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# The poetry of social reform

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THE POETRY OF SOCIAL REFORM

by

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## THE POETRY OF SOCIAL REFORM

In seeking to answer the question, Is social reform a legitimate mission of poetry? an important field of investigation presents itself. What has been the attitude of the poets towards social questions during the different periods of English Literature? What English poets have considered the propagandism of the principles of Democracy and reform their special mission; and what has been their influence? What poems attaining the higher standards of art have been written by them?

These, and other similar questions are worthy of investigation; and, while all of them may not be conclusively answered, at least a greater appreciation of the poets as reformers of social evils may be gained from their consideration.

Turning to the earliest period of English Literature, it is possible to trace the rise of the masses from absolute obscurity to a foremost place of interest in modern literature. To those seeking to do this, it is a significant fact that tradition says that Caedmon, the father of English poetry, the "Milton of our Forefathers" was a humble shepherd, singing of God and his creation, upon the Abbey lands of Whitby. It is certain that Democracy entered England with the church of Christ, and more certain it is that the spirit of democracy did not remain with the church for many generations.

As early as the eleventh century, we find the Goliards, wandering students, resembling the German socialists of today, singing jolly songs full of mockery, and social satire. During the twelfth century appeared the curious animal epics. The most important one, "Reynard, the Fox," contained much sweeping social criticism. The fox appears in the gown of a friar, Noble is the Lion-king, and I-sengrin, the Caron-wolf. The fat, innocent geese, always pursued by the fox, are the people. This poem shows in a good-humored, but mocking way, the injustice suffered by the poor from both the Church and the nobles.

Clouds of oppression gather, until the England of the 14th century is in a state of unrest, and discontent. The times are evil, the laws unjust, and gradually there awakes among the people a consciousness of class, and of great industrial wrongs.

This consciousness finds expression through William Langland; and the social literature of England begins with that wonderful poem, "the Vision of Piers Plowman." The world, making a pilgrimage to seek truth, finds a guide in Piers, a plowman at work on the land. The first words uttered by the workingman in English Literature are those of Piers, exclaiming, "I know truth as well as a clerk does his Cook. I have been his follower these fifty winters. I do whatever Truth tells me."

The part of the laborer in the social order is then dis-

cussed. Curiously prophetic notes are uttered of the modern doctrines of redistribution of work, the gospel of labor, the exultation of the people, and Christian Socialism; while mingled with them is a spirit of conservative moderation, and respect for the ruling class.

Miss Vida Scudder has compared Langland's ideas with those of Count Tolstoi. "What was distinctive in Langland," she writes, "was that the special type of poverty which he revered accompanied productive toil. His work thrills with the sorrowful consciousness of the difficult life of the working people."

"Poor people, Thy prisoners, Lord, in the pit of mischief,  
 Comfort thy creatures that much care suffer  
 Through dearth, through drought, all their days here.  
 Woe in winter times for wanting of clothes,  
 And in summer time seldom sup to the full;  
 Comfort thy careful, Christ, in thy ryche  
 For how Thou comfortest all creatures, clerks  
                   bear witness."

Serfs and peasants, sinking under their burdens, heard eagerly the words of Piers, and repeated them, realizing that at last they had found a voice.

Within a few years came the Peasants' Revolt, led by Wat Tyler and John Ball. Phrases from "Piers Plowman" became watchwords of the people, and Piers became a spiritual presence to them. It is doubtful if any poem ever had greater influence in shaping the ideals of the generation in which it was written, and in awakening the nation.

William Morris in his "Dream of John Ball", gives a

wonderfully vivid picture of the gathering of the peasants, and the influence of song upon them. One of the company at the tavern has sung the Ballads of Robin Hood; and the listener exclaims, "My heart rose high as I heard him for it was concerning the struggle against tyranny for the freedom of life, how the wild wood and the heath, despite of wind and weather, were better for a free man than the court and the cheaping town; of the taking of the rich to give to the poor; of the life of a man doing his own will and not the will of another man, commanding him for the commandments sake."

During the horrors of the insurrection of the peasants many abuses were committed in the name of "the plowman." Although Langland could not have approved of this, in his old age he still remained open to the too justifiable complaints of the poor. Some of the moderate disciples of Wyclif followed Langland's example in their writings. Among these was the author of "Piers Plowman's Crede", a bitter satire against the mendicant friars.

In most of the writings of Chaucer, the contemporary of Wyclif, we find no mention of the social unrest and desolation in England. The common people live in his poems, but depicted by the skillful artist, rather than by the brother. Chaucer's plowman had no thought of revolt, but

"A trewe swinker and a good was he  
Lyvyng in pees and perfight charitie."

Though Chaucer was essentially the poet of the Court, and of those who lived in luxury, in the latter part of his life, his sympathy with Wyclifism became marked. It is possible that "The Vision of Piers Plowman" may have had some effect upon him, for in 1398 he composed a ballad to King Richard on "Steadfastness", in which he laments the decay of old principles, and fidelity, and the despotism and cruelty of the times.

During the 15th century, a faint echo of "Piers Plowman" is heard in the "Boke of Colyn Clout" by John Skelton. Though chiefly an attack upon the ignorance and worthlessness of the clergy, it contains many interesting observations made by Colyn Clout upon the condition of the people.

"I Colyn Clout  
As I go about  
And wandryng as I walke  
I heare the people talke;  
Men say for sylver and gold  
Misers are bought and sold;  
-----

What care they though Gill sweat,  
Or Jack of the Noke?  
The pore people they yoke  
With sommons and citacions  
And excommunications."

No true prophet of the working people appears during the century and a half that separate Langland from More; and in the literature of the three centuries following More can be found hardly a trace of social discontent and unrest.

A reminiscence of Piers Plowman is sounded in "The Steel Glass", a satire of the Reformation by George Gascoigne.

"Behold him, priests, and though he stink of sweat,

Disdain him not! for shall I tell you what?

Such climb to heaven before the shaven crowns."

And again, "I see you, Piers, my glass was lately scoured."

Several ballads of the time of Queen Elizabeth complain of the passing of the great agricultural estates, which caused so much distress to the laborers. One sings,

"Some people, with great cruelty,  
Use the law with extremitie,  
The world is all without pitie."

"Temporall lords be well nie gone:  
Householdes keepe they fewe or none,  
Which causeth many a poore man  
For to begge his bread."

A curious ballad called "The Weaver's Song" complains,

"When princes' sons kept sheep in field,  
And queenes made cates of wheaten flowre,  
Then men to lucre did not yeeld,  
Which brought good cheere in every bowre,  
Then love and friendship did agree  
To keepe the bands of amitie."

Generally, however, the merry shepherd lads and lasses of the songs of this period prove to be but lords and ladies in disguise; and the jolly prentices show little discontent with their lives.

Spenser faithfully portrays the courtliness of his age. The "raskell many" little concern the poet. Sir Artegall quickly disposes of the giant of Communism whom he meets. This grant wishes to divide more evenly the sea and land.

"Tyrants, that make men subject to their law,  
I will suppress, that they no more may raine;  
And Lordlings curbe that commons over-aw,  
And all the wealthe of rich men to the poore will draw."

The crowd hear joyfully,

"Like foolish flies about an hony-crocke;  
In hope by him great benefite to gaine,  
And uncontrolled freedom to obtaine."

The reply of Sir Artegall that "All chance is perilous and all change unsound," seems to end the revolt.

In the drama of this period can be found hardly a trace of sympathy for the masses. Shakespeare supported sovereignty, and with lords and ladies laughed at the clownish common.

Although the temporary success of the Puritans meant great gains in religious and political freedom for the middle classes, the writers among the Puritans had nothing to say in regard to the condition of the poorest class. Even Milton in his loftiest pleas for liberty does not consider the masses of humanity.

Indeed, it was not until nearly the middle of the 18th Century that any poet paid tribute to the obscure and humble lives of the poor. Gray's "Elegy" shows a great change in attitude towards their "short and simple annals," after the disdain with which they had been heard. This poem may be considered the forerunner of the awakening of the more modern poets to a consideration for the common people.

In "The Deserted Village" of Oliver Goldsmith the new democracy that is rising finds voice.

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.  
Princes and lords may flourish or may fade--  
A breath can make them, as a breath has made

But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
When once destroyed can never be supplied."

In the latter part of the 18th century came the full awakening. Springing from the American Revolution, the fire of reform spread through France and England. Social and political subjects were eagerly discussed, and the new desire for freedom deeply influenced the literature of the period.

After the soulless, hollow, impoverished poetry of the Classical period, the works of Cowper and Burns return to a natural expression, an appreciation of nature, and a sympathetic rendering of the experiences of mankind.

As one of the people, as one who has himself suffered privation and want, Burns writes of their simple life, their wrongs, and of their aspirations. This greatest of peasant poets, with heart of flame, has first broken the silence of the years, and given voice to the dumb people. Some of his poems, as "A Winter Night," "Man Was Made to Mourn," and "the Elegy on the Death of Robert Dundas" may not rise much above the protests of the Chartist poets of the next century, but "The Cotter's Saturday Night," and "Is There, For Honest Poverty" have the force of unconscious sincerity and independence of mind that greets "the honest man, though e'er sae poor," as "king o'men for a' that!"

As the forerunner of the poets of the Revolution, the influence of Burns, especially in Scotland, has been great and lasting. Longfellow says of him,

"But still the music of his song  
Rises o'er all elate and strong;  
Its master-chords  
Are Manhood, Freedom, Brotherhood,  
Its discords but an interlude  
Between the words."

About the French Revolution clustered that wonderful group of lyric singers, dreamers, and seers, who received their inspiration from, and in turn inspired the new-born ardor for freedom. Their ideals of social equality they saw becoming a reality; and they realized their power to influence public thought and achievement. They believed that they

"Were called upon to exercise their skill,  
Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,  
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where,  
But in the very world which is the world  
Of all of us, --the place where in the end,  
We find our happiness, or not at all."

Their ideals have become our inheritance; and although their immediate fulfilment may have failed, the new thought of equal rights for all has entered literature. Henceforth the social passion is dominant.

Wordsworth was the first to write of the lives of the poor and simple, and who "tired not in maintaining their cause." "The Prelude," and "The Excursion" reflect his views upon the Revolution, and his disappointment at its outcome. In his sonnets written on returning from France to London, he does not exaggerate the harm caused by accumulated wealth, for

----"Rapine, avarice, expense,  
This is idolatry; and these we adore;  
Plain living and high thinking are no more.

The homely beauty of the good old cause  
Is gone; our peace, our fearful innocence,  
And pure religion breathing household laws."

From Coleridge, ardent expounder of Democracy, and promoter of a second Utopia upon the banks of the Susquehannah, might have been expected some wonderful, mystic dream-poem of freedom. But here, as upon other themes, there is much to regret in his silence.

Southey also produced no poetry upon social subjects; and, beginning a Radical, he ended as an intolerant Conservative.

Of the younger group of the poets of the "Age of Revolution", John Keats alone ignored entirely all human interests, and shunned those social questions that were convulsing Europe. No revolutionary spirit is to be found in his poetry. He has no new social theories to express, nor does he employ his art in complaints, nor attempts at reforms.

Of those who had witnessed the downfall of the French Republic, and the establishment of the power of Napoleon, Lord Byron most passionately expressed the rebellious and gloomy forebodings of the age. At a time when it seemed probable that monarchy, as embodied in the Holy Alliance, would triumph he writes, "I have simplified my politics into an utter detestation of all existing governments."

"His one pure passion" for liberty glows through his verse, as his truest, most genuine feeling, and consecrated his death.

Embodying as he did the mood of all Europe, Byron was a great social and political force in the large movement of democracy.

Percy Bysshe Shelley stands with Byron as a poet of revolt, but his love for liberty is purer, and the aim of his life higher and more unselfish. Although many of his dreams were vague and impossible, his life was devoted to the cause of humanity, and his passion molded and inspired his art.

Of this group of poets, Shelley has produced by far the greatest amount of revolutionary literature. "Queen Mab", written at the age of eighteen, and characterized in later years as crude and immature; "The Revolt of Islam", an experiment seeking to test the desire of the enlightened and refined for better conditions of society; "the Mask of Anarchy", written upon hearing of the Manchester Massacre, a poem for the people; all of these "flaming robes of verse" breathed the spirit and doctrines of the Revolution.

While Shelley did not make the enforcement of reform the direct aim of his poetry, and did not try to reason out a system or theory of social reconstruction, he writes in his introduction to "The Revolt of Islam", "I have sought to enlist the harmony of metrical language, the ethereal combinations of the fancy, the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion, all those elements which essentially compose a Poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality, and in the view of kindling a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines

of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice ever totally extinguish among mankind."

Shelley planned to write a number of poems especially upon the circumstances and wrongs of the people. Some were completed, but they were not in his loftiest style. He also intended to advance the cause of democracy with the loftier poetry of glory and triumph. Of this class is his "Ode to the Assertors of Liberty", a poem which in itself justifies his attempts to express his political and social opinions in poetry.

In his wonderful "Ode to Liberty" possibly the loftiest strains of the poetry of social reform are reached.

"Thou huntress swifter than the Moon! thou terror  
Of the world's wolves! thou bearer of the quiver,  
Whose sunlike shafts pierce tempest-winged Error,  
As light may pierce the clouds when they dis sever  
In the calm regions of the orient day!  
Luther caught thy wakening glance,  
Like lightning, from his leaden lance  
Reflected, it dissolved the visions of the trance  
In which, as in a tomb, the nations lay;  
And England's prophets hailed thee as their queen,  
In songs whose music cannot pass away,  
Though it must flow for ever: not unseen  
Before the spirit-sighted countenance  
Of Milton didst thou pass, from the sad scene  
Beyond whose night he saw, with a dejected mien."

Even while the poets were chanting odes in honor of Liberty, the dark clouds of industrial oppression and social discontent were rising. The glorious vision passed, their dreams had failed of fulfillment, and one by one, these

mighty singers became silent. Others have followed, but none with their aspirations, their confidence and power. Much of the poetry upon social reform in England written since their time might be classed as the poetry of protest.

Foremost among these writers of protest stands Thomas Hood. As one of the people through poverty and suffering, though superior in culture, he interpreted the popular heart. Perhaps no poem has ever so affected every class of society as did his "Song of the Shirt." Written at a time of prevailing distress among the working women of London, it was read by princes, and sung by the poor on every street of the city. "The Bridge of Sighs" is an even more forceful expression of the tragedy at the heart of our modern life.

Upon the death of Hood, not only the wealthy gave, but the laborers, and artisans, the needlewomen, and dressmakers contributed towards the erection of his monument. Gerald Massey sings thus of the influence of Hood,

"How like a bonny bird of God he came,  
And pour'd his heart in music for the Poor,  
Who sit in gloom while sunshine floods the land,  
And feel, through darkness, for the hand of Help!"

In her sympathy for the distressed, and her success in depicting their wretchedness, Elizabeth Barrett Browning may be compared with Thomas Hood. Though she has nothing decisive to suggest for the alleviation of their wrongs, some of her poems have incited others to practical reform. She sat listening to the cry of "the great humanity which beats its

life along the stony streets." She heard "the children weeping" in the factories, and gathered in the Ragged Schools of London. She felt "the curse of gold upon the land", and writes, "My heart is sore for my own land's sins." She heard even the sound of fetters from across the seas, and was impelled to write "A Curse for a Nation." Mrs. Browning lived at a time when England was filled with social unrest and industrial distress.

The agitation arising from the Corn Laws and the Chartist movement called forth during the period from 1836 to 1850 the work of a group of writers called the Chartist poets. Their object was avowedly social reform. Although none of their number rose to high rank as a poet, their influence over the people, from whom they sprung, was great; and the alarm raised by them was an important factor in the social movements of the times.

Foremost among them was Ebenezer Elliott, who according to John Greenleaf Whittier, was to the artisans of England, what Burns was to the peasantry of Scotland. Whittier believed that the "Corn-law Rhymes" by Elliott contributed <sup>NOT</sup> ~~but~~ a little to that overwhelming tide of popular opinion which resulted in the repeal of the tax on bread. Whittier writes in a poem called "Elliott,"

"On these pale lips, the smothered thought  
Which England's millions feel,  
A fierce and fearful splendor caught,  
As from his forge the steel.  
Strong-armed as Thor, -- a shower of fire

His smitten anvil flung;  
 God's curse, Earth's wrong, dumb Hunger's ire,--  
 He gave them all a tongue."

Although many of Elliott's verses are rhymed prose and no touch of imagination or fancy gilds the bare statement of wrongs received, we find in some of his poems a love of nature, and a high conception of his mission as a poet.

The author of "The Reforms and Reformers of Great Britain" has well said of him, "Not corn-law repealers alone, but all Britons who moisten their scanty bread with the sweat of the brow, are largely indebted to his inspiring lay, for the mighty bound which the laboring mind of England has taken in our day."

William Thom of Aberdeen, while not connected with the Chartist movement, produced the "Rhymes and Recollections of a Hand-Loom Weaver", poems which describe the poor man's sufferings, and valiently assert his rights; but which have the spontaneity, liquidity and sparkle of lyrics.

Thom estimates the value of such verse in speaking of the work of another weaver poet, Tannahill. "Poor weaver chiel! What we owe thee! Your 'Gloomy Winta' and other ditties, oh how they did ring above the rattling of a hundred shuttles. Let me again proclaim the debt we owe these Song Spirits, as they walked in melody from loom to loom, ministering to the low-hearted; and when the breast was filled with everything but hope and happiness and all but seared, let only break forth the healthy and vigorous chorus 'A man's a man for a' that', the fagged

weaver brightens up. His very shuttle skytes boldly along, and clatters in faithful time to the tune of his merrier shopmates."

Thomas Cooper a Chartist poet, consigned to prison for his allegiance to the cause of the oppressed, speaks of himself as one who -----"Only had lived and striven before his time, and let his heart impel him to the deed of championship defiant for the Poor."

W. J. Linton, a born reformer, was equally prolific and more poetic than Cooper. He writes thus of the mission of the poet,

"Learn higher apprehending  
Of the Poet's task!  
To him are God and Nature lending  
Ore of mighty thought,  
That for such use as the world's need  
may ask  
Fit iron may be wrought."

Ernest Jones, a Chartist whose verses show little lyric beauty, writes in his introduction in regard to poetry: --  
"It is well that men of widely different politics should say:  
'There is something truer and nobler than all this -- a calm and holy sanctuary of thought, wherein at least, if nowhere else all men are brethren, and all brethren friends.' "

Gerald Marsey who came in the wake of the Chartist movement has been diversely criticized. Some declare he has gained his popularity by cheap rhetoric and the substitution of sentiment

for feeling, while others hold him in high esteem.

The poems of Robert Buchanan, another member of this group are studies of the most wretched classes of London. They have the power of truth and are so faithfully and painfully realistic that it is a question if they do not repel the audience they were intended to move. Mr. Buchanan thus avows his purpose,

"To fight oppression, to assail the Flesh,  
To raise the barest and brand the best--  
Go forth, O Songs--bread cast upon the water,  
Return to me (if ye do return)  
Yonder, on the Great Ocean's farther shore."

Appealing to the lowest classes, the reform street ballads of this period, from 1800 to 1850, made no pretension to literary merit, but enjoyed a great popularity and helped to banish from the people the black spirit of discontent.

These Chartist poets, while not attaining great literary eminence, fulfilled their mission as they conceived it, believing with Eliza Cook that "literature is not an intelligent epicurism with men who have suffered and grown wise, but a real, earnest, passionate, vehement, living thing--a power to move others, a means to elevate themselves and to emancipate their order."

In America no such wrongs as aroused the songs of the Chartists needed righting; and of the earlier American poets none worked solely for social reform. Still a spirit of democracy and freedom pervades their work, and equality breathes

in every note.

Walt Whitman has contrasted the poetry of the Old World with that which he feels must become the national poetry of America. In the introduction to his poems he says: "The Old World has had the poems of myths, fictions, feudalism, conquest, caste, dynastic wars, and splendid exceptional characters and affairs, which have been great; but the New World needs the poems of realities and science and of the democratic average and basic equality, which shall be greater. In the centre of all, and object of all, stands the Human Being, towards whose heroic and spiritual evolution poems and everything directly and indirectly tend, Old World or New."

Whitman's own work is the best exemplifier of his ideas. The working-man and the working-woman are in his pages from first to last. What a New World spirit speaks in his lines

"I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it  
should be blithe and strong."

This song of America was hailed even across the waters as the new fresh note of democracy, whose buoyant ring contrasted so strongly with the indignant protest of the English reform poets.

Whittier has further expanded Whitman's thought of the joy of work under favorable conditions in a series of poems called "Songs of Labor" in which he sings of the craftsman, the ship-builder, the shoemakers and lumbermen. In his "Dedica-

tion" he states his purpose, not to arouse discontent nor even to rehearse the sorrows of poverty but;--

"Haply from them the toiler, bent  
Above his forge or plough, may gain,  
A manlier spirit of content,  
And feel that life is wisest spent  
Where the strong working hand makes  
strong the working brain."

It is interesting to compare with these poems of Whittier the poems of Carmen Silvia, Queen of Roumania. Under the title "Handwerkerlieder", or "Songs of Toil", she has written of the labors of her countrymen, the scissor-grinder, the butcher, the paper-maker, the sower, the clockmaker, the baker and the potter. Whittier paid tribute to her poetic genius, to her originality in conception and expression, and to her boundless sympathy with the poor.

All the Old World sorrow is in the song of the Scissor - Grinder.

"I and my grindstone, we wander by,  
And no one asks me from whence come I,  
How poor I am, no one cares to know,  
None care to hear of my spirit's woe."

The interests of Whittier were with any attempts to better the oppressed and he writes to the Reformers of England.

"God bless ye, brothers! in the fight  
Ye're waging now, ye cannot fail,

For better is your sense of right  
Than king-craft's triple mail."

Through the long struggle for the abolition of slavery, Whittier and his contemporaries sounded words of hope and courage, never losing their calm confidence in the final outcome of the conflict of the young nation.

It is impossible to estimate the wide influence of Whittier's poems, collected under the name of "Voices of Freedom". Through these, in words of power, rings his protest against the evils of a traffic that places

"Our fellow-countrymen in chains!  
Slaves -- in a land of light and law!  
Slaves -- crouching on the very plains  
Where rolled the storms of Freedom's war!"

Longfellow also contributed a few poems upon slavery, written during the year 1842, but the spirit of reform never seems to have taken great hold upon him.

Lowell was preeminently the poet of American Democracy, and with exultance and power, he advocated the "great cause". While he may have felt that his eager partisanship hindered his climb of Parnassus, still he believed, as he wrote of Hood, that

"Freedom needs all her poets: it is they  
Who give her aspirations wings,  
And to the wiser law of music sway  
Her wild imaginings."

Deprived of the "Biglow Papers", perhaps the greatest satire of the Age, the cause of freedom would have suffered serious loss, and the sway of the scaffold of truth still further been delayed.

While the poets in America had been writing especially for the abolition of slavery; and in England for the repeal of injurious laws, the novel also became a new and powerful agent in social reform.

Indeed, it must be admitted that during the Victorian Age, prose became largely the art form of democracy. Still through most of the poetry of the era can be traced the social passion which has become a vital part of the life it observes.

While Matthew Arnold has employed prose as the form for most of his social teachings, we find in the poem, "Obermann Once More," his message and incentive to the modern poet.

"What still of strength is left, employ

This end to help attain:

One common wave of hope and joy

Lifting mankind again."

This equality, real and material, was what Arnold wished and aimed for in all his writings; for he believed that in this way alone could the highest enjoyment, and greatest development come to society.

William Morris belongs to the number of writers using both prose and poetry to express their social teachings. He wrote a series of poems called "Chants for Socialists", which remind

us of the verse of the Chartists, and do not merit much admiration. In "The Day Is Coming," he embodies his special doctrine that all men should have work to do which shall be worth doing, and pleasant to do, under conditions which should make it neither over-wearisome nor over-anxious. Though he speaks of himself as a "dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time," his work was especially needed to give light to the people, for he realized that

"The singers have sung and the builders have builded,  
The painters have fashioned their tales of delight;  
For what, and for whom hath the world's book been gilded,  
When all is for these but the blackness of night?"

In Algernon Charles Swinburne, we have merely an echo of the old inspiration of the poets of the Revolution. We feel the futility of his rage against kings in his odes to political freedom. There is, however, in his poems much genuine appreciation of the work of other poets, and he believed that the "song-fires of England," "the sword of song," "the star that Milton's soul for Shelley lighted" should be the inspiration and guide of the reformers of England.

The two greatest poets of this period, Browning and Tennyson present a decided contrast in their attitude towards social questions.

"Robert Browning had little of the social idealism of the 19th century," says Professor Howard Griggs, "yet he was a

prophet as well as a poet, a prophet of modern life."

Browning was a spiritual teacher, a distinct individualist in thought and method, and concerned himself little with social problems in England.

On examining the poems of Lord Tennyson, it is surprising to find such a large number of references to prevailing social conditions, contained in them. His life seems far removed from that of the masses, but the author of "Despair" of "Locksley Hall", a poem of democracy, and of "Maud" must have been at heart with men, the workers.

Many have been stirred by the hopeful trumpet ring of the lines to the New Year.

"Ring out the feud of rich and poor,  
Ring in redress to all mankind."

Though Tennyson might look forward to the time "when wealth no more shall rest in mounded heaps," he was essentially a poet of rational and definite progress, hoping for an advance to be gained by established laws and institutions, and knowing well "that unto him who works, and feels he works" all the abundance of the golden year shall come.

Meanwhile in America with the close of the Civil War industrial conditions began to change. With the rapid increase in immigration came the evils attendant upon the overcrowding of cities, and production under unhealthy conditions. American literature, before so free from the note of protest, begins to reecho the bitter cry of Europe.

In his poems "The Symphony" Sidney Lamier exclaims,  
 "Look up the land, look down the land,  
 The poor, the poor, the poor, they stand  
 Wedged by the pressing of Trade's hand  
 Against an inward-opening door,  
 That pressure tightens evermore."

A remarkable protest against the industrial conditions of the present day, the sweat-shops, and the over-crowded tenements, is a little volume of Yiddish poems by Morris Rosenfeld. Mr. Rosenfeld received no education except that of all poor Jewish boys. He went to England, and there learned the tailor's trade, and worked for years in misery and want.

The poems "In the Sweat-Shop", "The Pale Operator" and "A Tear on the Iron" are written from the depths of mental and physical anguish. In the poem "Despair" is voiced the pathetic longing of the worker for the trees and fields. He feels that "Soon the trees and flowers will have withered; the last bird is already ending his song; soon there will be cemeteries all around! Oh, how I should like to smell a flower!" And again, "The woods are breezy, in the woods it is cool. How good to dream there quietly! The little birds sing pleasantly, but in the shop there is a noise, and the air is suffocating."

To America, "Mother of Nations," have turned these millions from the Old World. How will she receive them; what will she

do for them? Edwin Markham thus conceives her mission:

" 'Tis yours to bear the World-State in your dream,  
 To strike down Mammon and her brazen breed,  
 To build the Brother - Future, beam on beam;  
 Yours, mighty one, to shape the Mighty Deed."

The part of the poet in this new kingdom is that of seer and prophet.

"O Poet, thou art holden with a vow:  
 And Freedom's star is soaring in thy breast.  
 Go, be a dauntless voice, a bugle-cry  
 In darkening battle when the winds are high--  
 A clear sane voice wherein the God is heard  
 To speak to men the one redeeming word."

Will the poets of the future hear this call, as have the poets of the past? Langland heard the Voice saying to him, "Write", and a new spirit breathed through the English peasantry, rousing it to thought and action. Again after the silence of many centuries, the Voice sounded amid the throes of revolution; and at its bidding, those undisputed masters of their art, Burns, Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley sang of Freedom and Democracy. The Chartists added their lesser notes, while in America the "Voices of Freedom" were those of our poets.

Rising from obscurity and neglect, the cause of humanity

has become the subject both of prose and poetry; and the solution of social problems, acknowledged to be a legitimate mission of art, can never lose the place of interest it holds in modern literature.