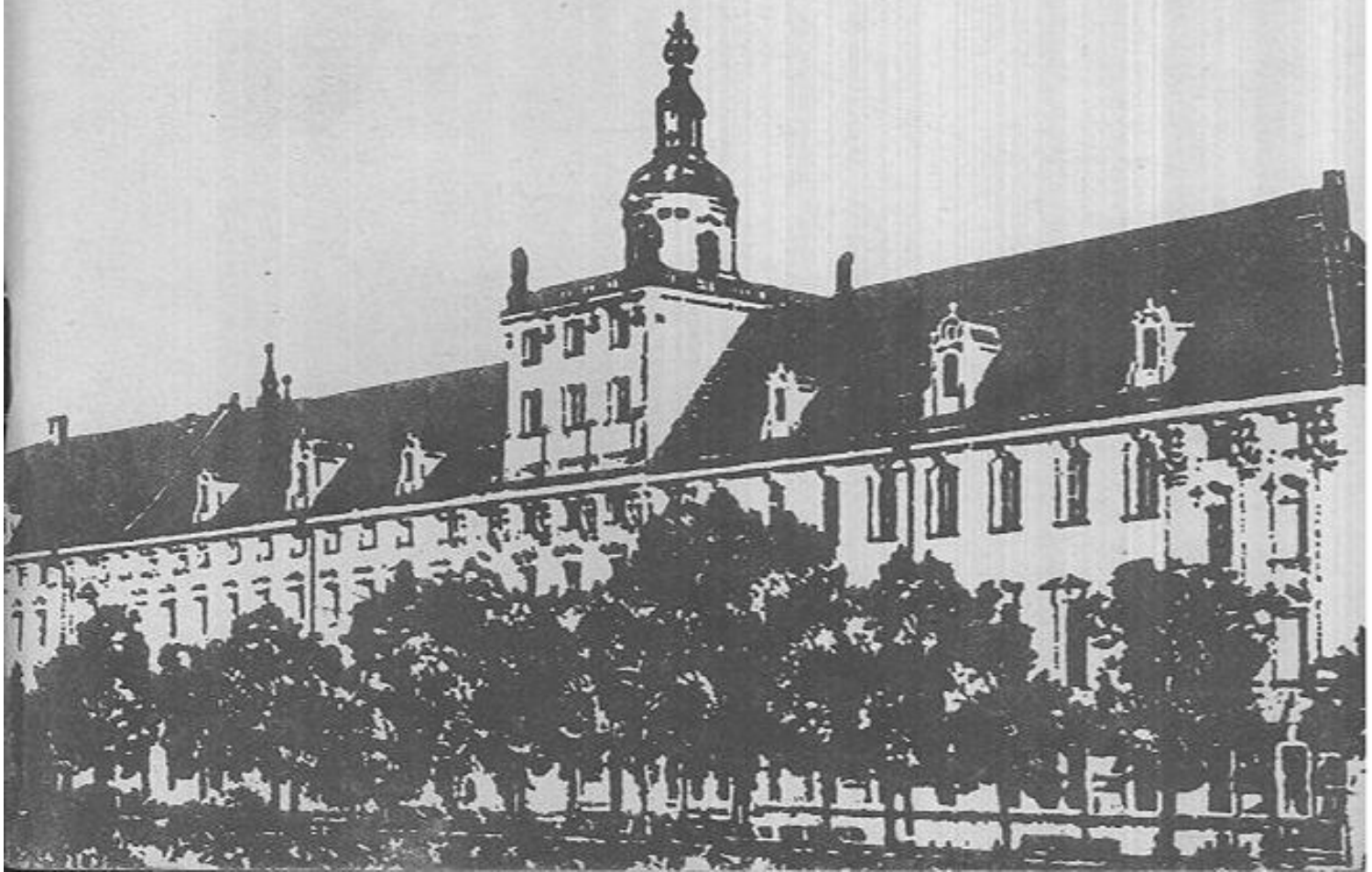
Danuta Piestrzyńska

WROCŁAW 1984

THE DECLINE OF SOME VICTORIAN ATTITUDES AS REFLECTED IN THE POETRY OF A.C. SWINBURNE AND J. THOMPSON (B.V.): 1855-1875



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Introduction

In the past few decades, a vast number of studies have been written about the various aspects of the Victorian age. Ever since the age came to its close almost eighty years ago it has never ceased to attract the attention of scholars and critics. Conversely, one has the impression that with the passage of time the Victorians have become at once more complex and more fascinating.

The early years of the 20th century saw a violent reaction against the Victorians and their attitudes and ideals. This was headed by Lytton Strachey, whose treatment of the „eminent Victorians" tended to turn them into objects of ridicule.

This early reaction, however, gave way to a nostalgic view of the period as one of stability, prosperity and peace, in sharp contrast to post-war England and Europe.

Recent studies have attempted to give a more balanced und unprejudiced view of the Victorian period, suggesting the complexity of the age and emphasizing at the same time the affinities between the 19th century and ourselves, to the point of regarding some Victorian ideas as seminal to modern attitudes. There is a tendency now to present the period as one precisely lacking in stability, with rapid changes taking place in various walks of human life which dramatically affected both the physical and spiritual welfare of men.

Numerous attempts have been made to strike out acceptable generalizations about the age, but as many and diverse, often contradictory, statements are put forth, that becomes obvious that the difficulties are enormous and the task is far from easy. Because of a great diversity under its more uniform surface, the Victorian age has been found by a number of scholars not to lend itself easily to generalizations; even the surface itself has often been found to be so perilously multifarious as to exclude the possibility of an overall view.

Basically, it is this diversity of the Victorian age that is responsible for the current two fundamentally opposed ways of looking at the period in present criticism.

One view is represented by Prof. J. Buckley, who in *The Victorian Temper* (1951), sets out to prove that one cannot regard the Victorian period as a homogeneous culture the way it used to be talked about some decades earlier in this century. He contends that there existed in the Victorian age a number of frequently divergent tendencies, and that far from presenting a homogeneous bourgeois aspect, selfsatisfied, sentimental and firmly rooted in unshakable foundations,

the Victorian age was a period of extreme restlessness, in which nothing was more stable than in the most dynamic period of English history, the Elizabethan. In short the more one analyzes the Victorian temper, the more elusive one is apt to find it (Levine 1967:45,48).

The opposite view is adopted by Prof. Mario Praz in *The Victorian Mood: A Reappraisal* written partly in response to Prof. Buckley's views, in which Praz regards Buckley's contention to be true to the extent that men have always been the same; but it is at the same time false when, laying undue stress on a number of tendencies destined to a brief life, he proceeds to deny the existence of a Victorian temper as distinct from that of both the preceding and the following epochs. Praz avers in closing that Buckley commits the error of

> missing the forest for the trees. What matters is the kind of tree that impresses its character on the wood, and a man who maintains that a garden in Europe is a tropical garden because of one or two rickety palm trees growing there would hardly be taken seriously (Levine 1967:55,56).

In the same vein, W. Houghton writes in *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (1974) that

> it is now smart to say that of course there was no such thing as Victorianism. But the literature of those years, while indicating shifts and changes of outlooks and showing that there are clear distinctions between the frame of mind at the start and at the close of the period, nevertheless so constantly reveals the presence of the same fundamental attitudes in every decade and in every group — among High Churchmen and liberals, agnostics and Tories — that I cannot doubt there was a common culture for which the term Victorianism, though in a wider sense than it usually bears, is appropriate (1974:XV).

It is difficult not to agree with either Houghton or Praz, and while some tropical trees should be borne in mind , to pursue Praz's simile further , it is, nevertheless, obvious that the tree which impressed its character upon the Victorian forest was that of the middle class. The Victorian period indeed can be interpreted in terms of the rise of the middle class to power in the wake of industrial capitalism. This is precisely how Granville Hicks in *Figures of Transition* interprets the age, stating that because of that „the Victorian era is more easily defined and more homogeneous than most other epochs" (1939:1).

Viewed as a whole, the Victorian age represents the triumph of the middle class in the sense that they no longer aspired after the culture of aristocracy but insisted on the validity of their own ideas and attitudes. These, in turn, seem to have been both shaped and expressed by the utilitarian spirit blended with evangelicalism.

In the stricter sense, utilitarianism was a theory of morals and of governement, while in the broader sense it stood for particular attitude toward life, and the practical encouragement to the man of enterprise. The businessman seized upon the idea that „the greatest happiness of the greatest number" would be achieved if he was let alone. This is indeed what utilitarianism meant to the average Victorian. And in its broader sense utilitarianism infiltrated and was accepted whole-heartedly by the largest and most important sections of the middle class.

The utilitarian bent of mind was further supplemented by evangelicalism, the latter like utilitarianism, being ubiquitous and indefinable,

> Starting early in the 18th century, as far back as William Law, author of *The Serious Call*, coming down through the Wesleys and Whitefield, Johnson and Cowper, Clarkson and Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect, great schoolmasters like Thomas Arnold and Charles Wordsworth, great nobles like the Greys on the Whig side and the philanthropic Lord Shaftesbury on the Tory, not to mention many 19th century preachers and divines, it became after Queen Victoria's marriage practically the religion of the court and gripped all ranks and conditions of society. After Melbourne's departure, it inspired nearly every frontrank public man, save Palmerston, for four decades [...] Nothing is more remarkable than the way in which evangelicalism in the broader sense overleaped sectarian barriers and pervaded men of all creeds (Ensor 1952: 137).

As Hicks states, it is easy to understand why evangelicalism should have appealed to the middle class so much. Its cardinal doctrine was personal piety, the individual relationship between the soul and God, thus it both appealed to and strengthened the individualism that the middle class practised in its economic and political affairs. Its moral standards were adapted to the needs of a frugal, hard-working and single-minded businessman as those of the Church of England had been to the habits of the gentry. It permitted, if it did not actually preach, the assumption that the wordly success is the evidence of God's favour and hence of personal righteousness.

The evangelical spirit permeated the whole realm of Victorian moral as well as intellectual life, leaving its unmistakable stamp on a body of ideas.

> During the 19th century evangelical religion was the moral cement of English society. It was the influence of the evangelicals which invested the British aristocracy with an almost stoic dignity, restrained the plutocrats who had newly risen from the masses from vulgar ostentation and debauchery, and placed over proletariat a select body of workmen enamoured of virtue and capable of self-restraint.
> Evangelicalism was thus the conservative force which restored in England the balance momentarily destroyed by the explosion of the revolutionary forces (Halévy 1961: 166).

Utilitarianism and evangelicalism were thus primarily responsible for the body of ideas concerning morality, life and duties of man current in the Victorian age. In the moral sphere it meant piety, sobriety, restraint and silence on all sexual matters. In the intellectual sphere it meant honesty, earnestness and dedication to Truth, as well as emphasis on duty.

Ultimately, utilitarianism and evangelicalism contributed to the sense of confidence and faith in progress which marked and were most characteristic of the age. These characteristics stemmed from the Benthamite proof that society could be improved by legislation, from the generally accepted Christian interpretation of the world, and from the scientific proof that man was now the master of the environment.

Man's complete subjugation of Nature to his needs, the triumph of his mind as attested to by the scientific discoveries of the age followed by great technological development, as well as its accompanying belief in unlimited possibilities of a human mind to arrive at Truth, were responsible for this sense of optimism and progress which was organic to the age. The 19th century was viewed as occupying a special place in history, which was in turn seen as a sequence of events passing along a linear scale from the primitive to the advanced, i. e., from the worse to the better.

Tennyson's words aptly express the spirit of the age when he says: „I the heir of all ages in the foremost files of time" *(Locksley Hall)*.

The optimism was also moral, for, as Chapman writes,

> The faith in 'human perfectibility' held by William Godwin and shared by some of the young Romantic poets kept its hold on others in the next generation. In the second half of the period philosophical positivism and scientific evolution gave a new turn to the belief in progress (Chapman 1968: 39).

It is not until the latter half of the century that evangelicalism began to wane and the essential attitudes of the Victorians came to be questioned, or else directly rebelled againts. Again scholars remain divided about the point in time when the wave of reaction set in.

Prof. Kitson Clark e. g. considers the years 1850-1875 the High Noon of Victorianism (1962: 31) after which the first signs of the crumbling of the system begin to occur. G. M. Young in his *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age* regards the years 1845-1860 the true Victorian span, after which ideas and attitudes which could be properly called Victorian gradually died out (1953: 18). Norman Foerster in *The Reinterpretation of Victorian Literature* is inclined to regard the eighties as a period of reaction, for as he writes, „The Victorian era, it is generally agreed, ends about 1880, that is, a full two decades before the end of the Queen's reign" (1962: 59). Walter Houghton, in turn, believes that the years 1830-1870 represented the true Victorianism (1974: 5). Edith Batho and Bonamy Dobrée in *The Victorians and After* contend that „throughout the period the dominating ideas and the reactions against them were those based on middle class idealism and middle class prosperity, the whole system reaching its heights in the sixties and seventies" (1962: 1). Batho and Dobrée would then suggest the eighties again as a period of decline. „By the Edwardian period the old Victorian picture had been completely shattered, the middle class was criticizing itself furiously and the superb confidence, the sense of being right, had gone" (Batho, Dobrée 1962: 3).

T. M. Parrott in *A Companion to Victorian Literature* concludes that the years immediately preceding and following 1870 have been called a watershed in Victorian England.

> The death of Dickens, 1870, seems to mark the end of an age almost as sharply as that of Scott in 1832. The early Victorians are falling silent; Carlyle, the oldest of them, lived on, but his work was done by 1865; Thackeray died seven years before Dickens; Mill published his last work in 1869; and Darwin put the capstone on his theory of evolution in 1871 with *The Descent of Man* (1955: 74-75).

This thesis attempts to provide an insight into some of A. C. Swinburne's and J. Thomson's (B. V.) poetry written and/or published between 1855 and 1875. While belonging thus to the High Noon of Victorianism, it will be found to constitute, however, a grave challenge to the prevalent attitudes being, at the same time, an early symptom of a gradual decline of these attitudes in the latter half of the century and their final disintegration by the Edwardian period.

Two poets as diverse in their own ways as A. C. Swinburne and J. Thomson have been chosen for this study not only for the simple reason of their being contemporaries, but also because their poetry of the period demonstrates striking similarities in preoccupation with the central issue of religion and faith versus the evidence of science.

Swinburne and Thomson, born in 1837 and 1834, respectively, matured as men and poets at a time when, which is understood as Victorianism, was in full sway, being bolstered by an unprecedented economic progress which resulted in material prosperity of the people. Both Swinburne and Thomson are commonly regarded as Late Victorian poets, yet it is in their poetry written between 1855-1875 that they gave utterance to sentiments that had little in common with the dominant attitudes, thus dividing themselves sharply from the age. The poetry of 1855-1875 either reveals little sympathy with the religious equilibrium as attained by Tennyson or else exhibits an unswerving hostility to it and to the optimism it breathed as found in *In Memorian*, which both of them tend to regard as facile and shallow.

Their backgrounds betray similarities too, with Swinburne and Thomson being born into warm and pious households with either High Anglican or Irvingite leanings, with convictions and beliefs being held firmly; the two of them remained committed Christians until their early maturity. It is, scientific conclusions of the age, primarily, that were instrumental in eroding the poets' early orthodoxy inducing both of them to rebel overtly againts the central solution of the age. What follows, then, is an analysis of those aspects of their poetry that place them directly in opposition to the religious compromise summed up in the position of Tennyson, as well as to the general spirit of the age.

Chapter I essays what is believed to be the characteristic traits of the Victorian temper: faith in progress and optimism, both of which were bolstered by philosophical and scientific, as well as material, achievements of the age. In particular, the importance of scientific discoveries as responsible for the prevailing note of optimism of the period is pointed out. At the same time however, the unexpected blow dealt by the same science to the supreme confidence of the age is emphasized, which resulted in an acute crisis in religion in the middle decades of the century, thus posing a grave threat to the idea of progress and optimism alike. What follows is an account of the characteristic responses to the crisis within the Church and the laity.

Chapter II, on the other hand, attempts to survey the characteristic reactions of the representative poets of the age to the scientific and scholarly challenge. The poets chosen for scrutiny in this chapter are Tennyson, Browning and Clough, mainly for two reasons:

1) representing the most typical reactions of the age quickened by evangelical spirit blended with middle class love of security;

2) supplying a solution to the problem in their poetry which was accepted by and large by the age.

In order to determine the general tendency of the age, the poetry of these three poets has, therefore, been taken into account. On the other hand, Matthew Arnold has been excluded from among the representative poets of the age dealt with in this study, also for two reasons.

Firts, because Arnold was not only a poet but a prose writer as well, and the

problems the Victorian age wrestled with found their due primarily in his prose. *Literature and Dogma, St. Paul and Protestantism* are expressive, among other things, of Arnold's concern for religion and contain the poet's attempts to effect a reconciliation of science with revealed religion by disengaging from biblical stories profound moral truths. While being of a piece with authors of *Essays and Reviews* Arnold actually went even further in his disengaging the content of the Bible from the dogmatic structures imposed upon it by theologians of the past. The result was, as Woodhouse notes,

> an extremely attenuated definiton of religion („morality touched by emotion") and of the Deity („a Power not ourselves making for righteousness") and a reduction of Scripture to a body of literature marked by that quality of „high seriousness" shared by the best poetry from Homer onward (1965: 211).

Since Arnold's main concern, however, was for morality, and moral issues are outside the scope of the present study, Arnold has, therefore, been excluded.

Second, his poetry, in contrast with his prose, is never overtly concerned with the crisis in religion the way it is dealt with in the poetry of his three great contemporaries. Arnold is primarily an elegiac poet, and the crisis in religon is dealt with only insofar as it is part of the general sentiment of loss which his poetry gives utterance to. A number of Arnold's poems are dominated by a nostalgic view of the past as a period of stability and peace in contrast with his own time of abrupt changes, a time of transition in which men are found.

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead
> The other powerless to be born.
>
> (Stanzas from the *Grande Chartreuse*)

Furthermore, even if obliquely concerned with the crisis, Arnold never brought forth a solution to it in his poetry. On the contrary, it is in his prose that Arnold attempts to formulate answers and express emotions that must be brought into order. It is also in his prose that Arnold refuses to commit himself merely to the fact as apprehended by the senses and the reason, or to a faith that responds to imagination and the heart, but demands a union of the two, which he designates as "imaginative reason" (Woodhouse 1965: 220). Arnold, therefore, has not received any attention in Chapter II, which, as has been stressed, chiefly deals with those poets who effected a solution to the religious crisis in their poetry.

Chapters III and IV are concerned with Swinburne's and Thomson's poetry, respectively, as being in opposition to the central solution provided by Tennyson in *In Memoriam*, in which a „vast majority of critics found the theology sound and the faith inspiring" (Shannon 1952: 149), and which long served as a poem of religious consolation and uplift, being interpreted in accordance with the demand for piety, optimism and a high moral tone.

The study of Swinburne has been confined to his two collections of poems, *Poems and Ballads*, First Series, and *Songs before Sunrise*, both of them published within the High Noon of Victorianism, with *Songs before Sunrise* providing a sequel to those aspects of *Poems and Ballads* that are of interest for this study.

Since emphasis has been put on Swinburne's response to the representative solution of the age, only poems considered to be relevant to the subject have received their due in this chapter. Other poems, while being iconoclastic in their own right, have been excluded from this study as not pertaining to the subject.

The study of Thomson likewise has been restricted to his poetry written and/or published betwenn 1855 and 1875. His later poetry has not been taken into account as being chronologically outside the boundaries of High Noon. In addition his later poetry does not introduce any new ideas, being in the main repetitive of the ideas und issues dealt with in his earlier work.

The dissertation is a thematic study, hence all formal considerations of Swinburne's and Thomson's poetry have not been discussed as being again outside the scope of this thesis. Also, the analysis has been strictly limited to the consideration of poetry alone; prose has been taken into acoount only insofar as it sheds light on the attitudes expressed in the poetry.

Chapter I

Some Characteristic Attitudes of the Victorian Age; Optimism of the Age Versus Crisis in Religion

Perhaps the most salient quality of the Victorian age is its optimism and deep faith in progress. This was especially pointed out soon after World War II when the period was viewed primarily as a golden age in possession of all the qualities the modern world seemed to be divested of: security, stability and belief in progress.

In a series of talks broadcast by the BBC in 1948 and published the following year as *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*, the Victorian age was presented as an age of optimism by contrast with the pessimism of the 20th century. The series was introduced by England's two outstanding humanists: G. M. Trevelyan and Bertrand Russell. Both of them spoke of the age in terms of progress, improvement and moral and intellectual evolution. While G. M. Trevelyan, the historian, focussed in his talks on material improvements and reforms, Bertrand Russell described the age almost as emphatically as Trevelyan as a change for the better. Drawing a comparison between his own times and the Victorian age he concluded:

> The daily life of our time is so filled with uncertainties and haunted by dread of disasters, that the period when Victoria was on the throne has already acquired the character of a golden age. In such a world the idea of present evil was bearable, since men felt that they knew what to do about it, and that it would soon be lessened [...] The Victorian age tackled its own problems with vigour and success [...] They found a country deeply divided against itself — 'the two nations' as Disraeli called it — a country full of brutality, misery and ignorance. At the end, the country was closely integrated, all the worst horrors of early industrialism had been mitigated; universal compulsory education had been in operation for thirty years; and democracy had been achieved except for the exclusion of women. All this without any violent upheaval. It is a good record; I wish it could be hoped that the present age could have one as good (*Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians*, 1949: 3).

Neither Trevelyan nor Russell was isolated in his view; faith in progress and the mood of optimism have been generally accepted as the characteristic traits of the age, which set it in sharp contrast with the present age.

> If after the First Word War, we were debunking the nineteenth century, after the Second we are deferring to it and even yearning nostalgically after it: tendentesque manus ripae ulterioris amore. In our own unpleasant century we are mostly displaced persons, and many feel tempted to take flight into the nineteenth as into a promised land. In that distant mountain country, all that we now lack seems present in abundance: not only peace, prosperity, plenty and freedom, but faith, purpose and buoyancy (Willey 1949: 52).

Recent studies, while confirming these ideas, have, at the same time, emphasized the fact that optimism and faith in progress were not entirely unlimited or unqualified throughout the age.

There was no one single factor responsible for the prevalent attitudes, but several causes should be regarded as all contributory to the Victorian confidence. The immediate source was philosophic trends having their origin in the 18th century as well as the material achievements of the age resulting from the development of science and its application in the practical sphere of human life.

Walter Houghton traces the belief in progress back to the very beginning of the Victorian age, suggesting that the renewal of hope around 1830, after a period of turmoil, had its basis in the idea of progress which had first clearly emerged in the Renaissance.

> The Baconian argument from advancing knowledge, each age possessing and profiting from a constantly increasing body of positive truth, was well established by the 18th century. To this the rational philosophers, assuming the almost omnipotent effect of external circumstances on the shaping of the mind and character added the particular argument that by the control of environment human life might be vastly improved (1974: 28).

Thus wise laws, democratic government, and universal education would end the time of tyranny and superstition and usher in an age of „the greatest happiness of the greatest number". The proponents of Benthamism actually emerged as a force in practical politics as Zlate as 1832, with Utilitarianism becoming the chief force in the first half of the century, shaping the mind of the middle class.

As J. S. Mill wrote in his *Autobiography*, the Utilitarian creed meant.

> In politics, an almost unbounded confidence in the efficacy of two things: representative government, and complete freedom of discussion. So complete was my father's reliance on the influence of reason over the minds of mankind, whenever it is allowed to reach them, that he felt as if all would be gained if the whole population were taught to read, if all sorts of opinions were allowed to be addressed to them by word and in writing, and if by means of the suffrage they could nominate a legislature to give effect to the opinions they adopted [...] In psychology, his fundamental doctrine was the formation of all human character by circumstances, through the universal Principle of Association, and the consequent unlimited possibility of improving the moral and intellectual condition of mankind by education (1924: IV, 89, 91).

Utilitarianism, as conceived by Jeremy Bentham, moulded then the early and mid-Victorian life, and was largely responsible for the faith in improvement.

In the late 18th century another theory of progress was founded on a new conception of history which was adopted by both Thomas Carlyle and J. S. Mill. History was viewed not as a „stop-and-go" process in which advance waited upon particular events, but as a natural and organic development in which each age was the outcome of the previous one. Since the contrast between the contemporary civilization and its inferior beginnings seemed obvious, the development then was one of progress.

Mill, drawing on French interpretations, was inclined to regard the process scientifically as a series of causes and effects, governed by some law of historical evolution. Carlyle, on the other hand, being steeped in German metaphysics, conceived of it as a gradual realization of ideals, a progressive unfolding of the capabilities

of mankind. Carlyle was assured of „the progress of man towards higher and nobler developments of whatever is highest and noblest in him [...] Under the mortal body lies a soul which is immortal; which anew incarnates itself in fairer incarnation" (after Houghton 1974: 29).

The note of optimism was further increased by the position assigned to the modern period in cyclical pattern of history. Goethe, Herder, Novalis and the Saint-Simonians alike regarded the present moment as the end of the critical phase, giving birth to a new period of vast improvements. Auguste Comte, with his positivist ideas, contributed in no small way to the belief in progress. Under his influence,the discovery of causes and secret motions of things, and the enlarging of the bound of Human Empire to the effecting of all things possible, came to be thought of as the historical end of the nineteenth century. According to Comte, the intellectual progress of mankind could be divided into three distinct stages. In the first stage, which was called by him the theological one, phenomena of the world were explained in terms of supernatural agencies; in the second, the metaphysical, by metaphysical abstractions, and in the third and final, by positive, scientific laws. New vistas and possibilities were thus opened up before Humanity which was finally delivered from the erroneous methods of theology and metaphysics alike. Hence the conviction that the Victorian age stood on the threshold of a new and great epoch in history of humankind.

Due to the new science of sociology founded by Comte and first discussed in England by Mill, the reconstruction of society on a scientific basis became the assumption of the time. Since the historical process was organic, the discovery of its dynamic laws held out immense possibilities to man. Once the laws had been discovered men would be able to determine „what artificial means may be used, and to what extent, to accelerate the natural progress in so far as it is beneficial to compensate for whatever may be its inherent inconveniences or disadvantages" (Houghton 1974: 35).

As W. K. Clifford predicted, once the laws of sociology are mastered, we may „rationally organize society for the training of the best citizens. Those who can read the signs of the times read in them that the kingdom of Man is at hand" (after Houghton 1974: 35).

Faith in progress as well as in almost unbounded possibilities of man was even more solidified as scientific discoveries and subsequent development of technology put man in a superior position in relation to Nature and brought about the material successes of the age. Man was conquering his natural environment, and owing to the advance of scientific knowledge, he was winning over Nature and bringing her under his control.

In the course of the century, numerous discoveries were made in such fields as chemistry, bacteriology, electromagnetics, thermodynamics, etc. And although the application of theory sometimes lagged behind, technology provided ample proof of science's benefit to mankind.

„The history of England is emphatically the history of progress", wrote Thomas B. Macaulay, who attributed the achievements of the age primarily to science and

its practical applications in the sphere of industry. It was his view that the endless continuation of applied science would produce greater and greater industrial civilizations. In 1930, a far larger and wealthier population would be „better fed, clad and lodged" than in 1830, live longer and healthier lives in bigger cities, travel only by railroads and steam, and have „machines constructed on principles yet undiscovered in every house" (1878: III, 279).

E. P. Hood writing in **The Age and Its Architects** pays tribute to the power of man to conquer Nature and to the human mind that could discover her secrets and transform her material resources into productive usefulness. „Within the last half century there have been performed on our island, unquestionably the most prodigious feats of human industry and skill witnessed in any age of time or in any nation of the earth" (1852: 138). The Great Exhibition of 1851, which was an impressive display of industrial achievements of the age, expressed its pride and its confidence in the beneficence of industrialism alike.

> If these forefathers of ours could rise from their graves this day they would be inclined to see in our hospitals, in our railroads, in the achievements of our physical science, confirmation of that old superstition of theirs, proofs of the Kingdom of God, realization of the gifts which Christ received for man, vaster than any of which they had dreamed (Kingsley 1877: I, 239, 240)

Indeed the advancement of science and technology improved greatly man's condition of living, as is evidenced by the following words of Macaulay,

> It has lengthened life; it has mitigated pain; it has extinguished diseases. It has increased the fertility of the soil; it has furnished new arms to the warrior; it has spanned great rivers and estuaries with bridges of form unknown to our fathers; it has quided the thundebolt innocuously from heaven to earth; it has lighted up the night with the splendor of the day; it has extended the range of human vision; it has fascilitated intercourse, correspondence, all friendly offices, all dispatch of business etc. These are but a part of its fruits, and of its first fruits, for it is a philosophy which never rests, which has never attained, which is never perfect. Its law is progress (after Laver 1954: 206).

Walter Houghton draws attention to the fact that the age had actually evolved two visions of Utopia, with the first based primarily on scientific advance of the period, and the second, a metaphysical conception of the universe erected on the narrow principle of natural evolution (1974: 36). It was the evidence of paleontology that made it possible before 1850 to interpret the history of animal life as a progressive development from primitive forms to more and more complex ones, culminating in man. However, man did not have to be the final stage of this development. Chambers himself asked in his *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) „Is our race but the initial one of the grand crowning type? Are there yet to be species superior to us in organization, purer in feeling. more powerful in device and act, and who shall take a rule over us?" (1844: 276).

Yet it was the very science that dealt an unexpected blow to the supreme confidence and optimism of the age by the challenging evidence of both evolutionary biology and biblical criticism.

The reception of the idea of evolution as put forth by Darwin in 1859 illustrates aptly the conflicting ways in which science influenced the spirit of the age. On the one hand, the theory of evolution contributed further to the optimism of the age,

since it inclined people to see in it the idea of progress. And if the suggestion of simian ancestry of man was to many abhorrent, yet it was also an indirect compliment to man's innate capabilities. The successful businessman, on the other hand, chose to interpret the doctrine of „the survival of the fittest" in self-justification of his activities. This too seemed to encourage a belief in unlimited potentialities of man.

But, at the same time, the idea of evolution as well as the findings of geology had a particularly disturbing effect on the major assumptions of the age, both intellectual and moral. In particular, its findings put science in conflict with religion, especially as preached by the Evangelicals, who relied primarily on the authority of the Bible. Thus while enhancing the optimism of the age, science was. at the same time, responsible for the crisis in religion that ensued, and which threatened the Victorian faith in progress and the sense of optimism alike.

At the beginning of the Victorian age, Englishmen, apart from a group of philosophical sceptics and a small number of avowed atheists, were all conventionally orthodox. They regarded the Bible as the literally inspired word of God, and accepted the Seven Days of Creation and the Fell of Man as historic facts. Bishop Ussher's chronology of the Old Testament, derived from the text of the Bible, and often printed in the margin, fixed the date of the creation at 4004 B. C., and was considered as accurate as the chronology of English kings (Parrott 1955: 143). Hence the Evangelical religion dominant at the time was particularly vulnerable to scientific evidence, as it insisted on the literal interpretation and inerracy of the Holy Scripture.

Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-1833) made it virtually impossible to hold on to a strictly literal interpretation of the Old Testament. It went far to show that the age of the earth and man's life upon it far exceeded the brief period of time allotted to by Ussher. At the same time, Lyell advanced the convincing hypothesis that geological formations were the results not of sudden occurrences such as Creation and the Flood, but the slow operation of uniform processes of change.

Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* also maintained that each species had not been specially created by God, but had evolved according to general laws. It followed from these that the Bible narrative of Creation could no longer be accepted as historic fact. The publication of the *Origin of Species* was therefore another blow to religion.

The book opened with a shattering introduction in which Darwin stated that the view which the majority of naturalists had thus far entertained — that each species had been independently created — was simply erroneous. By his own admission, Lyell's *Principles* altered Darwin's entire view of the species problem while Malthus' essay on *Population* gave him the clue to his theory by suggesting the struggle for life as the cause of natural selection and the survival of the individuals and species that were best fitted to adapt themselves to their environment. During a relentless „struggle for existence", „natural selection" had determined the future of living creatures „under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life" (Darwin 1968: 2-3).

Darwin had not discovered evolution — the notion had been advanced for centuries — but he had elaborated an ingenious theory of the method of evolution, which made the theory of evolution itself seem much more convincing. And while Darwin ended the book in an optimistic way by claiming that there was grandeur in his conception of life, there were few who failed to see that the view was not at all that impressive. In particular, the theory of spontaneous „natural selection" substituted accident or perhaps mechanism for intelligent and benevolent purpose in the world. There was no place for morality in the new conception of life: the fittest did not necessarily mean the best in the moral sense. Indeed, to equate evolution with progress and the fittest with the best was a fatal error. It was against this confusion that Huxley made vigorous protest in the address on *Evolution and Ethics* delivered shortly before his death. Progress, he said, does not consist in „imitating the cosmic process, still less in running away from it, but in combatting it" (after Somervell 1929: 140). Progress would not come through the survival of the fittest but through education and social reform.

Darwin's theory of natural selection and its corollary that there was no moral purpose in the world were found to be incompatible with the view of the world as expounded by Christianity. Burrow lists three major issues on which Darwinism conflicted with Christian belief (Lerner 1978: 167).

First, Darwin's theory runs counter to the literal word of the Sciptures, and of Genesis in particular, which gives the account of the creation of the world, since it calls in question the biblical idea of the world as being created by God successively in seven days.

Second, Darwin's theory by stating that natural selection determined the development of the species, with competition for survival among organisms acting on the occurrence of chance mutations, excluded indirectly the beneficent God and Divine Providence from the process. Instead, as it emerged from the hypothesis, the world was a soulless and pitiless mechanism operating through blind chance at enormous cost in waste and suffering.

Thirdly, by the theory of the descent of man from the animal world Darwin, in a sense, degraded man and destroyed the special relationship between man and God epitomized in, to use Burrow's words, „his creation in God's image and the incarnation of Christ as man" (Lerner 1978: 167). It was on this assumption that the Christian idea of immortality of the human soul with the hope of an afterlife rested. By descending man from the animal world, Darwin made belief in the soul and its immortality virtually impossible. And the idea of personal immortality, with its accompanying appreciation of the world as a moral order, as well as the belief in the significance of each act and each individual life, were the fundamental convictions of the age. The intensity of this belief must be traced, according to Burrow, directly or indirectly, to the Evangelical Movement of the early years of the century (Lerner 1978: 157-158).

In fact, religion found itself assailed on two sides: by the evidence of science proper, and by biblical criticism on the other, with the process reaching its heights according to A. Briggs (1978: 484) in the sixties and seventies. A glance at the

number of publications at the time will reveal the intensity of the process and the gravity of the challenge: 1859 — Darwin published *The Origin of Species*; 1860 — *Essays and Reviews* published; 1862-1879 — *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined* by Bishop Colenso; 1863 — Renan's *Vie de Jésus;* 1865 — *Ecce Homo* by J. R. Seeley published; 1871 — Darwin's *Descent of Man* published.

Higher Criticism, as Parrott writes, was „essentially a phase of the developing scientific spirit discarding tradition in the pursuit of truth" (1955: 146). It meant that the text of the Old Testament was no longer regarded as an infallible revelation, but was subjected to the same methods of scrutiny that were being applied to the reading of the literary texts. The free analysis of the Bible originated in the Tübingen school of biblical criticism in the 1830s. It first subjected the historical books of the Old Testament to critical examination which resulted in throwing grave doubts upon the factual truth of the biblical narrative. It then proceeded to a study of the New Testament, to a discussion of the sources of the Gospels, and a questioning of the authorship of the Epistles.

Das Leben Jesu by F. D. Strauss and *Vie de Jésus* by Renan, to mention only the most important books, questioned the infallibility of the Bible and raised the issue of the veracity of both the Old and the New Testament miracles. Jesus' divinity and the validity of his Atonement as well as the promise of the eternal life which rested upon the credibility of the Gospel miracles, especially the Resurrection were all called in question. If there were no miracles there was no Resurrection. If there was no Resurrection, there was neither the Divine Redeemer nor the assurance of immortality.

The controversy between science and religion resulting in the latter losing its authority, produced a profound shock at a time, when, as has already been observed, Christian belief and its corollaries were all widely held. The worst thing about the controversy was that it seemed to shatter belief in personal immortality and the promise of eternal life — thus stripping this life, as it seemed, of any purpose and meaning. For a typical Victorian to be divested of such belief meant a nightmare vision of a purposeless life. Elizabeth Barrett was asked once how she would feel if she had no belief in a soul or a future life. She replied that she would feel her life was a terrible waste and that her struggle would be even more terribly empty, for the goal would be dust rather than the crown of heaven.

> What a resistless melancholy would fall upon me if I had such thoughts! — and what a dreadful indifference. I should not have strength to love you, I think, if I had such a miserable creed. And for life itself [...] would it be worth holding on such terms, — with our blind Ideals making mocks and mows at us wherever turned? (after Byron 1965: 62).

Thus the whole question of faith and Christianity was focussed more sharply on the problem of the immortality of the soul and the existence of an afterlife, the two being strictly connected in the Victorian interpretation with purposefulness of human existence in general and ultimately with faith in progress and optimism of the age.

Writing about the conflict between science and religion, A. H. Whitehead concluded,

> The results of science and the beliefs of religion had come into a position of frank disagreement, from which there can be no escape, except by abandoning either the clear teaching of science, or the clear teaching of religion (1938: 210).

The Victorians, however, found a third way which was strictly connected with middle class and evangelical bent of mind, since „Evangelicalism was the principal ingredient in the state of mind which we today describe, contemptuously perhaps, as Victorianism" (Somervell 1929: 101).

What Evangelicalism infused the English mind with was primarily earnestness, not only religious, but moral and intellectual as well. In the intellectual sphere, to be in earnest was.

> to have or to seek to have genuine beliefs about the most fundamental questions in life, and on no account merely to repeat customary and conventional notions insincerely, or to play with ideas, or with words as if the intellectual life were a May-game (Houghton 1974: 221).

This is what Dr. Thomas Arnold, the headmaster of Rugby, was trying above all to give to his students: „moral thoughtfulness, — the inspiring love of truth going along with the devoted love of goodness" (Stanley 1904: III, 116).

Such an attitude is also evident in Carlyle's denunciation of Walter Scott as a sceptical dilettante writing simply to entertain „indolent languid men".

> The great Mystery of Existence was not great to him; it did not drive him into rocky solitudes to wrestle with it for an answer, to be answered or to perish [...] One sees not that he believed in anything, nay, he did not even disbelieve, but quietly acquiesced, and made himself at home in a world of conventionalities; the false, the semi-false and the true were alike true in this, that they were there, and had power in their hands more or less. It was well to feel so; and yet not well! We find it written „Woe to them that are at ease at Babel" (after Houghton 1974: 227, 228).

This purely Victorian detestation of mere playing with ideas is nowhere more clearly reflected than in their earnest attitude towards such fundamental questions as religion, human life, or the universe. They were never oblivious to any larger scheme of human destiny, whether natural or supernatural, nor to what duties or responsibilities it might entail.

Both Evangelical earnestness and love of truth dictated their serious attitude in the controversy between science and religion. There can be little doubt that faith was requisite to the Victorians: with no faith nihilism would ensue that would have made life unbearable. The interests of personal need dictated an endeavour to find a solution, but it must not be supposed that the will to believe was altogether setting aside the appeal to reason. On the contrary, part of the problem was the fact that the Victorians tried to face the conflicting evidence of science by way of reason; the zeal for and dedication to Truth, and a generally earnest approach to issues, made it virtually impossible for them to ignore what seemed to be the patent facts of science. However, they were also men of their age who, when difficulties presented themselves, „jumped intuitively to affirmations derived from their deepest feelings" (Cockshut 1970: 15). While not immediately ignoring the scientific evidence, they placed their faith hopefully if „faintly" in „the truths that never can be proved" (Altholz 1976: 67).

Altholz's words hint at yet another characteristic of the Victorian frame of mind: a middle class love of stability, security and a constructive way of thinking. Both resulted in a general endeavour to reconstruct, which is evident in their handling of the controversy.

Houghton, writing about the age as one of transition between the traditional framework of thought which was breaking down and the new, quotes Carlyle, who in the essay called *Characteristics* aptly expressed the aim of the Victorians:

> Both these Philosophies are of the Dogmatic or Constructive sort: each in its way is [...] an endeavour to bring the Phenomena of man's Universe once more under some theoretic scheme [...] they strive after a result which shall be positive; their aim is not to question, but to establish (after Houghton 1974: 9).

The same constructive aspect of their thinking is evident in the following words of Froude who, while admitting that the controversies unsettled him, concludes at the same time, „Difficulties had been suggested which I need not have heard of, but out of which some road or other had now to be looked for" (1888: IV, 311-312).

A reconstruction of thought was thus absolutely imperative; the general feeling was that it was „perilous for their own stability and that of society to sail blindfold and haphazard without rudder or compass or chart" (Houghton 1974: 223). „For them the end of intellectual journey is not doubt but reconstruction" (Houghton 1974: 17).

Within the Church and the laity alike, the crisis in religion therefore provoked various responses, whose common denominator was a constructive effort to restore the importance of Christian religion and to reassert belief in God, in personal immortality, and in eternal life.

The Oxford Movement, while it originated under different circumstances, nevertheless can be interpreted partly as an attempt to regain solid faith in the face of crisis by resorting to the Church authority like that of the Roman Catholic Church. Since the Evangelical stamp of religion was found powerless against the assault of scientific findings and Higher Criticism alike, defections were made to the Roman Catholic Church, whose body of belief seemed to be based on more solid foundations.

A different attempt was made by a group of Broad Church clergymen in their famous publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860. Its authors claimed that much Higher Criticism could be accepted

> without forsaking belief in divine inspiration of the Bible; they saw revelation and reason as related and complementary, not contrary to each other. They had a basic optimism, stemming from a general acceptance of evolution and the idea of progress, and according with the late Victorian growth of immanent philosophy (Chapman 1968: 282).

Their objective was, therefore, to effect a reconciliation of science with religion by distinguishing in the Bible between statements that could no longer be accepted in view of scientific truths on the one hand, and the profound spiritual and ethical truths which its religious and moral teaching embodied. They thus attempted to disengage these truths from the dogmatic structure imposed by theologians and in this way reassert the necessity of Christian religion.

Chapter II

Poetry of the Period Versus Crisis in Religion and Final Solution It Provides

As has already been observed in Chapter I, the crisis had far reaching effects not only on the clergy, but on the public as well. The poetry of the period supplies an interesting insight into the way the religious controversy affected the latter. It is at the same time suggestive of this constructive way of thinking which characterized the Victorian frame of mind with poets like Tennyson, Browning and Clough being representative of the age in their efforts at compromise.

The general idea underlying various poetic responses to the crisis is a determination to find a way out of the plight by resorting to intuitive belief based on evidence of the heart as opposed to evidence of reason. This tendency is clearly manifested in the poetry of the time, which records the lassitude and perplexity of the authors following the disruption of the traditional assumptions on the one hand, and a conscious effort to reconstruct faith in God and immortality of the soul on the other — thereby avoiding the spiritual shipwreck. For, as Tingsten observes, „Victorians often clung to religion as a safeguard against a nihilism that would have made life unbearable" (1972: 40).

In the poetry of the time, the controversy of science and religion took primarily the form of a preoccupation with two fundamental issues: belief in the beneficence of God and the moral order of the world, and personal immortality of man, without either of which life seemed to be divested of both sense and value. The final solutions worked out by such diverse poets as Browning, Clough and Tennyson do, nevertheless, exhibit certain common traits. In particular, all demonstrate an emotional need for spiritual security stemming from the belief in Christianity and its dogmas, as well as an attempt to mediate between this need and the conflicting evidence of science — not so much by ignoring it altogether as insisting on the validity of the evidence of the heart as opposed to that of reason. Thus typical responses oscillate between Browning's assertive optimism, and a more subtle and hesitant expression of faint optimism characteristic of both Clough's and Tennyson's solutions.

Whatever is known about Browning's early crisis of faith, to the general reader his poetry presents a somewhat isolated case of a robust optimism that is entirely unaffected by spiritual doubts. The famous lines in Pippa's song,

God's in his heaven —
All's right with the world

epitomize the essence of Browning's standpoint which DeVane described as the poet's „axiomatic faith which he spent the rest of his life defending" (after Colville 1970: 130).

The controversy of the age left Browning virtually untouched. Indeed, he laughed at the presumptions of a scientific man and depended exclusively on the strength of his own faith in God, which proved to be unshakable throughout his mature life. Since „axiomatic faith" lay at the core of Browning's attitude the problems of God's existence and immortality of the soul, as seen in the light of scientific conclusions, never seriously troubled him. Unlike Tennyson, or Clough, who made an honest attempt to meet the destructive evidence, Browning seems to have turned a cold shoulder to scientific findings, asserting emphatically,

This constitutes my earthly care:
God is above and distinct.

(*Christmas Eve*)

There are a handful of poems in which Browning's attitude is set forth explicitly. Chief among these are: *Christmas Eve, Easter Day, Rabbi Ben Ezra, Abt Vogler*, and *Toccata of Galuppi's*.

Christmas Eve (1850) attempts to clarify Browning's religious position. The fundamental quality of his belief in God as presented in the poem is that it is based solely on the apprehension of the vastness as well as the beauty of the world, the two being in his mind a clear manifestation of God's presence and His benevolence,

In youth I looked to these very skies
And probing their immensities
I found God there, his visible power,
Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense
Of the power, an equal evidence
That his love, there too, was the noble dower.

(*Christmas Eve*)

Browning makes a number of claims for such divine love and they seem to be based exclusively on his own intuitive conviction. God's love and wisdom are both infinite and He

Would never, (my soul understood)
With power to work all love desires,
Bestow e'en less than man requires.

(*Christmas Eve*)

Easter Day is mostly a lengthy monologue delivered to an unseen observer on the problem of belief in which rationalistic methods of arriving at truth are put to ridicule. *Easter Day* makes use of a familiar Romantic notion that the external beauty of the world implies the fuller, more perfect one that lies beyond it,

All partial beauty was a pledge
Of beauty in its plenitude:
But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
Retain it! plenitude be theirs
Who looked above:

(*Easter Day*)

The reality of personal immortality is likewise asserted with equal energy and confidence as that of the existence of God in the following lines of *Rabbi Ben Ezra*;

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith „A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all nor be afraid":

(*Rabbi Ben Ezra*)

Thus Browning is ultimately convinced about the purposefulness of human existence and states,

and I exult
That God by God's own way occult,
May — doth, I will believe — bring back
All wanderers to a single track.

(*Christmas Eve*)

Fairchild observes that falling back upon what Tennyson calls „the primitive impulses and feelings" Browning says,

...I have one appeal —
I feel, am what I feel, know what I feel,
So much is truth to me.

and concludes that this

> feeling — faith remains constant throughout his career. Many of his best earlier poems assume it without incongruously arguing for it; we can read them as expressions of a temperament which is exempt from rational criticism because it does not attempt to be rational (1957: IV, 151).

Browning's statements of belief made in other poems do not differ substantially from the position adopted in *Christmas Eve* and *Easter Day*. As has already been emphasized the essential feature of Browning's attitude is that he does not attempt to solve the problem on an intellectual plane, but grounds his faith solely in an inner conviction.

A late poem *La Saisiaz* (1878), however, is an exception. It offers a rare instance of an attempt on Browning's part to meet intellectual arguments on their own ground. However, Browning was no good at this sort of argument, and as Colville concluded, „its quality is at best unconvincing" (1970: 136).

Call this — God, then, call that — soul, and both —
the only facts to me.

Prove that facts? that they o'erpass my power of proving,
proves them such:
Fact it is I know I know not something which is fact
so much,

(*La Saisiaz*)

or those lines of *A Toccata of Galluppi's*.

The soul, doubtless, is immortal — where a soul
can be discered.
Yours for instance, you know physics, something of
geology
Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise
in their degree;
Butterflies may dread extinction — you'll not die,
it cannot be.

His assertions are enforced again and again in his poems which all breathe a note of unshakable optimism. Thus with his emphatic acquiescence in the benevolence of God and the purposefulness of human life, Browning represents one typical reaction. Other characteristic responses are furnished by Clough and Tennyson.

Unlike Browning, Clough was subject to doubts and perplexities resulting mainly from the disturbing evidence of Higher Criticism from the late forties throughout the fifties. His poetry depicts the mental chaos of one whose basic assumptions have suddenly crumbled and poignantly expresses the tension between the emancipated head and the traditional heart.

Matthew and Mark and Luke and Holy John
Evanished all and gone!
Lost, is it? Lost, to be recovered never?

(*Epi-Strauss-tium*)

The two Easter poems Clough wrote in 1849 show him wrestling with his problems and attempting to form some sort of spiritual equilibrium. The poems clash directly: the first shows Clough facing up to the conclusions of biblical criticism, and consequently being led to deny emphatically the grounds of religious faith. If Strauss was right in disproving the occurrence of the New Testament miracles,then

Christ is not risen, no,
He lies and moulders low,
Christ is not risen.

(*Easter Day*)

The revelation quickens a nightmare vision of a materialistic world in which death — the ultimate experience beyond which there is nothing — puts an end to a purposeless and futile existence. For, if Resurrection of Christ is but an „idle tale", it follows then that there is no spiritual relity, and the belief in the immortality of the human soul warranted by the assumption is also gone,

In darkness and great gloom
Come ere we thought it is our day of loom,
From the cursed world which is our tomb,
Christ is not risen!

(*Easter Day*)

The poem ends with bitter disillusionment verging on despair:

for we are men deceived
We are most hopeless who had once most hope
We are most wretched that had most believed
Christ is not risen.

(*Easter Day*)

The other Easter Day poem written the same year, when Clough was celebrating Easter at Naples, is conceived as a counterpart to the former, denying its bitter conclusions and its tone of despair alike while voicing hope,

Weep not, it bade, whatever hath been said,
Though He be dead, He is not dead.
In the true Creed
He is yet risen indeed,
Christ is yet risen.

(*Easter Day II*)

The two poems thus betray Clough's intellectual and emotional perplexities, alternating betwenn despair and hope. They are, at the same time, expressive of his need of faith and a determination to put aright the broken image. His poetry „is a poetry of a fine brain, making the search for moral and spiritual security through the doubts that were pressing down on the age" (Chapman 1968: 275). For, while he was prepared to accept Strauss' conclusions questioning the historical truth of the Christian story and the supernatural charakter of Christian dogmas, he was, at the same time, unwilling to reject Resurrection as an idea. To disengage moral truths from the old dogmas that could no longer be held as true was his personal solution, which, incidentally, he shares with the authors of *Essays and Reviews*. As he said himself, „whether Christ died upon the Cross, I cannot tell; yet I am prepared to find some spiritual truth in the doctrine of the Atonement" (after Houghton 1974: 359).

His later poetry elaborates the dilemma by suggesting further posssibility of mediating between the scientific evidence and belief in Christian dogmas. Although occasionally tormented with doubts Clough nevertheless resolves his personal plight by stressing the importance of intuitive convicition. Like Browning, he affirms his faith and the ability to find God by relying on the evidence of the heart, dismissing the issue of historical authenticity again as irrelevant,

Enough that in our soul and heart
Thou whatso'er thou may'st be, art.

(*Hymnos Ahymnos*)

Another central idea to Clough's solution is the argument that although the old creed may be false, the new one need not be true. For, as he says elsewhere

But the plot has counterplot,
It may be, and yet be not.

(*Is It True, Ye Gods, Who Treat Us*)

The final attitude reached by Clough for example in *What We, When Face to Face We See* bears strong resemblance to one adopted by Tennyson in *In Memoriam*: one of „vague hopefulness", to use Clough's own words. Central to that is the conviction that if opposite conclusions are both possible and neither can be proved or disproved, we

Must still believe, for still we hope
That in a world of larger scope,
What here is faithfully begun
Will be completed, not undone.

(*What We,...*)

Clough's case seems to be more representative of the age than Browning's. The poems discussed above are indicative of Clough's being cognizant of the importance of biblical criticism, and of the problems growing out of divesting Christianity of its quality of „revealed" religion. In one of the letters to, his sister, the poet expressly treats the problem, suggesting the importance of moral truth contained in Christianity that should be divorced from other concerns:

> I cannot feel sure that a man may not have all that is important in Christianity even if he does not so much as know that Jesus of Nazareth existed [...] Trust in God's justice and love, and belief in His commands as written in our conscience, stands unshaken, though Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, or even St. Paul were to fall. The things which men must work out will not be critical questions about the Scriptures, but philosophical problems of Grace, and Free Will, and Redemption as an idea, not as a historical event (1888: 57-68, 85-86).

By and large, however, it is Tennyson's poetry of the period that best exemplifies the predicament of a sensitive Victorian whose world — based on traditional assumptions — suddenly falls apart. At the same time, Tennyson remains truly representative of the Victorian temper in being „more hesitant, more willing to compromise, more resourceful in avoiding spiritual shipwreck by throwing out anchors in various directions" (Fairchild 1957: 473). His poetry records the intense struggle to mediate between the emotional need of faith and the facts as science and scholarship present them.

The Two Voices, dating back to early 1830s, and *In Memoriam* (1850) abundantly testify to Tennyson's wrestling with the disturbing evidence of science in an attempt to work out an equilibrium by adjusting his need of faith to the facts furnished by science of the period. Pre-eminently this is true of *In Memoriam* which is the most mature and consummate expression of Tennyson's final conclusions, but *The Two Voices* bears witness to his early preoccupations with the problems, thereby furnishing an interesting point of comparison with his later solution. For while in its final statement

it presages the *In Memoriam* standpoint, it nevertheless offers a marked contrast to the position adopted in his mature period.

In his early period, Tennyson appears to have been perplexed primarily by the findings of geology. Like Ruskin, quoted by Cook, Tennyson also heard those hammers of geology working busily to destroy his world of security, „If only the Geologists would let me alone. I could do very well, but those dreadful hammers! I hear the clink of them at the end of every cadence of the Bible phrases!" (1911: II, 19-20).

The Two Voices is an account of an inner conversation of the poet with two voices in his mind representing two different outlooks on life and the world, being therefore expressive of Tennyson's fears of the futility of human life as it seems to emerge from the new evidence. The first voice asserts that life has no value at all and denies the existence of another reality beyond the immediate one:

A life of nothings, nothing worth,
From the first nothing ere his birth
To that last nothing under earth!

To the poet beset with doubts and attempting to arrive at Truth, it demonstrates conclusively the futility of such efforts, for, no matter what means man applies to find out Truth he can at best „embrace" shadows:

If straight they track, or if oblique,
Thou know'st not. Shadows thou dost strike
Embracing cloud, Ixion-like;

The meaninglessness of life emphasized and the futility of human efforts to discover Truth demonstrated, the voice then urges the poet to put an end to this life of misery and wretchedness,

Thou art so steep'd in misery,
Surely 'twere better not to be.

And further on:

Why inch by inch to darkness crawl?
There is one remedy for all.

The poet's reply is that since one can never know, it is impossible to disprove the likelihood of another reality existing beyond the earthly one:

If all be dark, vague voice, I said,
These things are wrapt in doubt and dread
Nor canst thou show the dead are dead.

At this stage Tennyson resorts to the solution that recalls Clough's final attitude. Yet, the argument with the first voice produces no vital conclusions or solutions; it is the second voice which brings solace to the poet's tormented soul by suggesting:

I see the end, and know the good.

As the poem draws to its end, a note of optimism begins to prevail and is further reinforced by finding sudden strength and consolation in the surrounding world. It is Nature that invests the poet with a sudden cheerfulness and furnishes him with hope as he contemplates both its beauty and the intricacy of its design, the two clearly betraying the existence of a God of love:

And forth into the fields I went
And Nature's living motion lent
The pulse of hope to discontent.
[...]
The woods were fill'd so full with song
There seem'd no room for sense of wrong
[...]
And all so variously wrought,
I marvell'd how the mind was brought
To anchor by one gloomy thought;

It is with an emphatic „Rejoice! Rejoice!" that the poem concludes. Essentially, the conclusion invites comparison with Browning's idea of the beauty and vastness of Nature as being manifestations of divine order and divine beneficence alike, which they both inherited from their Romantic predecessors.

The solution, although satisfactory for the time being, proved precarious in the long run. Tennyson's later poetry, most notably *In Memoriam*, bears witness to his recurring states of perplexity and frustration provoked by the same dilemmas. *In Memoriam* has thus an especial significance, as these doubts and the ultimate compromise worked out by Tennyson received their most consummate expression in his magnum opus.

Tennyson's long elegy deals more explicitly than *The Two Voices* did with the two problems that were of paramount importance to the poet and to the Victorian age in general: the issue of immortality of the soul and the moral purpose of the world as manifestations of the existence of a God of love.

Elegy No.3 gives expression to the poet's dread of a soulless and pitiless mechanism running blindly if bereft of the presence of God,

"The stars", she whispers, „blindly run;
A web is woven across the sky;
From out waste places comes a cry,
And murmurs from the dying sun".

Such fears were even more pronounced at the time *In Memoriam* was written. By 1850, the „night of fear" had descended; Darwinism was in the air flanked by biblical criticism. If the view that the world of science propounded was a correct one, then Christianity, benevolence of God, and immortality of the human soul were but an „idle tale". The revelation was a bitter one as it divested human life of both purpose and meaning: human activities were directionless and futile, the

world and life all but ashes and dust. The familiar note of suicide, of putting an end to an aimless existence makes itself heard again as the poet avers,

> 'Twere best at once to sink in peace
> [...]
> To drop head-foremost in the jaws
> Of vacant darkness and to cease.
>
> (Elegy No. 34)

Nature is no longer of assistance to the poet. Conversely, it is Nature now, „red in tooth and claw" that lends evil dreams to him, as in its workings he sees cruel waste and carelessness of an individual life:

> She cries, „A thousand types are gone;
> I care for nothing, all shall go".
>
> (Elegy No. 56)

The message of Nature to man is particularly disturbing, for, if Nature does not care about an individual life, it does not care about human individual life either. Man is like any other species which lives and dies and turns to dust,

> And he, shall he,
> Man, her last work, who seem'd so fair,
> [...]
> Who trusted God was love indeed
> And love Creation's final law -
> [...]
> Be blown about the desert dust,
> Or seal'd within the iron hills?
>
> (Elegy No. 56)

If this were true, both human life and the history of the earth would be deprived of all their meaning:

> No more? A monster then, a dream,
> A discord. Dragons of the prime
> That tore each other in their slime
> Were mellow music matched with Him.
>
> (Elegy No. 56)

The thought that man may perish as did the lost species makes the human condition monstrous and even more terrifying to contemplate than the fate of prehistoric beasts, which at least worked out their destinies in harmony with natural law.

Yet, faced with all these nightmare visions, Tennyson shows again a determination to put the broken pieces of his world together. Although these bitter reflections momentarily result in his faltering „where I firmly trod", the final conclusion is again an optimistic one. It is true that the presence of God cannot be deduced from the external phenomena of Nature, yet he does find his God,

> I found Him not in world or sun,
> Or eagle's wing, or insect's eye,
>
> (Elegy No. 124)

but in his own heart instead.

Thus, while giving full recognition to the forces of reason making for doubt, he is, at the same time, incapable of resolving his problems on a purely intellectual plane; instead, he prefers to resort to the evidence of the heart. There is a direct appeal to feeling or feelings „which are, or give, an immediate assurance of God or of immortality" (Bradley 1901: 63). The assurance is direct or immediate, independent of reasoning or scientific proof.

At the same time, the consciousness of the best or highest in him yields a basis for the poet's faith. To quote Bradley again, „looking at that which he feels to be highest in himself [he] finds it to point beyond earthly experience; and on this characteristic of it he founds what is, in effect, an argument in favour of immortality or the divine origin of the soul" (1901: 62).

Elegy No. 124 becomes crucial in the development of Tennyson's argument. Although there is no proof of God's existence in Nature — using the old 18th century argument from design or in the light of new scientific interpretation of Nature — Tennyson, nonetheless, objects to cold arguments of reason by contrasting them with the evidence of the heart:

> If e'er when faith had fallen asleep,
> I heard a voice, „I believe no more",
> [...]
> And like a man in wrath, the heart
> Stood up and answer'd, „I have felt"
>
> (Elegy No. 124)

God and immortality of the soul are not matters of knowledge — „For knowledge is of things we see."

This position as set forth in *In Memoriam* is maintained throughout Tennyson's poetry, and is sometimes reinforced by the idea which he shares with Clough: reason is incapable of proving the existence of God, nor is it capable of disproving it, hence the injunction not to despair but to cultivate and attitude of hopefulness,

> wherefore thou be wise,
> Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
> And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith.
>
> (*The Ancient Sage*)

His faith, then, as Bradley concludes, „is not an adherence to something which reason declares false, but it is an adherence to something which reason cannot prove to be true" (1901: 66).

The final solution reached by opposing instinctive belief based on the evidence of the heart to the evidence of reason, and clinging to the former, brings about an ultimately positive attitude and confidence.

That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.

(Elegy No. 131)

The equilibrium Tennyson thus evolved in *In Memoriam* is his final and most consummate treatment of the agitations following the impact of science, and is truly representative of the Victorian frame of mind in that while making for the evidence of science, it nevertheless tries to avoid the spiritual self-destruction and hopeless despondency. It enabled his fellow countrymen to retain or regain belief in Christianity and cultivate the optimistic outlook so characteristic of the age.

At the same time, Tennyson's compromise and the optimism it breathes may be interpreted as a token of the optimism of the average middle class Englishman of the period, an optimism that was not diminishing but was steadily rising throughout the period and reached its apogee about the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Despite the conflicting evidence, then, belief in Christianity and the Christian view of the world and human existence still dominated the characteristic attitudes of the age. The majority were still attuned to believing in a world in which Christianity and God of love are at work, in a world which God planned, and with the immortality of the soul that He secured for man.

Chapter III

Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* and *Songs before Sunrise*

„He was born and baptized in to the Church of rebels" wrote A. C. Swinburne of William Blake in his long essay on the poet (after Lafourcade 1928: II, 350). The sentence might be applied word for word to Swinburne himself. Of the Victorian age he was truly the „enfant terrible" who showed little desire to conform throughout the best part of his life. A great portion of his early poetry was a direct assault on values and attitudes prevalent at the time. While the vehemence of the attack abated with years — a process all too natural — it certainly reached its high point in the two volumes published in the sixties and seventies, i.e., at a time when what is called Victorianism was in full sway. The two collections of poems which separated Swinburne from the Victorian establishment were *Poems and Ballads*, First Series, published in 1866, and *Songs before Sunrise*, published in 1871.

Poems and Ballads is made up of poems composed between 1858 and 1865 (Lafourcade 1928: II, 419). Despite the fact that Swinburne thought of the collection as a book the impression that the work makes on a reader is primarily that of disorder and heterogeneity. The poems do not seem to be arranged according to any particular plan, be it chronological or thematic. No continuity of development can, therefore, be afforded.

A varying degree of success has accompanied the numerous attempts of critics to introduce some order into the volume. Nearly all the divisions suggested by scholars have the virtue of accounting for half of the poems leaving the other half out. Yet C. Lang insists that the sixty two poems constituting the collection should be read „as a whole poem" (1964: 240). Rutland, on the other hand, censures the book heavily when he concludes that there is no book in English literature more unsatisfactory than *Poems and Ballads*; „considered merely as a collection, the absolute lack of coherence and all order is deplorable" (1931: 269).

The earliest grouping, however, suggested by W. M. Rossetti (Hyder 1970: 62) is probably the most satisfactory since it takes into account main currents of influence and feeling. Rossetti distinguishes the following four currents which he sets down in desending order according to their importance in the volume:

1) the Passionately Sensuous,
2) the Classic or Antique,
3) the Heterodox or Religiously Mutinous,
4) the Assimilative or Reproductive in point of literary Form.

The publication of *Poems and Ballads* in 1866 was a major literary scandal. The volume met with a spate of contumely mainly on account of its Passionately Sensuous content; there were at least a dozen poems that contained an outspoken assault on the basic moral ideals of the age. Thus the criticism was almost unanimous in denouncing what was called indecencies and blasphemies.

John Morley in the August 4, 1866, issue of the *Saturday Review* referred to Swinburne's subject matter as „the nameless shameless abominations", and Swinburne's treatment of it „revealed to the world a mind all aflame with the feverish carnality of a schoolboy over the dirtiest passages in Lemprière's". In particular Morley objected to the poet's pagan verses. According to him, Swinburne chose the bestialities and depravities of the Greek world to dwell upon instead of revivifying the grand old pagan conceptions of joy. He went on to censure the poet for lacking scrupulous moderation and sobriety in colour and for introducing extravagant passion which he found to be „mad intoxicated sensuality". At the end of his review he conceded that „the lurid clouds of lust or of fiery despair and defiance never lift to let us see the pure and peaceful and bounteous and kindly aspects of the great landscape of human life" (Hyder 1970: 23, 29).

The review by R. Buchanan in the *Atheneum* of August 4, 1866, attacked Swinburne for the same reasons it attacked the Pre-Raphaelite poets, i.e., for being the „fleshly school of poetry". Buchanan contrasted Swinburne harshly with the chief glory of the English poetry, namely, its „transcendent purity — no less noticeable in the passionate sweetness of Keats and Shelley than in the cold severity of Wordsworth" (Hyder 1970: 30).

It is easy to notice from the foregoing quotations that it was the Passionately Sensuous content which proved particularly offensive. In the storm over the al leged sensuality of *Poems and Ballads*, an aspect repellent to the Evangelical stamp of morality, the Religiously Mutinous content went relatively unnoticed. Neither Morley nor Buchanan seem to have paid much attention to it, their remarks being made in passing, as it were, and their attention being focussed mainly on love poetry. It was only the author of the Unsigned Review of August 4 1866, who found that „the strangest and the most melancholy fact in these strange and melancholy poems is not the absence of faith, but the presence of faith which mocks at itself and takes its pleasure in its degradation". Further on the author observed that „a faith that laughs at itself, that insults its own deities and defiles its own temples — this is the wildest and the dreariest aberration of all" (Hyder 1970: 36).

The reviews bear testimony to the iconoclastic quality of *Poems and Ballads*, with which Swinburne was putting himself at a wide distance from the contemporary attitudes. Primarily he was striking out against the Evangelical type of morality with his outspoken presentation of physical aspects of love. At the same time, by his onslaught on Christianity and God alike, he was also striking out against the religious equilibrium of the period as attained by the representative figures of the age, which he found to be facile and dishonest and which he befittingly ridiculed,

> Thus runs our wise men's song:
> Being dark it must be light
> And most things are so wrong
> That all things must be right,
> God must mean well, he works so ill by this world's laws
> This, when our souls are drowning,
> Falls on them like a benison,
> This satisfies our Browning
> And this delights our Tennyson
> And soothed Britannia simpers in serene applause.
>
> (Lafourcade 1928: II, 163)

Swinburne's religious iconoclasm has two phases, as it were, which loosely can be termed as negative and positive ones, the former being characteristic mainly of *Poems and Ballads*, while the latter of *Songs before Sunrise*. The negative phase shows Swinburne rejecting the Victorian compromise and decrying the evils of Christianity, as well as fulminating against the Christian God while, at the same time, extolling paganism.

The second phase, while continuing the attack on Christianity and repudiating the very idea of a God external to man, asserts a belief in the independent power of man preaching the Religion of Humanity.

The poems contained in *Poems and Ballads* were written, as has already been pointed out, between 1858 and 1865, being thus the immediate product of the years during which Swinburne — like the rest of his contemporaries — was subjected to the pressures of scientific conclusions which were probably instrumental in destroying his early orthodoxy.

Like Thomson, Swinburne was reared in an orthodox house with High Anglican leanings, and the religion he absorbed while at home continued to be vital throughout his youth, as is evidenced by a letter of 1854 which he wrote to his father revealing his joy at having been able to go to Church again after a period of illness and to have Holy Communion,

> I suppose you had Holy Communion today as well as we here [...] I get to church again, which I am very glad of. I mean never if I can to neglect going, as I fear I sometimes did before, when perhaps I might have gone, but was not obliged: now I have been so long without it, with my colds (Lang 1959: I, 1).

His subsequent rejection of orthodoxy was probably effected by scientific conclusions with which he had an opportunity to get familiar already through his association with John Nichol at Oxford. John Nichol was the founder of *Old Mortality* and contributed in no small way to Swinburne's intellectual development. Much of Swinburne's later republicanism can be traced to his influence. Of equal importance was his influence, as well as that of the whole association, on the formation of Swinburne's attitude to religion. Humphrey Hare observes that „there is no doubt that at Oxford his influence was complete and dominating. At his instance that lingering Anglicanism that Swinburne had so far managed to maintain languished and was discarded for ever" (Hare 1949: 33).

Nichol founded *Old Mortality* with the intention defined as,

> Object: stimulating and promoting the interchange of thought among the members on the more general questions of literature, philosophy, science as well as the diffusion of a correct knowledge and critical appreciation of our standard English authors (Hare 1949: 34).

Swinburne thus became acquainted with the advanced thought of the age. The scientific conclusions turned out to be no source of perplexity or doubt to him. In fact, he welcomed them because he found them to introduce harmony and order into the universe. Conversely, it was revealed religion that introduced an element of discord into an otherwise harmonious whole. The letter of August 29, 1874, gives expression to Swinburne's attitude to both. The occasion was Tyndall's Belfast Address on the relation between science and religion.

> My mind is very full just now of Tyndall's magnificent address. Science so enlarged and harmonized gives me a sense as much of rest as of light. No mythology can make its believers feel less afraid or loth to be reabsorbed into the immeasurable harmony with but the change of a single individual note in a single bar of the tune than does the faintest perception of the lowest chord touched in the whole system of things. It is Theism which to me seems to introduce an element — happily a factitious element — of doubt, discord and disorder (Lang 1959: II, 334-335).

The immediate outcome of these years was the rejection of the idea of the immortality of the soul and, consequently, the espousal of the materialist view of life, as is attested to by some poems in the collection, in particular *Dolores* and *Anactoria*, where he says,

> For the crown of your life as it closes
> Is darkness, the fruit thereof dust;
>
> (*Dolores*)

and

> Thee too the years shall cover; thou shall be
> As the rose born of one same blood with thee,
> As a song sung, as a word said, and full
> Flower-wise, and be not any more at all
> Nor any memory of thee anywhere.
>
> (*Anactoria*)

The repudiation of the immortality of the soul, which entailed the dismissal of a belief in a life beyond the grave, had a marked bearing on Swinburne's approach to life on the earth, which he demonstrates in the *Poems and Ballads* period.

It seems that life on the earth suddenly acquired a new significance and a special importance. He felt that if there was no second life man should be able to enjoy the gift of this life. Swinburne thus develops a cult of life with hedonistic leanings, which forms the basis for scorning Christianity on the one hand and exalting paganism on the other.

But there is more to it than pure hedonism. Swinburne deliberately and ostentatiously repudiates the ideal of Christian asceticism, as well as the Evangelical gospel of toil, calling loudly not only for the impulsive enjoyment of life but also indeed for the possibility of living life to the full. He thus feels Christianity with its emphasis on asceticism leaves out something essential and fundamental to the

fulness of life as he understands it. Primarily, it involves torturing the flesh and destroying the beauty of life. Consequently, Swinburne proceeds to assail Christianity for imposing limitations on the development of human personality by discrediting the flesh, and for smothering life by taking away from it the joy of living. Whereas,

> While he lives let a man be glad,
> For none hath joy of his death.
>
> (*A Lamentation*)

Life is transient and the energy of life should be begun before the grave; life should achieve completeness. Christianity is inimical to life; it holds man back from living life to the full, both by preaching asceticism and by its generally other-wordly orientation,

> Nay, for a little we live, and life hath
> mutable wings,
> A little while and we die; shall life not thrive
> as it may?
> For no man under the sky lives twice outliving
> his day.
>
> (*Hymn to Proserpine*)

The idea of Christian religion as inherently hostile to life finds its fullest expression in *Hymn to Proserpine*. The poem is a lengthy monologue spoken by an aged Roman pagan after the proclamation of the Christian faith in Rome, and lamenting the passing away of old gods and the coming of the new ones.

Throughout the poem the imagery supports the central idea: the association of Christianity with sterility and death. By torturing the flesh, Christianity is fundamentally opposed to the principle of life — not only does it take away all the joy of living but it also impedes life itself with its dead weight of asceticism. Hence the predominance of words suggesting barrenness and death-like quality of Christianity: „the days are bare", „the world has grown grey from thy breath", „their new device is barren", „pale Galilean" crop out in the poem, lending a colour to Swinburne's idea of Christianity as a repellent faith of self-denial and ugliness.

This ashen quality of Christianity is then vividly contrasted with the pagan world of

> The laurel, the palms and the paean, the breasts of
> the nymphs in the brake;
> Breasts more soft than a dove's, that tremble with
> tenderer breath;
> And all the wings of the Loves, and all the joy
> before death;
> All the feet of the hours that sound as a single lyre,
> Dropped and deep in the flowers, with strings that
> flicker like fire.

Other threads of imagery also support this central idea of Christianity as a sterile

and dead force, this being contrasted with the energy of life and beauty as characteristic of paganism.

The latter consideration is particularly prominent in images like those quoted above. This led some critics to bring out aesthetic grounds on which Christianity is being assailed by Swinburne. Thus Lafourcade avers, „le Christianisme est attaqué de biais de point de vue strictement esthétique. Les mythes Chrétiens sont laids, les mythes païens beaux. Venus est plus plastique que la Vierge" (1928: II, 481).

Chew follows Lafourcade when he notes that „Swinburne's hostility to Christianity takes the form of the accusation that Christianity is hostile to the principle of Beauty" (1966: 85).

However, as has already been hinted, the attack on Christianity involves much more than aesthetic considerations only, although the latter do play an important part in Swinburne's indictment of Christian religion.

Curtis Dahl, in his essay on the Victorian wasteland, observes that Swinburne actually created the picture of a wasteland in the *Hymn to Proserpine*. Comparing Swinburne's wasteland with that of Eliot, Dahl notes that „the triumph of Christian virtue over pagan sensuality and aestheticism causes the wasteland" (Wright 1961: 38).

> Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world
> has grown grey from thy breath;
> We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on
> the fulness of death.
>
> (*Hymn to Proserpine*)

Hymn to Proserpine becomes thus an accusation of Christian ethics that have devastated both the world and human life. It is Christian religion with its asceticism that was instrumental in stifling life, rendering it barren and fruitless, creating a wasteland. Hence Swinburne's bitter enmity to Christian religion and his exaltation of paganism which is informed with a cult of life.

The fundamental contrast between the two is further reflected in oppositions between images of the Virgin Mary and Venus, which acquire a symbolic relevance. Thus the Virgin was a „slave" and she came „rejected",

> pale and a maiden, and sister to sorrow.

The idea of death and aridity is again prominent while, at the same time, Swinburne tends to associate Christianity with sorrow and suffering,

> And grief is a grievous thing, and a man hath
> enough of his tears:
> Why should he labour, and bring fresh grief to
> blacken his years?

If the Virgin came as a „slave", „pale and barren", Venus came „flushed", arrayed in flowers, „laden with odours", „imperial" — she was the true goddess of love, of Eros, the spirit of life, and

> Bent down unto us that besought her, and earth grew
> sweet with her name.

The world of Christianity being grey, pale and arid is ultimately dead, while in pre-Christian times,

> The roses grew rosier, and bluer the sea-blue
> stream of the bays,
> Ye are fallen, our lords, by what token? we wish
> that ye should not fall
> Ye were all so fair that are broken; and one more
> fair than ye all.
> „Pale Galilean" destroyed all that, therefore,
> Though all men abase them before you in spirit,
> and all knees bend
> I kneel not neither adore you.

Denunciation of Christianity as a system of repression and denial on account of its extreme asceticism is accompanied with the rejection of the idea of the beneficence of God. A handful of poems in the volume show Swinburne attacking the Christian conception of a God of love while, at the same time, attributing to Him the qualities of evil, cruelty and malignance — the idea that he may have derived from both de Sade and Blake (Lafourcade 1928: II, 486).

The poems in which he gives utterance to his unorthodox conception of God are primarily *Anactoria, Félise, A Litany* and, partly *To Victor Hugo*.

Anactoria, which is a long poem written in the form of a monologue, has Sappho dwelling on her passionate love of Anactoria on the one hand and rebelling against God on the other. She reviles God, whom she finds to wrong humanity and crush life. God is a cruel and spiteful being who made man only to subject him to a life of transcience and misery, having denied immortality to him.

> Why hath he made us? What had we all done
> That we should live and loathe the sterile sun,
> And with the moon wax paler as she wanes,
> And pulse by pulse feel time grow through
> our veins?

Sappho outcries against God for giving man a life of evanescence and of the fleetness of passions. At the same time, she shows Him as being who relishes His power and uses it only to crush what He had created,

> But, having made me, he shall not slay,
> Nor slay nor satiate, like those herds of his
> Who laugh and love a little, and their kiss
> Contents them, and their loves are soft and sweet,
> And sure death grasps and gains them with slow feet,
> Love they or hate they, strive or bow their knees
> And all these end; he hath his will of these.

God is a wicked monster taking delight in suppressing and terrorizing humanity who are made to feel his „iron feet" — God is a destroyer,

Is not his incense bitterness, his meat
Murder? his hidden face and iron feet
Hath not man known, and felt them on their way
Threaten and trample all things and every day?
Hath he not sent us hunger? who hath cursed
Spirit and flesh with longing?

A Litany is written in then antiphones, and continues the indictment of God of *Anactoria*, with the emphasis being placed on God's suppression of man. Instead of a priest speaking to the congregation, Swinburne has God addressing mankind, exhibiting his supreme power over man, and relishing in terrorizing mankind,

All the lights of heaven
I will make dark over thee,
All the lights of heaven
I will make dark over thee,
I will send on thy strong men a sword,
On thy remnant a rod,
Ye shall know that I am the Lord.

He is unmerciful to those that have sinned:

As one breaketh and shattereth a reed
I will break and shatter them,

and takes delight in making human life one of misery,

From all thy lovers that love thee
I God will sunder thee.

Humanity addresses God and entreats Him to show mercy and grace, but her prayers remain unanswered, for God places himself beyond man's reach; He is remote and inaccessible

For behold, I God am holy,
I the Lord am strong;
Ye shall seek me and shall not reach me
Till the wine-press be trod.

Throughout the poem, the relationship of God and man is consistently presented in terms of the Lord and a slave, with God exercising His unbridled power to crush and subjugate man. God demands that man be a slave to Him. Those who oppose God and cry for freedom will be „exiled". Both spite and hatred characterize God's attitude to man. In mankind's final hour there will be no mercy shown. Hell will be awaiting them,

Would God it were dark! Thou shalt say;
Would God it were light!
And the sight of thine eyes shall be made
As the burning of fire;
And thy soul shall be sorely afraid

For thy soul's desire.
[...]
Ye whom your lords loved so well,
Putting silver and gold on you,
The inevitable hell
Shall surely take hold on you;

In a poem addressed to Victor Hugo, as well as in *Félise*, the emphasis is again placed on God's oppression of humankind. The poems, however, alternate between the denuciation of God's malignance and His subjugation of mankind, and the indictment of God's supreme indifference to man's lot. God created both the world and man, but He is either cruel and wicked to them, or else shows utter indifference,

We know he hath made us, and is king;
We know not if he care for anything
(*To Victor Hugo*)

The gods, the gods are stronger; time
Falls down before them, all men's knees
Bow, all men's prayers and sorrows climb
Like incense to them;
(*Félise*)

;none
Shall break or take away the rods
Wherewith they scourge us, not as one
That smites a son.
(*Félise*)

„and out of many lands/Have we stretched hands" but the heavens are unmoved by, and remote from, human suffering. God is superemely indifferent to human sorrow and misery

When have they heard us? who hath known
Their faces climbed unto their feet,
Felt them and found them? Laugh nor groan,
Doth heaven remurmur and repeat
Sad sounds or sweet?
(*Félise*)

The gods and the skies being blind and supremely indifferent to man's destiny, Swinburne derides the idea of prayer. Addressing mankind he shows the futility of prayer,

Cry out; they are gods; perchance they sleep;
Cry; thou shalt know what prayers are worth,
Thou dust and earth.
[...]
Pray, till ye feel the exceeding weight

Of God's intolerable scorn,
Not to be borne.

(*Félise*)

Man should not „seek high up in the air", he should not beat always at the gate, but should rid himself of such gods,

Ye must have gods, the friends of men,
Merciful gods, compassionate,
And these shall answer you again.

(*Félise*)

The denunciation of a jealous God of wrath, oppressing mankind and punishing the human race with eternal torture in Hell and demonstrating supreme indifference to human suffering, leads Swinburne to an open revolt against Theism, postulating casting out the tyrant God, and substituting for Him a new god who would be a friend to man. However, before he invokes the deification of man the Religion of Humanity, he again furiously attacks God and Christianity in *Songs before Sunrise*.

In October 1867 Swinburne wrote to W. M. Rossetti; „I think I may some time accomplish a book of political and national poems as complete and coherent in its way as the Châtiments or Drum Taps" (Lang 1959: I, 268).

If *Poems and Ballads* provoked indignant reaction on account of its alleged sensuality, *Songs before Sunrise* was greeted with the outraged cries of blasphemy and Red Republicanism. While the collection revives to a great extent the feelings and themes Swinburne had cultivated at Oxford during his association with Nichol the real inducement to compose the poems came from Mazzini who asked Swinburne to write *Lyrics for the Crusade* in one of his letters to the poet.

Swinburne indeed chose to give lyrics for the Crusade, and the outcome was a volume of thirty eight poems — *Songs before Sunrise*. The collection shows Swinburne's cult of life, which informed his *Poems and Ballads* phase, interacting now with his craving for liberty, resulting in a passionate rebellion against any authority that makes it impossible to live a full life by imposing restrictions on human freedom. His real call is to the removal of all which, shackling the full development of the individual, the nature, the whole body of mankind, hinders the progress of the universe towards complete expression. Chief among these are „creeds" and „crowns". Christianity therefore becomes identified with tyrannical forces as represented by „crowns" and the attack is levelled at both religious and political orthodoxy. In place of Christian Trinity, Swinburne puts forth his own: that of Life, Liberty and Truth.

His enmity to Christianity is now largely due to his espousal of Mazzini's anti-clericalism and is especially bitter in *Before a Crucifix* and *Christmas Antiphones*. The denunciation of Christian oppression, followed by the rejection of Christianity in favour of the Religion of Humanity, becomes the all-prevailing idea, infiltrating more or less intermittently the whole volume and finding its most consummate expression in *On the Downs, Hertha*, and *Hymn of Man*.

As Hyder and Chase observed, however (1937: XXIV), in spite of the outraged cries of blaspemy that greeted the volume, *Songs before Sunrise* expresses, in the main, a positive faith. It is true that Swinburne wages war on Christian religion again, because in his view it was allied with political autocracy and contributed, therefore, to the thraldom of man, which induced him to postulate casting out the Christian God. Yet, ultimately, there is a marked change in tone.

Before a Crucifix and *Christmas Antiphones* are the two poems in which Christianity is again indicted — though for different reasons than in *Poems and Ballads*. The opening image in *Before a Crucifix* is that od haggard women whose' „gaunt backs" have been „bowed by servitude", with „lean limbs that shew the labouring bones/And ghastly mouth that gapes and groans", shifting their loads and praying before a crucifix.

The depiction of the women's misery prepares ground for levelling an attack against Christianity and the Christian God as forces of oppression inflicting pain and suffering on mankind. In this respect, Swinburne avers, Christianity is as tyrannical as kings, with whom it actually joins hands in subjugating mankind. Jesus was sent to the earth apparently to set man free, but ironically, it is the Christian religion that had served for centuries as a means of enthralling man. It stymied his liberty and contributed to making his life one of grief and misery and poverty. Reviewing the history of mankind the poet finds that Christianity brought neither spiritual food nor freedom to humanity,

Hast thou fed full men's starved-out souls,
Hast thou brought freedom upon earth?
Or are there less oppressions done
In this wild world under the sun?

On the contrary, Christianity either conspires with the forces of tyranny or was used by them as a tool of suppression,

The blinding buffets on thine head
On their crowned heads confirm the crown;

The poem clearly divulges Swinburne's espousal of Mazzini's anti-clericalism, which results in the social turn his bitter denunciation of both Christianity and God now takes, both of which he identifies with the Church and priestcraft who have used Christian religion for their own, evil purposes. If God preached by these is one with Christ's God and is dumb and mute to the prayers of man, then it is better for men to dispose of Him,

Come down, be done with, cease, give o'er,
Hide Thyself, strive not, be no more.

Christmas Antiphones continues the central idea of the former poem in representing God as the very incarnation of tyranny, uniting with political autocracy on the earth in their common oppression of humankind; God and Christian religion support the forces of social injustice,

Man on us as God,
God as man hath trod,
Trod us down with might.

Evantually, *Christmas Antiphones* repeats the call to the removal of God and invokes man in His stead, who,

... shall do for you,
Men the sons of man,
What no God would do
That they sought unto
While the blind years ran.

As the poem draws to its close, Swinburne evolves an image of a utopian future in which man will put an end to political and social injustice, introducing instead equality, freedom, and brotherhood of man.

Before a Crucifix and *Christmas Antiphones* become thus primarily, as Stevenson observes, „diatribes against monarchy and autocracy in government, priestcraft and theism in religion, the poet often assailing both at once, since Swinburne regarded them as interchangeable phenomena" (1974: 233).

Christmas Antiphones ended by postulating discarding the Christian God from the world of men in order to regain freedom. And yet the expulsion of God resulted in a momentary emptiness, pointlessness and melancholy.

On the Downs, while ultimately preaching the religion of Man and sharing therefore the all-prevailing idea of *Hertha* and *Hymn of Man*, is, nevertheless, a curious poem to have been written by Swinburne; its opening stanzas are imbued with the sense of aridity and melancholy — the two inhabiting the world bereft of the presence of God.

The poem opens with a description of a desolate landscape, naked and sterile, informed with dejection and hopelessness not unlike that presiding over Thomson's cityscape — the place where God is dead. Thus vast stretches of land and sea are depicted with gloom and melancholy brooding over them,

A faint sky without wind or sun;
A sky like flameless vapour dun;
A valley like an unsealed grave
[...]
Along the long lines of the cliff,
Down the flat sea-line without skiff
Or sail or black-blown fume for mark,
Through wind-worn heads of heath and stiff
Stems blossomless and stark
With dry sprays dark.

At the same time lavish use of words like 'dun', 'grave', 'bare', 'dry', 'blossomless', 'sterile' helps to suggest aridity, nakedness and ultimately death-like quality of the world stripped of the presence of God,

As a queen taken and stripped and bound,
Sat earth, discoloured and discrowned;
As a king's palace empty and dead
The sky was, without light or sound;
And on the summer's head
Were ashes shed.

There is a sense of purposelessness and hopelessness of human existence as the speaker's soul looks up to the skies „as for news/Of comfort that all these refuse;" no „light" can be found to guide it on its way. Thus the opening of the poem is descriptive of yet another wasteland, this time, however, caused by the absence of God. It is only when the realization that

There is no God, O son,
If thou be none

comes that the world springs back to life: the image being symbolic of the necessity of a faith in a god,

And the sun smote the clouds and slew,
And from the sun the sea's breath blew,
And white waves laughed and turned and fled
The long green heaving sea-field through,
And on them overhead
The sky burnt red.

Ultimately *On the Downs* ends with invoking the religion of Humanity, placing emphasis on the destiny of man and welcoming the coming of the age of Man. At the same time, it hails the truth that time brought to man because

... truth makes free
And freedom fills Time's veins with power.

The sense of ecstasy and high expectations informs the poem as it draws to its end,

And with divine triumphant awe
My spirit moved within me saw,
[...]
In windless wastes of skies
Time's deep dawn rise.

As expressive of woe and hopelessness resulting from the expulsion of God, *On the Downs* reveals the plight of the 19th century with its fears of being suddenly bereft of the assurance of God's existence. The poem surprisingly gives utterance to sentiments that were characteristic of the Victorian attitude to crisis in religion, in particular the fear of pointlessness and unmitigated sorrow of human existence and the world if deprived of religion as a guarantee of the moral purposefulness of the universe, as well as of human life.

As a safeguard against the wasteland that would follow the evaporation of religion which he so effectively depicted, Swinburne postulates the deification of

Man. It is not so much, therefore, a godless universe that the poet finally posits as a Godless one with Man in His stead. *On the Downs* may be, therefore, interpreted as expressive of the will to believe; having discarded both Christianity and the idea of God external to man, Swinburne's will brings him eventually to the threshold of Positivism.

On the Downs embodies then a trend that became increasingly important as an alternative to the Christian religion which was being ousted.

For another poem deifying Man, Swinburne chose Hertha, the Earth-goddess of Teutonic mythology, embodying the forces of growth and fertility. By contrast with the changeable world of men and things, Hertha appears to be unchangeable, indestructible and everlasting, and is the soul of the world,

> Out of me God and Man;
> I am equal and whole:
> God changes, and man, and the form of them bodily,
> I am the soul.

And yet man has deserted her, betrayed her by making prayers to the God of his fashion; man has enslaved himself. Hence an appeal to him to summon all his strength and free himself from fetters, develop fully his might and live life to the full, be conscious of his God-like power and become God himself, emerging thus from darkness into light,

> A creed is a rod,
> And a crown is of night,
> But this thing is God,
> To be man with thy might,
> To grow straight in the strength of thy spirit, and
> live out thy life as the light.

Hertha is there to save man, to assist him, and she implores man to give himself to her, and free his life of all bondage.

> The free life of thy living,
> Be the gift of it free;
> Not as a servant to lord, nor as master to slave, shalt
> thou give thee to me.

Once the creeds and gods are discarded Humanity will strive forward, for man „shall live and not die" if only he should set himself free and partake of Hertha's spirit. She then prophesies the death of man-made God whom Truth will kill,

> Thought made him and breaks him,
> Truth slays and forgives;

The poem ends with a positivist anticipation of the twilight of man-made God and the birth of a new man delivered from self-imposed chains, finally in harmony with Hertha.

This positivist accent with which *Hertha* ended receives its more emphatic treatment in the *Hymn of Man* which is the crowning poem of *Songs before Sunrise*. The poem was written „During the Session in Rome of the Oecumenical Council" (1870), and the papal decrees of the Session were the immediate provocation of Swinburne's reaction.

Like *Hertha*, it is inspired by the revolt against Christian dogmas as well as by the cult of life interacting with the poet's love of freedom, and is a continuation of the argument of *Hertha*. Swinburne speaks about the futility of asking for the answers to the perennial questions about man's origin and that of God, because no such answers can be obtained. God will not and cannot help for he was created by man for his sake only. If there is a God, he is „the substance of men which is man" — no transcendent deity but a pantheistic spirit that informs the world and is most clearly manifest in man. Existence is a whole, there is no dichotomy between the body and spirit for these constitute one entity and man is „the glory of godhead",

> With such fire as the stars of the skies are
> the roots of his heart are fed.

There is therefore enough power in man's spirit to overcome the adverse influence of God and shake off the chains with which man has bound himself by introducing Christianity and bowing.

> To a master whose face is a ghost's;

What follows is a vehement denunciation of God's cruelty, malignance and tyranny for which God is finally judged by man freed from the trammels of mental tyranny. Having attained the spiritual maturity Man now comes into his own; he has no longer need of the „God of his fashion" since,

> The sun rearisen is his priest, and the heat
> thereof hallows his head.

Man's own soul is now a law to his soul, and his mind is a light to his mind, and

> His thought takes flight for the centre where-
> through it hath part in the whole;
> The abysses forbid it not enter; the stars
> make room for the soul.
> Space is the soul's to inherit to inherit; the night is
> hers as the day;
> Lo, saith man, this is my spirit; how shall not
> the world make way?

Swinburne then proceeds to ask God and his priests with derision,

> Who are ye that would bind him with curses and
> blind him with vapour of prayer?
> Your might is as night that disperses when light
> is alive in the air.

Finally there is an image of God stripped of all his attributes of power with his tyrannical empire falling to pieces,

> His red King's raiment is ripped from him naked,
> thy death is upon thee, O Lord.
> And the love-song of earth as thou diest resounds
> through the wind of her wings —
> Glory to Man in the highest! for Man is the master of things!

Like previous poems, *Hymn of Man* is iconoclastic in its repudiation of Christianity and the Christian God, representing both as forces of tyranny and oppression holding man in bondage. At the same time, it preaches emphatically the creed of Positivism in the sense that it welcomes the arrival of the age of Truth and knowledge that man attained: scientific, positive Truth by which man can discover the true nature of things and reestablish his relationship with the world by discarding the mental fetters which prevented his full growth.

Man is installed as the object of worship and the poem celebrates again the Positivist Religion of Humanity.

Compared with *Poems and Ballads, Songs before Sunrise* represents a complete change in the tone of the poet, of which he himself was aware. After pointing out that he had made „the All-Mother a good republican" who says, „I have need of you free/As your mouths of mine air/That my heart may grow greater within me, beholding the fruits of me fair", he added, „This much I think may be reasonably supposed and said without incurring the (to me, most hateful charge of optimism, a creed which I despise as much as ever did Voltaire" (Lang 1959: II, 80, 85).

And yet, it is impossible not to charge Swinburne with an optimism as facile and as emphatic as that of his contemporaries. What this enraptured song conveys is primarily a sense of supreme confidence in the power of humanity, and in the utopian future of the world.

Chapter IV

Thomson's Poetry of 1855-1874

James Thomson (B. V.), the second poet of that name (not to be confused with the 18th century poet of the same name, author of the *Seasons*), was not a great figure in the main current of Victorian poetry. He never achieved public recognition as a poet, but remained obscure throughout his life. Undoubtedly, one of the main reasons accounting for his relative obscurity was the fact that Thomson's poetry stands in direct opposition to the predominant attitudes and high expectations of the age. In particular, it contrasts sharply with the tide of optimism which was at the flood, being at the same time at variance with the intellectual structure of the age in its adoption of a materialist view of the world which followed Thomson's rejection of belief in God and Christianity.

Yet his early poetry is much representative of the age than that of Swinburne. In a number of poems Thomson will be found to give utterance to sentiments that have a close parallel in the poetry of Arnold, Clough and Tennyson. His poetry of the fifties testifies to the same spiritual perplexity caused by the disruption of certitudes and a mounting doubt under the impact of science. Indeed, up to a certain point his case was akin to that of his disillusioned contemporaries, as well as to Swinburne.

He was reared in a strictly Protestant home, his mother, Sarah Thomson, being a follower of Irving, imbued his childhood with Presbyteriam theology, and the religion with which he was invested at home continued to be vital throughout the fifties, although it was then that the first symptoms of disintegration began to occur, when he confronted the new industrial civilization as represented by the city from which positive religious belief is vanishing.

His early poetry shows Thomson brooding on the life actually led by men in the city and decrying the evils of the new civilization which he holds responsible for the withdrawal of God, only to give way to doubts and conflicts resulting from his emotional need of faith and the impossibility to retain it in the face of the evidence of science. Like Swinburne, he came to deride the kind of resolution attained by Tennyson — finding it intellectually precarious — while the words used to describe Tennyson's *Vision of Sin* as „very pretty and clear and silly and truthless" may be taken to reveal his attitude in this respect too.

Sharing with other Victorians that earnest approach to the problem, he found himself unable to retain his belief and loathing intellectual dishonesty, he was consequently led to embrace an attitude of whole-hearted materialism, refusing to see

any power transcending physical world. The loss of belief, however, engendered a pessimistic outlook which was further strengthened by Thomson's disillusionment with man and the industrial civilization as represented by the city. In fact, what seems to be of particular importance in his case is his recognition of the city and the Godless universe as being inseparably connected with each other.

His poetry is to an unusual degree a city poetry and the vision of this new world as it emerges from his poetry strangely contrasts with the Victorian high expectations. Both his experiences and his frustrations as a city-dweller, the awareness of the interdependence of the emergence of the city together with the withdrawal of God, and the disruption of traditional assumptions, are thus responsible for his pessimistic vision.

Thomson's poetry is usually divided into three periods (Vachot 1964), with the first covering the years 1852-1861 — the period of apprenticeship, the second, 1861-1874 — the period of maturity, and the third, 1881-1882 — late period. For the purposes of this study, however, a new division will be adopted which corresponds to the stages in the development of Thomson's vision of the new world.

The poetry of the first period, which includes poems written between 1852 and 1857, introduces the city and demonstrates an attempt on Thomson's part to apprehend his time. The poems betray primarily Thomson's distrust of the new civilization, and become a severe criticism of industrial civilization on the one hand, and a „dirge for the mighty creed outworn", which is made to die by the arrogance of the age, on the other. Thomson vehemently denounces the material goals of the new civilization, which he finds to endanger the spiritual welfare of man by expelling God from the world of human beings. His criticism has a close parallel in that of Matthew Arnold. In fact, much of Thomson's inspiration at that time came from Arnold, but whereas Arnold bemoans the effects of the new life on an individual, Thomson warns men against the effects of „modern march of thought" which will result in alienating man from God or God from man unless stringent remedies are applied. His poetry is expressive of the fears of a sensitive man who finds the ties between man and God to be severed by man's own presumptuousness, resulting in the withdrawal of God from the world of men.

Thus the poems of this period are all united by Thomson's awareness of the process that J. Hillis Miller pointed out in *The Disappearance of God*, where he observed that,

> The industrialization and urbanization of man means the progressive transformation of the world. Everything is changed from its natural state into something useful and meaningful to man. Everywhere the world mirrors back to man his own image, and nowhere can he make vivifying contact with what is not human. Even the fog is not a natural fog, rolling in from the sea, but is half soot and smoke. The city is the literal representation of the progressive dehumanization of the world. And where is there room for God in the city? Though it is impossible to tell whether man excluded God by building great cities, or whether the cities have been built because God has disappeared, in any case the two go together (1963: 5).

With Thomson, it is the city that expels God. *The Approach to St Paul's*, written in 1855, depicts the city streets, noisy and busy, swarming with crowds of people whose only concern is the pursuit of material goals. The poet finds himself appalled and helpless before this new phenomenon of a society pursuing its wordly goals of ambition or pleasure or wealth, in supreme indifference to spiritual values. The lines are especially remarkable for their sensitiveness to the influence of the industrial age upon man's spiritual life: the blind pursuit of money, absorption in dreams of opulence, desire to amass riches — all bring about man's spiritual death. Being too much preoccupied with their new goals, men cannot spare a single moment to look around; their blindness to the beauty of the external world is symbolic of their spiritual death.

> Eastwards through busy streets I lingered on;
> Jostled by anxious crowds, who, heart and brain,
> Were so absorbed in dreams of Mammon-gain,
> That they could spare no time to look upon
> The sunset's gold and crimson fires.

They pass by St Paul's but take no heed of it, its cupola with a cross towers amid the din and uproar of the new life, silent and forgotten because no longer desired. Superfluous, because it only hampers the modern march toward „arrogant opulence",

> : thus Religion towers
> Above this sordid, restless life of ours.

This is also undeniably true of *Suggested by M. Arnold's Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*: the ideas and feelings central to the *Approach* have been again transposed into this poem, showing Thomson setting himself against the negative powers which he found so menacingly in the ascendant.

The poem invites special consideration for two reasons: it is a dirge in the Arnoldian spirit, bemoaning the materialist goals of the modern civilization; at the same time, it is scornful of man's presumptuousness in the Positivist spirit. It expresses Thomson's apprehension at the industrial civilization which leads to the destruction of God and the disintegration of the Christian religion. It laments the arrival of the new age, „whose Life—march is a funeral knell", because Religion is no longer divine nor spiritually active, except to some, who cling to it either because they remember how by its light generations lived in the past, or else, because they „win wealth and power/And honours serving at Its shrine". The poem becomes truly a

> Dirge for a mighty Creed outworn —
> Its spirit fading from the earth,

The body of the poem gradually divulges the idea of God's retreat from the human world, his presence being no longer experienced by man. Christianity died as no more fit to guide the new, noisy, centrifugal, ignoble society on its way to material prosperity. Men, presumptuous in their new confidence, take no heed, believing themselves to be fit guides. Fooled by their material successes, they do not realize that they are not fit to lead for,

If He thus died as no more fit
[...]
He was at least Divine; and none
Of human souls can lead it on.

Thomson inveighs against the pride of the age which is responsible for the new world

fast losing all
Earth has of heaven; bereft of faith,
And living in Eternal Death.

Denouncing the crass materialism of the age on the one hand, Thomson scorns — in lines directly opposite to Swinburne's — the immense pride of men who

fell as gods in our own hearts;
Seeming to conquer Time and Space;

and yet

are all too slavish, too unmanned,
For Conquerors of the Promised Land.

The new petty life of material goals has resulted in breaking the connections with God, and men have become spiritually dead.

God turns to Mammon at our cry,
Our souls wealth-crushed, dross-stifled lie.

And yet men are

loudly boastful of such life.
Blinded by our material might,
Absorbed in frantic worldly strife,
Unconscious of the utter Night
Whose palpable and monstrous gloom
Is gathering for our spirits' tomb.

If men cannot hear the voice of God anymore, it is because they have become deaf, and not because God is mute and dumb.

Thomson considers the materialistic trend of the new civilization as mortally inimical to man in the sense that it destroys the most valuable part of man by impoverishing him spiritually. The fever of modern life, with its worship of Mammon, infects man and the aridity of vital feelings and values is the main cause of the decay of religion. For if God is obscure, it is only to the "gross and earth-bound sense",

The pure can see Him perfect-pure;
The strong feel Him, Omnipotence,
The wise, All-wise;

Proclaiming indirectly the necessity of Christianity for human spiritual health, at the same time, Thomson is indignant about the complacency of the age amd men's folly to disown God and believe that they themselves can act as gods. However „good and wise" they can be, they do not possess the power of God, for no man can ever rise to it. Therefore,

Vainly ye choose you Saviours now
Of men,-

The Doom of a City, dated in 1857, is a poem in which the city plays a prominent part, and points forward to later developments that received fuller treatment in Thomson's later poetry. It is a long allegory which presents an inhabitant of a city who sets off at night on a long voyage that takes him to another city, a nightmare desert city, petrified and empty. While in this city, which strangely resembles the one he left behind, the speaker hears God delivering judgments on the dwellers of the doomed city, whereupon he returns to his native city with a message to his fellow inhabitants.

The poem carries a weight of criticism that is mainly social and shows Thomson being outraged by the suffering which society inflicts on its humbler members and by the waste of human material. It also gives his own view of the successes his countrymen prided themselves on in exposing readily the ugly facts about industrial civilization as embodied in the city. In particular, the poem is concerned with the fatty degenation of the soul, which had put English society on what was, according to Thomson, its deathbed unless some remedies were applied.

It opens with a sinister image of the city at night: the image symbolic of this Life-in- Death as characteristic of the city,

I paced through desert streets, beneath the gleam
Of lamps that lit my trembling life alone;
Like lamps sepulchral which had slowly burned
Through sunless ages, deep and undiscerned,
Within a buried City's maze of stone;
Whose peopleing corpses, while they ever dream
Of birth or death — of complicated life
Whose days and months and years
Are wild with laughters, groans and tears,
As with themselves and Doom
They wage, with loss or gain, incessant strife,
Indeed, lie motionless within their tomb,

The poem reiterates thus the idea of spiritual emptiness which results from the age destroying God and religion,

Thy Church has long been becoming the Fossil of
Faith
The Form of dry bones thou hast, but where are
the blood and breath?

while expressing, at the same time, indignance about the „arrogant selfishness" of the rich and the materialism of the age. Towards the end of the poem Thomson assumes a prophetic role, prophesying the downfall of the new civilization unless men cleanse their infected souls,

> For fall thou wilt, thou must, so proud as thy
> state is now,
> Thou and thy sisters all, scarce better or worse
> than thou,
> If ye do not repent, and cleanse each one her
> heart
> From the foulness circling with its blood to
> poison every part.

All these poems that cluster together show Thomson standing apart and appalled at the fever of modern life infecting the spirit of man. They are also descriptive of the poet's awareness that life of material goals is a devalued life, the latter resulting from the rise of the modern, urban, industrial society which is responsible for the decay of religion.

Yet, however appalled by the turn civilization was taking, Thomson was unwilling at this stage to abandon his hopes of humanity that can still be reformed and find its way back to God and install religion in its proper place.

The second period in Thomson's poetry is marked by a complete reversal of position from that of a man deploring the complacency of the age, which brought about the withdrawal of God and religion, to that of a man subject to doubts and perplexities akin to those experienced by his outstanding contemporaries. The period extends from 1857 to 1867 and comprises a decade which saw Thomson abandoning the hopes of his early period while experiencing the crisis of faith himself. Such poems as *Lines on His 23rd Birthday* (1857), *A Recusant* (1858),*A Real Vision of Sin* (1859), *Mater Tenebrarum* (1859), *Sonnet* (1859), *To Our Ladies of Death* (1860) and *Vane's Story* (1864) divulge several phases of the turmoil caused by the conflicting evidence of science. Their particular value lies in showing Thomson undergoing the same spiritual breakdown that was characteristic of the period. However, while being in a way typical of the age, Thomson, at the same time, separates himself from the age by denying the intellectual validity of the Tennysonian compromise while professing unbelief and pessimism instead.

The turning point was the year 1857: *Lines on His 23rd Birthday* are clearly indicative of this lassitude and indecision which accompanied the dissipation of tradition alfaith. The anguish of uncertainty resulting from the conflict between the intellectual honesty on th : one hand, and the emotional need on the other, will be found to permeate the whole body of the poem. The poem is an early instance in the whole chain of poems written in the late fifties and early sixties, testifying to Thomson's predicament of a sensitive Victorian caught in a dilemma between his inner need of faith and the evidence of science which makes this faith intellectually untenable.

In lines strongly reminiscent of his spiritual mentor Shelley, Thomson addresses the West Wind and entreats it to inspire him with strength to overcome his doubts and fears and regain the former state of security,

> O pure West Wind, strong life-breath of the day,
> Inspire my wasted heart with strength and hope!
> Sweep thou its grievous doubts and fears away.

The battle of the heart and intellect is reflected in the lines descriptive of the poet's doubts, which alternate with lines professing an assurance in the purposefulness of life,

> What of the ends, means, issues of its trip
> Knows holy vessel or Brazilian barque?
> Through storm and calm it sees its best to float;
> For what? He knows who steers and rules the boat.

The poet's craving for religions certainties becomes paramount when he complains about wisdom being the source of his turbulence, for obviously he is unable to square his intellectual convictions with the emotional need of faith. The dilemma receives its fuller treatment again in the sonnet originally entitled *Heresy*, later *A Recusant*, which was also conceived in this troubled mood during the following year.

The octave provides the scenery depicting the poet alone in the countryside, sad and weary, „yearningly gazing" upon the Church's spire. The images of the church

> Lifted mysterious through the twilight glooms,
> Dissolving in the sunset's golden fire,
> Or dim as slender incense morn by morn
> Ascending to the blue and open sky,

lend the scenery an aura of peace and stability which contrasts sharply with the „forlorn heart" of the poet, void of the verities of the past and stricken with doubts. He would like to be able to come to church again and share its message with „all the others whom we love so well", hoping that,

> All disbelief and doubt might pass away,
> All peace float to us with its Sabbath bell.

Yet, sadly, he is conscious of the futility of his dream, which is a dream only, for his earnest zeal for Truth excludes the possibility of holding on to old dogmas:

> Conscience replies, There is but one good rest,
> Whose head is pillowed upon Truth's pure breast.

The poem thus poignantly defines this characteristically Victorian wistful longing for certainties of the past with a nostalgia of someone whose intellectual honesty renders his more immediate convictions untenable, who cannot, however, resign himself emotionally to the new situation.

The central theme of the agonized poems written in 1859, which all cluster

together, is that of the immortality of the soul and of an afterlife. *The Sonnet* („Through foulest fogs") gradually reveals the poet's mental plight. The octave skilfully builds up the atmosphere of hopelessness and terror. The main images of „foulest fogs" „midnight gloom" and „sulphurous cannon clouds" paint a desolate and sinister landscape, being suggestive of the „darkling plain" of the outside world as well as of his own soul in its vain search of „God, the Love-Supreme, All-wise, All-good".

The poem lays bare the spiritual anguish of the poet longing for security and admitting failure to find it. For, instead of the „Love-Supreme, All-wise, All-good",

> A dark and awful shadow seems to brood,
> A numbing, infinite, eternal gloom:
> I tremble in the consciousness of Doom.

The conflict between his emotional willingness to retain the former beliefs and the evidence of intellect inspires much of his poetry of the period and provides the core of *Mater Tenebrarum*.

The poem was also conceived in this questioning mood and is expressive of Thomson's faltering in his grasp upon the traditional belief in immortality of the soul. The opening lines present the poet „Sleepless in anguish" in the „endless night", crying out from his bed to his dead beloved to come down and comfort him by assuring him of the existence of an after-life

> and give me one kiss,
> One tender and pitying look of thy tenderest eyes,
> One word of solemn assurance and truth that
> the soul with its love never dies.

However, in view of his imploring being left unanswered, the poet is again driven to express emphatically an avowal of disbelief.

> She is dead, she is utterly dead; for her life
> would hear and speed
> To the wild imploring cry of my heart, that cries
> in its dreadful need.

This bitter realization prompts a vision of directionless and futile existence, governed by blind forces functioning mechanically and utterly indifferent to the fate of man. The poet finds himself appalled and helpless before the appearance of Doom, while averring that life is only a chain of.

> Anguish and grief and sin, terror, disease and
> despair.

He thus seeks oblivion to still the painful ferment of thought and feeling when concluding,

> Why throw not off this life, this garment of torture
> I wear
> And go down to sleep in the grave in everlasting rest?

Yet the sudden remembrance of the purity and beauty of his beloved's soul induces him to reverse his position again and profess an assurance of the soul's immortality,

> For thy pure and gentle and beautiful soul, it must
> immortal be.

The poem thus alternates between an avowal of disbelief and an avowal of belief, the latter being based mainly on his innermost convictions. The lines are also indicative of Thomson's unwillingness to cast aside his belief at this point of his life; the poem clearly betrays his desperate need of faith to which he clings despite the conflicting evidence. Eventually the agony of doubt and fear is resolved in an assertion of the reality beyond the immediate one.

Yet, his hold on it was precarious. *A Real Vision of Sin*, written the same year, amply bears witness to the renewal of perplexities which are again resolved, but in a way that bears little relation to the closing assertion of *Mater Tenebrarum*.

According to a note pencilled at the head of the original manuscript, *A Real Vision of Sin* was written „in disgust at Tennyson's" which is very pretty, and clever and silly and truthless" (after Byron 1965: 71). It might be argued that the poem was written not only in disgust at Tennyson's but at Thomson's as well: it marks a complete breakaway with former ideas and anticipates later development of the poet's attitudes which put him in direct opposition to the religious compromise as effected by Tennyson and others.

A Real Vision of Sin primarily ridicules Tennyson, being a recoil from his unbearable optimism. The poem depicts two old beggars who have reached the very depths of existence and finally resolve to commit suicide. The poem is the first of a group of poems comprising, in addition, *Melencolia of A. Dürer, To Our Ladies of Death*, and *Vane's Story*. All of these poems are united by being expressive of Thomson's rejection of a belief in God and Christianity, which is followed by an adoption of a strictly materialist interpretation of the world and human existence. This conception leads him to discarding the notion of the immortality of the soul and to denying any meaning or value to life.

A Real Vision of Sin expresses with great force the idea of life as a meaningless drudgery, fruitless and futile that leads to a grave only: all future life is a sham. The poem has thus been conceived as a counterpart of Tennyson's poem, laying bare the shallowness of Tennyson's vision. The vision put forth by Thomson is entirely pessimistic of both life and the human being, with the two beggars being descriptive of the wretchedness of human condition. The poet disowns the idea of men's free will and the idea of purposefulness of human life: man „works out God's will" regardless of what he does — for there is no God's will nor His interest in man. Man is thus reduced to a mere mechanism functioning irrespective of his will in accordance with the mechanical laws of the universe, performing tasks that have no meaning at all.

> But I am working out God's will
> Alike when active and when still;

And work we good or work we ill,
We never work against His will.

(*Vane's Story*)

The passage flatly denies both the notion of the benevolent God and the value of human life, or of human activities performed in this life, since God is remote — if He exists at all — and oblivious to man's endeavours.

In order to suggest total meaninglessness of human existence and of human being alike, Thomson frequently employs the motif of a pantomime or a card game, the two being suggestive of the lack of free will on the part of man, as well as the futility of his efforts. For man was made to play a role in „this bewildering Pantomime"

Whose scenes and acts fill Space and Time
The laws seem evermore the same,
The operation of the laws
Reveals no variance in the cause.

(*Vane's Story*)

The vision, then, which is evolved is that of a powerless man in the hands of powerful Fate, which reduced man to a mere meaningless automaton living for the sake of Fate's laughter. Human existence is reduced to a trivial repetition of an endless recurrent process in which man has been robbed of his human prerogatives. The realization prompts Thomson again to invoke the Lady of Death to put an end to his sorrow,

I close my eyes and calm my panting breath,
And yearn for Thee, divinely tranquil Death,
To come and soothe away my bitter pain.

(*To Our Ladies of Death*)

The symbol of this melancholy vision of life is, appropriately enough, *Melencolia of A. Dürer,* the image which Thomson employs to contain his pessimism. Melencolia is symbolic of man and of the human condition,

Lo, she has set herself with fierce intent
Of never-quailing will, and desperate pride,
[...]
And she has found but Fate — God petrified
And not a single word or sign can wring
From the tremendous, dumb, blind, crushing Thing.

(*Melencolia of A. Dürer*)

The poems written in 1864 and the latter part of the sixties follow Thomson's arrival in London, a fact of manifold importance. Primarily, however, the fact is significant because Thomson found himself for the first time in an intellectual milieu which was responsible for his re-education. By the end of 1863 Thomson appears to have been divested of all the remnants of his former outlook and his old world picture was completely shattered. There are no more gropings but a firm declaration,

I beseech no more
That one and one make up four,
When one and one are my assets
And four the total of my debts.
Nor do I now with fervour pray
To cast no shadow in broad day;
Nor even ask (as I asked once)
That laws sustaining worlds and suns
In their eternal path should be
Suspended, that to pleasure me
Some flower I love, — now drooping dead
May be empowered to lift its head.

(*Vane's Story*)

Surprisingly enogh, the final collapse of his former world picture resulted in two diametrically opposed solutions Thomson set forth in the poetry of the late sixties.

Initially he seems to have reacted to the crumbling of his faith in a manner reminiscent of Swinburne. The issue at stake was an attitude to life after the Christian view had been rejected. Having discarded the belief in the soul's immortality and the benevolence of God, Thomson unexpectedly evolved a philosophy which can loosely be labelled as hedonism.

Holding, that because the human being was but a segment of the universal life force, he had, therefore, only one duty — to live as fully as possible. This idea seems to be accompanied by another, namely, that due to a belief in the immortality of the soul and the other-worldly orientation of Christianity in general, man had not dared to live a true life. Now, finally, man was freed from past bondage: he was free to live a full life, to burn with pure aspiration.

This philosophy, so unexpected and so alien to Thomson in view of his earlier poetry, crops up in a number of poems written in the mid-sixties. For example, *Sunday up the River*, written in 1865, asserts joyously,

Let my voice ring out over the earth
Through all the grief and strife,
With a golden joy in a silver mirth:
Thank God for life!

Sunday at Hampstead, written the same year, is in the same vein,

We will rush ever on without fear:
Let the goal be far, the flight be fleet!
For we carry the Heavens with us, Dear,
While the earth slips from our feet!

Man should clutch at life given to him and „pitch it high", for what can be achieved through pining away one's life? One's life, the only life given to us, will be lost, hence the advice given in the 1866 *Philosophy,* the moral of which is,

If Midge will pine and curse its hours away
Because Midge is not Everything for-aye,

Poor Midge thus loses its one summer day,
Loses it all — and winneth what, I pray?

The hedonism of these years, however, was destined to be a short-lived affair, and was fated to be abandoned in favour of the pessimistic vision of life that informs the greatest poem Thomson wrote: *The City of Dreadful Night*. He himself admitted that „Striving to sing glad songs, I but attain/Wild discords sadder than Grief's saddest tune" (*Sonnet*).

The City of Dreadful Night is a sequel to his earlier poetry combining all the strands of thought into one final vision of life for which the city again provides the background. The poem arose primarily out of Thomson's own frustrations as a city inhabitant, and reflects his bitterness and his rejection of the Christian interpretation of the world. At the same time, as has already been pointed out, the poem forms a natural sequel to those strands of thought that characterized his early response to the crisis in religion, developing them thus to their logical ending.

While the poem is indicative of that earnest approach characteristic of the age in its attempt to slave the issue, nevertheless, it refuses to evolve a reconstruction of the world on a new basis. Instead, it insists on a strictly materialist interpretation — based on the findings of science — thereby evolving a vision of a mechanism indifferent to man, which

... grinds him some slov years of bitter breath
Then grinds him back into eternal death.

(VIII)

Again the city provides the setting and a vehicle through which his ultimate vision is projected. It is an ironic sequel to the tone of hope and expectations for the better that characterized the response of Tennyson's — and Swinburne's — as well as Thomson's own poetry of the fifties, asserting firmly disbelief and pessimism.

Thus George Meredith thought the poem to be „a poetical offence of dark monotonousness", and the practical effect of the poem to be that of „a litany of the vaults below" (Dobell 1899: XV) while Dobell himself observed that *The City* „compels us to sympathize with moods alien to our disposition" (1899: XVII), presumably having in mind not only his own but also the Victorian mood in general.

The opening lines of *The City* immediately set Thomson in opposition to the Victorian compromise and to the high expectations of Positivism of the Swinburne type alike,

Surely I write not for the hopeful young
[...]
Or pious spirits with a God above them
To sanctify and glorify, and love them
Or sages who foresee a heaven on earth.

(*Proem*)

The city becomes an appropriate vehicle through which to project the new vision in that it links this poem with the early poetry where the city was also prominent, while the lines breathed a note of hope — becoming thus an inverted vision of his former one. At the same time, the idea that the city and the crisis in religion go together is again emphasized.

There seem to be two sides to the poem which are constantly mingled: one is a very concrete picture of London with its dark streets and the river; however, this is simultaneously transformed into a fantastic and imaginary world, a limbo of the lost, set in a symbolic wasteland and peopled with equally symbolic phantom-like figures. These two aspects are already emphasized in an image of the city found in Section I,

The City is of Night: perchance of Death,
But certainly of Night: for never there
Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath
After the dewy dawning's cold grey air,
The moon and stars may shine with scorn or pity;
The sun has never visited the city,
For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.
[...]
A river girds the city west and south,
The main north channel of a broad lagoon,
Regurging with the salt tides from the mouth;
Waste marshes shine and glister to the moon
[...]
Great piers and causeways, many noble bridges,
Connect the town and islet suburbs strewn.

The metaphoric process is further extended by making London a symbol of all the great cities of commerce and politics, characteristic of the new civilization which dooms man to an existence of frustration and futility. The urban images shape themselves into an allegory which begins to express a pessimistic vision of the universe and man alike,

And now at last authentic word I bring,
Witnessed by every dead and living thing:
Good tidings of great joy for you, for all:
There is no God; no Fiend with name divine
Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

This little life is all we must endure,
The grave's most holy peace is ever sure,
We fall asleep and never wake again;
[...]
I find no hint throughout the universe
Of good or ill, of blessing or of curse;
I find alone Necessity Supreme.

(XIV)

Thus in this city where God is dead "a strange parody of daily life goes under the reign of terror, 'the lawless law' of the king Death-in-Life: figures walk the streets

and squares aimlessly, a speaker stands addressing an empty square" (Foakes 1958: 172). The main images are therefore those of night, silence, sepulchres and necropolis, being symbolic of the Death-in-Life which reigns in the city. It is a terrifying vision of the city as a wasteland where,

> The street-lamps burn amidst the baleful glooms,
> Amidst the soundless solitudes immense
> Of rangèd mansions dark and still as tombs.
> The silence which benumbs or strains the sense
> Fulfils with awe the soul's despair unweeping:
>
> (I)

Consequently, Thomson's city has been stripped of all its characteristic attributes such as the noise and bustle of life, invoking night and darkness and silence in their stead, which are suggestive of the abnormality of life in the city.

Yet, although the City is of Night, it is not really one of Sleep: there is a strange life going on in it, strange phantom-like beings appear in the streets, and are virtually indistinguishable from real men: phantoms are like men and men are like phantoms. Their insanity and wretchedness stem from the pointlessness of their existence in the city, the latter having deprived them of the three precious values in human life which, indeed, make life worthwhile: Faith, Hope and Love.

Since both spiritual values and spiritual security have been taken away from man, life can only result in an aching and inescapable futility, mechanical and aimless, as is suggested by Thomson's image of a watch, which becomes an ironic comment on the 18th century argument from design employed now to demonstrate the futility of human existence in a Godless world,

> Take a watch, erase
> The signs and figures of the circling hours,
> Detach the hands, remove the dial-face:
> The works proceed until run down, although
> Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go.
>
> (II)

Having deprived man of spiritual values the city has virtually destroyed him; it has doomed him to Death-in-Life. There is no escape,

> Escape seems hopeless to the heart forlorn,
> Can Death-in-Life be brought to life again?
>
> (V)

Ultimately neither the universe nor man has any meaning. The latter is a wretched being, miserable and impotent, and the former is a machanism of supreme indifference and futility devoid of any moral purpose,

> The world rolls round for ever like a mill,
> It grinds out death and life and good and ill;
> It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.
>
> (VIII)

Similarly pointless and mechanical is human life; there is no immortality of the soul, and this life is what little life man was granted,

> And this sole chance was frustrate from my birth
> A mockery and a delusion,
> Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss.
>
> (XVI)

The City then negates both the Christian assertion of the Tennyson type and the Positivist assertion of the Swinburne type. It builds up another wasteland presided over by the figure of Dürer's Melencolia, a fit symbol of the futility of the universe and of human existence alike,

> : and throned there
> An Image sits, stupendous, superhuman,
> The bronze colossus of a wingèd Woman,
> Upon a graded granite base foursquare.
> [...]
> Baffled and beaten back she works on still,
> Weary and sick of soul she works the more,
> Sustained by her indomitable will:
> The hands shall fashion and the brain shall pore,
> And all her sorrow shall be turned to labour,
> Till Death the friend-foe piercing with his sabre
> That mighty heart of hearts ends bitter war.

The City of Dreadful Night is Thomson's final word on faith, the universe, man and human existence. Fear of intellectual dishonesty and dedication to Truth precluded the poet from working out a compromise but compelled him to embrace a materialist interpretation of the world. In the main, the poem recapitulates much of Thomson's previous ideas, being at the same time, the most consummate expression of his final vision: a nightmare sense of sterility and futility.

Conclusions

When studied with respect to the prevalent attitudes of the High Noon of Victorianism involving questions of faith and optimism, Swinburne's and Thomson's poetry of 1855-1875 is of particular interest: it conclusively demonstrates that the process of disintegration of Victorianism was already setting in during the full flowering of this period. While suggestive of their personal enmity to the major attitudes of the period, Swinburne's and Thomson's poetry can at the same time be interpreted as an early symptom of the process of decline which is more characteristic of the last decades of the century.

Both Swinburne's and Thomson's cases are descriptive of how the scientific spirit of the age, as manifested in the theory of evolution and biblical criticism, was instrumental in dissolving the early orthodoxy resulting in the complete overthrow of the former world picture. Although the two poets exhibit some affinities with their contemporaries yet, in the main, the outlooks they expressed in their poetry of 1855-1875 are deeply antagonistic to the solution offered by Tennyson and others.

If Swinburne and Thomson are united in their common hostility to the Victorian compromise they are, at the same time, worlds apart in their final solutions. They moved from identical premises, i.e., from disowning the Victorian compromise in favour of scientific materialism, yet it is completely different and even incompatible conclusions that they finally drew. And although their solutions are virtually diametrically opposite, they are at the same time suggestive of the two alternatives open to the Victorian age after its central solution was discarded: alternatives which might simply be labelled as optimism and pessimism.

Ironically, while waging his war on Christianity and the Christian God and ridiculing the Tennysonian compromise Swinburne ultimately demonstrated the characteristic Victorian quality that lay at the basis of his contemporaries' response: the will to believe and an unwillingness or fear of relinquishing faith altogether. It is indeed difficult to avoid the conclusion that while Swinburne was quick to deny the basic premises of Christianity and Christianity as a religion in general, he found it, nonetheless, impossible to discard the idea of religion at all, shifting the grounds of belief to man instead.

If *Poems and Ballads* was mainly iconoclastic, *Songs before Sunrise* embodies a trend that became increasingly important as an alternative to the Christian religion which was being ousted. *Songs before Sunrise* is suggestive of the reconstructive effort on Swinburne's part, and the ideas put forth in this collection made him a disciple as well as a forerunner of that faith in progress and optimism which the materialists found in science.

For, if rationalism was primarily an escape from religion, a concurrent school of

anti-Christian thought constituted, in a way, an escape into religion: the Positivism of A. Comte, with its most memorable by-product, the so-called Religion of Humanity. The latter was in itself an attempt to provide a rationalistic age with an emotional centre, a core of faith, an object of worship that no society — according to Comte — could for long do without. It prided itself on its liberation from the superstition which radical thinkers like the French philosophers, William Godwin and P. B. Shelley had attributed to the traditional church. Ultimately, Positivism proposed to erect a new rationalistic church on the site of the old superstitious one. The new church, too, possessed an order of liturgy, a prayer book, and a succession of church festivals. In short, it was „Catholicism minus Christianity" as Huxley derisively concluded.

It was Positivism's informing spirit, the conviction of the nobility of the human race as metaphysically conceived that had a considerable influence upon the intellectual climate of the latter half of the century. Also, Positivism supplied the Victorians, who dispensed with Christian religion, with an emotional centre they all craved for, with a faith that they could not do without. Thus the Positivists' insistence that man needed religion as a binding principle of life concurred with the Victorians' deeper convictions and needs. At the same time, by confidently proclaiming the worship of Humanity, Positivism was ultimately supportive of the deep-rooted optimism of the Victorians.

Swinburne's final deification of Man, therefore, amounts to little more than substituting one religion for another as a safeguard against the nihilism that *On the Downs* so poignantly expressed. The final message of *Songs before Sunrise*: worship of Humanity and faith in progress is expressive then of an optimism as emphatic as that of his contemporaries he was in revolt against, which links him as much with his age as he was against it.

Both Swinburne's and Thomson's conclusions were drawn from materialist assumptions and were, therefore, in sharp opposition to the characteristic voices of the period, which clung to a metaphysical interpretation of the universe and man.

If Thomson agreed with Swinburne that science had indeed set the mind free, his vision of the universe and man, quickened by scientific revelation, had little in common with either Tennyson's more guarded optimism or Swinburne's unbounded one. His final vision, as expressed in *The City of Dreadful Night*, is not only a wholehearted rejection Of Christian interpretation, but also a crushingly pessimistic interpretation of the principles which rationalism advocated as a source of enlightenment, and of freedom and happiness as well. In contrast with the note of ecstatic optimism which marked the period after 1850, and to which Swinburne's *Songs before Sunrise* bears such ample testimony, *The City* embodies a pessimistic vision of a mechanistic universe, devoid of spiritual life and moral purpose, inhabited by human automatons who are divested of free-will and powerless before an inscrutable superior, all-governing ordination.

To convey this idea of the universe and man Thomson chose the urban milieu, which is at once the birthplace of the new civilization as well as its product. Through Thomson's London flows a river — the eternal symbol of life — and yet, ironically,

its waters not only do not give life to the inhabitants of the city but even suggest a wasteland: an allegory of the aterialist civilization. Thomson's poetry, therefore, denies confident proclamations of progress substituting for it an assertion of regress.

Hence, Thomson's rejection of faith and a refusal to reconstruct, which resulted in a pessimistic vision, commend him to the 20th century, as does the London cityscape which provides the background against which and through which his vision is projected. Hyde observes that T. S. Eliot paid tribute to this aspect of Thomson's poetry indicating that both Thomson and Davidson „contributed to the Modernist tradition a native English element that was not imitated from continental literature" (Bradbury 1978: 343).

Both Swinburne and Thomson appear to be among the pioneer exponents of the process of decline of Victorianism which proved to be a drawn-out one since the typical attitudes were well entrenched, as exemplified by Swinburne's case. While iconoclastic to the dominant attitudes of the High Noon, Swinburne's final message — the omnipotence of Humanity and the optimism derived therefrom — is suggestive of the need of reconstruction and affirmation which also lay at the basis of Tennyson's compromise. Despite his rejection of the central solution of the age Swinburne remained, therefore, essentially Victorian. Thomson's break with Victorianism, on the other hand, was more definitive and his ideas were anticipatory of essentially modern attitudes.

While this study suggests that the decline of Victorianism had actually begun during the High Noon — based on careful examination of two similarly inclined poets who arrived at paradoxically opposite resolutions of the question of the age — much remains to be studied of this fertile period of thought.

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Kryzys postaw wiktoriańskich i jego odzwierciedlenie w poezji A. C. Swinburne'a i J. Thomsona (B. V.): 1855-1875

Streszczenie

Praca niniejsza jest studium historycznoliterackim poezji A. C. Swinburne'a i J. Thomsona napisanej lub opublikowanej w okresie pełnego rozkwitu epoki wiktoriańskiej (tzw. High Noon of Victorianism). Przedmiotem badań jest zanikanie pewnych poglądów uważanych za typowo wiktoriańskie, którego wczesnym przejawem są treści zawarte w poezji tych dwu poetów.

Wiara w postęp oraz optymizm to według autorki najogólniejsze, a jednocześnie najbardziej reprezentatywne cechy epoki wiktoriańskiej. Przyczyniły się do tego nie tylko prądy filozoficzne i religijne omawianego okresu, takie jak utylitaryzm i ewangelikalizm, ale i osiągnięcia — zarówno w sferze teoretycznej jak praktycznej — nauki XIX wieku. Autorka podkreśla równocześnie, że nauka, która tak umocniła wiarę w postęp, spowodowała zarazem głęboki kryzys światopoglądowy, a tym samym zachwianie wiary w postęp. Teoria ewolucji Darwina oraz zastosowanie naukowych metod do odczytywania Starego i Nowego Testamentu (tzw. Higher criticism), podważyły podstawowe dogmaty religii chrześcijańskiej. Echa tego kryzysu odnajdujemy u czołowych poetów doby wiktoriańskiej, którzy równocześnie proponują w swej twórczości pewne rozwiązania konstruktywne. Problemy, z jakimi zmagała się epoka, odzwierciedla najpełniej poezja Clougha i Tennysona, a koncepcja tego ostatniego zyskała powszechną akceptację jako wyznanie wiary i optymizmu.

Autorka zwraca uwagę, że na tym tle poezja Swinburne'a i Thomsona z lat 1855-1875 jest zaprzeczeniem fideistycznej koncepcji Tennysona, co można traktować jako wczesny przejaw zanikania pewnych charakterystycznych dla epoki postaw.

W poezji Swinburne'a można wyróżnić dwie fazy: negatywną, buntowniczą i obrazoburczą, w której autor ośmiesza kompromis Tennysona oraz odrzuca religię chrześcijańską (*Poems and Ballads*), oraz fazę pozytywną, w której po odrzuceniu Boga i religii chrześcijańskiej poeta tworzy religię nową, pozytywistyczną religię ludzkości (*Songs before Sunrise*). Konkluzja zawarta w takich utworach, jak on *On the Downs, Hertha* czy *Hymn of Man* wyraża przekonanie o konieczności wiary i jako taka zdradza te same motywy, które Tennysona i innych skłoniły do postawy fideistycznej, a ze Swinburne'a uczyniły obrońcę pozytywizmu. *Songs before Sunrise* są przepojone optymizmem i wiarą w postęp, równie wiktoriańskimi, jak te, z którymi poeta walczył.

Bardziej konsekwentne stanowisko zajął J. Thomson, który odrzuciwszy fideistyczną koncepcję Tennysona oparł swój światopogląd na przesłankach materialistycznych. Jest on jednym z nielicznych poetów wiktoriańskich (jeśli w ogóle nie jedynym) zajmującym się problemami, jakie niosła nowoczesna cywilizacja przemysłowa. Symbolizuje ją w poezji omawianego autora miasto, a jej powstanie łączy on ściśle z kryzysem wiary. Z tego punktu widzenia można w twórczości tego poety wyróżnić trzy okresy, odpowiadające poszczególnym stadiom reakcji na kryzys wiary i kształtowania wizji świata opartej na podstawach materialistycznych: 1852-1857 — okres wiary i nadziei, 1857-1867 — kryzys wiary i odrzucenie fideistycznej koncepcji, 1867-1874 — filozofia pesymizmu, której najpełniejszy wyraz daje *The City of Dreadful Night*. W utworze tym Thomson zdecydowanie odcina się zarówno od optymizmu Tennysona jak i od optymizmu opartego na podstawach pozytywistycznych, charakterystycznego dla postawy Swinburne'a.

Ostatnia część pracy zawiera wnioski oraz sugestie dalszych badań. Autorka wykazuje, że proces dezintegracji postaw wiktoriańskich zaczął się znacznie wcześniej, niż się to zazwyczaj przyjmuje, tj. nie

w ostatnich dwu dekadach epoki wiktoriańskiej, ale już w okresie jej pełnego rozkwitu. Równocześnie proponuje nieco inne odczytanie tej poezji Swinburne'a, która odnosi się do problemów wieku, wskazując na wiktoriański charakter postawy poety z roku 1871.

Ponadto autorka zwraca uwagę na te cechy poezji Thomsona, które pozwalają widzieć w nim prekursora prądów i postaw typowych dla modernizmu i poezji XX wieku, zwłaszcza Eliota.

W swej warstwie ogólnej rozprawa stanowi próbę komparatystycznego ujęcia twórczości z lat 1855-1875 tych dwu tak bardzo różnych, a jednocześnie tak bardzo podobnych poetów.

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