such as philosophy or literary creation were non-productive in that they did not yield a tangible product or other measurable economic benefit. In making this remark, Adam Smith was not passing any adverse value judgements on the activities of thinkers, but merely considering their role from an absolutely economic perspective. He does not reject, but simply bypasses entirely the argument that literature makes any spiritual contribution to society. One can see however how easy it must have been for such views to be taken, in the nineteenth century, as evidence of the philistinism attributed to the political economists who followed Smith.

Elsewhere in *The Wealth of Nations* Smith, in a discussion of industrial society's division of labour, argues that

> In the progress of society, philosophy becomes, like every other employment, the principal or sole trade of a particular class of citizens. (1)

Although it seemed not illogical to Adam Smith to predict a growing division of labour between thinkers and doers, by the nineteenth century the concept, and indeed the reality, of such a division - between the life of action...
and the life of thought, in one formulation - was of serious concern to many writers anxious to demonstrate the usefulness of literature. It implied that writers were of no practical value. And indeed, in the early nineteenth century it was a common criticism that modern writers had somehow failed to contribute anything towards society, but instead had turned their backs upon it. They were frequently contrasted with the writers of antiquity, for whom no such division between the practical and the contemplative life existed -

the men of those days...were emphatically men of action. That division of labour which the unprecedented accumulation of employment has necessitated with us in every branch of mental as well as physical exertion, was comparatively unknown. The great thinkers of old were not mere thinkers. The house of an Athenian was the agora or the camp.

- runs a typical comment on this phenomenon. (2)

On the question of how writers should be remunerated Adam Smith took again a purely materialistic view which, in the hands of nineteenth century political economists, again lent itself to a rather harsh assessment of the value of artistic production. In The Wealth of Nations Smith had argued that as the market place was the tribunal of all value, the artist or philosopher, like any one else with something to sell, should subject himself to the economics of supply and demand. As competition for a market - the reading public - existed, so the unsuccessful writer is, in Smith's analysis, simply a bad businessman. He has thus no right to complain
in terms of the superior claims due to "neglected genius". In the nineteenth century, Adam Smith's argumentation was drawn upon by some critics - usually of a democratic turn of mind - who were irritated by what they saw as elitist the argument that artists should be sheltered from the marketplace.

Few intellectuals and writers can have welcomed the application to literature of the laws of political economy, laws which may have been felt to restrict artistic freedom by obliging the writer always to keep one eye on the "consumer". Keats's legendary distaste for the values of the public and the "market" expressed this attitude most typically. For one, difficult or profound writing was probably the least likely to earn money. And secondly, if an artist had to concern himself with money matters, the quality of his art was bound to suffer. As Shelley once remarked to his friend Peacock: "Do you think that Wordsworth could have written such poetry, if he had ever had dealings with money lenders?". Moreover, as Coleridge and others were frequently to point out, to have to turn one's energies to writing for profit often left little time or inclination for more creative ventures. (3) Nor was private or political patronage an answer: it also posed constraints on artistic autonomy. In the early nineteenth century the example of the poet laureate Robert Southey - a former democrat turned reactionary Tory in deference to his paymasters - was often held up to illustrate the evils of
political patronage.

There were thus a host of reasons why artists and intellectuals might wish to rid themselves of financial constraints on their independence. Most of these arguments appear time and time again in the literature of the early nineteenth century, and occupy an important place in Romantic thought.

But if neither the marketplace nor private patronage allowed the artist or the philosopher the chance to work independently, then to what could they turn for support? One answer lay in some kind of public or state patronage for the intellectual community, a proposition which starts to gain some support in the 1820's and 1830's, spurred on to some extent by the burgeoning of state enterprise, especially in the educational field.

Interestingly, the strongest voices in favour of state support for writers came from the radicals and utilitarians who had traditionally been considered the least sympathetic to culture. Beginning with the premise that the creation of a happier society depended, in James Mill's words, "almost entirely upon the political machine" (4), they naturally looked to the state as the guarantor of intellectual progress, particularly after 1832. The utilitarians moved on from the introduction of schemes for mass education to contemplate ways to safeguard the activities of higher intellectuals (5). Thus, for example, the radical
utilitarian writer William Bridges Adams made the proposal that -

men of letters, and inventors in science and art, should be pensioned at the expense of the state...we are more desirous to attract notice to this...as the enemy are fond of imputing to persons of strong democratic opinions, a disdain of literary attainments and of all intellectual pre-eminence. (6)

John Stuart Mill, one of the most influential of all the radical thinkers, advocated in the same year (1833) the setting up of endowed foundations to support culture - "a wide field of usefulness". He concurred with the views of the French philosopher Auguste Comte, that "the moral ascendancy once exercised by priests, must in time pass into the hands of philosophers", and shared Comte's ideal of a paid philosophical class as the leaders of society. And he looked to -

enlightened individuals and enlightened governments...to provide that good and wholesome food for the wants of the minds, for which the competition of the mere trading market affords in general so indifferent a substitute. (7)

Other leading radicals made similar proposals. When the Whig party assumed power in 1830, Chancellor Brougham - pioneer of the S.D.U.K. told the poet laureate Robert Southey that "the government of this country have long been exposed, I fear justly, to the charge of neglecting science and letters", and he asked Southey if he thought that -

1st. Whether or not letters will gain by the more avowed and active encouragement of the
Government?
2nd. In what way that encouragement can the most safely and beneficially be given them?

Southey replied by suggesting the institution of a permanent Academy...with salaries for its members" (8)

Similarly, in 1833, Bulwer Lytton, by now a member of parliament, also pressed for some form of state patronage for arts and letters, urging the creation of endowed professorships as an incentive to scholarly activity. He contrasted England's notorious neglect of its men of genius with the better provision made for them in Germany, with its more numerous universities - a comparison also drawn by J.S. Mill. (9)

Ironically, just as the radicals and utilitarians were beginning to understand the value of, and to advocate state support for, the higher forms of intellectual activity, opposition to such ideas lingered on, not among utilitarian diehards, but among maverick conservatives like Thomas Carlyle, who vigorously rejected any scheme for the institutionalising of creative activity -

Shall we say that Science and Art are indebted principally to the founders of schools and universities? Did not science originate rather, and gain advancement in the obscure closets of the Roger Bacoons, Keplers, Newtons...were Homer and Shakespeare members of any beneficial guild, or made Poets by means of it? (10)

Such provocative individualism, which looks back to the anti-social Romanticism of earlier decades, found itself
more and more as a minority view as the century progressed. For although both conservatives and radicals continued to accuse each other of neglecting the rights of intellect, on both sides the notion that the state’s support of deserving genius could be anything other than beneficial slowly fell into desuetude: a change which belongs very much to the set of attitudes we have come to associate with Victorian Liberalism.

One writer who thought and wrote extensively on the question of state support for writers was the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Both through his writings and through his own unhappy experiences at attempting to secure state support, he was instrumental in changing attitudes towards the state’s responsibility towards its men of letters.

In his philosophical work On The Constitution of The Church and State, published in 1830 (11), Coleridge presented his vision of the role he wished the Anglican church to play in fostering the cultural life of the nation. Recent years had witnessed, he argued, an overbalance of materialistic values in society and a corresponding decline in the influence of the church, whose authority had been further eroded by its own shortcomings. Rising to the defence of the Established church, Coleridge reiterated the Burkean view that the life of an organic society depends in part on the spiritual and moral welfare of its individual
citizens, which cannot be guaranteed by secular means or by
government legislation alone. Implicit in this view was his
scepticism over the utilitarians' confidence in the ability
of governments to change human nature.

Coleridge avoided however the extreme of Carlylean
individualism by insisting that it is a duty of the organic
state - through the medium of its national church - to
foster the development of its individual members. As early
as 1817, in his Lay Sermon, and again in Church and State,
Coleridge maintained the belief that among the positive ends
of government must be "the development of those faculties
which are essential to humanity, i.e. to [man's] rational
and moral being". Coleridge never swerved from this
proposition, which derives from the view that the individual
cannot be conceived as a moral being apart from the culture
by which he is shaped. Emphasis on this aspect of
governmental responsibility became a central ideal of
Victorian liberalism. Gladstone's claim that "it is a very
low theory of government which teaches, that it only has the
care of the body and the bodily goods", and his belief that
"a cultivation of the inward man...is the root, the
corrective and the safeguard of civilisation" were directly
influenced by his reading of Coleridge's *Church and State*.
(12)

By 1829, the year in which Coleridge's work was
published, it had become a truism that England lacked any
visionary political leadership. In Coleridge’s eyes it was equally the case that the higher classes as a whole - landowners, aristocracy, the Church - needed to equip themselves spiritually and intellectually to be fit for the future leadership of society, and in Church and State Coleridge provided a model for the re-education of both the mass of society and its leaders.

Speculating on what might have been the original educational role of the National Church, Coleridge introduces the concept of a CLERISY, which he defines as a permanent learning class or order, to be financed from a reserve of the national wealth, and whose functions and duties would be as follows -

A certain number were to remain at the fountainhead of the humanities, in cultivating and enlarging the knowledge already possessed, and in watching over the interests of physical and moral science; being, likewise, the instructors of the remaining, more numerous classes of the order. This latter body were to be distributed throughout the country, so as not to leave even the smallest integral part or division without a resident guide, guardian or instructor. (13)

Offering this idea of the clerisy partly as a historical account of the social and teaching role of the church, and partly as a theoretical model of national education, Coleridge implicitly criticises the Anglican church’s present neglect of its duties, and suggests the lines on which it might resume them.

Though Coleridge’s proposal of a Clerisy was to provide
later educationalists with arguments for a secular-based, state-financed educational elite — something largely realised in the twentieth century — Coleridge himself called upon the Church to reassert that role. And he called specifically upon the Anglican church to fulfil his vision — partly due to personal loyalty, because it had done so in the past, and because it alone held through its endowments and social organisation the means of continuing to do so. Even the atheist Shelley had recognised the unique social and educational benefits that could be offered by the Established Church when he told Peacock in 1813 to —

consider for a moment how much good a good clergyman may do, in his teaching as a scholar and a moralist; in his example as a gentleman and a man of regular life...it is an admirable institution that admits the possibility of diffusing such men over the surface of the land. (14)

It is evident that Coleridge always envisaged himself as a potential member of that Clerisy, enabled by state financing to work "at the fountainhead of the humanities", and to increase the store of knowledge already possessed. As early as 1786, when he told his friend John Thelwall "I am not fit for public life, yet the light shall stream to a far distance from the taper in my cottage window" (15), he was casting himself in his future role as a higher kind of intellectual whose influence on society would, if indirect and perhaps unacknowledged, still be — in J.S. Mill's word — "seminal". And indeed by the 1820's Coleridge was regarded
as one of the seminal minds of the age. Most of his prose writings are didactic, aimed and instructing and advising teachers and the leaders of society. *Biographia Literaria* offers "a torch of guidance to the philosophical critic, and ultimately to the poet himself"; *The Statesman's Manual* is an instruction book for the governing classes ("landowners, magistrates and senators") and for those who would shape the minds of such people; while the *Aids To Reflection* is designed for "students who have dedicated their future lives to the cultivation of their race". (16)

What makes Coleridge's concept of a Clerisy especially interesting is his emphasis that it should be financed by the state. His reasons were both practical and philosophical. He recognised that writers such as himself - addressing difficult ideas to a small elite - could not hope to support themselves from sales alone, if at all. More fundamentally however, he felt it was the duty of the state to provide for the continuation of its intellectual life, and through this the perpetuation of its history.

Coleridge's own lifelong financial problems render his views on state funding for intellectuals particularly telling. For a variety of reasons - his writings' lack of popularity and poor sales; his inability to work consistently through self-doubt and ill-health; his own financial mismanagement and the bankruptcy of his publishers; or his mistreatment at their hands; an estranged wife and family forever calling on his income - Coleridge had always
been poor. Usually living hand-to-mouth, and dependent on the precarious generosity of friends, Coleridge was continually in search of financial support of a kind that would neither hamper his creativity nor destroy his intellectual independence. His sensitivity to criticism and his low opinion of contemporary party politics also made him anxious to avoid the kind of attacks launched on Southey and Wordsworth for reputedly "selling" themselves to the Tory establishment. In Church and State he thus called for a national church free of political or party ties, and a clergy, or intellectual class thus free from the necessity of groping for places and livings.

Coleridge's ideal of state patronage also freed the intellectual from subjection to market values as well as party politics. He had learned through years of personal experience that the more lucrative forms of writing - such as journalism - which had to conform to popular tastes, could be damaging in their own way. He had formed the view that the English middle-class reader sought in literature only the reflection of his own prejudices or tastes, and not the originality that he had to offer. "So" he jotted in one of his notebooks, "the writer must be the Taylor who is to take the cloth already in the Readers' possession, and bring it back in the fashionable cut" (17). The thought of stooping to popular taste appalled him, and in Biographia Literaria he advises young authors "never to pursue literature as a trade." (18)
In the light of his views on the virtues of financial independence, it is all the more ironic that, in the last years of his life Coleridge became caught up in a political wrangle over his financial support of precisely the kind he had always tried to avoid. It is instructive to look at this episode in some detail, both for the variety of attitudes it reveals towards the question of state patronage, as well as for what it shows too of the tendency in this period for literary issues to become politicised.

In 1816, following an unusually productive spell of writing, Coleridge felt confident enough to pursue more seriously his belief that intellectuals like himself deserved some kind of official sponsorship or state patronage. As an interim measure, he canvassed friends to apply on his behalf to the Royal Literary Fund for some kind of grant. Although this only produced £30, news of his financial difficulties reached the ears of Byron, who anonymously sent Coleridge a further £100. Neither of these temporary means of relief corresponded to Coleridge's desire for some official recognition however: both carried with them the air of charity.

In July 1817 Coleridge sent the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, a set of his recently completed Lay Sermons and Biographia Literaria. Accompanying the gift was a tortuously written letter in which Coleridge pointed out to Liverpool the "powerful, tho' indirect influence" of philosophy on the
political life of a society. On such grounds, he concluded, he felt able to claim the patronage "of as many as entertain similar convictions with myself, and believe me qualified to enforce them" (19). Nothing came of this indirect plea for help, though Lord Liverpool's interest in assisting Coleridge was vaguely rekindled in the following decade. In the summer of 1826 Coleridge's friend John Frere obtained a "positive promise" from Liverpool of a £200 life annuity for Coleridge. Hopes for this foundered however when Liverpool was seized with a paralytic stroke in February 1827, and died the following year. Coleridge then considered approaching the Whig Marquis of Lansdowne before deciding to avoid any action which might be interpreted as identifying himself with the Whig party. Such party considerations did not apply to his claims on Liverpool who, in his capacity as Prime Minister (and not as leader of the Tories) had some access to the Treasury or other public funds which might have provided for Coleridge.

Coleridge's search for some form of state patronage free from political taint, free from restraints, and free from considerations of charity, was partly fulfilled when in 1824 the Royal Society of Literature made him an Associate, an award which carried with it an annual stipend of one hundred guineas. This sum came from the Privy Purse (ie from George IV) and was thus unlinked to any political party; it entailed no obligations on the holder other than an annual lecture; and it was awarded in recognition of literary
achievement and to aid a writer's future work, and not as a charity for writers in distress. (20)

That the stipend - though not large - met in principle his ideal of state patronage Coleridge confirmed during his address to the R.S.L. on becoming an Associate in May 1824, an address in which he also defined for the first time his concept of a "clerisy" -

Men of letters may be distinguished into two classes - of which the first and more numerous have it for their object to distribute and popularise the stores of knowledge already existing, and devote their talents to the instruction and entertainment of the many...But there is, or ought to be a smaller class, consisting of those who labour in the service of Science itself...and who must needs narrow the circle of their immediate influence...And to whom shall such men look for patronage and support, but to the lawful representative of the NATION - that is, to the King, or the Sovereign. (21)

The main drawback of the R.S.L. stipends was that, although free from political control, they were dependent on the generosity of the Sovereign. This was illustrated dramatically in 1831 when the new king, William IV, decided to withdraw support from the R.S.L. as part of a plan to reduce royal expenditure. This unexpected action took on symbolic proportions in the controversy that followed, most of which centred on the case of Coleridge, who out of all the ten Royal Associates was the least able to bear this loss of income.

In hearing of the discontinuance of his annuity in May
1831 Coleridge at once canvassed for support among those of his friends who had court or parliamentary influence. The minor poet Thomas Pringle interceded for him by approaching Whig M.P. Sir James Mackintosh and enlisting his help in an effort to obtain for Coleridge some kind of financial help from the state, perhaps by the voting of more money into the privy purse.

Mackintosh however was not hopeful. "To get a pension or a sinecure from the present Ministers is something like trying to pull down the moon. I should think a subscription more promising" (22). The elections of 1831 had increased the radical element in the Whig government that took power in 1830, and may have increased with it the Whigs' reluctance to continue the unpopular practice of their Tory predecessors of awarding pensions. Nor was a sinecure what Coleridge was looking for.

Coleridge's plight did however reach the ears of Lord Grey and his Chancellor Brougham, through the poet's friend William Sotheby. In late May 1831 Brougham wrote to Sotheby, telling him to inform Coleridge that Grey had been able to find, as a temporary relief, £200 out of Treasury funds. 'Let him have half each year' added Brougham. Sotheby forwarded Brougham's letter to Coleridge who, viewing the offer as an act of charity and one which connected him to the Whig party, and insulted by the breezy insensitivity of Brougham's suggestion, turned it down. "At no period in my
life" he explained to Sotheby -

have I ever belonged to any party, religious or political; never laboured for any lower purpose than the establishment or maintenance of principles; but though neither Whig nor Tory, I am enough of the latter, I trust.(23)

At this point the press entered what was quickly becoming a political controversy. The conservative Englishman's Magazine used the situation to adduce "the remarkable apathy of the government to the great cause of literature", implying that the liberal Whigs were responsible for the withdrawal of the annuities (24). The allegation was refuted by the less partisan Times on 3 June 1831, which attacked the Englishman's Magazine's claim that blame rested with the present government, noted Grey's intended generosity to Coleridge, and pointed out that the R.S.L. annuities were supplied from the privy purse, "over which...no person has authority but the king himself". (25)

In its July issue the Englishman's Magazine replied to the Times's arguments by redoubling its attack on the Whig ministry. It stated that the R.S.L. had made "a formal appeal to the Premier", but that -

their representations were heard with an attention ominous...of the only measure befitting an administration professing a proper deference to the popular voice. It may be believed that a Grey and a Brougham are guiltless of this miserable piece of thrift, but it will be difficult to exonerate them. (26)

The statement indicates the continued belief in some
circles that the radical and liberal wing of the Whig party, with its roots in the utilitarian movement, was still the enemy of culture.

Later the same month Fraser's Magazine followed the Englishman's example by using the R.S.L. controversy as political ammunition to fire at the Whigs. It noted that a majority of the ten Associates were Tories, and suggested that their annuities had been deliberately discontinued by the Whigs in order to "buy back" the support of the dispossessed writers for their own propaganda purposes -

To three or four of these Associates the stipend is of service, and the withdrawal of it perhaps was thought would induce them, or some of them, to RAT, in order to its continuation or substitution in some other shape. A compromise has actually been offered to "old Coleridge", who rejected the insidious offer of the Premier. Of the talents of such men the party in power are of great want. (27)

Though unfair, such allegations stuck. (28) Even after Coleridge's death, references were still made to the blow dealt to this "Tory pensioner" by an unfeeling Whig government.

Coleridge himself recognised that the problem he faced lay not with political parties, as with the lack of interest in literature and philosophy shown by political leaders in general. Most other commentators however had assumed that the literary world was inseparably subject to political control.
The most thoughtful comments on the Coleridge controversy came from John Stuart Mill who, in the 1830's, had come strongly under the influence of Coleridge's writings and had also outlined his own schemes for the public maintenance of an intellectual elite (29). Mill was drawn into the debate by a provocative article brought to his notice in the Brighton Guardian, which argued that because "literary men are no use", and that "the improvement of mankind is not, in the slightest degree, owing to them or their writings" they ought "in no case to be provided for at the national expense".

Mill responded to this in the Examiner newspaper in June 1831. Attacking the argument as "vandalism" and "perverse", he used the opportunity to launch a general attack on laisser-fairists who "limit the ends of social union...to those of a mere police". Can they not realise, he asks, that "political society is a combination among mankind for the purpose of helping one another in any way in which help can be advantageous", and that in this "the intellectual, the philosopher can help also" (30). Mill rightly saw the debate surrounding the R.S.L. annuities as a paradigm of the wider questions being asked about the role that the intellectual could play in society, and the obligations upon government to foster a nation's cultural life - questions to which Coleridge's idea of a clerisy had been one answer.
Other writers followed Mill in defending Coleridge. After Coleridge’s death in 1834 J.G. Lockhart wrote angrily that "there assuredly ought to have been some means of providing for such a man...either in some great metropolitan institution, or within the walls of one or other of our universities (31). In 1834 the Scottish poet Allan Cunningham, in a survey of British poetry over the past fifty years, wrote that "someone has desired me to describe the influence which men of genius have in this land: that can be done in a word - they have none", and he illustrated this with the point that "Coleridge has been deprived of his small pension". (32)

Coleridge’s unhappy experience over the withdrawal of the R.S.L. annuities, although not so much dependent upon party politics as was supposed, did nevertheless strengthen his belief in the unprincipled and philistine atmosphere of political life, and the indifference of practical men to the works of intellect and imagination. "All men in power" he wrote, "are jealous of the pre-eminence of men of letters; they feel, as towards them, conscious of inferior power" (33). The experience confirmed too his recognition of a growing divide between the world of intellect and the practical world of government - "the silent revolution" in his words - and increased his sense of isolation from the currents of everyday life.

In his later years, Coleridge was perforce to adopt a posture of proud independence to mask this feeling of
abandonment. Ever sensitive to criticism, hurt by the attacks of men like Hazlitt on his personal life and his writings, forever yoked with the politically unpopular Southey and Wordsworth, out of step with the reformist sentiments of the late 1820's and 1830.'s, and finally humiliated by those eager to make political capital out of his impecuniousness - Coleridge's famed indifference to the world was not a matter of choice but of necessity also. It is ironic that a writer who always stressed the practical value of philosophers and artists, and who would never have endorsed the Romantic idea that art could somehow thrive in adversity, should himself have ended his days in characteristically Romantic isolation. As the Edinburgh Review wrote after his death -

> If the world in some degree neglected the philosopher, he repaid its inattention by a very general scorn of the world and its opinions. He lived so much in the atmosphere of his own ideas. (34)

The Edinburgh Review's description of Coleridge is typical of many that appeared in the 1830's, in which the image of the isolated poet of earlier years is conflated with that of the political idealist rejected by a narrow-minded government - an image strengthened by the annuities controversy. Thus, the New Monthly Magazine suggested that -

> The notice of the discontinuance of the Royal Subscription...should be before him, with a sonnet to Independence written beneath (35)
while several other commentators compared Coleridge's political isolation in his old age to that of Milton. (36)

For Coleridge, the enemy of genius was the materialism of the age, which he felt had placed a low value on the contribution made by philosophers and artists to social progress. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the utilitarians, and democratic and radical politicians had most popularly been associated with this view, although they took pains to reject such allegations, especially once they entered the mainstream of political life. In some quarters, however, the Tory establishment was also regarded as unsympathetic to culture. One exponent of such a view was the nineteenth century radical poet Richard Hengist Horne. Horne, like Coleridge, was extremely interested in the question of state patronage for writers, and it is useful to compare his views with those of Coleridge, in particular because of the different political standpoint from which they were expressed.

Richard Hengist Horne (1803-1884) is remembered now, if at all, as the author of Orion (1844), the epic poem which, in an attempt to bring poetry within reach of ordinary people, Horne sold for one farthing. In his day, however, the "Farthing Poet" was a literary figure of some consequence. He was author of innumerable poems, plays, books and essays, and he was a close friend of Dickens.
Bulwer Lytton and the Brownings. By virtue of a literary career spanning sixty years Horne could truthfully be described, in 1877, as "one of the few remaining links between the period of Wordsworth and Shelley...and the present day". (37)

Horne was also a notable radical reformer, a youthful satirist and critic of the Established Church, and an early advocate of national education, Corn Law repeal, and secret balloting in elections. His early political essays for the influential Monthly Repository gained him an introduction to W.J. Fox's circle of unitarians, free-thinkers and radicals, and in July 1833 Horne took over Fox's editorship of the journal before handing it on the Leigh Hunt the following year. In 1844 Horne was appointed an Assistant Commissioner on the "Government Inquiry Into the Employment of Children and Young Persons In Mines and Manufactories" - better known as Chadwick's Factory Acts Commission.

Horne's first notable contribution to literary and political thought however, was the curiously titled book An Exposition of the False Medium and Barriers Excluding Men of Genius From the Public. (38) Published in 1833, the book is a lengthy account of suffering and neglected genius, its causes and its remedy. As an enquiry into the artist's relation with society and the state it offers an interesting parallel, but also a contrast with, Coleridge's writings on the subject in the same period.
An Exposition is divided into three main sections. The first section, entitled "Statement of Facts" describes in detail those artists, philosophers, inventors and other men of genius who from time immemorial have been persecuted, neglected or abused by - variously - governments, institutions, rivals, the public and the market. Most of Horne's examples are lifted liberally from Isaac D'Israeli's book _Calamities of Authors_ (1811), and add little that is new to what was by the 1830's a ubiquitous cultural stereotype. Among Horne's catalogue of suffering genius may be found Socrates, Boethius, Dante, Galileo, Milton, Chatterton, Burns, Keats and Shelley, as well as some lesser known sufferers such as Henry Kirke White, John Banim and Richard Ayton.

The second section of the book, headed "Of Causes", probes in detail the many reasons why men of genius have failed to win the recognition they deserve from society. The impediments are numerous. The maliciousness of governments, the malpractices of publishers, the political bias of review magazines and critics, the cut-throat values of the literary market, the corrupt or monopolistic power of institutions (such as the royal Academy, which Horne labels as a "junta") - the barriers excluding men of genius from the public are manifold. and Horne accordingly swings his political axe widely.

Horne's analysis suffers however from a lack of balance, for he mounts what seems a disproportionately violent attack
on publishers and publishers’ readers, for their reluctance
to publish original work by new writers. The publisher’s
reader, in Horne’s judgement, is —

a mere critic, who has no ideas beyond
criticism...His philosophy is a dull
antithesis to human nature, as mean and
abortive in intellect as in feeling...He has
no liberty, candour or toleration. He is a
bigoted sectarian upon the crutches of false
knowledge...There is no high faith, hope or
charity in his composition. He has no
reverential love of truth. (39)

Blackwoods’ Magazine, reviewing the book on its
publication, remarked on Horne’s violent prejudice and
accused him of being “monogamous” in his obsession with
blaming the publisher’s reader for all the ills of
contemporary culture. (40) The severity of Horne’s attack
was as much a personal vendetta against the publishing world
as anything else. In An Exposition he mentions the
rejection by the literary world of his early poem
Hecatympoles, and refers to himself obliquely as a living
example of neglected greatness. There is evidence too that
he compared himself with Shelley and Keats (41) in this
respect. An Exposition was thus, at least in part, an
exercise in self-promotion.

In the third part of the book, entitled “The Remedy”,
Horne proposes the establishment of a “Society of English
Literature and Art” —

for the encouragement and permanent support of
Horne is scornful of existing literary societies such as the Athenæum, or the Literary Union, which he regards as no more than eating clubs, and is scathing about the Literary Fund for doing nothing to encourage men of genius. Other organisations have equally failed: the Society of Arts is impotent, Horne asserts; the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge cannot help genius because it must concentrate on helping the masses; while the Royal Society of Literature does not even merit a mention.

Having found all existing literary organisations in some way lacking, Horne presents his concept of a Society of Literature and Art as one which would be dominated by no ruling junta, which would be free from the taint of patronage or government interference, and which would be financed by public patronage alone through taxes. The Society's main function would be to distribute its income in the form of generous awards and grants to writers commonly agreed upon - by a disinterested committee of experts - to be deserving or in need. As such, Horne hoped that the Society would provide the focal point and the initial stimulus for a more just appreciation of true genius in the future.

When Horne descends into details of his plan, enthusiasm
leads him into absurdities. An epic poet, he proposes, should receive an annuity for life of £300; but the writer of a “powerful tragedy” just £100. The Society should found a college in which to physically house its members living in the London area, and its staff should include two surgeons to attend on the men of genius for an annual salary of £150. Horne was proposing nothing but "a great national almshouse" mocked Blackwood's Magazine (43).

Though preposterous in its small print, Horne's plan for a Society of English Literature and Art - buildings and all - almost came to fruition in the 1850's, when with Dickens, Lytton, Jerrold and others Horne helped to found a "Guild of Literature and Art", using land donated by Lytton on which to build a college. Lytton wrote a comedy which was enacted under Dickens' direction before the Queen in order to raise preliminary subscriptions. However, the buildings erected were, according to Elizabeth Browning, no more than "three doleful cottages standing in a field"; money was not forthcoming, and the scheme fell through. Shortly after, Horne sailed for the South Seas.

By far the most interesting parts of An Exposition are those which treat the sufferings of genius as a political problem. Here Horne's arguments merit attention, for they were - to most of Horne's radical readers - most persuasive. Horne, like Coleridge, was disgusted by the indifference or hostility of those in power to men of genius. "We know" wrote Horne -
that all the great chemists of early times, were looked upon as necromancers and dealers with the devil; all great philosophers, as impious blasphemers; and all great mechanists, dating from Archimedes, as madmen, a situation which, he asserted, is no better today. But he holds responsible for this not the utilitarian movement, nor the parliamentary radicals, but the Tory establishment. It is they, he argues, who have stifled genius in an effort to suppress dissenting views and hold on to their own powers and privileges. Horne's exposition of the neglect of genius thus becomes an attack on the means by which authority removes opposition. He cites Socrates, Anaxagoras and Boethius as just three early examples of great genius suppressed by governments afraid of the truths they had discovered, and follows these examples with a catalogue of prescribed books and supposedly heretical writers from ancient times to the present day. Milton provides the best example of an English genius discarded on political grounds, while turning to his own lifetime Horne notes

the busy quietism with which Government, especially during the last reign, squandered its resources on enormous salaries, sinecures, and pensions, to individuals of no capability or merit...suffering men of real ability to live and die as they might. (44)

The neglect or persecution of genius in the last twenty years is labelled - in a phrase redolent of radical opposition to the infamous newspaper stamp duty - a "tax upon sensibility".
On similar lines Horne dismisses as "condescending cant" the claim made by publishers and their readers that their censorship role is necessary to safeguard an ignorant or uncritical public from "bad" literature. "The time is advancing" he retorts, "when authors and men of genius will no longer be subject to ignorant panders and charlatan readers" (45). To declare that the public do not know what is good for them, and that they need guidance from their literary superiors smacked to Horne of elitism, and of the wish to control the population's access to the written word that was held to characterise the reactionary portion of the establishment. As a man of democratic political sympathies, Horne not unnaturally believed in the freedom of ordinary people to choose what they wished or did not wish to read.

An Exposition is thus as much a defence of liberty as it is an critique of the philistinism of authority.

An Exposition did not achieve the recognition Horne felt it deserved. He regarded it as a work of polemic every bit as powerful as Paine's Rights of Man, as a political revelation as well as a practical text-book on how to nurture genius. It was the one book which Horne for a long time wished to be known by, and he was disappointed when it attracted little attention beyond a one-line note of approval in the Monthly Repository, and a damning review in Blackwood's Magazine. Despite its sincere political conviction, the work's prolixity, illogicalities of argument and unjustifiable
biases guaranteed it only the most lukewarm of receptions.

Coleridge would undoubtedly have been sympathetic to Horne’s overall scheme for the state support of men of genius. Both writers - partly through personal experience - had concluded that the political and material pressures on writers were too great to enable them to think creatively and independently. The solution was thus to create some form of institution which would guarantee their financial well-being and their autonomy. Where the two differed was in their political reading of the problem. Coleridge believed that the twin evils of utilitarianism and political economy, working their way through society and political life, had created a climate of materialism which failed to recognise society’s spiritual and cultural needs, and which thus placed a low value on intellectuals and artists. Horne’s alternative thesis is that reactionary governments are to blame for suppressing men of genius in their efforts to stifle truth, of which the Tory governments of the first quarter of the nineteenth century were the prime example.

Depending on one’s political belief, either view had some validity in the period of the reform bill. The truth was - as Coleridge had himself half recognised - that, in an era of political cynicism, few of England’s leaders, whatever their political cast, had much respect for, or belief in the relevance of intellectuals and artists. Indeed both writers had sensed the predominantly practical spirit
of the age. It was largely left to the men of a later era to attempt to reverse that materialistic outlook, and to recover for intellectuals something of their former pre-eminence. Although Horne’s treatise suffered the neglect against which it was campaigning, Coleridge’s idea of a clerisy at least provided a well-defined and important element in Victorian educational and cultural thinking.
CHAPTER THREE: NOTES


3. The remarks by Shelley is quoted in *The Collected Works of Thomas Love Peacock*. London, 1834. Vol. 8, p.96. For just one example of the argument that writing for profit leaves little time for really creative achievement - a fairly self-evident proposition - we can cite Wordsworth, who in *Two Addresses To The Freeholders of Westmoreland* (Kendal 1815) argued that only men of independent wealth could lead society since they alone had the time and means to read and write profoundly.


5. The utilitarians had started out with attempts to spread knowledge amongst the working and lower middle classes through the activities of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. From the late 1820's onwards the concern was frequently expressed that greater efforts needed to be made to protect higher intellectual endeavour, lest the diffusion of knowledge led to its dilution. See for example,
J.S. Mill's essay "Democracy in America" (London and Westminster Review, vol II, October 1835) which suggests the need of "a class composed of all the most cultivated intellects in the country" as "the salutary corrective of all the inconveniences to which democracy [ie the democratisation of education] is liable".

6. "Writings of Junius Redivivus". Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, vol III, June 1833. p.347. As the century progressed, utilitarians and radicals became increasingly concerned to dispel the old notion that they were hostile to cultural achievements, and to point out instead that utilitarianism had been misinterpreted in this regard. Thus, for example, a writer in The Monthly Repository in 1836 was to lament the damage done to poetry by the "vulgar misinterpretation of true utilitarian philosophy". Monthly Repository, n.s., vol. VII. p.584


9. Bulwer concentrated his parliamentary activity in pressing for legislation which would better protect authors. His interest in this subject even surfaces in his novels. The eponymous hero of Eugene Aram (1832), a reclusive "Coleridgean" intellectual, asks the government for an annuity to support him in his "abstruse science". Aram
claims that because his work is not popular with the public, he needs some kind of state support to keep on with his research. Bulwer may have been indirectly referring to Coleridge’s real-life problems, which form the subject of much of this chapter.


13. Church and State, pp. 51-52.


20. In practice, even the obligation to deliver an annual lecture was usually waived.


28. For example, the comment of W.B. Adams that "the only good public act of George IV was the establishment of a literary fund of one thousand pounds per annum, to be divided amongst ten literary men...It will be a lasting reproach to the Whig government, that they deprived these men of their living ". The Rights of Morality. London, 1832. p.115. Another theory of the time was that the supposedly populist William IV had stopped the annuities as an anti-Tory gesture.

29. In his articles "Democracy in America", and "Corporation and Church Property". See notes 5 and 7 above.

quotes the remarks of the Brighton Guardian article.


35. New Monthly Magazine. vol. XXXII, September 1831. p.380

36. Shelley had made such a comparison as early as 1820 in his portrait of Coleridge as -

he who sits obscure
In the exceeding lustre and the pure
Intense irradiation of a mind
Which, with its own internal lightning blind
Flags wearily through darkness and despair.

with its unmistakeable echoes of Paradise Lost and Milton's blindness. ("Letter To Maria Gisborne". Poetical Works, ed. T. Hutchinson. 1870. p. 388). Coleridge himself drew parallels between his own and Milton's isolation and their subsequent banishment into the political wilderness. In A Lay Sermon Coleridge depicts himself as an isolated prophetic voice crying out over the materialism of his age, and he defends his stance by reference to Milton's justification of protest in his Reason of Church Government. Coleridge's description of Milton in Biographia Literaria -
He reserved his anger for the enemies of religion, freedom and his country... this great man in his latter days: poor, sick, old, blind, slandered, persecuted... in an age in which he was as little understood by the party for whom, as by that against whom, he had contended.

(Periographia Literaria, Everyman edition, ed. G. Watson, 1960. Chapter 2, pp. 18-20. also owes much to Coleridge's perception of himself, a point that did not go unnoticed amongst his contemporaries. J.G. Lockhart, for example, compared Coleridge's "serene scorn" with that of "the greatest of his political predecessors". After his death Coleridge was even physically compared with Milton. The Athenaeum, for example, recalled that Coleridge's "very voice had a peculiar Miltonic melody", while another magazine wrote of Coleridge's "flowing white locks", again recalling Milton in his old age. See Edinburgh Review, vol CxxII, 1835; Athenaeum, No.425, 1835; New England Magazine, vol IX, 1835.


41. Ann Blainey, in her biography *The Farthing Poet: A Biography Of Richard Hengist Horne* (London, 1968) has shown how Horne consciously modelled himself on Shelley and Keats. He also convinced himself that his habitual hypochondria and pessimism were the necessary accompaniments to genius.

42. *An Exposition*, p.287.


44. *An Exposition*, p.298.

45. *An Exposition*, p. 25
CHAPTER FOUR
EBENEZER ELLIOTT, 'THE CORN LAW RHYMER'

We have seen in earlier chapters how the reformist spirit of the 1820’s and 1830’s encouraged the belief that literature ought to be useful. No one subscribed to this view more readily than the early nineteenth century Sheffield poet Ebenezer Elliott. In both his poetical works and in numerous essays, Elliott, "the Corn Law Rhymer", was the most passionate advocate, and the most thorough exponent, of the view that poetry must be the handmaid of political reform, and poets in the van of social change. For Elliott, politics was the only true subject for poetry. The extraordinary popularity of Elliott’s "Corn Law Rhymes" and other poetry in the 1830’s suggests a strong measure of adherence to these views among his contemporaries. A study of Elliott’s poetry, and the reception it received at the time, provides some useful insights into the literary taste of the Age of Reform, and demonstrates how pervasive at times was the influence of politics upon the literature of the period.

There is more however to Ebenezer Elliott than the utilitarian poet. In his lifetime, Elliott was credited with having launched a literary revolution, as one who wrote for, and expressed the feelings of, an emerging
industrial working class. He was believed to be the poet of the urban poor, representing them in the parliament of words just as their voice was beginning to be heard in the reformed House of Commons. He was, it was felt, a glowing example of the new democratic spirit sweeping across the land; a testimony to the success of the March of Mind; a new breed of writer, ushering in a new age. For this too he merits our attention.

---

Ebenezer Elliott was born on the 17th of March, 1781, at the New Foundry, Masborough, in the parish of Rotherham, south Yorkshire, the third son of a well-to-do ironmonger, also named Ebenezer. In the seventeenth century the Elliotts had been cattle stealers on the Scottish border, but at some stage seem to have wearied of this life and settled down as merchants in the north of England. Robert Elliott, the poet's grandfather, was, by the early eighteenth century, working in the iron trade, and was to finish his life as a prosperous iron merchant in Newcastle upon Tyne. His son, Ebenezer the elder, followed the same profession, first as an apprentice at the great iron foundry of Samuel Walker Bros. at Masborough, and later setting up his own foundry nearby.

The ironmasters of Sheffield and Rotherham, of whom
Ebenezer Elliott the elder was but one of many, were a distinctive breed. They were, almost to a man, dissenters in religion, radical in their politics, and, it has been suggested, "austere and grim in their private lives" (1). Many of them were the recent descendents of labourers or artisans, drawn in from the agricultural areas of Derbyshire or Yorkshire to the growing iron region of Sheffield. For such men, self-made, and moving rapidly up the social ladder, non-conformity, whether in the form of Methodism or more extreme Calvinist doctrines, naturally appealed. One needs only to see the names of some of the Sheffield ironmasters - men like Zephaniah Walker, Jeremiah Homfray, Nehemiah Lloyd, Shadrach Fox, Isaac Hawkins, Joab Parsons, and of course Ebenezer Elliott himself - to get a sense of their puritan background. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Sheffield had only six churches but as many as seventeen dissenting chapels, many of which "belonged" to a particular foundry. The Walker family, to whose ironworks Ebenezer Elliott the elder was apprenticed, was one of England's leading Methodist families: the Methodist chapel attached to their foundry was known simply as 'Walker's chapel'.

With non-conformity in religion went dissent in politics. As a class, the ironmasters and merchants lacked formal political power commensurate with their growing economic muscle. Power, as they saw it, still lay with rural, landed interests rather than with the
industrialists; it was hereditary rather than bought by the wealth of the self-made man. The ironmasters were largely unrepresented in parliament, and successive governments pursued economic and political policies inimical to their interests. In the 1780's the iron industry had had to mobilise against Pitt the younger's attempts to finance the war with France by taxing the industry. A similar attempt to tax iron exports in 1806 was also resisted. Again, Samuel Walker's foundry at Masborough provided the political leadership. It was from there that the opposition to Pitt's proposals had been organised, and it was to there that the famous revolutionary Thomas Paine had come upon his return from America in 1787, where he designed the bridge which Walkers were later to construct over the river Wear at Sunderland. Ebenezer Elliott the elder is almost certain to have known Paine, and may have pointed out to his young son the author of the Rights of Man.

Such was the society into which Ebenezer Elliott was born in 1781. His father, Ebenezer the elder, seems to have been a not untypical member of the ironmaster class, both in his religion and his politics. He was, the poet recalled, a Berean Calvinist, who "used to preach every fourth Sunday to persons who came from distances of twelve and fourteen miles to hear his tremendous doctrines of ultra-Calvinism and hell hung round with span-long children". (2) The hell-fire preacher Enoch Grimes in Elliott's 1833 poem "The Ranter" is modelled at least in
part on Ebenezer Elliott senior. If his father's sermons terrified the young Ebenezer, at the same time he may have learned something from them, for his political speeches of the 1830's owe much to the oratorical techniques of the dissenting preacher.

In politics the elder Ebenezer was no less radical. During the politically repressive 1790's his reputation as a Jacobinical Tory-hater was notorious, and the local Tory squirearchy referred to him contemptuously as 'Devil Elliott'. In his cottage at the foundry, in a room hung with pictures of Cromwell and Washington, he would spend the evenings railing against the government and - conceivably influenced by Thomas Paine - praising American democracy. On more than one occasion in the politically nervous 1790's the young Ebenezer witnessed his father's arrest for scuffling with members of the King's cavalry, whose custom was to back their horses so as to break the windows of local Jacobins' houses (3).

Although the values and attitudes of his father, as well as the political climate of the 1790's, must undoubtedly have helped shape his later political sympathies (4), Ebenezer Elliott's early years - and his earliest attempts at poetry - seem largely unconcerned with politics. In a fragment of autobiography published shortly before his death in 1850, Elliott described what must have been a not untypical boyhood growing up in what was still a mostly rural part of England: of mornings spent at the village
dame school "kept by a Nanny Sykes...where I learned my
ABC", and of afternoons spent sailing toy boats, stealing
birds' eggs and playing in the woodlands that backed up
onto the foundry yard.

Of formal education Elliott had little. From the age
of ten to sixteen he attended a number of local schools, at
which his academic performance was so execrable that he
quickly gained "a reputation for duncery at home". In
depression, Elliott's father sent him at the age of
sixteen to work in the foundry, partly as a punishment, but
partly with an eye to his son taking over the business one
day. As the poet recalled "to my twenty-third year, I
worked for my father as laboriously as any servant he had,
and without wages, weighing every morning the unfinished
castings, besides opening and closing the shop in
Rotherham..." (5). These years, in which he associated with
habitually drunk ironworkers, were difficult ones for
Ebenezer Elliott, but from them he did gain a better
insight into, and sympathy for the problems of the
industrial working classes which later enabled him to speak
on their behalf with some authority. He also learned the
iron trade through and through, later becoming his father's
commercial traveller, and ultimately his partner.

During the same years Elliott read avidly. Not
surprisingly, given his intense religious background, the
Bible figured prominently in his early reading, and Elliott
was to recall that even at the age of twelve, he knew much of the Old Testament by heart. At about the age of fourteen, a local curate bequeathed to his father a small library, which contained, besides a number of Greek and Latin books, copies of Young’s *Night Thoughts*, Shenstone’s *Pastoral Ballad*, and the poetical works of Milton. The latter book in particular captivated the young Elliott, so much so that he was to recall that, by his sixteenth year, he could repeat, without missing a word, the first, second and sixth books of *Paradise Lost*.

Another poem that Elliott admired early was James Thomson’s “*The Seasons*”, read aloud to him by his elder brother. Elliott may have been attracted to “*The Seasons*” because of its rusticity and relatively unpretentious style, a style that had been influential in challenging the artificiality of much English poetry since its first publication in the 1720’s. Elliott professed a corresponding aversion to the carefully wrought poetry of Pope, which “gave me the headache if I heard it read aloud”.

Like so many of his contemporaries, Elliott seems to have learned early the value of education. Though never able to claim particularly humble origins, Elliott nevertheless felt considerable pride in having taught himself to read and understand literature:

*as a literary man I claim to be self-taught; because I have of my own will read some of*
the best books in our language, original and translated, and the best only, laboriously forming my mind on the highest models (G).

What books were these? Following his discovery of Milton and Thomson, Elliott continued to read widely; the list of items read during this period might be taken from the autobiographies of a hundred other auto-didacts in the age of self-improvement:


The above list might seem somewhat eclectic, but already it exhibits a tendency towards what was regarded as enlightened or radical opinion. Elliott's political, no less than his literary taste, was already forming.

At around the same time that he began work in his father's foundry, Elliott began writing poetry. One of his first attempts was an imitation in rhyme of the blank verse thunderstorm in Thomson's "The Seasons". The poem is in every way unremarkable except for a rather confused scene in which a flock of sheep, having been killed by lightning, somehow revive themselves and run away. Elliott later recalled how an elder cousin scoffed mercilessly at the poem when he read it aloud to him one evening. Unperturbed by this early setback, he persevered, and in 1801, when he was twenty, succeeded in publishing his first
poem, The Vernal Walk, a blank verse pastoral of several hundred lines. The publisher, J. G. Flower of Cambridge, was fairly well known in liberal and dissenting circles, and Elliott may have been introduced to him through his father.

Like his earlier piece, The Vernal Walk has little to recommend it, being a rather immature and repetitive blank verse eulogy of nature in which the sentimental, the banal and the quasi-religious are found in equally generous quantities. The following short passage, extolling the virtues of rustic domestic life, may be taken as representative:

Oft have I passed yon cottage door at eve,
Where sat the swain, his daily labour done,
Nursing his little children on his knee,
And kissing them at times, while o'er him bent
His happy partner, smiling as she viewed
Her lisping babes; then have I blessed thee, Love,
And fondly called thee Fount of Social Peace!

The poem in both style and sentiment is typical of much late eighteenth century minor poetry. Elliott "had not yet found his forte", commented an early biographer, going on to say that the poem exhibited "tautology, redundancy, that superfetation which, Dr Johnson says, is not much better than barrenness. It is a chaos..."(8). Many years later Elliott wrote to a friend saying that he had tried to read The Vernal Walk and that "in ten minutes I was asleep, with the volume at my feet". (8)
There is no record of how many copies of *The Vernal Walk* were sold by J.G. Flower, but one suspects very few. At any rate, it was a long time – almost twenty years – before Elliott was again successful in getting any work published.

In 1804 Elliott served out what might be termed his apprenticeship in the iron foundry and, at the age of twenty three, was taken into partnership by his father. His elder brother Giles had already become a partner by this time. The New Foundry at Masbrough was entering a period of prosperity, with a large stimulus coming from war production. While working hard to expand the family business, Elliott continued to write poetry during this period. In 1806 he completed *Night, or the Legend of Wharncliffe*, a Gothic horror story with a Peak district setting, and in the following year a collection of shorter Gothic-influenced poems *Tales of Night*. This latter collection included a dramatic poem on the life of Bothwell, which was to influence Swinburne’s drama of 1874 on the same subject.

Although *Night, or the Legend of Wharncliffe* was not to be published until 1818, nor *Tales of Night* until 1820, in 1808 Elliott sent both drafts to the poet Robert Southey asking him whether he could recommend them to any publisher. The previous year, Southey had published the *Remains* of the penurious and virtually unknown poet Henry Kirke White (10), a much-publicised act which was to draw upon him many requests for assistance from unknown or
unsuccessful poets, including now Elliott. Although not sufficiently impressed by Elliott's poems to feel able to recommend them to any publisher, Southey did at least write back in encouraging terms:

There is power in the least of these tales; but the higher you pitch your tone, the better you succeed. Thirty years ago they would have made your reputation; thirty years hence the world will wonder that they did not so (11).

Southey also advised Elliott to "feel your way with the public" by trying to get published first in newspapers, and over the following two years he continued to advise and offer criticism to Elliott, forever urging him to improve through practice. As we shall see later on, this early connection with Southey was to prove fortunate, for Southey was to be instrumental in securing Ebenezer Elliott's eventual success and poetic fame. That fame was built on Ebenezer Elliott's political poetry, and it is to this that we now turn.

--- o o o ---

Ebenezer Elliott's poetry falls into two characteristic periods. His early poetry, up to around 1820, shows a desire to experiment with different styles and genres, ranging from pastoral lyric to Gothic melodrama, and draws upon a variety of historical themes and subjects. In much of this early poetry, the
influence of numerous contemporary or eighteenth-century writers - Young, Thomson, Collins, Robert Montgomery, Southey, Thomas Campbell, Samuel Rogers, to name some - is clearly evident. This is only as one would expect from any minor poet of this period who had not yet developed an individual voice. One rarely sees in Elliott's early work any evidence of the political commitment that was to be the hallmark of his later work, and for which he was to become the most famous and highly-praised poet of his day (12).

Before considering in any detail the political poetry of the 1820's and 1830's on which Ebenezer Elliott's reputation rests, we must first look briefly at Elliott's political development, in particular his support of Free Trade and the reform movement.

It was noted earlier that the ironmaster class from which Elliott sprung was notorious in the 1790's for its radical sympathies, born partly out of a perception that the balance of political power in Britain lay still with rural, landed interests rather than the emerging industrial towns, but added to which was a more specific resentment at the sometimes brutal tactics used by the government in quelling periodic bouts of industrial unrest in the fiercely anti-jacobinical climate of the 1790's. We noted too the early opposition of the iron industry to the wars with France, and the industry's determined efforts to prevent the imposition of revenue raising taxes on it.
Despite the success of such agitation the French wars, and the trade restrictions that accompanied them, severely disrupted the iron industry, while the more generalized economic slump that followed the peace in 1815 led to the ruin of many ironmasters and the starvation of their workers.

The Elliott foundry was not spared this economic recession. The details are not available, but it appears that by around 1818 Ebenezer Elliott the elder lost a large part of his capital, a blow from which he was never able to recover, and it was from around this time that Ebenezer the younger took control of the business, slowly building it up again in the more stable economic climate of the early 1820's. The widespread discontent that followed the recession, particularly in northern England, led in turn to a series of notorious repressive measures by Lord Liverpool's government, notably the so-called Six Acts of 1819, the introduction of which really marks the date at which the Reform movement began in earnest (13).

The Corn Laws, a series of protectionist duties preventing the import of foreign corn, provided a natural focus for discontent among the Sheffield industrialists. The principal law, Robinson's Act of 1815, permitted importation only when the price of wheat reached 80/- a quarter, the effect of which was to keep the price of bread, and wages, high. This presented no hardship if trade was uniformly healthy, and employers could support
high wages, but any decline in trade - such as occurred after the peace in 1615 - meant that manufacturers either had to lower wages, or become less competitive. Either course of action could spell ruination for the workforce.

As far as the Sheffield iron industry was concerned, both manufacturers and employees alike traced the slump in their trade after 1615 directly to the operation of the Corn Laws. In previous years, Sheffield iron and steel had sold widely in the United States, a market which shrunk after 1615. It was thought that had there been a freer import of U.S. wheat and flour, this would have stimulated demand there for Sheffield goods, while lower bread prices and wages would have enabled Sheffield goods to maintain their competitiveness.

Opposition to the Corn Laws was not, however, just a question of economics. It provided above all a focus for a great deal of the pent-up resentment against the old order of things. The Corn Laws favoured the landed interests at the expense of the urban industrial population, and in the first thirty years of the century neither Whig nor Tory governments showed themselves willing to risk alienating those landed interests, on whose support they depended, by the extensive introduction of free trade measures. Thus, anti-Corn Law agitation, much of which centred around Sheffield, was as much an attempt to force political as economic change; and the general free trade
movement which gathered momentum in the 1820's was part of the agitation for political reform which was to culminate in the Act of 1832.

Of the overwhelming necessity of repealing the Corn Laws Ebenezer Elliott was never in doubt. To their operation he ascribed not only the failure of his father's business in 1818, but many of the social ills of the first part of the nineteenth century. He believed the introduction of the Corn Laws responsible for destroying the livings of both rural and urban workers alike, of forcing the depopulation of the countryside and creating destitution in the industrial towns. His experience of the immense distress suffered by the working classes in Sheffield during the economic downturn of 1817 - the starvation and destitution of workers and their families, and the growth of labour unrest in a sector previously characterised by its good industrial relations - convinced Elliott that only through Corn Law repeal could any form of economic and social stability be guaranteed, and that repeal in turn could only be achieved by doing away with the present repressive government and political system.

Thus, from the early 1820's on, hatred of the "bread tax" became the guiding principle of Ebenezer Elliott's life, and Free Trade a cause which he was to embrace with almost religious fervour, first as leader of the anti-Corn Law movement in south Yorkshire, and later as a leading member of the nationwide Anti Corn Law League. "Nothing,"

127
commented a friend, "could make him doubt for a moment that competition was the great social law of God, destined to rule the world to the end of time". (14) Elliott himself believed that Free Trade was in itself the practice of Christian principles:

the heavenly principle which seems to epitomise Christianity itself, that the free exchange of blessed equivalents, is the secret of all useful progress (15).

- a sentiment he later expressed in verse:

And Commerce, while the powers of evil fade, Shout o'er all seas - "All lands for me were made!" Hers are the apostles destined to go forth Upon the wings of mighty winds, and preach Christ Crucified! (15)

Ebenezer Elliott's political and social views find their first poetic expression in his poem The Village Patriarch, published in 1829. This rambling, often incoherent poem of around three thousand lines tells the story of Enoch Wray, a blind old stonemason, and the worsening of his fortunes in old age as a result of industrialisation and the operation of the Corn Laws. Elliott described the poem as "a sort of history, in verse, of a blind old Whig, or Jacobin", who "dies of Free-Trade and the Corn Laws" (17), which implies that he intended the poem to stand as a historical document as much as a work of art. Indeed, the poem has limited literary merit. There is little attempt at creating a continuous narrative, but instead the author presents a series of isolated incidents.
in which the once proud Enoch Wray and his family are reduced to poverty by the bread tax, greedy landowners, and repressive governments.

Nevertheless, the poem contains much of both literary and sociological interest. Enoch Wray, the protagonist, is portrayed as one of those men-giants of rural life, a rock-solid countryman, a craftsman and fiercely independent. Ebenezer Elliott had read, and developed a great appreciation for Wordsworth during the 1820's, and in Enoch Wray he created a character consciously modelled on the gaunt figures that people the Lyrical Ballads: men like The Old Cumberland Beggar, or Michael in Wordsworth's 1800 poem of that name.

One of the principal themes of the poem is the destruction wreaked upon rural life by the process of industrialisation. Drawing in large part from his own experience of the creeping urbanisation of the Sheffield region, and influenced too by the poetry of George Crabbe, whom he was also reading, and greatly admiring, in the 1820's, Elliott makes, in The Village Patriarch, his first significant observations about the transition from rural to urban society. The idyllic pre-industrial landscape and way of life are contrasted sharply with the physical and moral ugliness of the town which has encroached upon them. Thus, when Enoch Wray returns to the village of his childhood, he finds it horribly changed:
But much he dreads the town's distracting maze,
Where all, to him, is full of change and pain.
New streets invade the country; and he strays,
Lost in strange paths, still seeking, and in vain,
For ancient landmarks, or the lonely lane
Where oft he play'd at Crusoe, when a boy.
Fire vomits darkness, where his lime-trees grew;
Harsh grates the saw, where ooo'd the wood-dove coo;
Tomb crowds on tomb, where violets droop'd in dew...
(16)

Not only has the environment changed but with it -
again a most Wordsworthian theme - man's nature too. The
once independent countrydwellers who people Elliott's poem
have been reduced to beggary or economic slavery through
rural depopulation, the destruction of their farmland and
the machinations of greedy landlords. Developing this into
a wider theme, Elliott remarks the passing of a way of
life, and the decline of the English people over the last
century. In a manner very typical of many writers in the
first part of the nineteenth century, he invokes the spirit
of Milton, Pym and Hampden to contrast Britain's glorious
past with its inglorious present, asking why the English
have allowed themselves to be duped and enslaved by
avaricious capitalists and corrupt or repressive
governments, and bidding Englishmen be free and sturdy
again:

Say, Rock, is that a Briton? that mean thing
Who dares not lift his eyes above the feet ....

... Art thou a Briton, Ass, that lov'st the goad,
And bray'st in honour of thy glorious load? -
...

... Could Hampden breathe where crawl such worms

130
In his book Fiction for the Working Man, the critic Louis James has written of Elliott's "deep spiritual dissatisfaction with the results of the industrial revolution" (20). The observation is correct, though only up to a point, for it would be wrong to regard works like The Village Patriarch as simple condemnations of industrialisation and all that that means. For Elliott's attitudes towards industrial and social change are, at the very least, ambivalent. Though he certainly regretted the passing of the pre-industrial age, as one would expect from the proprietor of an iron foundry he was quick to perceive the benefits that industrialisation could bring, in terms of the expansion of trade and the economic prosperity in which all could share. Thus, in the poem, the life of the skilled industrial worker is compared favourably with that of the dispossessed rural labourer who is condemned to end his days in the workhouse. Though hard-pressed by his employer, the industrial worker is at least able to save money and to educate himself:

He feels his intellectual dignity,
Works hard, reads usefully, with no mean skill
Writes, and can reason well of good and ill.
He hoards his weekly groat. (21)

In a similar spirit, in an earlier passage of the poem, sub-titled the "Comparative independence of skilled labour", Elliott praises the independence and dignity of
the industrial workers of Sheffield:

Cloud-rolling Sheffield! ...
... Thy proud labourer knows
Nor workhouse wages, nor the exile's woes (22).

Nor is the pre-industrial rural society held up
uncritically as an ideal. Indeed, the poem goes so far as
to suggest that the industrial revolution has exerted a
civilising influence on what was the barbarity of rural
society. The following passage contrasts the peace and
industry of the present with the violence and lawlessness
of the past:

...robbers prowl'd
And, tiger-like, skulk'd robber lords for prey,
Where now groan wheelworn streets, and labour bends
O'er thousand anvils. Bled the feudal fray,
Or rav'd the foray, where the cloud ascends
For ever; and from earth's remotest ends
Her merchants meet, where hamlets shriek'd in flames.
(23).

Following the arguments used by political economists
at the time, Elliott goes on to stress the way in which
free trade, by creating economic interdependence between
nations, becomes a guarantor of international peace. Trade
is eulogised as "the Tamer of tyrants", and mercantilism
portrayed as a system of trade based on hostility between
nations. In an oft-quoted passage, Elliott describes in
dramatic terms the economic disruption and human suffering
experienced in the iron industry during the Napoleonic wars
and as a result of the slump that followed them:
While navies sank on fortune’s sunny sea...
Most fatal, when least dreaded, came the blow
That still was nearest when expected least;
And none who felt the stroke could see the foe:
but all was wondering fear and helpless woe.
The servant took the master by the nose;
The beggar’d master slunk aside to die...
Like frost and thaw in April’s fickle sky,
The wretched rich, and not less wretched poor,
Changed places miserably; and the bad
Through, while the righteous begg’d from door to door:
None smiled, save knaves...(24)

The poet’s strongest indignation is reserved however
for the ruling political class whom Elliott held
responsible for most of the ills of the first quarter of
the century: men like Pitt, Canning and Castlereagh, who
are blamed variously for their warmongering, for their
unenlightened economic policies, for their opposition to
reform and their brutal suppression of dissent. The forces
of reaction, rather than those of economic progress, are
Elliott’s enemies in The Village Patriarch.

The Village Patriarch, though of limited literary
value, embodies a number of themes and elements which are
noteworthy for the period. First, as social and political
commentary the poem includes both common and uncommon
ideas. If the criticism of grasping landlords and
repressive government shares much with other radical
polemical poetry of the time, the expression in verse of
economic theories, and the use of poetry to expound the
author’s views of free trade, represent something of a
departure. Only in an age which demanded a literature of
immediate social relevance, could such a poem have found a
publisher and a readership.

Secondly, the poet's ambivalent attitude to the phenomenon of industrialisation represents something unusual in the literature of the period. If Elliott's positive characterisation of the industrial workforce corresponds more to the ideal rather than to reality, it nevertheless reflects what Elliott did feel about the potential of the industrial age to improve people's lives. One can go far as to say that Elliott was one of the first, if not the first, writer of the nineteenth century to accept industrialisation as a fait accompli. The Village Patriarch moves from a passing regret at the disappearance of Olde England towards an acceptance of change and the possibilities it can offer. Elliott's most trenchant criticism is reserved not for those who have pioneered the industrial revolution, but for the forces of reaction who refuse to accept a changed economic order and to adopt more enlightened policies, whether they be the liberalisation of trade, or the granting of greater political and civil rights to the new industrial population. Such sentiments, if new in poetry are nonetheless highly characteristic of this period of transition, and in this respect we can regard The Village Patriarch as strongly representative of an age in which the group of attitudes we call "Romantic" were giving way to those we describe as "Victorian".

The Village Patriarch sold few copies, and its
publication went unheeded by most of the literary reviews, one exception being a review of the poem which appeared in the July 1829 edition of the Westminster Review. The reviewer, while scathing about the poem's literary qualities, nevertheless concluded that the poem had some sort of sociological value "as an indication of what is passing among the labouring classes" who are "beginning rightly to feel, and powerfully to express, their feelings". In other words, the poem was to be valued not as literature, but as a political document.

Elliott himself would not have demurred at these observations. He had few illusions about the aesthetic qualities of his writing, which he was to regard increasingly as little more than a useful vehicle for his political opinions. "I am not a poet", he once confided, and indeed he was to develop a contempt for literature devoted to any end but political change. The spirit of the age, he argued, demanded that every writer should lay his talent to the disposal of the Reform movement -

we cannot spare one true man from the ranks of thought and progress, in these distracted times... and it grieves me to see any man waste his talents in constructing cobwebs, when the world has to be built anew. (25)

Such a posture - one might describe it as utilitarianism taken to its most inflexible extreme - reached its apotheosis in Elliott's best known collection of poems, the Corn Law Rhymes of 1831.
Corn Law Rhymes, a collection of short lyrical poems on current political and economic issues, appeared in April 1831; the publisher, as with much of Elliott's earlier work, was the radical Edward Bull. The poems entered the market at a time when political issues - in particular the reform question - had become a national obsession. The first half of the year 1831 had seen the defeat at amendment stage of the first reform bill, the dissolution of parliament amid widespread fears of a revolution, the re-election of Lord Grey as prime minister, with a renewed mandate for reform, and massive popular agitation throughout the whole of the country. In the second half of the year a second attempt at legislation was thrown out by the bishops in the House of Lords, raising the political temperature even more. Parliament was prorogued and riots and acts of arson occurred throughout the country. It was an opportune time to publish political verse.

Elliott himself was playing at the same time an active role in reform agitation. In common with many other anti-Corn Law campaigners, following the partial repeal of the Corn Laws by Huskisson in 1828, Elliott had turned his energies to the wider question of political reform, and had become one of the leaders of an active reform movement in Sheffield, where he was greatly in demand as a public
speaker. The Corn Law Rhymes should be seen against such a background. In writing them, Elliott hoped to lend some impetus to the reform movement, using poetry as a vehicle to communicate to its readership the problems faced by the labouring classes and the urgency of political and economic reform. Many of the Corn Law Rhymes are, simply, propaganda, and some were adapted to popular tunes of the day and sung or recited by the author at political rallies and pro-reform gatherings. Elliott must have hoped that the poems would serve as a useful corrective to the uninformed opinions and prejudices against the working classes which had been aroused in the climate of violence and uncertainty with which 1831 drew to a close.

In a more extended sense, Elliott wished his poetry to be the authentic mouthpiece of the new industrial working class which lay as yet unrepresented in the field of literature as it did in parliament. Just as Wordsworth had, in the Lyrical Ballads of a generation before, given a voice to the rural poor, creating an appropriate poetic language to do so, similarly Elliott in the Corn Law Rhymes was trying to create a literature of and for the industrial poor. "I am", he often said, "the poet of the poor"; and in a different strain, he would speak of his overwhelming desire to write literature that would effect lasting social change:

Oh, that I might live to be the author
of some great epic which might survive long enough to be in its consequences a river of fertility, influencing beneficially unborn generations of men! (26).

he was to write in the Preface to the 1833 edition of *Corn Law Rhymes*.

Judged simply as poetry, the *Corn Law Rhymes* mark an immense improvement over any of Ebenezer Elliott's previous work. Several of the shorter poems in the collection - 'Songs', Elliott entitled them - describe the poverty and suffering of the English poor with a simplicity, directness and sincerity that is hard to find in much other poetry of the period. The following, for example:

```
Child, is thy father dead?
   Father is gone!
Why did they tax his bread?
   God's will be done!
Mother has sold her bed;
   Better to die than wed!
Where shall she lay her head
   Home we have none! (27)
```

Frequently expressed in these poems is the idea that for the poor, death can be the only release from the troubles of life:

```
No toil in despair,
No tyrant, no slave,
No bread tax is there,
With a maw like the grave. (28).
```

In both its religiosity and its occasional sentimentality,
the tone is unmistakably Victorian. Although such sentiments in poetry seem a trifle maudlin to a modern-day reader, they were profoundly affecting to contemporary audiences. Accounts exist of how Elliott’s working class audiences were reduced to tears when the poet read his poems out at public meetings:

We sympathised with the poet, even tearfully, because he sympathised with us. An honest-hearted old collier, worn out with a life of hard work, and who was then a pauper...wept again and again, as I read...to him. (29)

Elsewhere, anger rather than sorrow is the dominant key. One quite remarkable poem, "The Recording Angel", mounts a bloody attack on King George IV for his failure to govern for all the people, and for permitting the introduction of the bread tax during his reign. He would, Elliott suggested, ever be remembered for the latter:

King of dear Corn! Time hears, with ceaseless groan,
Time ever hears, sad names of hate and dread:
but thou, thou only, of all monarchs known,
Didst legislate AGAINST thy People's bread!
King of the Corn-Laws! THUS wilt thou be read! (30).

The virtues of Corn Law repeal and free trade feature throughout the collection of poems. In "Elegy", Elliott laments the untimely death the previous year of the country's principal free trader, Robert Huskisson:

G Huskisson, our friend in vain!
Where now are hope and liberty?
Thou should' st have lived, if with thee dies
The poor man's hope of better days. (31)
A further poem pays tribute to Daniel Defoe, "First champion of commercial liberty". Other poems touch upon the subject of emigration to America, so often in the first half of the century the only salvation for many of England's poor. The pressure on wages caused by the immigration of Irish labourers into a shrinking job market is also featured. The final poem of the 1831 volume is entitled "A Poet's Prayer", in which Elliott prays that his life and work be of use:

A patriot bard, by sycophants reviled,
Let him live usefully, and not die old! (32).

The 1832 and subsequent editions of *Corn Law Rhymes* feature some additional poems written to celebrate the passing of the 1832 Reform Bill, notably "The Revolution of" 1832, and "The Triumph of Reform" which with their jubilant tone contrast sharply with the overwhelmingly sombre and pained tones of the rest of the volume.

*Corn Law Rhymes* was an enormous success. Publication figures are not available but, judging from the number of reviews and articles written on it, and by the massive attention it attracted, one can safely state that no other collection of poetry rivalled it in popularity during that decade. The literary world was bowled over by it. In the twelve months following its publication, it was reviewed no
less than seventeen times. James Montgomery, the popular Anglican poet, described the acclaim it received thus:

Whig, Tory and Radical reviewers vieing with each other who should magnanimously extol the talents which they had either not discovered, or had superciliously overlooked. (33);

while John Stuart Mill, showing an uncharacteristic lapse of judgement, was moved to declare on reading *Corn Law Rhymes*, that

I am convinced that these poems, having, as they have, sufficient intrinsic merit to live, will hereafter be a text for annotation, explanation, and commentaries without end, and that future historians...will build largely upon it. (34)

The story of how *Corn Law Rhymes*, written by a man better known for his political work than his poetical, and then only in northern England, first came to public notice, is worth recounting. The sequence began when Dr. George Bowring, the utilitarian reformer, paid a visit to Sheffield in May 1831, and was shown a copy of *Corn Law Rhymes*, as well as another of Elliott’s poems, *The Ranter*. Perhaps Bowring was impressed by the poems’ intrinsic worth. Or perhaps he was pleasantly surprised, on opening the volume, to find the following dedication to the founding father of the utilitarian movement:

To all who revere the Memory of JEREMY BENTHAM, our second LOCKE, and wish to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number for the greatest length of time, I inscribe
these "Corn-Law Rhymes".

Whatever the reason, he mentioned the poems soon after in a letter to a friend of his, the Quaker writer William Howitt, who immediately went out and bought a copy. Wordsworth happened to be staying with Howitt in Bradford, and, on reading the poems, professed himself "much struck with the wonderful composition" of the poems as Howitt and Bowring were with their political message. Wordsworth then passed on a copy of the poems to Southey, with a suggestion that he review them, which Southey eventually did in the Quarterly Review (35).

In the meantime, Bowring returned to London and showed the poems to Bulwer Lytton at a party. The immediate outcome was a brief review of the poems by Lytton in the New Monthly Magazine in June 1831. Entitled "A Letter to Dr Southey", the review, which is full of praise for the Corn Law Rhymes and their little known author, suggests that Southey, with his reputation for assisting struggling writers, should take on board this "uneducated poet". Lytton also expressed the hope that Elliott's poetic talents be recognised despite his holding opposing political views to Southey (36).

Bulwer Lytton's review appeared at about the same time that Southey was perusing the volume of Corn Law Rhymes passed on by Wordsworth. Southey professed himself much amused at being recommended a poet whose latest volume he
not only had in his possession, but whom he had also been encouraging for over twenty years (37).

Southey's 'reply' to Bulwer Lytton's letter appeared in the Quarterly Review in October 1831. It is instructive to study this, and other contemporary reviews of Corn Law Rhymes, as a means to understand better the literary taste of the period. Southey's review of Corn Law Rhymes begins by urging Elliott to refrain from writing anything which could feed or inflame the kindling political discontent in England. While recognising the facts of inequality and poverty, he exhorts Elliott not to judge critically the ruling classes, but to "accept the Christian teaching 'be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry'". Though admiring Elliott as a poet, Southey abhorred his political views and the zeal with which he expressed them. He later commented that Corn Law Rhymes "cannot be commended too highly for the genius which is displayed in it, nor condemned too severely for the spirit of ferocious jacobinism which it breathes" (38). The stance is what one might expect from a quintessentially establishment figure, and leading Anglican as the older Robert Southey.

Southey then turns to seek an explanation of Elliott's extraordinary popularity. The obvious explanation, of course, was that the political subject matter of Corn Law Rhymes appealed naturally to a readership whose interest in current political events had almost reached the level of a national obsession. We have
seen earlier that during the period leading up to the passage of the Great Reform Bill, political debate dominated intellectual and literary life to the virtual exclusion of almost everything else. Literary activity was put on hold. In such a climate, it may not have been surprising that Elliott's poetry, despite its literary inferiority, was able to find its way into print, and gain a high degree of attention, where other, non-political poetry failed. This was remarked upon by contemporary commentators. Elliott's politically appropriate verse "hit the spirit of the times" remarked one. "Altogether the poet of circumstances" commented another. "Would you have...a man keep perpetually prattling of flowers when the world has to be built anew?" asked Blackwoods Magazine (39). Conversely, Tennyson's earliest volume, the Poems of 1833, one of the few important books of verse to emerge during this period, was held by most critics to be inferior to Elliott's verse. Political poetry was the order of the day.

Elliott himself argued in similar terms. When accused by one critic of being unpoetic in his choice of subject matter, Elliott's retort was that the times demanded little else. "If," he wrote in the Preface to Corn Law Rhymes, "wars and taxation, Corn Laws, and restricted industry, landlords and their victims, and the triumphant march of British Capital, seeking profitable employment in foreign lands - if these are now the muses that inspire the poets of England, the fault rests with whom? Not with the poet of
trade and the rabble!". In similar vein, he was intensely critical of Wordsworth for what he regarded as his unacceptable quietism in the face of pressing social and political issues.

A second reason for Elliott's popularity was the fact that he was not only a political poet, but he was able also to express the experience of the working classes. England in the early 1830's was beginning to develop what we might call a sociological interest in its own condition, and one characteristic of the period was the growing desire to understand better the political values and demands of the industrial working classes who were starting to play an important role in national affairs and to whom much of the reform movement was directed. An educated, liberal readership was interested in knowing what the working class had to say. Elliott was able to articulate certain working class grievances, and his poetry can be regarded as a genuine and practical contribution to the reform debate (40).

There may have been however, a further and related reason for Elliott's enormous popularity. Southey suggested that this popularity might be based, at least in part, on the supposition that the Corn Law Rhymes were the creation of an uneducated man. It is worth looking at this a little closer. Bulwer Lytton's letter in the New Monthly Magazine, which had called Elliott an "uneducated poet" had
begun such a misapprehension. It was one which rapidly found favour. The label was quickly picked up in other magazines. The *Atheneum*, for example, in June 1831, in a long review of *Corn Law Rhymes*, refers to Elliott as a "Sheffield Mechanic", whose poetry is "much in the style of Ephraim Mucklewrath", while the *Monthly Repository* labels him a "Poet-Mechanic" in an article written around the same time. (41).

Elliott himself, in his Preface to the 1833 edition of *Corn Law Rhymes*, lamented the fact that his poems' popularity might have been due to their "being brought into notice as the work of an operative", and all his life he was suspicious of society's desire to cast him in the role of an unlettered working class genius. On one occasion he stated to a friend that although as a literary man he was self-taught, he had never claimed to be an uneducated poet, nor a member of the working class, and that he had never used his working experience "as an excuse for my poetry if bad, or if good as a claim for wonder". (42).

There was little, however, he could do about it. The age demanded an image, and Ebenezer Elliott supplied it. In the climate of the early 1830's nothing was more appealing to the literary world than the sight of an uneducated man scaling the heights of Parnassus. The idea of the uneducated poet has of course, a long history, and one can trace the image back to the early Romantic movement, to poets like Robert Burns, and probably far earlier still.
But in the political and intellectual climate of the 1830's, the concept of the uneducated poet, the "poet-operative", the poor auto-didact - call it what you will - has a special significance and place.

Interestingly, it was Southey himself who in a large part contributed to the popularity of this type in the nineteenth century. In 1828 he had published the very successful *Lives of the Uneducated Poets*, a work of literary biography which contained entries on a range of eighteenth century writers of humble origins, people like James Woodhouse, the shoemaker poet, Ann Yearsley, the milkmaid poet, and John Taylor, the ferryman poet. Sheridan had once remarked that "if a work comes out under the name of a thresher, a bricklayer, a milkwoman... it is sure to be eagerly sought after by the million" and it was this phenomenon that Southey wanted to explore. He was keen to record what he saw to be a dying breed of writers, auto-didacts who would vanish as the March of Mind made inroads into working class education. It was thus first and foremost a work of history.

We have already noted also Southey's own interest in encouraging budding poets, especially from among the poorer classes. Southey felt that such writers, drawing perforce upon a different life experience and subject matter, often had new things to say in their work. They were thought generally to exhibit a "romantic" spontaneity lacking in
other writers, but which was highly valued from the mid-eighteenth century onward. This was especially true of those uneducated poets who were seen to come from rural backgrounds, and who were thus more likely to correspond to Rousseau-esque and romantic concepts of the original goodness of human nature, unsullied by civilisation.

Southey also had a specific political message in studying and promoting the interests of the uneducated poets. He wished to furnish instances of those whose "exercise of the mind, instead of rendering the individual discontented with his station, had conduced greatly to happiness". To put it slightly differently, Southey wished to illustrate his view that the road to self-betterment and happiness lies in industry and the cultivation of the intellect. Such a view moreover provides an argument for the cultivation of the poorer classes, since the more civilised they were, the less likely they would be to threaten social order by violent means.

In the eighteen thirties, all these themes identified by Southey came into play in the critical appreciation of the works of poets like Ebenezer Elliott as, to the earlier romantic notions of untutored genius were added more modern notions of the benefits of a cultivated working class. To the evangelical movement, the image of the uneducated poet was generally a welcome one. One of the principal worries of the conservative upper echelons of English society was how to prevent the poor from becoming disorderly and
threatening the social fabric which ensured their continuation of power. It was heartening to see the poor taking to such peacable pastimes as the writing of verse. Thus, the conservative evangelical writer Hannah More had provided financial support to poor poets in the belief that the satisfaction of their literary aspirations would render them less likely to be discontented with their position in society. The idea of the uneducated poet who through his abilities is rendered more humane and recognisable than the swinish multitude of his class appealed to the natural paternalism of the middle and upper classes, as well as to their Christian instincts.

This is not of course to say that conservatives in England would necessarily have approved of Elliott's poetry. We have already noted Southey's view that Elliott should refrain from writing inflammatory, potentially rabble rousing verse. Such a concern was shared by others. In some circumstances, the comforting concept of the uneducated poet may have become blurred with the fear that an articulate working class posed a threat to the established social order. But generally, by the eighteen thirties, anything which pointed to the civilising of the poor was welcome.

To the radical or liberal reformers, the romantic notion of the "uneducated poet" quickly became subsumed in the almost opposite concept of the educated worker. The
emergence of working class poets indicated - as one liberal journal put it - "the spirit of the age and the march of general improvement". One of the principal activities of the utilitarians, and of reformers in general, being to raise the educational level of the working classes, the development of a working class literature naturally pointed to their success in this field. It mattered little whether the poet was an untutored rustic or an operative who had gained literacy at an evening institute; his very existence was a sign that the lower classes were gaining a voice. Utilitarian based organisations such as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge thus published books with titles such as "The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties" - compendiums of examples of working men who had educated themselves, as a means to encourage working class people to strive for knowledge and a betterment of their lot.

The emergence of the "poet-mechanic" type also provided the reform movement with the argument it needed for an extension of the franchise. For if the working class were able to bring forward its own writers and its own literature, how could one question its fitness for political participation? The uneducated poet was living proof of the innate fitness of the poor to participate in the civilised norms of political society.

Lastly, one cannot ignore the simple fact that in literature, as in most kinds of artistic achievement, fads
and fashions exist. In the 1830's - and beyond - uneducated poets were simply fashionable. As Alton Locke's patronising wealthy cousin remarks, in Kingsley's novel, "the self-educated dodge pays well now". There was no shortage of writers willing to market themselves under the guise of being self-educated, nor any shortage of wealthy patrons, like Alton Locke's cousin, keen to be seen to be supporting "their" uneducated poet.

It is hardly surprising therefore, given the widespread interest in the notion of the uneducated poet in the 1830's, that Elliott was able to command such attention, and that he found favour on both sides of the political spectrum. As one writer put it "Whig, Tory and Radical reviewers vying with each other who should magnanimously extol the talents which they had either not discussed, or had superciliously overlooked". (43)

It is useful to end this chapter by studying two further notable reviews of Corn Law Rhymes which illustrate fairly fully the nature of contemporary interest in the poet. The first is one by Thomas Carlyle, writing in the Edinburgh Review in May 1832 (44). Carlyle professed to be impressed with the originality of Elliott's poetry, which he describes as "a little prismatic blush, glowing genuine among the wet clouds". Carlyle also praises the strength of Elliott's political commitment, which has resulted in a poetry both more individual and more sincere than his
earlier, rather derivative work "He has struggled out from
that dim, pestiferous marsh-atmosphere into a clearer and
purer height". The result, in Carlyle's eyes, is that
Elliott has produced a new type of poetry, one rooted in
the experience of the working classes. It was the critic's
job. Carlyle asserted, to recognise the relevance of poetry
like Elliott's, such "weather-symptoms of the literary
heaven".

Perhaps recalling Bulwer Lytton's remark that Elliott
was an "uneducated poet", Carlyle praises Elliott for
asserting the rights of the poor to engage in literary
creation. He is scathing of those who would try to deny them
this right, or who would wish to patronise working class
writers with that "aristocratic recognition, which looks
down with an obliging smile...and admits that it is
wonderfully well for one of the uneducated classes may be
getting out of place". Carlyle's only reservation is that
Elliott exhibits, to his mind, a rather destructive,
negative type of radical politics, and he urges him to "lay
aside anger, uncharitableness, hatred, noisy tumult"
Otherwise, he was fully in accord with those who would
argue that in the present, politically charged times, a
poet's duty is to write on political subjects.

One can only speculate, but Carlyle was almost
certainly attracted by temperament to writers such as
Elliott. Perhaps he conformed to the Carlylean concept of
the struggling individual who, his spirit unbowed by suffering, realises his genius. Perhaps his admiration for Ebenezer Elliott was based in part on a misapprehension of the poet's background and circumstances. Elliott conformed to his theory of creative genius, that quality which arises in the heart, and whose origin is mysteriously independent of education, class, comfort or adversity. To Carlyle, Elliott may have represented something of the traditional romantic concept of the uneducated poet.

The second review to look at is one by the influential Unitarian and radical journalist William Johnson Fox, published in the liberal journal the London Review in January 1835 (45). Coming three years after the event, the review is able to take a longer and deeper look at the impact of the Corn Law Rhymes and their author on the intellectual climate of the 1830's. The review stands as the definitive radical assessment of Elliott's contemporary importance.

Fox's review, of Elliott's 1835 Collected Poems, opens with the declaration that "the intellectual rank, as a poet, of Ebenezer Elliott is now established". It then goes on to identify Elliott's unique contribution to literature, in the following terms:

He comes into the national assembly of the republic of letters as Daniel O'Connell first came to the House of Commons...he establishes a literature, and one of ominous aspect - the literature of Poverty. The time is gone when a
reviewer...can be of any avail to the Poet of the Poor. Ebenezer Elliott has taken the place to which he is entitled...the laurel-crowned have received the unwashed artificer into their fellowship.

For William Johnson Fox the emergence of Ebenezer Elliott, and the "literature of poverty" is above all a political phenomenon. Elliott's greatness lies in his ability to articulate the silent sufferings of the oppressed working classes of Britain, and to claim for them a literary culture with which they could identify. The rise of such a poet, able to express the views of the poor is, argues Fox, symptomatic of the political development of that class, while the enormous popularity of Elliott testifies to the growing currency of radical ways of thinking.

More fundamentally, Elliott provides for Fox an example of the ability of the poor to develop their own cultural and political ideals without the help of the middle or upper classes. Elliott is an exemplar of the "making" of the English working classes, to recall E.P. Thompson's well-known term. A process which began by the poor spawning political leaders from their midst, has now spread to poetry:

Happy was the day the poor took to politics. The French revolution was their first great stimulus. The Corresponding Society was their first Institute. Then Bell and Lancaster prepared them for the mechanics of Birkbeck. The Diffusion Society shot wide of the mark,
or fired over their heads; but the Great Unstamped levelled point blank at their hearts. The politics of the poor for the first time became their own... God said "Let Elliott be", and there was a poetry of the poor.

In other words, Fox suggests that what Cobbett and his fellow working class journalists were to politics, so Elliott is to poetry. If the language of Cobbett's Political Register, Hetherington's Poor Man's Guardian, Carlile's Gauntlet - the "great unstamped" radical newspapers - had mobilised the working people through their forcefulness and directness, through speaking in a language understandable to the poor, then so had Elliott's poems. They were able to do so simply because both had first hand experience of working class life, and both used simple language to articulate that experience.

For Fox, who was always suspicious of middle class attempts to raise the educational level or culture of the working classes, or to impose upon them their cultural values, it was only fitting that the working classes develop an indigenous culture, the emergence of which was "bound up with the rights of humanity and the progress of society". Elsewhere, he was to write that in literature, just as much as in politics, the upper classes held a monopoly, and that working class literature had to throw down the gauntlet to the poetry and philosophy of the modern world. "The overthrow of privilege" he added tersely "must be conducted at all levels". (46)
Developing these ideas, Fox suggests that Ebenezer Elliott belongs firmly to a school of writers which includes Bunyan, Burns, Crabbe and - interestingly - Wordsworth, all of them writers who, in his view, displayed in their writings a deep sympathy for the lower classes, and a realistic understanding of poverty, based on direct experience. Fox distinguishes between such writers and middle class writers who wrote - mainly morally improving literature - for the working class readership. He notes that despite the efforts and undeniably good intentions of the evangelical writers like Hannah More and Legh Richmond, only Bunyan "the Bedford tinker" knew the way to the heart of the poor, since he was one of them.

Burns, argues Fox, was the direct precursor of Elliott in his anti-romantic notion of poverty. Burns spoke "the sturdiness of the Scotch peasant" at a time when "no bard had yet dared to be more than a reduced gentleman". Fox draws a distinction between poets like Burns and Elliott and the stereotype romantic image of the penniless poet. The latter, though poor, were not of the poor, and "their poverty was an individual accident, not the characteristic of their class. The author was fallen from his high estate, and his condition was the misfortune of the genius". Fox is critical of those writers who idealise the poor, with their false images of "the pastoral poor of poetry", and the insincere literary representation of the servant class "the faithful dependent, ever grateful for the smallest
bounties". He is equally critical of poets like Byron and Shelley, who, despite all their "opposition propensities and democratic cant...ever displayed aristocratic leanings".

The comparison Fox draws between Elliott and Wordsworth is especially interesting. In his review he argues that both were radical and democratic poets, albeit in different ways. Despite Wordsworth's allegiance to the Tory party, to Church and State, he notes the levelling influence of Wordsworth's poetic style, and the universality of the human emotions he depicts, and his deep sympathy for the peasant or working man in the *Lyrical Ballads* and *The Excursion*. In such a way, Fox argues, Wordsworth was a true democrat, just as Elliott is a generation later.

We noted earlier Elliott's stated antipathy to Wordsworth, or at least to the later, conservative, quietist Wordsworth. However, it is not fanciful to suppose that Elliott himself drew some sort of comparison between what he was trying to achieve in the *Corn Law Rhymes*, and Wordsworth's objectives in the *Lyrical Ballads*. Both men were trying to forge a poetic diction and style which would communicate in a direct way the experience of the poor, and by doing so enhance their cultural identity. Both were claiming for their respective constituents the right to be heard and to be valued. Perhaps in deliberate emulation of Wordsworth, Elliott wrote a lengthy preface to the 1833
edition of Corn Law Rhymes in which he set out the justification for writing his particular kind of poetry. One would not wish to press the comparison too far - Wordsworth had many greater aims in the Lyrical Ballads - but the parallel does remain there to be drawn, and there is no doubt that Elliott's contemporaries drew it. (47)

Fox ends his lengthy review with the assertion that it was wrong to suppose that politics was an unsuitable subject for poetry. Posterity, however, did not share Fox's view. Within a few years, Elliott's reputation, which was firmly pinned on his political poetry, had declined drastically. In 1834 the English poet Allan Cunningham had predicted that this was bound to happen when one's reputation was bound to an ephemeral cause. "When the price of corn falls", he wrote "the fame of the poet will fall in proportion, for such is the penalty paid for pouring out fancy and feeling and sarcasm on fleeting matters", and he was proven right. (48)

Elliott's success had depended less on his inherent poetic talents than on satisfying a readership's need for political literature. Once that need had subsided, by the mid 1830's, the poet's popularity dropped. After Corn Law Rhymes, Elliott was barely able to publish anything else, and his name dropped into virtual oblivion. Once the Reform bill had been passed, "political literature" he lamented, "is anything but a recommendation to a publisher".
In the 1840's Ebenezer Elliott was remembered fondly as a minor poet whose "poetry died with the age that gave it birth". His friend and biographer John Watkins was led to question "who does not deplore the waste of poetic talent on such a theme as politics?", judging that "true poetry...flies from politics like a retort in chemistry". (49).

There was a minor revival of interest in Elliott following his death in 1850, but which ironically paid more attention to his previously overlooked pastoral and lyrical poetry. Of his political verse little was said.

Elliott was thus not the great poet that his contemporaries considered him to be. His best work, the Corn Law Rhymes, is admirable in its sentiment, and competent in its execution, but it would be difficult to make a case for it as an important work of art. Elliott today is worth studying not for his literary abilities, but for what he reveals of the literary temper of the age of reform. The popularity of the Corn Law Rhymes reflects the period's demand for literature devoted to current political events, a demand which though short lived, while it lasted effectively dictated the subject matter of serious literature.
It has been said that Elliott appeared at the "low water mark of English poetry", a comment which though harsh is perhaps true (50). The spirit of the age deterred imaginative literature, and distorted the judgement of the educated reading public as to what constituted true art. Thus it was that a second rate poet like Ebenezer Elliott could be catapulted to fame and to greatness, and that so many major commentators - Mill, Carlyle, Southey, and others - could err so in their judgement. In the end, Ebenezer Elliott stands not as a literary phenomenon but a social one, of importance not for his artistry as for what he reveals about a decade devoted to political reform, and increasingly interested in its own condition, and which often demanded a literature which catered to those needs.

--oo0000oo--
There is some interesting writing on the connection between non-conformity and the Sheffield iron industry. Sidney Pollard, in *A History Of Labour In Sheffield* (Liverpool, 1959) writes of the industry in the early nineteenth century that "there was not yet the large gap between merchants and manufacturers on the one hand, and workmen on the other... the transition from workman to master was a common occurrence". A number of historians have made the related point that religious Non-conformism was naturally attractive to socially mobile societies such as obtained in Sheffield. The process has been described thus: "The unskilled labourer becomes in turn a skilled workman, an artisan, the head of a small business, a businessman possessed of a modest capital, and as he rises out of the barbarism in which the working class was plunged, he becomes a Non-Conformist. If he himself rises still higher on the social ladder, or if his children rise after his death, he or they go over to the Church of England". (Elie Halevy, *A History Of The English People*, transl. E. I. Watkin (London, 1837), vol. I, p.371. See also Lucy Brown, "The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League", in *Chartist Studies*, ed. Asa Briggs (London 1959), p. 359. It is
interesting to note that one of Ebenezer Elliott's sons followed Elie Halevy's prescription by becoming an Anglican bishop.

2. The description is taken from a brief autobiographical sketch written by Elliott in the 1840's for posthumous publication in The Athenaeum, but which was ultimately published as a preface to John Watkins' Life Poetry and Letters of Ebenezer Elliott, The Corn Law Phrymer (London, 1850) p.7.

3. ibid. p.36

4. Elliott was to write that the political climate of the later 1780's - "those days of rabid Toryism" - had disturbed him so deeply that, like many young liberal-minded men of that time, he had contemplated emigrating to America (Watkins, op. cit. p.9)

5. ibid. pp.25-26

6. ibid. p.26

7. ibid. p.24

8. ibid. p.47


poetry which came to Southey's notice. Died in penury aged twenty one.


12. We have noted that Elliott the elder was a great believer in American democracy, and that Elliott at one stage considered emigrating to America, as many friends had done with whom he corresponded. The only early poem which provides a clue to Elliott's political thinking is one called "The Exile" which is set in America (The Poetical Works of Ebenezer Elliott, edited by his son. 2 vols. 1878. vol. I, p. 16.).

13. The six legislative acts were aimed at checking what was regarded as dangerous radicalism, in an immediate response to public anger over the killing by Government troops of several unarmed people during a protest meeting at St Peter's Fields, Manchester (the "Peterloo Massacre"). The acts dealt with procedures for bringing cases to trial, the prohibition of meetings "for military exercises", the issue of warrants to search for arms, powers to seize seditious and/or blasphemous literature, the extension of a stamp-duty on newspapers and periodicals, and the
regulation and control of all public meetings. The last three were particularly resented and regarded as a threat to freedom. The Acts proved counter productive by provoking much opposition; three years later the government of Lord Liverpool began to move towards more liberal policies.


There are many records of Ebenezer Elliott speaking of Corn Law repeal, and free trade, as a religious crusade, of which only one further example shall be given here. After reading the repeal tract Corn Law Catechism by T.F. Thompson (a leading anti-Corn Law agitator, and friend of Elliott), Elliott declared that "every letter of the Corn Law Catechism ought to be printed in gold, and read once a day on Sundays from every pulpit in the land" (Searle, op. cit. p. 129) The free trade movement as a whole often expressed its ideals as Christian ones, with the argument that the free flow of commerce between nations taught them the Christian example that men ought to depend upon each other, and reduced the risk of war between them.

16. The lines are taken from Elliott's 1830 poem, The

18. The Village Patriarch, Book I, section XII.


21. The Village Patriarch. Book III, section VIII.

22. ibid. Book III, section I.

23. ibid. Book I, section XIV.

24. ibid. IX, section IX.

25. Recorded in Searle, op. cit. p. 25. Searle goes on to observe that Elliott, by the 1830’s, “had a great contempt for dilettante poetry”. There is evidence too that Elliott held reservations about the value of any poetry at all. He is recorded as having once said that “the very best...vehicle of a patriot-poet’s opinion is the novel” Letter to John Watkins date 21 January 1836. Watkins, op. cit. p. 133.


34. Letter to Carlyle dated May 29 1832. Earlier Letters Of John Stuart Mill, ed. F.E. Mineka. Toronto 1983. pp. 28-29. Mill continues thus - "the poems ... will go down to posterity as one of the principal memorials of this age, from which a large portion of its character will be known which is registered in little else of a permanent nature, being chiefly those melancholy features in the position of the working class towards the other classes and towards the world altogether which have imposed upon so earnest and so loving a heart a character or almost unrelieved gloom,
bitterness and resentment".
35. The sequence of events is related in William Howitt's
Homes And Haunts Of The Most Eminent British Poets, 2 vols.
1847. vol. II, pp. 418-419.
36. New Monthly Magazine. vol. XXXI. June 1831. pp. 289-
295.
37. Letter of 29 July 1832. New Letters Of Robert Southey,
38. The comment appears in an article "The Poetry of Mary
Colling". Quarterly Review XLVII, March 1832. p. 92.
author is John Wilson ("Christopher North").
40. Many reviews of Elliott's poetry reflect this interest
in the kind of experiences and class consciousness
expressed by Elliott. We cite one example, from a review of
Corn Law Rhymes in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, vol. II,
November 1832: "everything about the constitution and
growth of a self-educated mind belonging to Elliott's
class, is at present doubly interesting and curious...these
are the men, the influence of whose opinions is already
strongly and directly felt in public affairs".
41. Athenaeum, June 1831. pp. 369-71. Monthly Repository,
vol VI, June 1832. p. 189. See also Monthly Repository, n.s.
vol IX, January 1834, where in R.H. Horne's "Political
Oratorio" Elliott briefly appears as one of a choir of "Poet-Mechanics", and wielding a cricket bat, perhaps in deference to his Yorkshire origins.


47. In an era when the train was just beginning to open up hitherto unknown parts of England, Elliott was strongly admired as a topographical poet who, poetically speaking, had put south Yorkshire and the Peak District on the map. He was compared in this respect with Wordsworth who, of course, had made well-known in his poems much of the
Lakeland landscape.


50. Searle, *op. cit.*
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CONSULTED

(Place of publication is London unless otherwise indicated)


Adams, William Bridges. The Producing Man's Companion. 1833.

Alison, A. History Of Europe During The French Revolution. 1833.


Bloom, H. The Visionary Company.

Bowring, J. "The Member". Westminster Review. XVI. April 1832.


Brougham, Henry. "High Church And Popular Education". Edinburgh Review XLIII. April 1825.


Buntingsby: A Tragic Tale. 1819


Butler, J.R.M. The Passing Of The Great Reform Bill. 1914.


Carlyle, Thomas.
*Chartism*. 1839.
*Literary Remains*. 1881.

Carr, P. Days With The French Romantics In The Paris Of 1830. 1832.

Chalmers, Thomas.
*On The Use And Abuse Of Literary And Ecclesiastical Establishments*. 1827.
*Political Economy And Morality*. 1832.
*The Application Of Christianity To Commerce*. 1820.


Cobban, A. Edmund Burke And The Revolt Against The Eighteenth Century. 1939.

Cobett, William.
*A Peep At The Peers*. 1820.
*An Address To The People Of Paris*. 1830
*History Of The Regency And Reign Of King George The Fourth*. 2 vols. 1830.


Cole, Henry. *Diary 1827-34*.


Coleridge, Samuel Taylor.
*Aids To Reflection*. 1825.
*A Lay Sermon*. 1816.
Essays On His Own Times, ed. Sara Coleridge. 3 vols. 1850.
... Noteworthy... British Library MS 47533.
... Notes... Coleridge. ed. Derwent Coleridge. 1856.
... Notes... ed. Sara Coleridge. 1850.
... Notes... The Constitution Of The Church And State. 1830.
... Notes... The Collected Letters Of S.T. Coleridge. ed. E.L. Griggs.
... Notes... Oxford. 6 vols. 1868 - 71.
... Notes... The Collected Works Of S.T. Coleridge. ed. K. Coburn. London
... Notes... and Princeton. 1868.
... Notes... The Statesman's Manual. 1841.
... Notes... The Tattle Talk Of S.T. Coleridge. ed. H. N. Coleridge. 1835.
... Notes... Colis, J.F. Utilitarianism Unmasked. 1844.
... Notes... Colmer, J. Coleridge. Critic Of Society. 1968.
... Notes... Conway, M.D. "Sheffield - A Battlefield Of English Labour".
... Notes... Harper's New Monthly Magazine XXXVI. 1866.
... Notes... "Conversation Between S.T.C. And John Frere". Cornhill Magazine.
... Notes... April 1817.
... Notes... Cornish, T.H. British Melodies. Or. Songs Of The People. 1831.
... Notes... "Corn Law Rhymer". Times Literary Supplement. 2 December
... Notes... 1949
... Notes... Courthope, J. The Liberal Movement In English Literature. 1886.
... Notes... Cunningham, Allan. Biographical And Critical History Of The
... Notes... English Literature Of The Last Fifty Years. Paris. 1834.
... Notes... De Quincey, Thomas.
... Notes... Collected Writings, ed. D. Masson. 14 vols. 1889-90.
... Notes... "Corn League Riots". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine LII.
... Notes... Edinburgh, September 1842.
... Notes... "The Aristocracy Of England". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine-
... Notes... LIV. Edinburgh, July 1842.
... Notes... De Tocqueville, Alexis. Journeys In The British Isles And The
... Notes... European Continent. Boston 1853.
... Notes... Dibdin, Thomas. Reminiscences Of A Literary Life. 1836.
... Notes... Disraeli, Benjamin. Coningsby. 1844.
... Notes... D'Ir esraeli, Isaac. The Revolutionary Epick. 1834.
... Notes... Dowden, Edward.
... Notes... Studies In Literature 1788-1877. 1909.
... Notes... Duff, Grant. Notes From A Diary. 1851-1872. 1897.
... Notes... Dyce, A. The Living Poets Of England. 1827.
... Notes... "Ebenezer Elliott". Taite Edinburgh Magazine. July 1833.

Elliott, Ebenezer.
- Corn Law Rhymes. 1831.
- More Verse And Prose From The Corn Law Rhymers. 2 vols. 1850.
- Night, A Descriptive Poem. In Four Books. 1818.
- The Pursi'd: A Satire. 1828.
- The Rantier. 1830.
- The Village Patriarch. 1829.

Empson, W.

Feiling, K. Sketches In Nineteenth Century Biography. 1900

Festham, G. John Hookham Frere. 1889.

Fielding, K.J. "Dickens And Horne". English 9. 1852.


Forman, H.B. Our Living Poets. 1871.

Fox, William Johnson.
- "Ebenezer Elliott". London Review 1, May 1835.
- Lectures, Addressed Chiefly To The Working Classes. 4 vols. 1846.
- "Postscript To The Monthly Repository For The Year 1833". Monthly Repository N.s. VII. 1833.

"France And England". Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine. XXVIII. October 1830. (author unidentified).


Froude, J.A. The Life Of Thomas Carlyle. 4 vols. 1882-84.

Galt, John. 
Annals Of The Parish. 1821. 

The Member. 1832. 


The Radical: An Autobiography. 1832. 


Gladstone, W.E. The State In Its Relations With The Church. 1839. 

Goldberg, M. Carlyle And Dickens. 1972. 


Gore, Mrs. Catherine. 
The Hamiltons, Or Official Life In 1830. 1830. 

The Money Lender. 1843. 


Green, S.G. The Working Classes Of Great Britain. 1850. 

Grinfield, The Rev. E.W. A Reply To Mr Brougham's 'Practical 
Observations Upon The Education Of The People'. 1829. 


Grote, Harriet. 
The Personal Life Of George Grote. 1873. 

The Philosophical Radicals Of 1832. 1868. 

Halevy, Elie. 
5 vols. 1837. 

The Growth Of Philosophical Radicalism. 1829. 

Hall, S.C. 

Biographical Sketches Of Remarkable People. 1873. 

Hamburger, J. Intellectuals In Politics: John Stuart Mill And The 
Philosophers, Radicals. 1869. 

Hammond, J.L and B. 

The Town Labourer. 1917. 


Hayward, A. "Young England". Edinburgh Review LXXX. October 1844.
Hazlitt, William.
1830-34.
The Spirit Of The Age. 1825.

Hobhouse, John Cam (Baron Broughton). Recollections Of A Long Life. 5 vols. 1883.

Holloway, J. The Victorian Sage. 1953

Holyoake, G.J. John Stuart Mill As He Was Known By The Working Classes. 1870.

Hood, Thomas. Literary Reminiscences. 1839.

Hook, S. The Hero In History. 1943.

Horne, William Hengist.
A New Spirit Of The Age (together with E.B. Browning). 1844.
Death Of Harloe. 1837.
"Westley Of Han", Or, Death Of Haydon". People's Journal I. 1848; and II. 1847.
Essay On Tragic Influence. 1840.
Exposition Of The Raise Medium And Barriers Excluding Men Of Genius from the Public. 1836.
"Hecatompylos". Athenaeum I. 1828.
"High Church And Convencible". Monthly Repository n.s. IX. 1833.
"Philosphy Of War". Taits Edinburgh Magazine I. 1834.
"Political Oratorio". Monthly Repository n.s. IX. January 1834.
Spirit Of Peers And People: A National Tragicomedy. 1834.
The Age Of Steam. Monthly Repository n.s. VIII. 1834.
The Dreamer And The Worker. 1850.
The Poet Artist.". 1850.
The Stamped Press". Taits Edinburgh Magazine II. 1835.


North, Middlesex. 1974.
"Keats' Poems". Edinburgh Review XXXIV. November 1820.


King, J.W. "Ebenzer Elliott: A Sketch". Sheffield. 1854.

Kingsley, Charles. Alton Locke. 1850.
"Burns And His School". in Literary And General Essays. 1890.


Landor, W.S. A Satire On Satirists. 1836.

Leader, F. Life And Letters Of John Arthur Roebuck. 1887.


Macleay, Thomas Babington. Literary Essays Contributed To The Edinburgh Review, By Lord Macaulay. 1810.


Mallalieu, E. "Whigs, Radicals, Middle Class And The People". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine XII. April 1837.

Martineau, Harriet.
Harriet Martineau's Autobiography. 3 vols. 1877.
History Of England During The Thirty Years' Peace. 3 vols.
1845.
Illustrations Of Political Economy. 1832-34.
The Positive Philosophy Of Auguste Comte. 2 vols 1833.
June 1831.

Mill, James.
On The Ballot. 1830.

Mill, John Stuart.
Auguste Comte And Positivism. 1854.
"Comparison Of The Tendencies Of French And English Intellect". Monthly Repository VII. November 1833.
"Corporation And Church Property". The Jurist IV. February 1833.
Correspondence Inedite Avec Gustave d'Eichthal. Paris 1893.
"Democracy in America". London And Westminster Review II.
October 1835.
Dissertations And Discussions. 4 vols. 1859.
"History Of Europe During The French Revolution".
Monthly Repository VII. 1833.
"Letter From An Englishman To A Frenchman". Monthly Repository VII. June 1834.
M. de Tocqueville On Democracy In America". Edinburgh Review LXXII. 1840.
Michelet's History Of France". Edinburgh Review LXXXIX.
1844.
"On Genius". Monthly Repository VI. October 1832.
"Scott's Life Of Napoleon". Westminster Review IX. April 1828.
"Spirit Of The Age", pbl. in weekly parts in The Examiner.
"Writings Of Alfred de Vigny" check title. London And Westminster Review April 1838.
"Writings Of Julius Redivivus". Monthly Repository n.s. VII. April 1833.

Moir, George.
"The Life Of A Poet". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine XLII. September 1837.

Milnes, Richard Monckton. Poetry For The People. 1840

Montgomery, Robert.
The Age Reviewed. A Satire. 1827.
The Unpresence Of The Deity. 1828.

Monthly Repository. 1827 - 1835.

Moore, Thomas.
Odes Upon Corn, Cash, Catholics. 1828.
Paper Money Lyrics. 1830.


Muirhead, J.H. Coleridge As Philosopher. 1930.


"Novels Of Fashionable Life". Quarterly Review XLVIII. 1832.
author unidentified.

O'Doherty, M. "Pursuit Of Politics: A Poem". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine XXXII. October 1832.

"On The Late French Revolution". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine XXIX. January 1831.

Orr, J. English Deism. 1934.

Partridge, E. Literary Sessions. 1832.
Radical Principles: A Tale. 1821. author unidentified.
Richards, I.A. Coleridge On Imagination. 1858.

Rickett, A. The Vagabond In Literature. 1906.


"Population". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine XXI. April 1827.

"Free Trade". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine XVII. May 1826.

"Rejected Corn Laws". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine. XXII. August 1827.

"The Opposition". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine XXII. November 1827.

"The Poor Laws". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine XXIII. June 1828.


"Rousseau". Taits Magazine. I. Edinburgh, June 1832.


Sanders, L. The Holland House Circle. 1908.

Scott, W.R. Adam Smith As Student And Professor. Glasgow, 1937.


Southey, Robert.
*Poetry Of Mary Colling*. Quarterly Review XLVII. March 1832
The Life And Correspondence Of Robert Southey. ed. C.C. Southey. 9 vols. 1830.
The Life Of The Rev. Andrew Bell. 3 vols. 1844.

Stael, Mme. Anne Louise Germaine de. De l'Allemagne. trans. S. Austin. 1813.


Sterling, John.
*Essays And Tales Of John Sterling*. 2 vols. 1848.


Thackeray, W.M.
*The Four Georges*. 1861.

"The Present Crisis". Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine October 1830.


Tillotson, Kathleen. *Novels Of The Eighteen Forties*. 1854.


Trelawny, E.J. *Recollections Of The Last Days Of Shelley*