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thesis entitled

MEDIEVAL-MODERN CONTRASTS USED FOR A  
SOCIAL PURPOSE IN THE WORK OF WILLIAM COBBETT,  
ROBERT SOUTHBY, A. WELBY PUGIN, THOMAS CARLYLE,  
JOHN RUSKIN, AND WILLIAM MORRIS.

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MEDIEVAL-MODERN CONTRASTS USED FOR A SOCIAL  
PURPOSE IN THE WORK OF WILLIAM COBBETT, ROB-  
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by

Charles Herbert Kegel

AN ABSTRACT

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Medieval-Modern Contrasts Used for a Social  
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ert Southey, A. Welby Pugin, Thomas Carlyle,  
John Ruskin, and William Morris

This dissertation attempts to describe the existence in the nineteenth century of a backward-looking literary tradition, one which compared the social conditions of a glorious and ordered medieval past with those of a sordid and chaotic industrial present.

I have started in 1824 with William Cobbett's History of the Protestant Reformation, since that work contains the earliest sustained application of the medieval-modern contrast, and terminate with the work of William Morris, who was perhaps the most thoroughly prepared medievalist among the creative artists of his century. Within that temporal span, I have limited my investigation to those English authors whose works actually contrast the middle ages with the nineteenth century in an attempt to do one or all of three closely related things: (1) castigate the present, (2) find a cure for contemporary ills, (3) plan a program for the future. This means that the major figures to be considered are Cobbett, Southey, Pugin, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris.

These figures I investigated with several questions in mind: (1) If the idea of using a medieval-modern contrast does amount to what we can call a tradition, what is the particular author's contact with that tradition? (2) If he does know his forerunners, either personally or through reading, does he

reflect a similar attitude either in point of departure or ultimate result? (3) What esthetic and/or intellectual temperament causes him to use the middle ages as an instrument by which to work some good upon his own age? Once these areas were explored, I analyzed particular works in which the author employs the medieval-modern contrast. I tried to isolate those aspects of the medieval social structure which he considers superior to the chaotic structure of nineteenth century society. And I attempted to show just how he used the past as a corrective for the present and/or as a pattern for the future.

After this rather complete analysis of individual authors and works, I attempted to synthesize the phenomenon and to determine whether or not it may be called a tradition. Finally, I tried to place in perspective this particular application of medievalism with the total body of medievalism which permeated the nineteenth century.

The results indicate that despite occasional and often important political, intellectual, and religious differences among the six men, there existed a transcendent unity of purpose in their use of the medieval-modern contrast and that their repeated use of it throughout the century may justifiably be called a tradition. Furthermore, that tradition experienced not only a growth and development as it progressed temporally through the century, but it moved generally from right to left, ending in the Socialism of William Morris.

The conclusion asserts itself that the tradition of

medieval-modern contrasts offers an important commentary upon the meeting point of two of nineteenth century England's persistent trends, the desire for social reform and interest in the middle ages. Dissatisfied with the effects upon man of the industrial and commercial spirit, bombarded on all sides by the nineteenth century's interest in and admiration for the middle ages, these six men juxtaposed the two periods in a very vivid attempt to lead Englishmen to the better life.

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## PREFACE

Although this study owes an incalculable debt of gratitude to the healthy liberal spirit which permeates the Department of English here at Michigan State University, yet it has particular obligations to three members of that department. Dr. Elwood Lawrence, the director of this dissertation, Dr. Arnold Williams, and Dr. James Rust have contributed toward making a pleasurable task of what too often amounts to pedantic drudgery. Scholarly severity along with genuinely good-natured humanity characterized their criticism of my work. They have done abundant service for this study.

Librarians and others deserve thanks too. Mrs. Anne Alubowicz and her reference staff here assisted me in many ways; Miss Elizabeth Williams of the Fine Arts Library at the University of Michigan offered kind assistance with Pugin material; Mrs. Meredith Baskett, librarian at large, saved me many bibliographical moments. Mr. Martin Stevens has amply proved his friendship by listening without complaint for more than two years to talk of Cobbett's argument with the Pitt Ministry, Pugin's second wife, Ruskin's street sweeping experiment. In addition, he has offered helpful suggestions concerning the text and has helped to purge the participle which dangleth. Finally, I must acknowledge the constant inspiration of the one who wishes to remain unnamed.

## INTRODUCTION

From time to time in the world's history there comes a decade, a century, or an age in which a civilization must meet the stern challenge of adjusting itself to new ideals, new values. The new values may be spiritual, philosophical, social, economic, political, artistic, scientific, or--as is usually the case--combinations of these. And from this adjustment no century is completely free. Never, however--certainly not in England--had a century been faced with such a total disruption of old values and such a frantic, often heroic, search for new ones as was the nineteenth. Conventional Christianity was crumbling before the higher criticism and the new gods of scientific progress. Kant and Hegel through their English popularizers were replacing Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. New economic conditions largely, though not entirely, brought about by the industrial revolution were creating severe social dislocations. A nouveau riche, Philistine middle-class was asserting, and winning, its place in the nineteenth century political sun, while a new class of industrial workers, detached from the soil and completely at the mercy of an unjust economic law of supply and demand, served notice through its Peterloos, Chartisms, and Bloody Sundays that it too must be reckoned with.

It was one of the century's characteristics that a good deal of its energies were spent in both collective and individual attempts to find its way out of what Matthew Arnold, with a detached perception far more acute than that of most of his contemporaries, called "the hopeless tangle of our age."



What were the Oxford Movement, Christian Socialism, Socialism in its several varieties, Young England, St. Simoneanism, Comte's Positivism, but attempts to find some synthesizing rationale by which to order the complex problems of the century? Individuals--"unacknowledged legislators of the universe" and otherwise--Shelley, Coleridge, Cobbett, Owen, Carlyle, Disraeli, Browning, Newman, Huxley, Morris, Marx, George, Wallace, Ruskin, Keble, Dickens, both Arnolds, both Mills, both Froudes--the list could be trebled easily--each sought in his particular way to create order out of the century's chaos.

Still another important characteristic of the nineteenth century was its interest in the middle ages. One sees that interest manifested everywhere: in the century's gothic churches and railroad stations, in its poetry, in its novels, in its Punch cartoons, in its clothing styles, in its art, in its historical endeavors, in its schemes for religious and social reform. Partly this medievalism was the result of the Romantic Movement's interest in the past. Partly, and it is extremely difficult to separate cause and effect, for they often operate simultaneously, it was the result of pure nostalgia. Just as the adult often looks back to his carefree and colorful childhood to offset the drab and prosaic, yet often complex, reality of his workaday existence, so too does a civilization turn to the past when it is confronted with problems too large for its comprehension or when it becomes bored with its dull routine. Thus did the nineteenth century often focus its gaze upon the

middle ages as a period undisturbed by the complexity of the problems which the present faced.

This resurgence of interest in the middle ages, a phenomenon which touched the century in so many different ways and might with ample justification be called a medieval revival, needs badly to be studied as a whole. Some of its parts have already been explored by scholars, and this study attempts to explain another of those parts. Yet before I describe the exact nature of my design, let me quickly survey the extent of this medieval revival in the nineteenth century.

Medievalism permeated the century's belletristic efforts. The story, though by no means complete, of this literary interest in the middle ages is told in A History of English Romanticism in the Nineteenth Century by Henry A. Beers, who in the companion work to this one had narrowly defined Romanticism as "the reproduction in modern art or literature of the life and thought of the Middle Ages."<sup>1</sup> Most of the century's great, near-great, and not-great literary men succumbed at one time or another in their careers to the temptation of the middle ages. Scott, Coleridge, Keats, Southey, Peacock, Cobbett, Reade, Darley, Tennyson, Bulwer-Lytton, Carlyle, Kingsley, Disraeli, Browning, Manners, Smythe, Ruskin, Rossetti, Patmore, Fitzgerald, Dixon, Arnold, Swinburne, Hardy, Yeats, and Morris are some of those who were attracted.

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<sup>1</sup> A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1899), p. 2.

Art too felt the impact of the renewed interest in the middle ages. Not only in the area of architecture, which I shall discuss separately below, but in painting and the crafts as well. The Pre-Raphaelite Movement looked back to a period beyond the Renaissance for its theory and much of its subject matter. The paintings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in particular, and those of his younger disciples, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, though they were not Pre-Raphaelites per se, testify to the influence of medieval literature, especially Chaucer and Malory, upon the movement. Repeatedly they turned to the Canterbury Tales and to Morte d'Arthur for artistic inspiration. Too, the Arts and Crafts Movement later in the century bore unmistakable traces of the medieval revival; it attempted to recapture in the nineteenth century the creative satisfaction which, according to Ruskin and Morris, the medieval handicraft worker had experienced.

A more widespread manifestation of the nineteenth century's medieval interest was the Gothic Architectural Revival. A. E. Addison has shown the affinity of this phenomenon with the Romantic Movement,<sup>2</sup> while Charles Eastlake's A History of the Gothic Revival and Kenneth Clark's The Gothic Revival both testify to the impact which medievalism had upon the movement. Churches and ecclesiastical buildings usually come to mind when one thinks of gothic architecture, and certainly hundreds

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<sup>2</sup> "If there had been no Romantic Movement, there would have been no Gothic Revival." (Agnes Eleanor Addison, Romanticism and the Gothic Revival [Philadelphia, 1938], p. 144).



of them were so designed and built during the century, but the revival was much wider than that. Collegiate buildings, cemetery vaults, country estates, mass-produced suburban homes, public buildings, warehouses, stores, even the larger railroad stations--how far can an anachronism be carried?--were more often than not gothic in design. It was a movement with which an Englishman could hardly avoid contact; gothic buildings of one sort or another were everywhere; they were "as inevitable as trees and haystacks," wrote Clark, "in every town, old or new, and in almost every village."<sup>3</sup>

Religious developments during the century also bear the imprint of widespread interest in the medieval period. Indeed, much of the success of the Oxford Movement, thought Newman, derived from Scott, who taught Englishmen to look sympathetically at the middle ages.<sup>4</sup> And while the doctrine of the Oxford Movement owed less to the fourteenth century than to the fourth, the esthetic appeal of the movement was largely medieval. There existed a rather significant relationship between the Gothic Architectural Revival and the movement toward a high church. The Cambridge Camden Society through the Ecclesiologist not only dictated to England the proper gothic architectural design, but also advocated the use within the Anglican Establishment of the altar decorations and vestments of

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<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Clark, The Gothic Revival, an Essay in the History of Taste (New York, 1950), pp. 11-12.

<sup>4</sup> John Henry Newman, Essays Critical and Historical (London, 1877), I, 267.

the medieval Catholic Church.

Historians and scholars too were turning their attention to the middle ages. A new attitude toward history was developing, especially toward the medieval period. Historiographers Gooch and Peardon<sup>5</sup> have studied carefully the transition from the contemptuous view of the middle ages perpetrated by the rationalist historians of the enlightenment to the more liberal view taken by nineteenth century historians. A great deal of credit for this shift, thought Gooch, should be given to the Romantic Movement; "The romanticists," he wrote, "rendered a priceless service to historical studies. They enriched the imagination by their presentation of the many-coloured life of other ages and countries. They doubled the intellectual capital and widened the horizon of their time."<sup>6</sup> On the continent Ranke, Thierry, and Michelet, all of whom had been profoundly influenced by Sir Walter Scott, demanded that the historian use primary documents for his interpretations of historical events and that these documents be used in such a way that the middle ages might be brought to life. No longer would it be possible to agree with Voltaire that the "Middle Ages deserved as little study as the doings of wolves and bears."<sup>7</sup>

The contagion spread to England too, and the periodicals

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<sup>5</sup> George Peabody Gooch, History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1913); Thomas Preston Peardon, The Transition in English Historical Writing 1760-1830 (New York, 1933).

<sup>6</sup> Gooch, pp. 54-55.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

of the thirties and forties were alive with the announcement that "We are . . . arrived at an entirely new era of the writing of history,"<sup>8</sup> and that with respect to the middle ages "a new set of historical works must supersede those [of the last century]."<sup>9</sup> And pleas were made that the history of the medieval period, long banished from English schools, be introduced into the standard curriculum.<sup>10</sup>

Along with this new historical view of the middle ages, serving a reciprocal cause-effect relationship with it, was the increased attention given to the editing of medieval documents. Antiquarian and linguistically oriented scholars formed private societies and clubs which augmented the work of the English Record Commission in making available hitherto unpublished or very rare materials. The importance of these societies to scholarship in general has been told in Steeves' very readable Learned Societies and English Literary Scholarship; but it might be well to list here the names and dates of origin of those organizations which did make a textual contribution to medieval scholarship. They were: the Roxburghe Club, 1812; Bannatyne Club, 1823; Maitland Club, 1828; Surtees Society, 1834; Abbotsford Club, 1834; English Historical Society, 1837; Welsh Manuscripts' Society, 1837; Camden Society, 1838; Spalding Club, 1839; Cambridge Camden Society, 1839; Parker Society,

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<sup>8</sup> "M. Guizot's Commission Historique and the English Record Commission," Foreign Quarterly Review, XVII (1836), 362.

<sup>9</sup> "The Dark Ages," The English Review, I (1844), 362.

<sup>10</sup> "Guizot's Course of Modern History," Foreign Quarterly Review, XVI (1836), 437.

1840; Percy Society, 1840; Shakespeare Society, 1840; Philological Society, 1842; AElfric Society, 1843; Chetham Society, 1843; Caxton Society, 1845; Hakluyt Society, 1846; Cambrian Archaeological Association, 1846; Philobiblon Society, 1853; Warton Club, 1854; Early English Text Society, 1864; Ballad Society, 1868; Chaucer Society, 1868; English Dialect Society, 1873; Wyclif Society, 1881; Scottish Text Society, 1884; Henry Bradshaw Society, 1890. Added to the work of these private societies were the many county historical associations and the publicly financed publication of Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores under the direction of the Master of the Rolls, a series which started in 1858 and made easily accessible to scholars some two hundred and fifty volumes of medieval text.

Some of the century's great medieval scholars worked in and with these many societies. The indefatigable Thomas Wright, whose separate entries in the British Museum Catalog number one hundred and twenty-nine, edited medieval texts for seven of them. Walter Skeat and Frederick Furnivall, the latter of whom founded seven separate societies, found in them ready outlets for their considerable editorial work with the literature of the middle ages. Meanwhile, other scholars and antiquarians worked independently developing their interpretations of various aspects of medieval life. Characteristic in this respect was the work of Digby, the two Maitlands, and Rogers. In five mammoth volumes of The Broad Stone of Honour, Kenelm Digby dealt with the exercise of the medieval chivalric code. S. R. Maitland's The Dark Ages examined the state of learning in the



middle ages, while F. W. Maitland's many works dealt with medieval law. James E. Thorold Rogers attempted to explain the workings of medieval economy in his six volume History of Agriculture and Prices in England and his Six Centuries of Work and Wages.

In the areas of belles-lettres, painting, crafts, architecture, religion, history, and scholarship the nineteenth century was influenced by the revival of interest in the middle ages. And that revival of interest has been, with the exception of the last area mentioned above, the subject of considerable scholarly investigation.

Another manifestation of the medieval revival, however, has been curiously neglected by scholars: it is that point at which two salient characteristics of the nineteenth century, agitation for social reform and interest in the middle ages, cross. Given a widespread dissatisfaction with contemporary social conditions and an urge to better them, given concurrently an interest in and an enthusiasm for the middle ages, it was inevitable that certain artists and men of letters would contrast contemporary conditions with those of the medieval period. Indeed, four scholars in going about their several tasks have cursorily generalized about the existence in the nineteenth century of just such a backward-looking tradition, one which compared a glorious and ordered medieval past with a sordid and chaotic industrial present. Yet nobody has ever investigated and followed that tradition, if it is one, through

the nineteenth century. Such an investigation needs to be carried out, for it would contribute toward our understanding of the total medieval revival and it would also help to explain one avenue by which Victorians approached the pressing problem of their age, that of social reform.

In the following study I have attempted to make that investigation.

I have limited myself to the consideration of six nineteenth century Englishmen, William Cobbett, Robert Southey, A. Welby Pugin, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and William Morris. All of them were addicted to their century's habit of looking admiringly to the medieval past. Yet their backward-lookingness did not result--as, for example, it did with Scott and Keats--in a comfortable, romantic medievalism which assured nineteenth century readers that the middle ages had little or nothing to do with their own century; instead, it resulted in an attempt to reassert certain values of that past period, to use the middle ages with a purpose. And though the specific values they would reassert and the purposes for which they used their medievalism differed greatly, the six men were alike in that they fashioned and employed the same literary device. This device, which I shall call the medieval-modern contrast and which is most clearly exemplified in Carlyle's Past and Present, consisted of the explicit contrast between analogous conditions in the middle ages and the nineteenth century. Always the contrast favored the medieval over the modern

period and always it was used in an attempt to do one or all of three closely related things: castigate the present, find a cure for contemporary ills, or plan a program for the future.

I shall individually investigate the six men mentioned above with several questions in mind, each one of which leads to the next. First, if the idea of using a medieval-modern contrast for social purposes amounts to what we can call a tradition, what is the particular author's contact with the tradition? Obviously, the attention given to this aspect of the study will increase as I move chronologically through the century. Second, if he does know his forerunners, either personally or through reading, how strong was the influence of that contact? Does his use of the contrast reflect, with relation to his predecessors, a similar point of departure or a similar result? Third, what esthetic and/or intellectual temperament causes him to use the middle ages as an instrument by which to work some good upon his own age? And how does that temperament determine not only what he considers admirable in the medieval period, but also what he considers despicable in his own nineteenth century? Once these questions have been explored, I will analyze particular works in which the author employs the medieval-modern contrast. I will try to isolate those aspects of the medieval social structure which he considers superior to the chaotic structure of nineteenth century society. And I will attempt to show just how he used the past as a corrective for the present or as a pattern for the future.

Finally, after having made a thorough analysis of these individual authors and works, I will attempt to synthesize their particular application of medieval interest by showing that the use of the medieval-modern contrast as a tool for social melioration and reorganization can legitimately be called a tradition. In spite of its contributors' many individual differences, it possessed a transcendent unity of purpose. Conceived in an atmosphere of tremendous social upheaval through the marriage of two of the century's persistent intellectual currents, the desire for social reform and the revival of interest in the middle ages, the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts, developing and changing as it did to meet the exigencies of rapidly changing conditions, offers an important running commentary on one of the ways by which nineteenth century Englishmen sought to solve the problems of their chaotic today.

## CHAPTER I

### THE PRECURSORS:

COBBETT, SOUTHEY, PUGIN



William Cobbett (1763-1835) was one of the first Englishmen to apply on an extensive and influential scale the contrast of the middle ages with the nineteenth century. And, of course, the nineteenth century was found wanting.

Cobbett, the early nineteenth century's acknowledged master of Swiftian vitriol,<sup>1</sup> offered somewhat of a paradox to his contemporaries, one which they--and even he--had difficulty understanding.

In 1792, after an unsuccessful attempt to reform the English army, Cobbett went to France. There he obtained from William Short, the American ambassador at the Hague, a letter of introduction to Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State in Washington's administration. In November of the same year he arrived in the United States "brim full of republicanism"<sup>2</sup> and "ambitious to become a citizen of a free state."<sup>3</sup> It was not long, however, before Cobbett was to detect errors in the "free state" and was to yearn for "dear Old England, far distant from Yellow Fevers and universal suffrage."<sup>4</sup> His attacks on democracy in his American publications were welcomed by an England frightened by two successive revolutions into Peelite Toryism. When

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<sup>1</sup> A comparison of Cobbett with Swift is common among Cobbett critics. For a contemporary expression see Timothy Tickler, "To Christopher North, Esq. on Campbell, Cobbett, &c. &c. &c.," Blackwoods Magazine, XIV (September, 1823), 314.

<sup>2</sup> Porcupine's Gazette, August 12, 1799; quoted from Mary Elizabeth Clark, Peter Porcupine in America; the Career of William Cobbett, 1792-1800 (Philadelphia, 1939), p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Letters from William Cobbett to Edward Thornton, ed. G. D. H. Cole (London, 1937), p. 5.

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for transparency and accountability, particularly in financial matters. The text outlines various methods for organizing and storing data, including digital databases and physical filing systems. It also mentions the need for regular audits and reviews to ensure the integrity of the information.

2. The second part of the document focuses on the role of communication in achieving organizational goals. It highlights the importance of clear and concise communication, both internally and externally. The text provides guidelines for effective communication, such as using appropriate language, listening actively, and providing feedback. It also discusses the importance of maintaining open lines of communication and fostering a collaborative work environment.

3. The third part of the document addresses the issue of resource management. It discusses the importance of identifying and allocating resources effectively to support the organization's mission and vision. The text provides strategies for managing resources, including budgeting, prioritizing tasks, and delegating responsibilities. It also mentions the need for regular monitoring and evaluation of resource usage to ensure optimal performance.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the importance of continuous learning and improvement. It emphasizes that organizations must stay up-to-date with the latest trends and technologies to remain competitive. The text outlines various methods for learning, such as training, workshops, and conferences. It also mentions the importance of encouraging a culture of learning and innovation within the organization.

5. The fifth part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining a strong ethical foundation. It emphasizes that organizations must adhere to high ethical standards and values to build trust and credibility. The text provides guidelines for ethical behavior, such as being honest, transparent, and respectful. It also mentions the importance of having a clear code of ethics and holding all employees accountable for their actions.

in 1800 Cobbett finally returned to England, his first political shift had been completed. He had come here an ardent republican; he returned a violent anti-Jacobin.<sup>5</sup>

English Tories were glad of his return, for he would help crush English Jacobinism. He dined with Ellis, Frere, and Canning, the anti-Jacobin pamphleteers. He dined with Pitt.<sup>6</sup> In the following year he started The Porcupine, a daily which strongly supported the government, but the paper failed in November, 1801. The next year he was assisted financially by William Windham and other influential Tories in establishing Cobbett's Political Register, which was to continue until after his death.

But Cobbett and the Political Register were not long to please the British government, either Whig or Tory. Throughout the next three or four years Cobbett more and more freely criticized the government. Late in 1806 and early in 1807 he openly espoused causes which were connected with the radical platform.<sup>7</sup>

He was quickly to be criticized for inconsistency, a charge which was leveled against him by his enemies--not without ample justification--throughout his Radical career. In July of 1807 Frances Jeffrey's destructive guns were leveled at him. After speaking of the prodigious circulation of the Political Register

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<sup>5</sup> Clark, passim; this work is the best--in fact, the only--thorough and considered treatment of Cobbett's first American residence.

<sup>6</sup> G. D. H. Cole, The Life of William Cobbett (London, 1927), p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> S. MacCoby, The English Radical Tradition 1763-1914 (London, 1952), p. 53; MacCoby thinks that Cobbett's conversion to radicalism was complete with the publication in 1806 of Letters to the Electors of Westminster.



and of Cobbett's early value to the government, Jeffrey adds,

Within the last six months, however, he has undergone a most extraordinary and portentous transformation. Instead of the champion of establishment, of loyalty, and eternal war with all revolutionary agency, he has become the patron of reform and reformers; talks hopefully of revolutions; scoffingly of Parliament; and cavalierly of the Sovereign; and declaims upon the state of the representation, and on the iniquities of placemen and pensioners, in the very phrases which have been for some time laid aside by those whom he used to call levellers and Jacobins.<sup>8</sup>

The rest of the article points out many of Cobbett's self-contradictions "for the purpose of reducing his authority."<sup>9</sup>

But Cobbett's authority was not to be reduced by Jeffrey or anybody else. Even his two year jail sentence (July 9, 1810 to July 9, 1812) for seditious writing did not silence him; he continued to direct the Political Register from within Newgate.

His contemporaries did not understand his conversion to the radical ranks, and, as I have said, neither did he himself. For he, too, thought that he had undergone a fundamental shift in political alignment. He wrote, addressing Lord Onslow, but with himself in mind: "My Lord, there is another sort of courage; courage other than that of retrenching. . . . I mean political courage, and, especially the courage of acknowledging your errors; confessing that you were wrong, when you called the re-

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<sup>8</sup> Francis Jeffrey, "Cobbett's Political Register," Edinburgh Review, X (July, 1807), 387.

<sup>9</sup> Loc. cit.; see an answer to Jeffrey written by "An Old Englishman" in the Political Register, XII (September 5, 1807), 375-377.

formers jacobins and levellers; the courage of now joining them in their efforts to save their country, to regain their freedom."<sup>10</sup>

What his contemporaries did not really understand--what, indeed, it is even difficult for us to understand--is that the grounds for Cobbett's radicalism can be found in his fundamentally reactionary attitude. G. K. Chesterton, a great chaser of paradox, noticed that "it is the paradox of his [Cobbett's] life that he loved the past, and he alone really lived in the future."<sup>11</sup> During his American years, he had come to despise republicans because they were changing too rapidly the comfortable eighteenth century world into which he was born. In 1798 he wrote to Edward Thornton, "You know, the great object [of the republicans] is to prevent the people from looking back to old times. The precious word (for it is no more) Independence is ever held up as the cheap purchase of every thing that we are accustomed to look upon as of any value."<sup>12</sup> Cobbett had espoused the Tory cause because he felt it was his, the cause of "dear Old England." But when he found that the Pitt government was aligning itself with the new industrial and commercial forces growing out of the war with France, he quickly deserted them.

For Cobbett was by nature an agrarian. Cole says of him, "Yet for all his fighting on the side of the new popular forces which the Industrial Revolution had called into being, Cobbett

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<sup>10</sup> William Cobbett, Rural Rides, ed. Pitt Cobbett (London, 1886), I, 116-117.

<sup>11</sup> William Cobbett (New York, 1926), p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Letters from William Cobbett to Edward Thornton, p. 4.

took his stand to the last on the ground of the past, far more readily harking back to the old [agrarian] England of his boyhood than forward to the new England of the enclosures and the factory town."<sup>13</sup> Again, "Cobbett was no Socialist, seeking a reconstruction of society in terms of the new economic conditions; . . . he felt in terms of the old."<sup>14</sup> He had the misfortune of living during a period when agriculture was rapidly being pushed aside by the factory and the machine.

His hatred for the machine in a sense anticipates that of Ruskin and Morris, yet the grounds for that hatred were much less complex than theirs. He saw that machines were causing great dislocations in the population of rural England. Many farmers were moving to the cities. Not only that, but those who remained were being impoverished by machinery. This remark, repeated many times in his Rural Rides, is typical:

At Monckton they had seventeen men working on the roads, though the harvest was not quite in, and though, of course, it had all to be threshed out; but, at Monckton, they had four threshing machines; and they have three threshing machines at Sarr, though there, also, they have several men upon the roads! This is a shocking state of things; and, in spite of everything that the Jenkinsons and the Scots can do, this state of things must be changed.<sup>15</sup>

On one occasion Cobbett made a direct rather than verbal contribution against the use of machinery. His farm at Barn Elms in Surrey had some land which needed turning over. He could

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<sup>13</sup> Cole, Life of William Cobbett, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Rural Rides, I, 322.

use either the new mechanical plough or many men working with spades. He chose the latter. The December 15, 1827, issue of the Political Register carried an advertisement for men willing to work with spades, for "Everything that can be done by wheels, by iron, by steel, by wood, by horses, has been done by them, as it were for the purpose of starving the labouring classes out of existence."<sup>16</sup>

In 1807 Cobbett had been strongly influenced by William Spence's Britain Independent of Commerce, and had come to the "radical" conclusion that agrarian prosperity was far more important for England than commercial prosperity.<sup>17</sup> Unless the profits accruing from machines were actually disseminated among the workers themselves, the factory system had actually done a disservice to England. This idea he never fundamentally changed. As late as the publication of Rural Rides in 1830 he argued in the same vein.

The greater part of manufactures consists of clothing and bedding. Now, if by using a machine, we can get our coat with less labour than we got it before, the machine is a desirable thing. But, then, mind, we must have the machine at home, and we ourselves must have the profit of it; for, if the machine be elsewhere; if it be worked by other hands; if other persons have the profit of it; and if, in consequence of the existence of the machine, we have hands at home, who have nothing to do, and whom we must keep, then the machine is an injury to us, however advantageous it may be to those who use it,

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted from Cole, Life of William Cobbett, p. 311.

<sup>17</sup> Cobbett wrote several articles about this book; all appear under the same title, "Perish Commerce." See Political Register, XII (November 21, 1807), 801-824; XII (November 28, 1807), 834-849; XII (December 5, 1807), 865-882; XII (December 12, 1807), 897-915; see also Cole, Life of William Cobbett, p. 144.



and whatever traffic it may occasion with foreign States.<sup>18</sup>

If Cobbett was, as I have suggested, fundamentally a reactionary in that he really never understood the economic and industrial forces which were changing the face of England; if this is so, we can expect him to have looked at the past to find solutions for the nineteenth century's ills. And if he found ease and plenty in the past, we can expect him to have presented to his nineteenth century readers a contrasting picture of that glorious past and his inglorious present. This is exactly what he did, and often the contrast was between the middle ages and his own century.

Such a contrast would have been almost impossible before the nineteenth century. For the historians of the Enlightenment--Hume and Gibbon are good examples--had passed an unfavorable judgment upon the medieval period; to them it was truly a dark age.<sup>19</sup> But historiographers, Peardon and Gooch in particular, have traced the change in the historical conception of the medieval period. Hallam's View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages (1818) had presented a somewhat new picture of the middle ages to English readers. Peardon says of Hallam, "If he had no romantic emotions about the past, neither had he any doctrinaire belief in the superiority of the

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<sup>18</sup> Rural Rides, II, 79.

<sup>19</sup> The term itself seems to have developed during the eighteenth century. New English Dictionary reports the first use of "dark ages" as an unfavorable synonym for the middle ages in 1730.

present. In one instance, at least, when he speaks of the standard of living of agricultural laborers, he gave preference [sic] to the Middle Ages over his own day."<sup>20</sup> The influence of Sir Walter Scott should also be mentioned in this connection, for one should not underestimate the tremendous impact his novels had upon the nineteenth century reading public. His middle ages are not the drab, barbaric, dark ages portrayed by the eighteenth century historians, but a very colorful pageant of yeoman and serfs, knights and ladies, an age of courtesy and chivalry. But the historical picture of the middle ages which seemed most to have influenced Cobbett was neither Scott's nor Hallam's. It was the work of the Catholic historian, John Lingard (1771-1851).

In his great zeal to defend Catholicism Lingard was forced into a favorable presentation of the middle ages, the greatest era of English Catholicism. His Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church (1806-1810) in two volumes presented an appealing picture of medieval monastic piety and charity. This work was severely attacked in the Quarterly Review, where Lingard was accused of making "history an insidious channel for the conveyance of controverted principles."<sup>21</sup> And he continued that favorable picture of medieval life in his History of England from the First Invasion of the Romans, the first three volumes of which appeared in 1819.

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<sup>20</sup> Peardon, p. 276.

<sup>21</sup> "The Antiquities of the Saxon Church. By the Rev. John Lingard," Quarterly Review, VII (March, 1812), 92.

We can be quite certain that Cobbett knew these works, for in his History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland<sup>22</sup> he leaned heavily upon Lingard. So heavily in fact that certain comparisons indicate that he had Lingard open before him as he worked, only sharpening a few words to achieve the distinctive Cobbett tone. Note, for example, the following parallel passages which describe the precarious position of Catholics under Elizabeth:

## LINGARD

No man  
could enjoy security  
  
even in the privacy  
of his own house,  
where he was liable  
at all hours,  
but generally  
at night,  
to be visited by a  
magistrate at the head  
of an armed mob.  
At a signal given,  
  
the doors were burst open,  
and the pursuivants  
in separate divisions  
hastened  
to the different apartments,  
examined the beds,  
tore the tapestry and  
wainscotting from the walls,

## COBBETT

No Catholic, or reputed Catholic,  
had a moment's security  
or peace.

At all hours,  
but generally  
in the night-time,

the ruffians entered his house  
by breaking it open;

rushed, in different divisions,  
  
into the rooms;

<sup>22</sup>

William Cobbett, A History of the Protestant "Reformation," in England and Ireland; Showing How that Event Has Impoverished and Degraded the Main Body of the People in those Countries. In a Series of Letters Addressed to all Sensible /a/nd Just Englishmen (London, 1824); I have consulted two 1824 copies of the work, one from the University of Rochester, the other from the Cleveland Public Library. There are many differences in punctuation, typography, and word choice. All my citations from the work are from the Cleveland Public Library copy, which seems to be an improved state of the text.



forced open closets,  
drawers and coffers,

and made every search  
which their ingenuity could  
suggest  
to discover either  
a priest, or books,  
chalices and vestments

appropriated to the  
Catholic worship.<sup>23</sup>

broke open closets,  
chests and drawers;  
rummaged beds and pockets;  
in short,  
searched every place and thing

for  
priests, books,  
crosses, vestments  
or any person or thing  
appertaining to the  
Catholic worship.<sup>23</sup>

Cole, Cobbett's most adequate biographer, was certainly aware of the influence which Lingard exerted. "Cobbett was carried away," he wrote, by Lingard's work.

He [Cobbett] now discovered for the first time that the mediaeval Church, and especially the monasteries, had performed most important social functions, that the tithes had been destined for the care of the poor as well as of the parson, that the monasteries had been centres of relief and social organisation, . . . and that the Reformation had ruthlessly swept away the communal work of the mediaeval Church without putting anything in its place.<sup>24</sup>

Cobbett had long been interested in the Catholic question. He felt that the division of England into Protestant and Catholic camps was detrimental to the cause of political freedom. After discussion the dichotomy in the February 6, 1813 issue of the Political Resister, he summarized,

In short, the agitation of this Catholic question serves, and can serve only, to amuse the people, and to keep them divided. If I were to choose

<sup>23</sup> John Lingard, The History of England from the First Invasion of the Romans to the Accession of William and Mary in 1688, Copyright Edition (Edinburgh, 1902), VI, 337; William Cobbett, History of the Protestant Reformation, letter XI, para. 344, L10V.

<sup>24</sup> Life of William Cobbett, p. 278.

a people to hold in a state of complete subjection, it should be a people divided into several religious sects, each condemning the other to perdition. With such a people, furnished with a suitable set of priests, a Government endued with barely common sense might do just what it pleased.<sup>25</sup>

By 1823 Cobbett was being accused of serious Catholic leanings.

The postscript to a letter published in that year says,

What is this story of Cobbett's going to settle in France? I can't believe a word of it . . . [although] his recent praises of the Bourbons, and of catholicism, look very like as if he had some such matter in his head. . . . Good gracious! if it should be so in right earnest--if William Cobbett should really become a member of the holy Roman Church, and a French proprietaire--Imagine that termination to that career! Monsieur le Compte de Cobbette!

The truth is that Cobbett had no Catholic leanings at all. He felt that if the condition of England were to improve, Catholics and Protestants must get together. Lingard's work opened his eyes to the fact that Protestant historians had falsely represented the Catholic middle ages and had presented a biased picture of the benefits of the Reformation. "Every Protestant historian, from the reign of the 'VIRGIN' Elizabeth to the present hour," Cobbett wrote, has applied the unjustified phrase, "Monkish ignorance and superstition," to the middle ages.<sup>27</sup> He believed that by correcting that impression he could help bring the two faiths closer together and thus speed the process of reform.

His History of the Protestant Reformation attempted to do

<sup>25</sup> Quoted from Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>26</sup> Tickler, p. 329.

<sup>27</sup> History of the Protestant Reformation, letter I, para. 28, A9<sup>v</sup>.

just that. Actually it was not a history at all. Gooch, Peardon, and Barnes, three historiographers concerned with the nineteenth century, all fail even to mention Cobbett's work. For he lacked the scholarly disinterestedness of a historian. Lingard, certainly, had worked with a thesis in mind, but he remained suprisingly candid toward his subject. Cobbett was not such a man; he could not do things other than in the extreme. Claiming to "have had no motive, but a sincere and disinterested love of truth and justice,"<sup>28</sup> he set out to show that

A fair and honest inquiry will teach us, that this was an alteration greatly for the worse; that the "Reformation," as it is called, was engendered in beastly lust, brought forth in hypocrisy and perfidy, and cherished and fed by plunder, devastation, and by rivers of innocent English and Irish blood; and that, as to its more remote consequences, they are, some of them, now before us, in that misery, that beggary, that nakedness, that hunger, that everlasting wrangling and spite, which now stare us in the face and stun our ears at every turn, and which the "Reformation" has given us in exchange for the ease and happiness and harmony and Christian charity, enjoyed so abundantly, and for so many ages, by our Catholic forefathers.<sup>29</sup>

This attempt to "prove" that "it was not a reformation, but a devastation, of England"<sup>30</sup> involved nothing less than a complete reversal of many conventional historical conceptions. Henry VIII must be presented as a lustful plunderer and tyrant;<sup>31</sup> Bloody Mary and Good Queen Bess are turned around when Cobbett talks of "the unfortunate Mary [who] expired on the 17th of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., letter XVI, para. 478, Q12<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., letter I, para. 4, A3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., letter II, para. 37, B1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., letter II, para 63, B8<sup>r</sup>.

November 1558 . . . leaving to her sister and successor the example of fidelity, sincerity, patience, resignation, generosity, gratitude, and purity in thought, word and deed; an example, however, which in every particular, that sister and successor took special care not to follow."<sup>32</sup>

So too is the usual picture of the middle ages reversed, and that reversal results in a picture contrasting the glorious middle ages with the poverty and squalor of the nineteenth century, a picture which was often to be repeated later in the century. England before the Reformation was, according to Cobbett, "the happiest country, perhaps, that the world had ever seen."<sup>33</sup>

The climax of this vitriolic attack on the present comes in the last letter,<sup>34</sup> which was entitled "Former Population of England and Ireland, Former Wealth. Former Power. Former Freedom. Former Plenty, Ease, and Happiness." In all these areas Cobbett tells his nineteenth century readers of medieval supremacy. His argument for greater population in the medieval period I will take up in special connection later, for it is in a sense pivotal to all the others.

England's former wealth he "proves" by making a simple comparison of annual rents. He uses Hume for his information that the annual rental of England and Wales in the medieval period was three million pounds. The rental for the whole of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., letter IX, para. 257, I2v.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., letter II, para. 37, B1r.

<sup>34</sup> The work was published as a series of sixteen letters, the last of which is dated March 31, 1826.



England in 1804 was, according to a House of Commons report dated July 10, 1804, thirty-eight million. Cobbett then determines the purchasing power of money in the two periods by comparing the prices of meat. This comparison indicates that three million pounds in pre-Reformation times corresponds to sixty million pounds in the nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Hence, greater wealth in the middle ages.

England's former power Cobbett demonstrates easily: "What do we want more than the fact, that, for many centuries, before the 'Reformation,' England held possession of a considerable part of France? . . . France was never a country that had any pretensions to cope with England until the 'Reformation' began."<sup>36</sup>

When he comes to the discussion of England's former freedom, he anticipates in some respects the stern remarks of Carlyle and Ruskin. Yet unlike that pair, Cobbett insisted on a tangible definition of the word, tangible and rather simple.

And, as to FREEDOM of the nation, where is the man who can tell me of any one single advantage that the "Reformation" has brought, except it be freedom to have forty religious creeds instead of just one? FREEDOM is not an empty sound; it is not a thing that nobody can feel. It means, and it means nothing else, the full and quiet enjoyment of your own property. If you have not this; if this be not well secured to you, you may call yourself what you will, but you are a slave.<sup>37</sup>

This is, of course, a rather negative proof, but it served for Cobbett. What was lacking in logic, he compensated for with

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<sup>35</sup> History of the Protestant Reformation, letter XVI, para. 453, Q4r.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., letter XVI, para. 454, Q4v-Q5r.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., letter XVI, para. 455, Q5v.



powerful expression.

These first three, former wealth, power, and freedom, furnish the basis for his discussion of former plenty, ease, and happiness. But Cobbett strengthens his argument with "unquestionable" authority. "I will infer nothing;" he says, "I will give no 'estimate'; but, refer to authorities, such as no man can call in question."<sup>38</sup> Then he proceeds to quote at length from Fortescue's De Laudibus Legum Angliae in order to show that in the middle ages "every one, according to his rank, hath all things which conduce to make life easy and happy."<sup>39</sup> Cobbett then enters into a long economic discussion using ceiling wages from medieval Acts of Parliament and medieval prices drawn from Fleetwood's Chronicon Preciosum. These he places against contemporary wages and prices. The method, as F. A. Gasquet has pointed out,<sup>40</sup> comes very close to that later to be employed in a more scientific manner by James E. Thorold Rogers, whom I shall discuss in connection with William Morris. Cobbett, confident that this economic comparison was unanswerable proof, rises to an ironic crescendo:

We have seen, that the "popish superstition slave" had to give fivepence a bushel for his wheat, and the evidence of Mr. GEORGE states, that the "enlightened Protestant" had to give 10 shillings a bushel for his wheat; that is, 24 times as much as the "popish fool," who suffered himself to be

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., letter XVI, para. 457, Q6<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., letter XVI, para. 458, Q7<sup>v</sup>. See Sir John Fortescue, De Laudibus Legum Angliae, trans. (London, 1775), p. 129.

<sup>40</sup> A History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland, ed. Francis Aidan Gasquet (London, 1896), p. 393n; also see Appendix, pp. 403-406.

"priest-ridden." So that the "enlightened" man, in order to make him as well off as the "dark ages" man was, ought to receive twelve shillings, instead of 3 s. 7 $\frac{3}{4}$  d. for mowing an acre of grass; and he, in like manner, ought to receive, for thrashing a quarter of wheat, eight shillings, instead of the four shillings, which he does receive.<sup>41</sup>

In a final vehement pronouncement Cobbett says,

Go, and read this to the poor souls, who are now eating sea-weed in Ireland; who are detected in robbing the pig-troughs in Yorkshire; who are eating horse-flesh and grains (draff) in Lancashire and Cheshire; who are harnessed like horses and drawing gravel in Hampshire and Sussex; who have 3 d. a day allowed them by the Magistrates in Norfolk; who are, all over England, worse fed than the felons in the gaols. Go, and tell them, when they raise their hands from the pig-trough, or from the grains-tub, and, with their dirty tongues, cry "No Popery"; go, read to the degraded and deluded wretches, this account of the state of their Catholic forefathers, who lived . . . in those times, which we have the audacity to call "the dark ages."<sup>42</sup>

This is very strong history indeed, and it is history with a purpose. In the work, "the master of plain speaking,"<sup>43</sup> as William Morris calls him, presented a set of medieval-modern contrasts more vigorous than any which were to follow in the century, with Carlyle's a possible exception. The impact of the work on Cobbett's contemporaries is difficult to measure. Cole estimates that the numbers sold about 40,000 copies each and notes that the work was republished immediately in Ireland and America, and that it was translated into French and other languages.<sup>44</sup> Cobbett's son Pitt, who edited Rural Rides in

<sup>41</sup> History of the Protestant Reformation, letter XVI, para. 466, Q9<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., letter XVI, para. 459, Q7<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> The Letters of William Morris, ed. Philip Henderson (London, 1950), p. 179.

<sup>44</sup> Cole, The Life of William Cobbett, p. 289.

1886, claims that "50,000 each of many of the numbers, even of the first edition, and of one number even 61,000 copies, were sold."<sup>45</sup> Cobbett himself boasted that the work is "unquestionably the book of greatest circulation in the whole world, the Bible only excepted."<sup>46</sup>

At the bottom of these contrasts between the medieval period and the nineteenth century is Cobbett's concern for the poor of England, in particular the agricultural poor. The reader notices that all the contrasting examples deal with the agricultural laborer. One could argue that the medieval period had no machine manufacturing, so there could be no contrast of factory laborers; but the answer is not so simple as that. Morris and Ruskin, for example, were able to make that contrast. Instead, the answer probably lies in Cobbett's innate agrarianism. His early Spencean enthusiasm had convinced him "that agriculture is the only source of national wealth."<sup>47</sup> That conviction that "from the land all the good things come"<sup>48</sup> remained with him, and he simply could not understand why a farmer should be starving when he was able to grow more food than was needed for himself and his family.

But the nineteenth century had an answer for him, one which he was not able to accept. Thomas Malthus' Essay on the Principle of Population (1798) had explained--indeed justified--the

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<sup>45</sup> Rural Rides, I, 376n.

<sup>46</sup> Advice to Young Men, and (Incidentally) to Young Women, in the Middle and Higher Ranks of Life. In a Series of Letters, Addressed to a Youth, a Bachelor, a Lover, a Husband, a Father, a Citizen, or a Subject (London, 1906), p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> "Perish Commerce," Political Register, XII (December 5, 1807), 870.

<sup>48</sup> History of the Protestant Reformation, letter V, para. 150, E5<sup>v</sup>.

poverty in England by showing that a geometrically increasing population was outdistancing a numerically increasing food supply. This made good conservative argument and no doubt eased many Tory consciences. For it placed the blame for poverty not upon the rich, but upon the poor themselves. They had created their own poverty by excessive propagation. This doctrine, if widely held, would invalidate any historical contrast which demonstrated that the medieval peasant was better off than the nineteenth century farmer. Malthusians could simply argue that the population of the medieval period was very small, and, naturally, there was more food for all.

Cobbett had no use whatsoever for "beastly Malthus, or any of his nasty disciples."<sup>49</sup> He realized that he must answer the population argument or else all his contrasting pictures would be of no worth. So, with typical Cobbett ingenuity, he took the offensive. He would argue that the medieval period was more thickly populated than the nineteenth century. It is no mere chance that he prefaces his discussion of "Former Wealth. Former Power. Former Freedom. Former Plenty, Ease, and Happiness" with a lengthy "proof" of the greater "Former Population of England and Ireland."

In his argument that medieval England was more heavily populated than nineteenth century England, Cobbett is, of course, very wrong. But seldom has an erroneous idea been stated so vigorously and so repeatedly. If he had read his Lingard carefully, he could have arrived at fairly accurate population

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<sup>49</sup> Rural Rides, II, 80.

figures through simple computation with the tax figures cited.<sup>50</sup>  
But he did not, for such was not his purpose.

To sustain his point, Cobbett calls attention to the 100,000 men who followed Wat Tyler in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, getting his figures from Hume.<sup>51</sup> He points next to a medieval Canterbury which was able, according to Hume, to accommodate 100,000 pilgrims at once; now it is "a beggarly, gloomy-looking town, with about 12,000 inhabitants."<sup>52</sup> His main proof, however, concerns the number of churches which dotted medieval England. He counts the churches, estimates their capacity as "four, five, or ten times the number of their present parishoners,"<sup>53</sup> then asks his questions: "What should men have built such large churches for?. . . And what motive could there have been for putting together such large quantities of stone and mortar, and to make walls four feet thick, and towers and steeple, if there had not been people to fill the buildings? And, how could the labour have been performed."<sup>54</sup>

Apparently Cobbett thought that he had found the unanswerable refutation for the Malthusian arguments in his church capacity theory. For he continued throughout his life to sell the theory to his readers. In his Rural Rides he fashions what

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, John Lingard, History of England (Philadelphia, 1827), IV, 141.

<sup>51</sup> History of the Protestant Reformation, letter XVI, para. 452, Q2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., letter XVI, para. 452, Q3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., letter XVI, para. 452, Q2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Loc. cit.

almost amounts to a formula. As he rides from village to village, city to city, he counts the cathedrals and churches in the area. Then he reiterates the question, "What, I ask, for about the thousandth time I ask it; what were these twenty churches built for?"<sup>55</sup> He simply will not capitulate to the Malthusian argument, nor will he allow his readers to so capitulate.

I do not believe one word of what is said of the increase of the population. All observation and all reason is against the fact, and as to the parliamentary returns, what need we more than this: that they assert, that the population of Great Britain has increased from ten to fourteen millions in the last twenty years! That is enough! A man that can such that in, will believe, literally believe, that the moon is made of green cheese.<sup>56</sup>

A corollary to the Malthusian argument was a new attitude toward the treatment of the poor, an attitude which culminated in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. This law abolished parochial responsibility and direct relief to paupers and established throughout the entire country workhouses where the men and women were separated so as to check population growth among the pauper classes.

Cobbett again rose to the occasion, for he bitterly represented the inhumanity of the act; and again he used the contrast of the middle ages with the nineteenth century as his most effective weapon. He believed that relief to the poor was not merely a begrudging necessity in the middle ages. Instead, it was a sacred duty performed in large part by the monasteries.

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<sup>55</sup> Rural Rides, II, 99.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., I, 176.

The poor had a legal right to one-third of the tithes. His List of Abbeys, Priories, Nuneries, Hospitals, and other Religious Foundations in England and Wales and in Ireland, Confiscated, Seized on, or Alienated, by the Protestant "Reformation" Sovereigns and Parliaments (1827) is merely another attempt to demonstrate to the nineteenth century Englishman the just provision which the Catholic middle ages had made for its poor, to contrast "our well-fed and well-clad Catholic forefathers [with]. . . their unfortunate, half-famished, ragged, pauperized descendants."<sup>57</sup> In contrast to this long list of abbeys, priories, nunneries, and hospitals where certain, sufficient, and humane provisions were made for the unfortunate, Cobbett presented in his Legacy to Labourers (1835) the nineteenth century counterpart, the inhuman poorhouse, where only the minimum essentials of life were grudgingly dispensed. His scorn of the Malthusian-inspired modern poorhouse was complete.

If a man with a family should break his leg, or should be unable to find work [the authorities are empowered] to make him come into the workhouse, which may be at forty or fifty miles from his home; there to have his own clothes stripped off, and a workhouse dress put upon him; and to cause his wife and children to be treated in the same manner; to separate man and wife completely, day and night, and never let them see one another; to separate the children from the parents, and never let them see one another; to suffer no friend, no relation, to come to speak to either, though upon their dying beds; there being, observe, the Dead Body Bill still in force, which was supported by Lord Radnor and the Bishop of London, which Bill

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List of Abbeys, Priories, Nuneries, Hospitals (London, 1868), p. 3. In the preface to this work Cobbett points out that it should be considered a second part to his History of the Protestant Reformation.

will authorize the keeper of the workhouse, who may be a negro-driver from JAMAICA, or even a NEGRO, to dispose of the body to the cutters-up, seeing that it cannot be claimed by the kindred of the deceased, they not being allowed to come into the workhouse.<sup>58</sup>

The Poor Law Amendment Act and the inhuman workhouses which resulted from the act had been the product of the Protestant Reformation, Cobbett felt. The medieval poor had been supported by the tithes, but the Reformation "took away the great tithes, as well as the rents, from the monasteries, and gave them to the king."<sup>59</sup> Thus the poor had been deprived of what was rightfully theirs. To substantiate this line of argument, Cobbett again considered the medieval period:

Long before the Norman conquest all the lands were charged with tithes, out of which tithes the law required that the poor should be relieved. . . . The law and practice of England gave a third part of the tithes to the poor; and gave them also a very large part of the rents of the lands belonging to the monasteries or religious houses. There were then no moduses; that is to say, no giving of a trifling sum, instead of the tithes of a parish; there were then no exemptions from the payment of tithes; mills; the tills of markets; all underwoods; even trades, in certain cases, yielded tithes; so that the amount of tithes, in proportion to the whole produce of the country, was very great; and hence arose up all the magnificent cathedrals and churches, while the poorer part of the people were taken excellent care of.<sup>60</sup>

Cobbett continued,

In this state of things the Norman Conqueror came; established the feudal system; made a new distri-

<sup>58</sup> William Cobbett, Cobbett's Legacy to Labourers; or, [what] is the Right which the Lords, Baronets, and Squires, have to the Lands of England? (London, 1835), p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-115.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 109-110.

bution of the lands; or, granted them to their then possessors. But, he made no change with regard to tithes: the right of the poor still remained; and never was it questioned . . . until the days which afflicted this kingdom with the writings of the hard-hearted MALTHUS, and his merciless followers; who . . . now have the audacity to tell us, that a legal and certain provision for the poor is a bad thing; that the means of protecting the aged and infirm is mischievous, and that, even hospitals, charitable donations, and the giving of alms, are injurious to a nation.<sup>61</sup>

As was the case with his population theory, this argument of Cobbett's was partially erroneous. Indeed, Coulton points out that the losses to the poor through dissolution of the monasteries "have often been exaggerated to an absurd extent, in defiance of plain documentary evidence."<sup>62</sup> "The account-rolls show that not one-tenth of the enormous monastic incomes were spent upon charitable purposes; and frequently the monks were not even giving to the poor all the money which had been definitely earmarked for them by the donors, and of which the monasteries, therefore, were not owners but merely trustees."<sup>63</sup>

But Cobbett was not one to examine account rolls, even had they been available to him. Having stated this belief, he repeated it again and again. In Rural Rides he boastfully measured the impact of his contrast:

We all know how long it has been the fashion for us to take it for granted, that the monasteries were bad things; but, of late, I have made some hundreds of thousands of very good Protestants

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>62</sup> George Gordon Coulton, The Medieval Scene (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 86-87.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 81-82.

begin to suspect, that monasteries were better than poor-rates, and that monks and nuns, who fed the poor, were better than sinecure and pension men and women, who feed upon the poor.<sup>64</sup>

Beside the fact that Cobbett was the first to apply extensively the medieval-modern contrast, it is interesting to note the similarity of certain aspects of that contrast with those who were to follow him.

Pugin, Ruskin, and, to some extent, Morris were later to use architecture as an indication of the greatness of the middle ages. They saw in the twisted gargoyles, aspiring steeples, and massive solidity of medieval churches a spirituality, a freedom, a happiness far greater than that to be found in the nineteenth century. One is surprised to find quite similar ideas in Cobbett.

I do not believe that Cobbett found an esthetic delight in viewing a gothic arch. Nor would he, like Pugin or Ruskin, climb the walls of a gothic cathedral with measuring stick in hand. No, I am inclined to think that Cobbett's real attitude was indicated when at the end of a day's ride he wrote, "Though we met with no gothic arches . . . we saw something a great deal better; namely, about forty cows, the most beautiful I ever saw."<sup>65</sup> But he was not the sort of man who would neglect to use any argument which might further his purpose. So, perhaps taking his cue from the "flood of pamphlets" about gothic archaeology which were issued in the early decades of the century,<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Rural Rides, I, 348.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., I, 7.

<sup>66</sup> Clark, The Gothic Revival, p. 95.

Cobbett spoke in glowing terms of the architecture of the middle ages. And always there is the inevitable contrast. "For my part," he says in Rural Rides, "I could not look up at the spire and the whole of the church at Salisbury, without feeling that I lived in degenerate times. Such a thing could never be made now. We feel that, as we look at the building. It really does appear that if our forefathers had not made these buildings, we should have forgotten, before now, what the Christian religion was!"<sup>67</sup>

Later we will see Pugin and Ruskin saying much the same thing. But they will not have quite the same practical emphasis that one finds in Cobbett. Note, for example, the following passage in which Cobbett uses the contrast for his immediate and practical cause.

After we came out of the cathedral [at Winchester], Richard [Cobbett's son] said, "Why, Papa, nobody can build such places now can they?" "No, my dear," said I. "That building was made when there were no poor wretches in England, called paupers; when there were no poor-rates; when every labouring man was clothed in good woollen cloth; and when all had a plenty of meat and bread and beer."<sup>68</sup>

The contrast is repeated again and again. About the church at Ely he says, "It is impossible to look at that magnificent pile without feeling that we are a fallen race of men. . . . You have only to open your eyes to be convinced that England must have been a far greater, and more wealthy country in those days than it is these days."<sup>69</sup> The church at Burghclere inspires his

<sup>67</sup> Rural Rides, II, 86.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 375.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 301.

best vein, "What tales these churches do tell upon us! What fools, what lazy dogs, what presumptuous asses, what lying braggarts, they make us appear."<sup>70</sup>

In addition to using gothic architecture for much the same purpose as Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris, Cobbett's contrasts often anticipate Carlyle. Carlyle, who liked vigorous prose, thought Cobbett "strong as a rhinoceros."<sup>71</sup> There is a power, a vividness, a realism about Cobbett's presentation of the middle ages which is akin to Carlyle's. Unlike Scott, who "assured men that mediaevalism was only a romance,"<sup>72</sup> Cobbett presented it as a reality, and in doing so he approximated Carlyle's theory of historical realism.

Also, some of his utterances are worded strangely like Carlyle's. The Following, which appeared in the Political Register for April 14, 1821, could very easily find a place in Carlyle's Past and Present: "When master and man were the terms, every one was in his place; and all were free. Now, in fact, it is an affair of masters and slaves, and the word, master, seems to be avoided only for the purpose of covering our shame."<sup>73</sup> And how close is Cobbett's, "They [nineteenth century farm laborers] have 'liberty' to choose between death by starvation (quick or slow) and death by the halter,"<sup>74</sup> to Carlyle's "Gurth

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., II, 179.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Carlyle, "Sir Walter Scott," Works, ed. H. D. Traill, Centenary Edition (London, 1896-1899), XXIX, 39.

<sup>72</sup> Chesterton, William Cobbett, p. 165.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted from Cole, Life of William Cobbett, p. 267.

<sup>74</sup> Rural Rides, II, 116.

is now 'emancipated' long since; has what we call 'Liberty'. Liberty, I am told is a Divine thing. Liberty when it becomes the 'Liberty to die by starvation' is not so Divine."<sup>75</sup>

William Cobbett certainly deserves to be called the first important contributor to the nineteenth century habit of the medieval-modern contrast. Fundamentally an agrarian reactionary yearning for the "dear Old England" of pre-industrial days, a confused man who simply couldn't understand the new pressures which were making over the world, he lashed out at the new forces with sharply focused verbal pictures which demonstrated vividly the superiority of the medieval worker over the worker of the nineteenth century.

Talk of vassals! Talk of villains! Talk of serfs! Are there any of these, or did feudal times ever see any of them, so debased, so absolutely slaves, as the poor creatures who, in the "enlightened" North, are compelled to work fourteen hours in a day, in a heat of eighty-four degrees; and who are liable to punishment, for looking out at a window of the factory.<sup>76</sup>

If this made him a radical, then radical he would be. I feel sure, however, that if Cobbett had been given to writing utopias, his would have had medieval overtones. The society would have been an agrarian one; hand labor would have reigned. There would have been no paper money. Master and man would be real distinctions, and each would recognize his rights and his obligations. His would not be a Marxian utopia without private property; it would sanction private property, and that

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<sup>75</sup> Works, X, 212 (Past and Present, book III, chap. XIII).

<sup>76</sup> Rural Rides, I, 230.

sanction would carry obligations for its owner.

At bottom Cobbett always respected the rights of property and the laws of England. Abuses of either those laws or those property rights, he, of course, fought; however, he did not fight the things themselves. And he saw many abuses in his nineteenth century, abuses which needed badly to be remedied. This is why he joined the reform cause. If his efforts for that cause led toward the working class movement and Socialism, he was not to blame. One of the last paragraphs he wrote, the final paragraph of Legacy for Labourers, which appeared in the year of his death, makes his position quite clear.

My friends, the working people of England! Let us resolve to hold fast to the laws of God, and the laws of England; let us continue to hold theft and robbery in abhorrence; let us continue to look upon the property of our neighbor as something which we ought not even to covet, and as, next after life and limb, the thing most sacred on earth; but, let us, at the same time, perish, rather than acknowledge, that the holders of the lands have a right so to use them, as to cause the natives to perish of hunger, or of cold.<sup>77</sup>

Five years after Cobbett began to publish his History of the Protestant Reformation in 1824, another book appeared which employed on an extensive scale the contrast of pre-Reformation England with England of the nineteenth century. This was Robert Southey's Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society. Although it contained none of the biting irony which marked Cobbett's work, the Colloquies called into question the theory of progress which his century seemed



to be accepting.

Like Cobbett before him, Southey's early political leanings had been Jacobin; again like Cobbett, the last years of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth century saw him switch to the Tory side. But there--unlike Cobbett--Southey stayed. William Haller has discussed "Southey's Later Radicalism,"<sup>78</sup> and has insisted that "in the midst of his Toryism he was still a good deal of a radical,"<sup>79</sup> but this is to play with a word; Haller's definition of "radical" is broad enough to include almost all Tories.

The desire to make the world a better place in which to live is not enough in itself to entitle one to the radical designation; the implementation of that desire distinguishes the radical from the conservative. A man may desire to fashion a new world, a new social orientation to a changing economy, as did Robert Owen; or to a new philosophy, as did Shelley. On the other hand, a man may merely wish to recreate a world which has passed, as did Cobbett. And, as we have seen, if this desire to recreate the conditions of the past calls into question present political and religious alignments, if that desire to recreate were to be implemented by severe dislocations in the status quo, then the holder of that desire is a radical.

In this sense Southey was not a radical. Not once after his brief and early pantisocratic enthusiasm had waned did he

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<sup>78</sup> William Haller, "Southey's Later Radicalism," PMLA, XXXVII (1922), 281-292.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

directly propose political reform. Crusades for moral reform he did propose, but these--witness the Eisenhower campaign in 1952--are always good instruments for conservative thinkers. For Cobbett he had no sympathy whatsoever. Of the many mentions of Cobbett which I have found in Southey's works and letters, the only favorable one occurs in a letter written in 1801, shortly after Peter Porcupine had returned from America as a strong Tory.<sup>80</sup> After Cobbett's second political shift, Southey always alluded to him in derogatory terms. Southey called him one of "the Anarchist journalists,"<sup>81</sup> an "incendiary,"<sup>82</sup> and in a letter to Landor, Southey wrote, "Very soon such fellows as Cobbett will take up the principle [of socialism], and use it as an engine of mischief,--the most tremendous that has ever yet been brought to bear upon society."<sup>83</sup>

Yet these two men had some ideas in common. Both viewed with alarm the effect of the machine manufacturing system upon England; both blamed on it the present condition of England's poor. I have summarized Cobbett's argument against the machine; Southey's is quite similar. In the Letters of Esprilla, after considering the problem, he concluded, "The poor become year after year more numerous, more miserable, and more depraved; and this is the inevitable tendency of the manufacturing system."<sup>84</sup> If Cobbett had written this, it would have

<sup>80</sup> Letters of Robert Southey, ed. Maurice H. Fitzgerald (London, 1912), p. 51.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 281.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 452; see also Robert Southey, Select Prose of Robert Southey, ed. Jacob Zeitlin (New York, 1916), p. 304.

<sup>84</sup> Select Prose, p. 421.

been more vigorously stated and the word "inevitable" would perhaps not have appeared, but he would not have changed the total idea.

Another point of contact between the two men was their attitude toward the monasteries. After reading Lingard, Cobbett awoke to the fact--or fiction--that the monastic orders had dealt liberally with the poor and that the dissolution which accompanied the Reformation had thus destroyed what in the middle ages had been a right of the poor, the right to alms. Poor rates and workhouses were the inhuman and reluctant substitutes in the nineteenth century for what was a sacred duty in the Catholic middle ages.

Southey would not go quite that far. His strong hatred of Catholicism would not allow him to give aid and comfort to the enemy. For to the very end Southey was a bitter foe of Catholic emancipation while Cobbett, of course, was its champion. Southey's views toward Catholic emancipation were formed early and never fundamentally changed. As early as 1801 he wrote in a letter to C. W. Wynn, "You might as well let a fire burn or a pestilence spread, as suffer the propagation of popery. I hate and abhor it from the bottom of my soul, and the only antidote is poison."<sup>85</sup> A passage in the preface to the Colloquies shows that his attitude had not changed by 1829.

My opinions respecting the Roman Catholic claims to seats in Parliament and certain offices in the state have always been the same. . . . It is against the plainest rules of policy to

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<sup>85</sup> Letters of Robert Southey, p. 41.



entrust men with power in the State whose bound-  
ed religious duty it is to subvert, if they can,  
the Church. These opinions I have uniformly held  
since the question was brought forward in the  
first year of the present century; and in these  
. . . I expect to continue for the short remain-  
der of my life.<sup>86</sup>

This anti-Catholic feeling modified and made somewhat difficult his attitude toward the monastic system, but it did not erase his sincere admiration for monasticism.

The development of that attitude is interesting. As a pantisocratic idealist in 1793 he confessed in a letter to G. C. Bedford that "to monastic foundations I have little attachment."<sup>87</sup> Perhaps a nineteen year old youth could not view with approval a celibate life. By 1811, however, Southey's early disposition toward monasticism had changed. In the Quarterly Review for December, 1811, Southey wrote an article on the monasteries which, although it reflected his strong anti-Catholicism, yet was dotted here and there with high praise of monasticism. Such high praise, indeed, that William Cobbett saw use for it thirteen years later in his History of the Protestant Reformation; he quoted an entire paragraph--slightly altered to fit his purpose--from this article.<sup>88</sup> Excellent irony, for Cobbett's purpose was to assist the cause of Catholic

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<sup>86</sup> Robert Southey, Sir Thomas More; or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society (London, 1829), I, pp. XIII-XIV; see also I, 294.

<sup>87</sup> Letters of Robert Southey, p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> "Tracts on the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions," Quarterly Review, VI (December, 1811), 313-357. The paragraph Cobbett used appears on pp. 318-319; it appears in Cobbett's History of the Protestant Reformation, letter V, para. 141, E2<sup>r</sup>-E2<sup>v</sup>. The authorship of the Quarterly article is proven in Hill Shine's The Quarterly Review under Gifford, Identification of Contributors 1800-1824 (Chapel Hill, 1949), p. 127.

emancipation!

By 1816, Southey's feeling toward the monasteries had developed still farther. In the 1811 article he had merely pointed out the excellences of the monastic orders before their corruption; he had not suggested that they might perform a function any longer. By 1816, however, he began to wish that England still had monasteries: "I wish we had reformed the monastic institutions instead of overthrowing them. Mischievous as they are in Catholic countries, they have got this good about them, that they hold up something besides worldly distinction to the respect and admiration of the people, and fix the standard of virtues higher than we do in Protestant countries."<sup>89</sup> His interest in the monasteries continued. In October, 1824, he wrote to his friend Bedford that he had recently talked to his publisher about "my proposed History of the Monastic Orders."<sup>90</sup> Although this work was never completed--in fact never actually started--Southey often talked of it in his later letters. And his notebooks attest to the great amount of research he had done in preparation for the work.<sup>91</sup>

In those two things Southey and Cobbett showed similar tendencies. Both called into question the nineteenth century's satisfaction with material "progress," and both were drawn to realize the worth of monastic establishments.

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<sup>89</sup> Letters of Robert Southey, p. 253.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>91</sup> Southey's Common-Place Book, ed. John Wood Warter (London, 1876), II, 368-401.



I have shown that Cobbett, in his zeal to soften the gloomy picture of the middle ages which had been created by Protestant historians, had been forced into prolonged contrasts between the medieval period and his own. Southey, too, was to use this method, but with his Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society the device of contrasting pictures is more artistically applied and sustained than in Cobbett's work.

Southey, always one to believe that posterity would reward his work, was more than usually confident that the Colloquies would last. To his friend Walter Savage Landor, from whom he probably borrowed the idea of an imaginary conversation, he wrote, "One edition will sell; some of the rising generation will be leavened by it, and in the third and fourth generations its foresight will be proved."<sup>92</sup> It was to be a work in which his contrast between the past and the present would be strong enough to make "our political men . . . rub their eyes."<sup>93</sup> Although Colloquies was not actually published until 1829, Southey told Landor in this letter that the work was very far advanced. That was in August of 1824, three months before the first letter of Cobbett's History of the Protestant Reformation was published; therefore, we can assume that Southey came upon the medieval-modern contrast device independently.

The structure of the work is interesting. Montesinos,

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<sup>92</sup> Letters of Robert Southey, p. 380.

<sup>93</sup> Loc. cit.

who represents Southey, is browsing around in his private library when Sir Thomas More appears. The two plan to meet occasionally to discuss the problems of the world. Like Morris' A Dream of John Ball, which I shall discuss later, these fifteen colloquies allow a double-barreled expression of the author's point of view. Through More, Southey can express his own opinions; then he, as Montesinos, is allowed to comment upon them. A plan to employ medieval-modern contrasts is made explicit by More in the first meeting. He says,

By comparing the great operating causes in the age of the Reformation, and in this age of revolutions, going back to the former age, looking at things as I beheld them, perceiving wherein I judged rightly, and wherein I erred, and tracing the progress of those causes which are now developing their whole tremendous power, you will derive instruction which you are a fit person to receive and communicate; for without being solicitous concerning present effect, you are contented to cast your bread upon waters. Tomorrow you will see me again; and I shall continue to visit you occasionally as opportunity may serve.<sup>94</sup>

The attack upon the present begins at the very next meeting. After asserting categorically that religion, politics, and morals are in worse condition at present than in any former age,<sup>95</sup> More goes on to call the idea of progress a "mere speculation."<sup>96</sup> He admits

that improvements of the utmost value have been made, in the most important concerns: but I deny that the melioration has been general; and insist, on the contrary, that a considerable portion of the people are in a state, which as relates to their physical condition, is greatly worsened, and,

<sup>94</sup> Colloquies, I, 19.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 32.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 37.

as touching their intellectual nature, is assuredly not improved. Look, for example, at the great mass of your populace in town and country,..[Southey's punctuation] a tremendous proportion of the whole community! Are their bodily wants better, or more easily supplied? Are they subject to fewer calamities? Are they happier in childhood, youth, and manhood, and more comfortably or carefully provided for in old age, than when the land was uninclosed, or half covered with woods?<sup>97</sup>

Again and again More answers his question; the condition of the great majority of nineteenth century Englishmen "is greatly worsened."<sup>98</sup> They are worse fed, worse clothed, they have less fuel, they have less religious feeling than did the feudal serf. Nineteenth century man has gained only independence since the decay of the feudal system, and that "has been dearly purchased by the loss of kindly feelings and ennobling attachments."<sup>99</sup> The feudal serf's advantages are then enumerated in a manner which looks forward to Carlyle and Ruskin:

He served one master as long as he lived; and being at all times sure of the same sufficient subsistence, if he belonged to the estate like the cattle, and was accounted with them as part of the live stock, he resembled them also in the exemption which he enjoyed from all cares concerning his own maintenance and that of his family. The feudal slaves . . . were therefore in general satisfied with the lot to which they were born . . . and going on in their regular and unvaried course of duty, generation after generation, they were content.<sup>100</sup>

Whenever the condition of the nineteenth century's poor is seriously contrasted with the condition of the medieval poor,

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., I, 46-47.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., I, 59.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., I, 60.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., I, 69-70.

the discussion must ultimately get around to the function of the medieval monastery. That, in turn, cannot fail to bring up the question of dissolution during the reign of Henry VIII.

Southey's attitude toward monasticism, which I have discussed earlier, is again expressed in Colloquies. More points out to Montesinos that the monasteries

accumulated no treasures, and never were any incomes more beneficially employed. The great abbeys vied with each other in architectural magnificence, in this more especially, but likewise in every branch of liberal expenditure, giving employment to great numbers, which was better than giving unearned food. They provided, as it became them, for the old and helpless also.<sup>101</sup>

Southey, in fact, is forced to echo Cobbett in admitting that the Reformation was accompanied by some "perilous consequences,"<sup>102</sup> the most important of which was the destruction of the monastic orders. "I consider," he said, "the dissolution of the Religious Houses as the greatest evil that accompanied the Reformation."<sup>103</sup> He did not, however, forget that the Reformation had made positive accomplishments, and to strengthen the effect of those accomplishments, he allowed More, the Catholic martyr, to admit its "eventual good."<sup>104</sup>

Toward the end of the second volume More and Montesinos leave the realm of the tangible and concentrate upon the abstract. But still the medieval-modern contrast is used. Both are convinced that the feudal times "were less injurious than

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., I, 84.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., I, 246.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., II, 35-36.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., II, 40; elsewhere Southey had More say, "The Protestants brought back a corrupted faith to its primitive purity." (Ibid., I, 154).



these commercial ones to the kindly and generous feelings of human nature, and far, far more favourable to the principles of honour and integrity."<sup>105</sup> After much discussion on either side, both conclude that lack of discipline and order had depraved the nineteenth century. "The root of all your evils," says More in summary, "is the sinfulness of the nation. The principle of duty is weakened among you; that of moral obligation is loosened; that of religious obedience is destroyed."<sup>106</sup>

With this, Cobbett before him and Carlyle after him would have concurred, but their solutions for the problem were much different from Southey's. Cobbett would agitate for legislative reform, would emancipate the Catholics, would teach the poor of England their rights. Carlyle would teach the nineteenth century Englishman to honor his heroes and pay homage to a law which transcended that of church and state. No such radical changes were advocated by Southey. Cobbett's power he would limit by allowing the government to censor those "panders of the press"<sup>107</sup> who inculcated dangerous errors and vile passions in the populace. Carlyle's major work in the tradition came, of course, too late for Southey to comment

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., II, 246-247; earlier in the work More had said that at the end of the middle ages "a trading spirit . . . gradually superceded the rude but kindlier principle of the feudal system: profit and loss became the rule of conduct; in came calculation and out went feeling." (Ibid., I, 79).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., II, 417.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., II, 387; Henry Crabb Robinson recorded in his diary after a visit to Southey, "He [Southey] considers the Government seriously endangered by the writings of Cobbett." (Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence, ed. T. Sadler [London, 1869], II, 21).

upon it.

Having called attention to the problems of the nineteenth century and having caused the politicians to "rub their eyes," he allowed those eyes to be closed again. He could not or he would not allow himself to see that the ills of his century were not to be cured by simple admonitions to reverence the constitution of church and state, to keep the prayer, "Esto perpetua,"<sup>108</sup> forever on one's lips, and to establish Protestant monasteries and convents in nineteenth century England. Accuse Southey of what you will: pompousness, bigotry, even stupidity; yet he was not ungrateful, for to a government which made him its laureate and rewarded him with a handsome pension, he did constant service.

I have dealt thus far with two early users of the medieval-modern contrast. The two, William Cobbett and Robert Southey, differed widely in political convictions, yet they paralleled each other occasionally when they placed the middle ages in juxtaposition with the nineteenth century and drew comparisons. Both of them questioned the theory of progress, both saw value in the medieval monastic system, both argued against the manufacturing system, and both felt that man in the "dark ages" was in many respects better off than his nineteenth century descendants.

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<sup>108</sup> [Robert Southey and William Gifford], "Bell and Lancaster's Systems of Education," Quarterly Review, VI (October, 1811), 304; for evidence on authorship see Shine, the Quarterly Review under Gifford, pp. 26-27.

Cobbett as spokesman for the radicals and Southey as a conservative spokesman for sound morality--thatever that is--used the medieval-modern contrast only as part of a larger and more immediate purpose; their connection with medievalism was spasmodic, irregular. The next figure I am going to consider made more than occasional use of medievalism. In him the spirit of the middle ages burned like a raging fire. From the time when, as a lad of fourteen, he dangerously suspended himself over the moat of Rochester Castle to measure its walls, until 1851, when, as director of the Medieval Court at the Great Exhibition, overwork and nervous strain brought about his insanity and death in the following year, Pugin dedicated his life to medievalism.

Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852) has not yet received the scholarly attention he deserves. There is no adequate biography.<sup>109</sup> He is mentioned in studies of the Gothic Revival and in architectural studies; but even in these areas his well-deserved fame is obscured by Ruskin, whose festooned flights of impassioned prose have caused scholars to overlook his forerunner. Yet Pugin had earlier expressed many of the same ideas in a more vigorous but less beautiful style.

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Michael Trappes-Lomax's Pugin, A Mediaeval Victorian (London, 1932) has too strong a Catholic bias to be objective; Benjamin Ferrey's Recollections of A. N. Welby Pugin, and His Father, Augustus Pugin (London, 1861) is often no more than a disorganized collection of documents and comments, though as a source of a Pugin biography it would be indispensable.

Pugin was born on March 1, 1812 the son of Auguste-Charles, Comte de Pugin, who as a member of the French aristocracy, had fled his native country during the Revolution. The elder Pugin served first as a ghost designer of gothic ornament for John Nash, a leading London architect; later he became one of England's leading gothicists in his own right.

Augustus Welby Pugin, after finishing his private education at Christ's Hospital, learned the fundamentals of gothic from his father, whose school of architectural drawing he attended. Gothic architecture, of course, led him to considerations of the medieval period; those considerations in turn were reapplied to gothic architecture. According to Kenneth Clark, one of the most competent students of the nineteenth century's Gothic Revival, gothic was looked upon as no more than a style before Pugin taught his fellow Englishmen to regard it as a religion.<sup>110</sup>

For religion it was with him. In 1834, after growing more and more dissatisfied with the moral and physical ugliness of the English Church, Pugin adopted the Catholic faith. In January of that year he wrote his friend Osmond in Salisbury, "I can assure you that, after a most close and impartial investigation, I feel perfectly convinced the Roman Catholic Church is the only true one, and the only one in which the grand and sublime style of church architecture can ever be restored."<sup>111</sup> By shifting to Catholicism, Pugin demonstrated

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<sup>110</sup> Clark, The Gothic Revival, p. 164.

<sup>111</sup> Ferrey, p. 88; this shift, as I shall show later, incurred the wrath of John Ruskin.

the affinity which the Gothic Architectural Revival, until it was rescued later by Ruskin,<sup>112</sup> had with the Oxford Movement, its doctrinal counterpart. Both led toward a high church and Pugin, as well as Newman, felt the insecurity of the middle-high position, that of high church Anglicanism, and traveled the entire distance to Rome.

Pugin's conversion in 1834 was followed in the next year by a move to Salisbury where he built himself a medieval house complete with hand decorated medieval furniture and a drawbridge.<sup>113</sup> There, surrounded by the pseudo-medievalism of his youthful enthusiasm, he started to write the work which employed the medieval-modern contrast. In 1836 he published, at his own expense, Contrasts: or, a Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages and the Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing the Present Decay of Taste.<sup>114</sup> The work was much more than a mere contrast of architectural styles; if it were only that, we would have no reason to consider it here. Instead, it reached out into social and ethical, even into economic questions.

I have said that the Gothic Revival was to Pugin much more than a mere revival of architectural forms; to him it was actually a revival of Christian life, and the only true Christian

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<sup>112</sup> Clark, The Gothic Revival, p. 270.

<sup>113</sup> Interesting descriptions of this home can be found in Trap-pes-Lomax, p. 64 and Ferrey, pp. 72-73.

<sup>114</sup> I shall quote from the second edition, which although it carries the date 1836 on its title page, was published in 1841. The title of this second edition was changed to read: Contrasts or a Parrallel [sic] between the Architecture of the 15th & 19th Centuries.

life, he felt, was that of the Catholic middle ages. Pugin believed, as did Ruskin after him, that a work of art, in this case architecture, possesses a moral worth quite aside from and in fact producing its esthetic worth. The moral worth of a building and the moral worth of the builder were to Pugin inseparable. The builder must have certain mechanical skills, yes, but these alone could never produce the spirit of the true gothic style. Therefore, the solution, thought Pugin, was to reform the nineteenth century after the pattern of the Catholic middle ages. Concerning this, he wrote, "The mechanical part of Gothic architecture is pretty well understood, but it is the principles which influenced ancient compositions, and the soul which appears in all the former works, which is so lamentably deficient; nor, as I have before stated, can they be regained but by a restoration of the ancient feelings and sentiments."<sup>115</sup> Two years later in his An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England, he became more emphatic: "We do not want to revive a facsimile of the works or style of any particular individual, or even period; but it is the devotion, the majesty, and repose of Christian art, for which we are contending;--it is not a style, but a principle."<sup>116</sup>

When a man feels this strongly about the soul or the principle of a building, and when he believes that that soul or principle is dependent upon the moral worth of the builders, then he is forced to place his emphasis not upon the art form

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<sup>115</sup> Contrasts, p. 43.

<sup>116</sup> (London, 1843), p. 44.

itself, but upon the society which produces the art. This accounts for the fact that not only Pugin, but Ruskin and Morris as well, shifted their attention to the reformation of society in order to produce a greater art. Neither Pugin, nor Ruskin, nor Morris--if we excuse his brief lapse while under Rossetti's influence--could be completely comfortable in an art-for-art's-sake environment.

So in Contrasts Pugin set out to show his corrupt nineteenth century the splendor and the majesty of the middle ages with the hope that he could create a thirst for the principles which once produced such a majestic art. He did this by employing the medieval-modern contrast in pictorial form. In a series of sixteen engraved sets of contrasting pictures he emphasized the splendor of medieval architecture by placing a medieval church next to a modern church, a medieval dwelling next to a comparable nineteenth century residence, a medieval altar next to a nineteenth century altar, a medieval town next to a modern town. And so forth.<sup>117</sup> Nor is the use of the contrast

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There is no pagination in the section of the work which contains the drawings; nor are the drawings numbered. In the following list I have numbered them and have supplied appropriate titles for the three which are untitled: (1) Contrasted Parochial Churches, (2) Contrasted Chapels, (3) Contrasted Altar Screens, (4) Contrasted College Gateways, (5) [Contrasted Church Doorways], (6) Contrasted Crosses, (7) Contrasted Episcopal Residences, (8) Contrasted Episcopal Monuments, (9) Contrasted Sepulchral Monuments, (10) Contrasted Town Halls, (11) Contrasted House Fronts, (12) Contrasted Public Conduits, (13) [Contrasted Towns], (14) Contrasted Public Inns, (15) Contrasted Residences of the Poor, (16) [Weighed in the Scales of Veritas]; preceding these sixteen plates of contrasts is a plate entitled "New Church, Open Competition," designed to satirize the sham gothic of the nineteenth century.

restricted to the sixteen plates alone; in the text as well Pugin continually employed the device. The reader is told in the preface that "the author is quite ready to maintain the principle of contrasting Catholic excellence with modern degeneracy; and wherever that degeneracy is observable . . . it will be found to proceed from the decay of true Catholic principles and practice."<sup>118</sup>

The preceding quotation reveals both the structural nature, that of medieval-modern contrasts, and the bias of this "intemperate and one-sided but clever and useful book."<sup>119</sup> Like Cobbett before him, Pugin realized that to gain his point he would first have to debunk many of the currently held notions about the middle ages. In this respect he wrote,

Before true taste and Christian feelings can be revived, all the present and popular ideas on the subject must be utterly changed. Men must learn that the period hitherto called dark and ignorant far excelled our age in wisdom, that art ceased when it is said to have been revived [in the Renaissance], that superstition was piety, and bigotry faith.<sup>120</sup>

Certainly the man who wrote those lines would have enjoyed reading Cobbett's History of the Protestant Reformation; however, I could find no indication that Pugin had read it.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Contrasts, p. v.

<sup>119</sup> So called by the Cambridge Camden Society, which championed Pugin's gothic principles, yet could not condone his religion. The society remained for the most part Anglicans of the highest sort. For the remark on Contrasts see, "Ferrey's Recollections of Pugin," Ecclesiologist, O.S. XXII (October, 1861), 308.

<sup>120</sup> Contrasts, pp. 16-17.

<sup>121</sup> Pugin, however, was a devoted reader of Lingard, the Catholic historian upon whom Cobbett leaned heavily. (Ferrey, p. 178).

Negative evidence in fact seems to suggest that he did not know the work. Pugin cited a great many historians in Contrasts, most of them Catholic. But whenever he could solidify his Catholic position with Protestant authority, he delighted in doing so. If he had known Cobbett's work, he almost certainly would have used it to strengthen his argument, and he would have accompanied each Cobbett citation with the pungent remark, "This, remember, is a Protestant historian speaking."

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the fundamental similarity between Cobbett and Pugin. Both had different points of departure, Cobbett an interest in political reform, Pugin in gothic architecture, yet they often arrived at the same terminus. First, as we have seen, their aims were best carried out by the use of medieval-modern contrasts. Second, and this is both a cause and an effect of the first point, both Cobbett and Pugin felt that a reexamination of the middle ages was needed to erase the erroneous impressions created by historians unsympathetic to that period. Third, in order to account for the degeneracy of modern times as compared with the middle ages, both centered their attention upon the disastrous effects of the Reformation. To Cobbett "it was not a reformation, but a devastation, of England."<sup>122</sup> Pugin's remarks on the Reformation were all in Cobbett's vein, indeed would have been worthy of him. "The so-called Reformation," Pugin said in the preface to Contrasts, "is now regarded by many men of learning

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<sup>122</sup>

History of the Protestant Reformation, letter II, para. 37, B1f.



and of unprejudiced minds as a dreadful scourge, . . . and those by whom it was carried on are now considered in the true light of Church plunderers and crafty political intreguers [sic], instead of holy martyrs and modern apostles."<sup>123</sup> Later in the work appears the same question Cobbett had raised so many times: "Where, I ask, are the often-boasted blessings which the misnamed Reformation has brought? where the splendid results so often asserted?"<sup>124</sup>

A fourth similarity between Cobbett and Pugin grows out of the third. If one questions the value of the Reformation, he must castigate its champions and absolve its opponents. Take, for example, the attitude of the two men toward Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, and Mary. Henry VIII is in Cobbett's work a lustful plunderer and tyrant;<sup>125</sup> in Pugin's he is a "monster of cruelty," a "merciless tyrant."<sup>126</sup> In the same manner both Cobbett and Pugin took a historical about-face in the traditional conceptions of Bloody Mary and Good Queen Bess. Cobbett's attitude toward the two I have discussed earlier; he felt that their reputations needed to be turned completely around, and he described at length the many vicious laws perpetrated during Elizabeth's reign against Catholics. Pugin similarly changed the usual historical conception of Mary and Elizabeth. "There is no period of English History," he said

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<sup>123</sup> Contrasts, p. 1v.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>125</sup> History of the Protestant Reformation, letter II, para. 63, B8<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>126</sup> Contrasts, pp. 62, 21.

in an appendix to Contrasts,

which has been more disguised than the reign of that female demon, Elizabeth; for while her unfortunate sister has been stigmatised as bloody Mary, and ever held up to odium as an intolerant persecuting bigot, Elizabeth has been loaded with encomiums, of which she is quite undeserving. The parliament during her reign enacted most sanguinary laws equally directed against persons who professed the ancient religion, or those who carried Protestant principles further than the new churchmen thought advisable for the safety of their establishment.<sup>127</sup>

A fifth similarity in the medieval-modern contrasts of Pugin and Cobbett is found in their attitude toward the monasteries. Here they are in a sense even joined by Southey, who in Colloquies thought that Protestant monasteries and nunneries, if carefully supervised to keep them free of popish superstition, might serve a necessary function in the nineteenth century. I have pointed out that Cobbett looked upon the demand of the poor to alms as a genuine right established by long practice. Throughout his work, but particularly in his Legacy to Labourers, he praised the work of the medieval monastic houses for their ungrudging care of the aged, the infirm, and the poor. The Reformation changed all this because it took away the monastic rents, rents which had been used--in part at least--for the care of the poor. Certainly, wrote Cobbett, "monks and nuns, who fed the poor, were better than sin-eure and pension men and women, who feed upon the poor."<sup>128</sup>

Like Cobbett, Pugin drew the contrast between the medieval,

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 65-66.

<sup>128</sup> Rural Rides, I, 348.

monastic way of dealing with the poor and the modern way sanctioned by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, and he literally drew it! One of the sets of contrasting plates I mentioned earlier in connection with Pugin's Contrasts places in juxtaposition a medieval and a modern poor house; the page is entitled "Contrasted Residences for the Poor." The contrast is obvious at the first glance, yet closer examination of the plates reveals that Pugin was doing much more than merely pointing out an architectural contrast. The plates have social implications as well.

Approximately one-half of the page is given to each; of that space, the buildings themselves are pictured in six and one-eighth by three and one-half inch plates bordered on the left and lower margins by a series of five insets each depicting a scene within the respective poor houses. These insets correspond with each other in size and position and are, with one exception, given identical captions--the contrast is complete.

First let us look at the structures themselves. The top half of the page is devoted to the modern poor house. It is the familiar octagon design of the approved workhouses of England. Its barred windows, high brick walls encompassing the structure, and the equally high partitions which extend out from the center to divide the workhouse into eight equal areas give the entire unit a prison-like appearance. No life is visible within, though outside the walls, near the entrance, guards split up a family previous to entry into the workhouse. In the far distance, well outside the walls and out of touch

from those within, there is a parish church. The entire scene is dismal, without vegetation.

Much more pleasant is the medieval poor house pictured in the large plate on the lower half of the page. The entire monastic establishment in early gothic presents a scene of industry, beauty, and spiritual comfort. Alms house, residence halls, and church comprise three sides of the court, open on the fourth side to a row of thriving trees. No prison walls here! Inmates walk about the yard alone or in groups. Behind the alms house is a tidy garden with a well in its center. A picture of peace and repose.

The border drawings are more specific studies of the medieval-modern contrast. The first is captioned "One of the Poor Men." In the modern poor house a dejected figure dressed in a shabby poor-house uniform sits crouched in his dark cell, barred windows overhead. The corresponding picture on the lower half of the page presents a striking contrast. This "poor man" of the middle ages walks forth into the open air, staff in hand, wearing a dignified full length cloak. Below the poor men, medieval and modern, are contrasting drawings of "The Master." The modern master stands within the workhouse; manacles hang on the wall behind him. In his left hand he holds a cat-o'-nine-tails which he has selected from a basket of assorted whips. His medieval counterpart is a humanitarian abbot who carries in his left hand not handcuffs, but a purse. He stands outside and is giving alms to a young boy accompanied by an older man, perhaps his father. The third drawing is

entitled "Diet." It presents a contrast between a meager and a well-stocked table. The modern poor house menu reads,

3 oz of bread	1 pint of gruel
2 oz of bread	1 pint of gruel
1 oz of bread	$\frac{1}{2}$ pint of gruel
oat meal	potatoes.

Much more appetizing is the medieval poor man's fare of "beef, mutton, bacon, ale and cider, milk, porridge, wheat bread, and cheese." The fourth set of corresponding insets differ slightly in title. The modern version is called "The Poor Man's Convoy." After death, the modern poor man's body, by sanction of the Dead Body Bill which Cobbett argued so vehemently against, is being carried to a cart labeled "For Dissection." On the wall Pugin placed a sign reading, "A variety of subjects always ready for medical students." Not so in the pious middle ages. This print is called "The Poor Brother's Convoy." Here the deceased poor man, a brother, shown as he is being lowered into the ground, is given a dignified funeral. Candle bearers stand off on one side, cross bearers on the other. A priest, slightly elevated, reads the last sacred rites over the coffin. The fifth and last of the border drawings is entitled "Enforcing Discipline." In the modern poor house the master directs an attendant to pull a pleading mother away from her weeping children. She is to be locked in the cell behind. Discipline in the medieval period is enforced by means of a religious ceremony.

Certainly Pugin has stacked the cards in favor of the

middle ages, just as Cobbett had done. Of this there can be no doubt. Notwithstanding, the total effect of this particular contrast is a powerful one. In every way Pugin leaves no doubt that the medieval monastery is superior to the nineteenth century workhouse. The architectural superiority of the monastery over the workhouse is, Pugin would say, a reflection of the moral superiority of the age which produced the building.

Not all of the sixteen sets of contrasting drawings display so fruitful a yield in social theory. Some of them are almost entirely concerned with esthetic and architectural contrasts, yet even these reveal social and moral implications. For remember, Pugin thought of architecture as the expression in stone of a people's soul. He could not conceive of an immoral or irreligious people producing great churches; nor could a moral and religious people keep from producing them.

The thirteenth set of plates, the set which contrasts "Catholic Town in 1440" with "The Same Town in 1840" indicates an ethical change in soul. As we would expect, the change is reflected in the architecture of the town itself. The main impression one gets from the drawing of the medieval town is one of aspiring piety. Pointed spires dominate the scene; as with the medieval-like villages of Morris' News from Nowhere, all is trim, clean, and neat. The same town in modern times offers a suitable contrast. A new jail dominates the foreground, while most of the church spires have now been replaced by factory smokestacks. The ecclesiastical buildings in the medieval town have been assigned a number, and a key at the bottom of the page identifies them. A close comparison shows



that St. Thomas' Chapel has been replaced by the New Jail, St. Marie's Abbey by the Gas Works, All Saints by the Lunatic Asylum, St. John's by the Iron Works, St. Botolph's by the Socialist Hall of Science. The religious unity of the Catholic middle ages has been destroyed when Mr. Evans' Chapel replaces St. Peter's; the Baptist Chapel now stands on the ground of St. Aikmund's; and a Unitarian Chapel, the New Church, the Wesleyan Centenary Chapel, and a Quaker Meeting House replace St. Marie's, St. Edmund's, St. Cuthbert's, and Trinity, respectively.

The drawing contains subtle insinuations as well. The cathedral has been allowed to fall into ruin. Toll gates have been added to the bridge. The pleasure grounds which accompany the New Parsonage House are built on the ground which held the pious dead in the middle ages. And over that burying place now cleared of its crosses, a woman and four noisy children, presumably the impedimenta of an uncelibate clergy, violate the last rest of the medieval souls beneath.

One could discuss the innuendo of the other contrasts at great length. In set number four, the religious procession moving through the medieval College Gateway at Oxford offers a penetrating contrast to the disorganized group, one of whom carries a sign advertising "Cheap knowledge lecture [at the] Mechanics Institute [by] McGab on The Power of the People," before the fenced gateway at King's College, Strand. Likewise, in the set of Contrasting Chapels, number two, parishioners run jubilantly from the open doors of the modern chapel, while before the medieval chapel one lone petitioner bows in



supplication before a cross. So also with the other drawings. His supposedly candid scheme of presenting the contrasting facts and allowing the viewer to judge the superiority of one age over the other is not so candid as it seems; in all the drawings Pugin allowed his bias toward the middle ages to enter, often, as I have attempted to point out, in very subtle ways. In only one drawing, that the last, does he openly assert the superiority of the middle ages. Weighed in the scales of "veritas" the buildings of the nineteenth century are found wanting; the balance inclines toward the tray which holds an eleventh century cathedral.

Taken in its entirety, Pugin's Contrasts offered as concentrated an indictment of modernity as the nineteenth century had yet produced. Neither Cobbett nor Southey, both of whom had preceded him in using the medieval-modern contrast, had struck so sharp a blow at the very soul of the age as did Pugin. His passion for the true gothic was so strong that he would revive the religious spirit of the middle ages, the only spirit capable of producing that style. Southey thought he saw in the present Protestant generation some of the same "spirit which built cathedrals;"<sup>129</sup> to Pugin this was incomprehensible. The very best architectural efforts of a Protestant nation must, he felt, "fall far short of the glorious solemnity that can alone be attained in a truly [sic] Catholic position."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Colloquies, II, 315.

<sup>130</sup> An Apology, p. 33.

Interesting as the work is, Contrasts has fallen into the general obscurity which surrounds even Pugin's name. I have suggested earlier that Ruskin's more brilliant light assisted in the process. That certainly seems true. But there are other reasons as well. First, Pugin was a Catholic, and England, especially nineteenth century England, has a way of forgetting its Catholic worthies. Second, and far more important, Pugin carried his medievalism much too far--sometimes to the point of absurdity, even insanity. To his critic in Fraser's Magazine who complained that Pugin's type of gothic architecture was an impossibility in nineteenth century culture "unless we could . . . change ourselves,--put off our present identity as people, and change ourselves into 'our English forefathers,'" <sup>131</sup> Pugin would have answered, "Amen." For such was his constant prayer! In his great zeal to unwork the "change of soul" <sup>132</sup> which was the product of the Reformation, he attempted to convert the age to medievalism--and to Catholicism. <sup>133</sup> The middle ages were Catholic; he would be Catholic too. Medieval man lived in a medieval home; he would build himself one. He would even have a medieval wife, and he boasted after his third marriage to "have got a first-rate Gothic woman at last." <sup>134</sup> "He was a man," said his friend,

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<sup>131</sup> "Architectural Revivalism and Puginism," Fraser's Magazine, XXVIII (November, 1843), 605.

<sup>132</sup> An Apology, p. 7.

<sup>133</sup> A reviewer of Ferrey's Recollections wrote, "During his [Pugin's] insanity, one of his chief hallucinations was that the Churches of England and Rome had become reconciled." (Ferrey's Recollections of Pugin, "Ecclesiologist", O.S. XXII, [October, 1861], 310).

<sup>134</sup> Trappes-Lomax, p. 280.

William George Ward, "of one idea,"<sup>135</sup> one consuming passion. That passion was for gothic. He would eat no puddings unless they were gothic in form,<sup>136</sup> he would pray in the proper gothic gown,<sup>137</sup> and he would worship in a proper gothic church. When the newly converted Newman and Faber decided against gothic in favor of both Italian Renaissance and modern Roman architecture, Pugin commented, "Very sad, . . . they have fallen from grace."<sup>138</sup> This passion for gothic architecture caused one contemporary Irishman to write that even

The Catholic Church, she never knew--

Till Mr. Pugin taught her,

That orthodoxy had to do

At all with bricks and mortar.<sup>139</sup>

The intensity of Pugin's medievalism, an intensity which often bordered upon the ridiculous, helped to obscure him. For while succeeding generations often forget the positive achievements of a man, they very seldom forget his absurdities. And realistic medievalism is an anachronistic absurdity. Medievalism could only thrive in a materialistic nineteenth century as

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<sup>135</sup> Wilfrid Ward, William George Ward and the Catholic Revival (London, 1893), p. 386.

<sup>136</sup> He once wrote to a friend by whom he had been invited to spend a short vacation that he could only eat gothic puddings, and he enclosed a design for one. (Wilfrid Ward, William George Ward and the Oxford Movement [London, 1889], p. 155).

<sup>137</sup> Once Pugin came upon Dr. Cox, who was about to offer prayers for the conversion of England to Catholicism. Cox wore a French cope. "What is the use, my dear sir," said Pugin, "of praying for the conversion of England in that cope?" (Ward and the Catholic Revival, p. 386).

<sup>138</sup> Ward and the Oxford Movement, p. 154.

<sup>139</sup> Ferrey, p. 115.

long as it remained a romance. That century could accept the medievalism of Scott, of Keats, of Tennyson, of Rossetti because theirs was a comfortable medievalism; it assured the reader that medievalism had little or nothing to do with nineteenth century life. But the moment that that comfortable and romantic medievalism assumed a vital, working role, as it did with the Oxford Movement and as it did with Pugin, then it was quickly criticized. Charles Kingsley, himself a romantic medievalist in his early days,<sup>140</sup> was shocked into a reinterpretation of that period by the practical turn medievalism was taking in the forties. "We must learn to see it as it was,"<sup>141</sup> he wrote, "a coarse, barbarous, and profligate age."<sup>142</sup>

So Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, called in the year of his death "the most eminent and original architectural genius of his time,"<sup>143</sup> has been largely forgotten. That he served the medieval revival and the tradition of the medieval-modern contrast is without question. Contrasts is still an interesting book to read, and if Pugin had been content to use the medieval-modern contrast merely to work up enthusiasm for a contemporary problem, as Cobbett had done; or if he had used it without disturbing the structure of the Establishment, as Southey had done; then the book would have continued to be read.

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<sup>140</sup> Approximately one-third of Kingsley's early verse falls in the medieval ballad tradition.

<sup>141</sup> Charles Kingsley, Works (London, 1893), VII, 7.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 6.

<sup>143</sup> "The Late Mr. Pugin," Ecclesiologist, O.S. XII (October, 1852), 352.

## CHAPTER II

THOMAS CARLYLE

"Out of old Books, new Writings, and much Meditation not of yesterday, he will endeavour to select a thing or two; and from the Past, in a circuitous way, illustrate the Present and the Future."--Past and Present.

The next writer to use the medieval-modern contrast on an extensive scale was Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). His well known Past and Present is assuredly the high point of that tradition. Like his predecessors Carlyle used the middle ages to teach his contemporaries a lesson, yet that lesson took on a new and different appearance. In this chapter I shall discuss that new appearance and the reasons which helped to shape it. Our first task then is to establish Carlyle's contact with the medievalism of his century, emphasizing, of course, his knowledge of those who had utilized the medieval-modern contrast as a tool by which to fulminate against their own nineteenth century.

The years between Cobbett's History of the Protestant Reformation (1824) and Carlyle's Past and Present (1843) saw a continued growth in medieval enthusiasm. No thinking--nor seeing--Englishman could escape it. Gothic churches in the then accepted medieval style were building throughout the land. Of the two hundred and fourteen churches built as a result of the Church Building Act (1818), one hundred and seventy-four were Gothic in design.<sup>1</sup> Sir Walter Scott continued to turn out novels set in the middle ages,<sup>2</sup> preparing England, as Newman later thought, for the Oxford Movement.<sup>3</sup> Tennyson's early work

<sup>1</sup> Trappes-Lomax, Pugin, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> The following were published after 1824: The Betrothed (1825), The Talisman (1825), The Fair Maid of Perth (1828), Anne of Geierstein (1829), Count Robert of Paris (1831), Castle Dangerous (1831); all of these were set in the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries.

<sup>3</sup> Newman, Essays Critical and Historical, I, 267.

gave England notice that the sentimental and emotional medievalism of Keats had found a continuator,<sup>4</sup> and that the Arthurian legend, a century flower, was about to bloom again. Scholars and antiquaries too were at work. The Surtees Society (1834) and the Camden Society (1838) were busy editing rare medieval manuscripts,<sup>5</sup> while the Cambridge Camden Society (1839), the architectural counterpart of the Oxford Movement,<sup>6</sup> was proclaiming in its organ, the Ecclesiologist, that "Gothic Architecture is, in the highest sense, the only Christian Architecture."<sup>7</sup> In politics George Smythe (1818-1857), Alexander Cochrane-Baillie (1816-1890), and Lord John Manners (1818-1906) rallied under the leadership of Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) and formed the Young England group in parliament, a band of aristocratic Tories who believed that the cure for nineteenth century society was to let it "take a more feudal appearance than it presents now."<sup>8</sup> In religion the Oxford Movement owed a debt and made a contribution to the medievalism of the century, although the contribution has been largely overemphasized. However, Richard Hurrell Froude's growing

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<sup>4</sup> I need mention only a few poems in which Tennyson expressed his interest in medievalism: "Mariana" and "Ballad of Oriana" from Poems, Chiefly Lyrical (1830); "The Lady of Shalott" from Poems (1832--dated 1833); "Morte d'Arthur" and "Sir Galahad" from Poems (1842).

<sup>5</sup> For a complete list of societies publishing medieval material see note 83, p.85.

<sup>6</sup> Clark, The Gothic Revival, chap. VIII, 204-239, passim.

<sup>7</sup> O.S. II (October, 1842), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Whibley, Lord John Manners and His Friends (Edinburgh, 1925), I, 137.

dislike of the Reformation<sup>9</sup> was an attitude which, although not actually expressed, was probably prevalent among many other Puseyites; and it was an attitude which allowed them to look back to the middle ages with satisfaction. In all these areas, politics, religion, literature, architecture, even in clothing styles,<sup>10</sup> medievalism was in the wind. And all this was, of course, in addition to the more particularized sort of medievalism, that of the medieval-modern contrast, which we have found in Cobbett, Southey, and Pugin.

So it is not surprising that Carlyle focused his camera obscura upon the middle ages and found some lessons there. It would have been surprising if he had not; for Carlyle, in spite of his conviction that the great man, the hero, makes the age, was proof enough that the age also shapes the great man. For, as B. H. Lehman aptly put it, "Not once did Carlyle go, as it were, over the head of his age for his ideas."<sup>11</sup> With this statement Calder, who has recently done excellent work with Past and Present, concurs.<sup>12</sup>

Carlyle's contact with the various strains of medieval interest in his century can be established without difficulty. In the first place, Carlyle was a wide reader. Like his

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<sup>9</sup> Remains of the Late Reverend Richard Hurrell Froude, M.A. (London, 1838), vol. I, pt. 1, 251, 325, 336, 389, 433.

<sup>10</sup> See Cecil Willett Cunnington, English Women's Clothing in the Nineteenth Century (London, 1948). Chapter V, "The Gothic '40's," traces the influence of medievalism upon women's fashions.

<sup>11</sup> Carlyle's Theory of the Hero: Its Sources, Development, History, and Influence on Carlyle's Work (Durham, North Carolina, 1928), p. 130.

<sup>12</sup> Grace Calder, The Writing of Past and Present, A Study of Carlyle's Manuscripts (New Haven, 1949), p. 29.

Teufelsdröckh he could boast that "what printed thing soever I could meet with I read."<sup>13</sup> And certainly Carlyle had met with a great deal.<sup>14</sup> In addition to his reading he had, as any Carlyle scholar will readily admit, almost phenomenal powers of observation; once having seen something, he retained a vivid picture of that scene in his mind. He could not, for example, have been unaware of the growing vogue for gothic architecture .

Scott he knew well. Coming at a time when it was not easy to criticize unfavorably the then acknowledged giant of novelists, Carlyle's "Sir Walter Scott" (1838) was a bold attempt to assay the worth of his recently deceased countryman and to find Scott's rightful place in literary history.<sup>15</sup> Carlyle found "nothing spiritual in him; all is economical, material, of the earth earthy." Whatever power he had "was a genius in extenso . . . not in intenso."<sup>16</sup> The novels lacked universality; they would cease to be read when modern fashions pass away.<sup>17</sup> Yet, although he found Scott wanting on these counts, Carlyle admitted that Scott's contributions were none the less real.

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<sup>13</sup> Works, I, 81.

<sup>14</sup> See Hill Shine, Carlyle's Early Reading, To 1834, with An Introductory Essay on His Intellectual Development (Lexington, Kentucky, 1953). The work is an attempt to identify Carlyle's voluminous early reading.

<sup>15</sup> The essay, originally published in the London and Westminster Review, purported to be a review of Lockhart's Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Baronet; but as was Carlyle's usual practice when writing a review, he went far beyond the usual scope of a review, broad as was that scope at the time.

<sup>16</sup> Works, XXIX, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

The most important of these contributions was Scott's removal of history from the exclusive domination of Dryasdust.

These Historical Novels have taught all men this truth, which looks like a truism, yet was as good as unknown to writers of history and others, till so taught: that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled with living men, not by protocols, state papers, controversies and abstractions of men. Not abstractions were they, not diagrams or theorems: but men in buff or other coats and breeches, with colour in their cheeks, with passions in their stomach, and the idioms, features and vitalities of very men!<sup>18</sup>

This truism which Carlyle himself might have learned from Scott is a central idea in Carlyle's historical creed. The historian must convince the reader that the personages in his history are not stuffed dummies, but living, breathing human beings who walked forth to toil in the morning and returned in the evening, who drank wine, loved women, ate bread, enjoyed sunlight. That achieved, the reader is enabled actively to contrast his times with past times, as Carlyle thought many of Scott's readers did; and if he found conditions better back in those "rough strong times, wherein those maladies of ours had not yet arisen,"<sup>19</sup> he often sighed, "Oh, that I too had lived in those times, had never known these logic-cobwebs, this doubt, this sickliness; and been and felt myself alive among men alive."<sup>20</sup> In short, the reader experiences in a minor way the same past-present contrast which is the subject of this investigation.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 77-78.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> Loc. cit.

In addition to being well acquainted with Sir Walter Scott, Carlyle knew something of William Cobbett, who first employed the medieval-modern contrast in his History of the Protestant Reformation. We know that at least one of Cobbett's books, his Cottage Economy, was a possession in the Carlyle household, for Jane, learning to bake bread at Craigenputtock, used the work.<sup>21</sup> And Carlyle too must have read at least parts of the work, for in his unfinished History of German Literature, he passed a literary judgment upon the Cottage Economy.<sup>22</sup> On some occasions Carlyle echoed a pet word or phrase of Cobbett's; twice he called London the Wen and both times labeled the word Cobbett's coinage.<sup>23</sup> On another occasion Carlyle echoed the epithet "Bloody old Walter," which was Cobbett's favorite name for the editor of the Times.<sup>24</sup> In addition, there is evidence that Carlyle held a high regard for Cobbett. Two conversations are recorded in which Carlyle introduced the subject of Cobbett. In a letter written to his brother, Dr. John Carlyle, on October 21, 1831, Carlyle reported a "pleasant, discursive" conversation with John Stuart Mill

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<sup>21</sup> James Anthony Froude, Thomas Carlyle, A History of the First Forty Years of His Life 1795-1835 (New York, n.d. [1882]), II, 18n.; for a somewhat different account of the incident see Emery Neff, Carlyle (New York, 1932), p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> Carlyle's Unfinished History of German Literature, ed. Hill Shine (Lexington, Kentucky, 1951), p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> The Love Letters of Thomas Carlyle and Jane Welsh, ed. Alexander Carlyle (London, 1908), II, 56; David Alec Wilson, Carlyle Till Marriage, (1795-1826), (London, 1923), p. 361.

<sup>24</sup> Early Letters of Thomas Carlyle, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (London, 1886), II, 258.

"about Scotch scenery, Buonaparte, Cobbett, Immorality, and the Tax on Tobacco."<sup>25</sup> Buonaparte, who was later to become one of Carlyle's "heroes," was again coupled with Cobbett in a later conversation, and a still greater name, that of Goethe, was added. After discussing in his Diary (February 12, 1832) Carlyle's great admiration for Goethe and Buonaparte, Henry Crabb Robinson adds, "Another object of his eulogy is--Cobbett, whom he praises for his humanity and love of the poor! Singular, and even whimsical, combinations of love and reverence these."<sup>26</sup> Singular and whimsical they may be, but they are indicative of the high esteem in which Carlyle held Cobbett at the time.

Other brief mentions<sup>27</sup> of Cobbett appear in 1833, and the following year Carlyle moved to Chelsea, where Leigh Hunt, who was from time to time a personal friend of Cobbett, was a frequent caller on the Carlyles. There is no record of their conversations, but it seems almost certain that they discussed Cobbett, for Carlyle was aware of the relationship between Hunt and Cobbett,<sup>28</sup> and he was at the time extremely interested in politics. However, we cannot know for certain.

We can be certain that in 1838, when Carlyle wrote his

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<sup>25</sup> Letters of Thomas Carlyle 1826-1836, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (London, 1888), I, 359.

<sup>26</sup> Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence, III, 2.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Letters of Thomas Carlyle 1826-1836, II, 79; Letters of Thomas Carlyle to John Stuart Mill, John Sterling, and Robert Browning, ed. Alexander Carlyle (London, 1923), pp. 32, 38.

<sup>28</sup> Letters to Mill, Sterling, and Browning, p. 32.

essay on Scott, Cobbett, now three years dead, was enough on his mind that in two sections of the essay Carlyle wrote of him in impressive terms. Cobbett, Carlyle wrote, "the pattern John Bull of his century, strong as the rhinoceros, and with singular humanities and genialities shining through his thick skin, is a most brave phenomenon."<sup>29</sup> Later in the essay, after having discussed Scott's faculty of easy-writing, Carlyle remarked, "William Cobbett, one of the healthiest of men, was a greater improviser even than Walter Scott: his writing, considered as to quality and quantity, of Rural Rides, Registers, Grammars, Sermons, Peter Porcupines, Histories of Reformation, ever-fresh denouncements of Potatoes and Paper-money, seems to us still more wonderful."<sup>30</sup> This argues that Carlyle was fairly well acquainted with Cobbett's various literary productions; at least he was familiar enough to mention the more important and to make a literary judgment upon them. And in two of them which he mentioned, Rural Rides and the History of the Protestant Reformation, Carlyle found the medieval-modern contrast extensively used.

Carlyle's association with Robert Southey, who had contributed to the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts with Sir Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society (1829), is less hypothetical than his familiarity with Cobbett. Not only were he and Southey personally acquainted, but in "Reminiscences of Sundry," an appendix to

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<sup>29</sup> Works, XXIX, 39.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 81.



Reminiscences, Carlyle sketched in brief outline their friendship.<sup>31</sup>

Some early mentions of Southey in Carlyle's letters refer to Southey's writings in the Tory Quarterly Review; most are unfavorable.<sup>32</sup> In another place Carlyle recorded his reactions to the pamphlets which followed the pirated publication of Southey's Wat Tyler by Richard Carlile, the radical publisher, in 1814. Southey, newly appointed poet laureate, was extremely embarrassed by the publication of this revolutionary drama, written during his radical youth. Carlyle and Edward Irving "cackled and triumphed over Southey . . . as over a slashed and well-slain foe to us and mankind; for we were all Radicals in heart."<sup>33</sup> One would expect this young radical to rejoice at the discomforture of any one-time radical now turned respectable Tory.

Carlyle did not remember exactly when it was that he first became acquainted with Southey's books,<sup>34</sup> but it was a year or two after the above rejoicing that one of the epics came into his hands. He was much impressed by "the piety, the gentle, deep affection, the reverence for God and man, which reigned in these pieces."<sup>35</sup> Carlyle added, "I always afterwards looked out for his books, new or old, as for a thing of value. . . . In spite of my Radicalism, I found very much in

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<sup>31</sup> Reminiscences, ed. James Anthony Froude (New York, 1881), pp. 321-331.

<sup>32</sup> Early Letters of Thomas Carlyle, I, 110, 154, 305; II, 259; the letters here cited date from 1817 to 1824.

<sup>33</sup> Reminiscences, pp. 321-322.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

these Toryisms which was greatly according to my heart; things rare and worthy, at once pious and true, which were always welcome to me, though I strove to base them on a better ground than his."<sup>36</sup> Some of those pious and true things he probably found in Southey's Colloquies, things which he does place on better ground in his Past and Present.

The two men met at the instigation of Henry Taylor in 1835, the year after Carlyle had come down to London.<sup>37</sup> They had a second meeting at Taylor's home, and then they did not see each other until after Carlyle's French Revolution had been published in 1837. Southey was wildly enamored with the work and told his friends "that he meant to read the F. R. six times."<sup>38</sup> He and Carlyle spent an evening together and "talked largely on the huge event itself, which he had dwelt with openly or privately ever since his youth, and tended to interpret, exactly as I, the suicidal explosion of an old wicked world, too wicked, false, and impious for living longer; and seemed satisfied and as if grateful that a strong voice had at last expressed that meaning. My poor 'French Revolution' evidently appeared to him a good deed, a salutary bit of 'scriptural' exposition for the public and for mankind."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>37</sup> In the Reminiscences (p. 322) Carlyle places the date of this first meeting in 1836 or 1837. He is certainly in error, for the first meeting is recorded in two letters which make it quite clear that the meeting took place some time in February, 1835. See Letters of Thomas Carlyle 1826-1836, II, 284, 295-296.

<sup>38</sup> New Letters of Thomas Carlyle, ed. Alexander Carlyle (New York, 1904), I, 118.

<sup>39</sup> Reminiscences, p. 327.

The aged Southey and Carlyle agreed that nineteenth century England was in an advanced state of moral decay; mammon worship reigned supreme; democracy was rapidly approaching; humanity, piety, and fidelity to God or man was disappearing. Southey perhaps thought, after reading the French Revolution, which carried a threat but not a solution, that Carlyle and he were closer politically than they actually were. The great laureate even condescended once to pay a call to five Cheyne Row, an honor which Carlyle, not without some pride, wrote about to his mother.<sup>40</sup>

The two met for the last time in the same home in which they had first met some years earlier, that of Henry Taylor; and Carlyle's account of their conversation points out the agreement which the two critics of nineteenth century society actually had, political convictions notwithstanding.

We sat on the sofa together; our talk was long and earnest; topic ultimately the usual one, steady approach of democracy, with revolution (probably explosive), and a finis incomputable to man; steady decay of all morality, political, social, individual; this once noble England getting more and more ignoble and untrue in every fibre of it, till the gold (Goethe's composite king) would all be eaten out, and noble England would have to collapse in shapeless ruin, whether forever or not none of us could know. Our perfect consent on these matters gave an animation to the dialogue.<sup>41</sup>

It would have been interesting if Carlyle had gone farther, if he had not only listed vaguely the conditions about which he and Southey were in agreement, but had said something about

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<sup>40</sup> New Letters of Thomas Carlyle, I, 118.

<sup>41</sup> Reminiscences, p. 330.

the ways out of this miserable modern condition of society. Here the two might have disagreed, but they might also have looked back to the middle ages for at least partial answers as Southey had done in his Colloquies, and as Carlyle was going to do in his Past and Present. Perhaps they even talked of the Colloquies; Carlyle, who had "looked out for his books, new or old, as for a thing of value,"<sup>42</sup> had almost certainly read it, for even more than Southey's other work, this one airs thoroughly the arguments against modernity in which Carlyle was most interested. But the conversation is gone; nothing can call it back again--we can merely conjecture.

About Carlyle's knowledge or connection with Augustus Welby Pugin, who, after Southey, was a contributor to the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts, we need say little. There is absolutely no indication that Carlyle ever read any of Pugin's works, no indication that he even knew the name, although it seems likely that he did.

There are good reasons for the lack of contact between Carlyle and Pugin. Carlyle, perhaps as a result of his Calvinistic rearing, retained throughout his life a distrust of art. As a clothes philosopher, he realized that church architecture, Pugin's great passion, was merely a kind of apparel and should be recognized as such, a relative thing.<sup>43</sup> For Pugin, gothic architecture was an absolute value. Carlyle

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>43</sup> The equation of clothing styles and various forms of architecture is found in Sartor Resartus (chap. V); see Works, I, 27.

thought other things, a blue sky or a poem, much more magnificent and glorious than gothic cathedrals;<sup>44</sup> Pugin could never have thought that. Another--perhaps the most important--point of no contact between the two men is their religious difference. Carlyle's religion was a personal faith based on obedience to absolute ethical principles and a stern obligation to work at the duty lying nearest him. Pugin's religion consisted of the proper use and display of mullioned windows, altar screens, correctly designed surplices--the kind of form-worship which caused Carlyle to call Catholicism the "Scenic Theory of Worship."<sup>45</sup>

Thus, of the three Englishmen who had, before Carlyle's Past and Present, placed the middle ages and the nineteenth century next to each other for the sake of comparison, Carlyle was acquainted with the work of the first two, Cobbett and Southey; he apparently did not know Pugin.

When in 1843 Carlyle published Past and Present, he contributed what Oliver Elton has called "perhaps the most remarkable fruit in English literature of the mediaeval revival."<sup>46</sup> So it well may be, for the second book of that work, the one which deals exclusively with Abbot Samson and the monastery at Bury St. Edmunds, is as energetic and vivid a

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<sup>44</sup> David Alec Wilson, Carlyle on Cromwell and Others (London, 1925), p. 61; The Correspondence of Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson 1834-1872, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (London, 1883), p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Works, X, 139.

<sup>46</sup> Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature 1780-1880 (New York, 1920), III, 240.



reconstruction of medieval life as the nineteenth century produced.

The medievalism of the romantic poets had a nebulous haze about it which required for perfect communication that the reader abandon his own identity and project himself into a far distant and unreal time. So too with the cardboard medievalism of Sir Walter Scott's novels. His preoccupation with the external details of life and his complete inability to get inside his characters, to plumb them spiritually, created the effect of unreality. As I have said in the previous chapter, his was a comfortable medievalism able to be enjoyed by Catholic or Protestant, by Tory, Whig, or Radical because Scott convinced all that medievalism was only a romance and was totally unconnected with the nineteenth century.

Medievalism becomes uncomfortable only when those past ages are placed in the scales with the nineteenth century and the latter is found wanting. Then medievalism ceases to be merely esthetic romanticism, it becomes romanticism with a social purpose. Once used as an instrument for social purpose, medievalism cannot be comfortable, for it takes sides upon controversial issues. The three figures we have examined, Cobbett, Southey, and Pugin, employed the medieval-modern contrast for Radical, Tory, and high-church Catholic purposes, respectively. Each interpreted the middle ages differently, made them say that which would best serve his political and/or religious convictions. Carlyle did likewise.

But it is not a simple matter to characterize Carlyle's

use of the medieval-modern contrast. He did not fit into neat little categories; he thought on too vast and too many-sided a scale to be denominated Whig, or Tory, or Radical.<sup>47</sup> His medieval-modern contrast had historical, political, economic, social, and religious implications. He looked at his own nineteenth century and saw it dominated by sham in all these areas, and so he, as Cazamian put it, "mit son siècle à l'école du passé."<sup>48</sup>

Carlyle's earliest writings demonstrated his social consciousness. In fact, one nineteenth century scholar believes that the trend of English Romanticism turned with the publication of Sartor Resartus. In that work the problems of the individual, while they are far from lost, retain their vitality as problems of society.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that with Carlyle, the individual and society were one and the same thing; the Everlasting Yea is important to the individual who reaches it, but it is more important to the society which now has order in one spot, great or small, where there was once chaos. "Social Life," Carlyle said in the essay "On History" (1830), "is the aggregate of all the individual

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Good evidence of this many-sidedness of Carlyle is the fact that as a periodical writer he had business with the Whig Edinburgh Review, the Tory Quarterly Review, the Radical Westminster Review, and others of varying shades of political and social convictions. His circle of friends also demonstrates his many-sidedness. Who else in his England would or could have been friends simultaneously with Robert Southey, Leigh Hunt, Frances Jeffrey, John Stuart Mill, and John Lockhart?

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Louis Cazamian, Carlyle (Paris, 1913), p. 176.

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Neff, Carlyle, p. 209.

men's Lives who constitute society."<sup>50</sup>

Carlyle's ever increasing concern with contemporary social problems and his conviction that the literary man should become a prophet for his age come to the fore in his Chartism (published 1839, dated 1840). From this work he turned, with the exception of On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History (1841), to a study of Cromwell.

However, Carlyle felt compunctions about his Cromwell work. Although he realized that Cromwell had been maligned by previous historians and badly needed a fresh historical treatment, his concern for the problems of his own age played upon his conscience. In his journal for October 3, 1841, he wrote, "Ought I to write now of Oliver Cromwell? . . . What a need of some speaker to the practical world at present! They would hear me if, alas! I had anything to say. Again and again of late I ask myself, in whispers, Is it the duty of a citizen to be silent, to paint mere Heroisms, Cromwells, etc.?"<sup>51</sup> By July of 1842 he, along with "all men" was "becoming alarmed at the state of the country,"<sup>52</sup> and in a letter to Emerson he wrote, "There is no use of writing of things past, unless they can be made in fact things present /my

<sup>50</sup> Works, XXVII, 86.

<sup>51</sup> James Anthony Froude, Thomas Carlyle, A History of His Life in London 1834-1881 (New York, 1885), I, 132--this journal entry also exhibits Carlyle's conviction that he was to be the prophet of his age. The italicized "me" is in keeping with that conviction. His duty, therefore, would be to speak out on current problems.

<sup>52</sup> Letters of Thomas Carlyle to His Youngest Sister, ed. Charles Townsend Copeland (London, 1899), p. 128.

italics<sup>7</sup>: not yesterday at all, but simply to-day and what it holds of fulfilment and of promises is ours."<sup>53</sup> Here, certainly, lies the germ of Past and Present, the past was useless unless it bore upon the present. A month later, on August 29, 1842, Carlyle again wrote to Emerson, this time criticizing him for avoiding the problems of contemporary civilization.

Alas, it is so easy to screw one's self up into high and ever higher altitudes of Transcendentalism, and see nothing under one but the everlasting snows of Himmalayah, the Earth shrinking to a Planet, and the indigo firmament sowing itself with daylight stars; easy for you, for me: but whither does it lead? I dread always, to inanity and mere injuring of the lungs! . . . A man has no right to say to his own generation, turning quite away from it, "Be damned!" It is the whole Past and the whole Future, this same cotton-spinning, dollar-hunting, canting and shrieking, very wretched generation of ours. Come back into it, I tell you.<sup>54</sup>

In the same letter Carlyle applied this advice to himself, for he felt that his work with Cromwell was saying "Be damned!" to his own generation. "One of my grand difficulties I suspect to be that I cannot write two Books at once; cannot be in the seventeenth century and the nineteenth at one and the same moment."<sup>55</sup>

Whether or not the "two Books at once" indicates that Carlyle was then engaged in writing parts of Past and Present is impossible to say; he may merely have been turning a figure. But if it does mean that, he could only have been working on Books I, III, and IV, those which deal with the present. His

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<sup>53</sup> The Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 6-7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., II, 12.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., II, 10.

interest in the matter which ultimately made up Book II was yet to be born.

On the first day of September, 1842 Carlyle left London to join his wife, who had been visiting the Bullers in Suffolk, near the heart of the Cromwell country. While there he paid visits to scenes important to Cromwell's early life, but he also visited places which germinated his ideas for a book on contemporary problems. At St. Ives in Huntingdonshire he saw the workhouse with its robust young men sitting on wooden benches in a torpor, a sight "that reminded me of Dante's Hell."<sup>56</sup> And in contrast to this picture of present misery Carlyle visited the ruins of the medieval monastery at Bury St. Edmunds, at which Jocelin de Brakelonde had written his Chronicle.

Before the next month had passed, Carlyle had obtained a copy of that Chronicle, which had been made available as the thirteenth publication of the Camden Society in 1840. His Journal entry for October 25, 1842 mentioned that he has been reading "Jocelyn de Brakelonde's Chronicle, and been meditating on the old monk's life in St. Edmund's monastery."<sup>57</sup> Carlyle's friend and biographer believes that this meditation gave birth to Past and Present.<sup>58</sup>

His reading of medieval chronicles continued into Novem-

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<sup>56</sup> Works, X, 2.--Here, early in the first book of Past and Present, Carlyle presented a vivid recollection of the dismal scene.

<sup>57</sup> Froude, Life in London, I, 166.

<sup>58</sup> Loc. cit.--Calder thinks likewise, pp. 7-8.

ber,<sup>59</sup> and late in that month Jane Carlyle wrote that "Carlyle has also a considerable bundle of MS., not about Cromwell at all! but about that old Abbot of St. Edmunds Bury!! which he 'rather wishes me to read and give him my views about.'"<sup>60</sup> The "past" of what was later to become Past and Present was at least roughed out that early.

Just when Carlyle thought of joining the Samson material with criticism of the contemporary scene is doubtful. Perhaps some of the material on the present had been written or at least thought about by December 14, 1842, when Carlyle wrote to Sterling,

If we had a Periodical on foot at this moment, it seems to me I should write a variety of Articles! Yet at bottom, perhaps it were only waste. The thing that will not run together as a Book, we fling it out in detached splashes as Articles. We should have made it run together; fused it, roasted, tortured it, till the devisive dross had been all tortured out of it.<sup>61</sup>

It may be that the raw materials which he had on hand for this "variety of Articles" was forced into fusion, the result being the medieval-modern contrast of Past and Present.

The two had been fused at least by January 9, 1843--probably a good deal earlier, depending upon the strength one gives to "good while," "all along," and "good time" in the following letter written by Jane:

Carlyle is no more writing about Oliver Cromwell than you and I are! I have known this for a

<sup>59</sup> Jane Welsh Carlyle: Letters to Her Family, ed. Leonard Huxley (London, 1924), p. 55.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>61</sup> Letters to Mill, Sterling, and Browning, p. 266.

good while--you will ponder that I should not have known it all along--the fact is his papers were a good time more resembling hieroglyphics than finished manuscript. I could not be at the trouble of making them out--then when I came to find, on days when I chanced to look, pages about the present fashion of men's coats--about the rage for novelties--puffing everything or anything except "Cromwell Oliver"--I had no misgivings--I know he has such a way of tacking on extraneous discussions to his subject--but when I found at last a long biography of that Abbot Samson! then indeed--I asked what on earth has all this to do with Cromwell--and learned that Cromwell was not begun--that probably half a dozen other volumes will be published before that.<sup>62</sup>

At any rate, it seems probable that Carlyle developed the idea of using a medieval-modern contrast some time between the letter to Sterling on December 14, 1842, and the end of the year.<sup>63</sup>

Froude's statement that "'Past and Present' was written off with singular ease in the first seven weeks of 1843"<sup>64</sup> has been pretty much accepted by Carlyle scholars, with the exception of Calder. Accepting Froude literally would mean that Carlyle began the work on January 1 and finished on February 18. When, on February 23 Carlyle wrote to Sterling that he still had "three weeks of the ugliest labor," Froude explains in a footnote that this means "correcting proofs."<sup>65</sup> But we have seen that Carlyle had written "a considerable bundle of MS." about Abbot Samson in November of 1842, long before Froude thought he began the work. And Carlyle could not have meant

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<sup>62</sup> Jane Welsh Carlyle, Letters to Her Family, p. 79.

<sup>63</sup> That is allowing a very conservative interpretation of the references to past time in Jane's letter of January 9, 1843.

<sup>64</sup> Life in London, I, 170.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., I, 171.

by "the ugliest labor" the correcting of proofs, for in another letter to Sterling, this one dated March 9, Carlyle wrote, "I finished my poor Book yesterday, in a very sick condition (it and I); and today have corrected the first sheet of it [my italics]: we find there are to be some 19 in all; and it will be towards May, I conjecture, before the sluggish people will let me be quite free of it."<sup>66</sup> Froude certainly was very much in error!

Carlyle was free of the work a bit earlier than he had thought he would be, for in April this most energetic of the nineteenth century's medieval-modern contrasts, this work calculated, in Carlyle's words, to "awaken here and there a slumbering blockhead to rub his eyes,"<sup>67</sup> was published by Chapman and Hall.

I have said that Carlyle's use of the medieval-modern contrast was more complex than that of his predecessors, that Past and Present contains historical, social, and religious implications. These implications we shall pursue in an attempt to explain what it was that made Carlyle juxtapose the middle ages with his own century.

Let us first consider the historical implications surrounding Carlyle's Past and Present, for an adequate understanding of his attitude toward the theory and practice of

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<sup>66</sup> Letters to Mill, Sterling, and Browning, pp. 266-267; for other evidence that he finished writing the work on March 8 see Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 22; Jane Welsh Carlyle, Letters to Her Family, p. 93.

<sup>67</sup> Froude, Life in London, I, 171.



history is necessary not only to understand the work, but to determine the reason he wrote it as he did.

Several excellent studies have been attempted to find Carlyle's place as a historian, and recently the work of Hill Shine, Louise Young, and René Wellek has probed deeper--though without essential agreement--into Carlyle's philosophy of history.<sup>68</sup> Yet we need not burden ourselves with that broad problem since we are concerned only with those factors which influenced Carlyle to compare the medieval past with the nineteenth century present and to treat that comparison in such a way that the present learned a lesson from the past.

One such factor of paramount importance was the changing historical conception of the middle ages. The rationalist historians of the enlightenment, a period so permeated with the idea of progress that its historians "were certain to despise the medieval period,"<sup>69</sup> had treated the middle ages with studied contempt. "Hume," according to Gooch, "dismissed the Anglo-Saxon centuries, the time of the making of England, as a battle of kites and crows," and Voltaire thought that the

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See especially G. P. Gooch, History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century, pp. 323-340; Hill Shine, Carlyle's Fusion of Poetry, History, and Religion by 1834 (Chapel Hill, 1938), and Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians, the Concept of Historical Periodicity (Baltimore, 1941); Louise Merwin Young, Thomas Carlyle and the Art of History (Philadelphia, 1939); René Wellek, "Carlyle and the Philosophy of History," Philological Quarterly, XXIII (1944), 55-76. This work of Professor Wellek is in great part a criticism of Young and Shine and should be read to temper the generalizations made in their works.

<sup>69</sup>

Young, p. 29.

"Middle Ages deserved as little study as the doings of wolves and bears."<sup>70</sup> Even Hallam, born of the rationalist eighteenth century, though his famous history did not appear until the second decade of the nineteenth, reflected this same attitude. Although he did "attempt to give a more adequate sense of the spirit and character of the Middle Ages,"<sup>71</sup> yet he thought vast portions of time in the middle ages "so barren of events worthy of remembrance that a single sentence or paragraph is often enough to give the character of entire generations and of long dynasties of obscure kings."<sup>72</sup> In addition to their studied contempt for the medieval period, the rationalist historians were spiritually unequipped to handle that which was a potent factor in the middle ages, its religious sentiment. Stripped of its spiritual synthesis, the glory of the medieval period, that age could hardly be brought to life, and the externals might well appear bleak and barren to the rationalist historian.

But along with the romantic movement in literature Europe experienced a romantic historiography. With Ranke demanding the use of contemporary documents for the correct interpretation of historical events,<sup>73</sup> with Thierry and Michelet insisting that those documents be used in such a way as to make the past actually come to life, a distinctly romantic attitude

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<sup>70</sup> Gooch, p. 11.

<sup>71</sup> Peardon, The Transition in English Historical Writing 1760-1830, p. 276.

<sup>72</sup> Loc. cit.--Carlyle lacked respect for Hallam's work; see Letters to Mill, Sterling and Browning, p. 77.

<sup>73</sup> Gooch, p. 102.

toward history developed.<sup>74</sup> No longer was the historian restricted in scope to the mere enumeration of dynasties, wars, revolts, and "important events;" instead, his previously limited subject matter was enlarged. The historian now was allowed--even obliged--to search beneath the surface of external events to penetrate the spirit of an age, to examine the small as well as the large, and to enter subjectively into his material in such a way as actually to bring the past ages to life again.

Carlyle's absorbing interest in matters historical could not have left him unaware of this "new history." The periodicals of England in the thirties and early forties often told their readers that "We are . . . arrived at an entirely new era of the writing of history."<sup>75</sup> A contributor to the British and Foreign Review eloquently announced that the science of history is finally about to arrive.<sup>76</sup> "There was never," he wrote, "so great an historical tendency in European thought as is manifested in the present century; and seldom has the world seen such historians as those who have made this tendency illustrious."<sup>77</sup> One reviewer of M. Guizot's Course of Modern History

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<sup>74</sup> The work of Sir Walter Scott strongly influenced all three of these continental historians. From him they learned that the middle ages could be vividly presented to readers. See Gooch, pp. 78, 170, 174.

<sup>75</sup> "M. Guizot's Commission Historique and the English Record Commission," Foreign Quarterly Review, XVII (1836), 362.

<sup>76</sup> "State of Historical Science in France," British and Foreign Review, XVI (1844), 72-118 passim.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

confidently looked for a "school of history, more perfect than any the world has yet witnessed," and he announced "the historical novel as the source from which, at no distant period, will be derived the union of accuracy with liveliness, the blending of interesting narrative with practical instruction, the gratification at once of the imagination and the judgment."<sup>78</sup>

The eighteenth century historical picture of the middle ages was singled out for particular revision. In a series of essays which appeared during 1835 and 1836 in The British Magazine and later in book form,<sup>79</sup> S. R. Maitland attempted to demonstrate that the middle ages were not so dark as they had been pictured by the historians of the eighteenth century. By doing so, wrote a reviewer of The Dark Ages, he "called in question the received maxims of a whole century" and served notice that "a new set of historical works must supersede those [of the previous century]."<sup>80</sup> And the same reviewer noticed that in the eight years which had elapsed since the appearance of Maitland's first essay a revival of interest in the middle ages had taken place; "the Revival of Gothic art, the taste for an aesthetic religion, the more candid estimate which some have formed of the monastic and conventual insti-

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<sup>78</sup> "Guizot's Course of Modern History," Foreign Quarterly Review, XVI (1836), 408. Carlyle says much the same thing in the "Essay on Scott." See Works, XXIX, 77-78.

<sup>79</sup> The Dark Ages; a Series of Essays Intended to Illustrate the State of Religion and Literature in the Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Centuries (London, 1844).

<sup>80</sup> "The Dark Ages," The English Review, I (1844), 362.



tutions,--in all these points the minds of men have undergone during eight years a wonderful alteration."<sup>81</sup>

This altered view of the middle ages was coexistent with and, in part derived from an upsurge of interest in the editing of medieval texts. In the twenties, thirties, and forties the work of the English Record Commission<sup>82</sup> was augmented by the appearance of eighteen private societies or clubs which edited medieval material,<sup>83</sup> thirteen of them appearing within ten years at the height of the vogue. The textual work done by these groups of scholars and antiquarians was of extreme importance, for it gave historians the medieval documents with which they could form the new and more adequate picture of the

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 363. Other similar expressions which call attention to the new and enlightened view of the middle ages can be found. See, for example, "The Fine Arts of the Middle Ages," Foreign Quarterly Review, VII (1831), 94; "On the Anglo-Latin Poets of the Twelfth Century," Foreign Quarterly Review, XVI (1836), 386.

<sup>82</sup> There are in the periodicals many criticisms and calls for reorganization of the English Record Commission. The following are representative: "M. Guizot's Commission Historique and the English Record Commission," Foreign Quarterly Review, XVII (1836), 362-390; "Report from the Select Committee on Record Commission," British and Foreign Review, IV (1837), 120-168; "English Historical Society," British and Foreign Review, VII (1838), 167-192; "Historical Researches: The Camden Society's Publications," Fraser's Magazine, XXII (1840), 445-455.

<sup>83</sup> They are: Bannatyne Club, 1823; Maitland Club, 1828; Surtees Society, 1834; Abbotsford Club, 1834; English Historical Society, 1837; Welsh Manuscripts' Society, 1837; Camden Society, 1838; Spalding Club, 1839; Cambridge Camden Society, 1839; Parker Society, 1840; Percy Society, 1840; Shakespeare Society, 1840; Philological Society, 1842; AElfric Society, 1843; Chetham Society, 1843; Caxton Society, 1845; Hakluyt Society, 1846; Cambrian Archaeological Association, 1846.

middle ages. This effect is carefully brought out in The English Review by an anonymous reviewer of two Camden Society publications. The historians of the eighteenth century presented a faulty view of the middle ages because they did not possess the documents by which to judge it. Modern historians, on the other hand, have "a particular and circumstantial knowledge of the men, manners, and events of the middle ages, a knowledge in which the writers of the last century could not have been otherwise than deficient."<sup>84</sup>

Without this interest on the part of private societies to equip scholars with documents for evaluating the middle ages there could have been no Past and Present, for it was from the thirteenth publication of the Camden Society, the Chronica Jocelini de Brakelonda, that Carlyle drew the inspiration for his work. He did not, as B. H. Lehman pointed out in this respect, "go . . . over the head of his age for his ideas."<sup>85</sup>

In another respect as well he did not go over the head of his age, for into the reaction against the theory of objective, rational history espoused by the historians of the enlightenment Carlyle can be legitimately placed. Like the other romantic historians, Carlyle was in revolt against the insufficiency of the rational historians, who had "effaced, and what is worse, defaced"<sup>86</sup> the past. In their hands,

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<sup>84</sup> "Old English Chroniclers," The English Review, I (1844), 453-454.

<sup>85</sup> Carlyle's Theory of the Hero, p. 131.

<sup>86</sup> Works, X, 239.

thought Carlyle, the middle ages had been "sacrilegiously mishandled,"<sup>87</sup> for "how shall the poor 'Philosophic Historian,' to whom his own century is all godless, see any God in other centuries?"<sup>88</sup> He, the rational historian, looks at the medieval period and affirms it "to have been a godless Impossibility. Your Norman Conquerors, true royal souls, crowned kings as such, were vulturous irrational tyrants: your Becket was a noisy egoist and hypocrite; getting his brains spilt on the floor of Canterbury Cathedral, to secure the main chance."<sup>89</sup>

Two periods in England's history Carlyle thought badly mistreated by previous historians, the period of the Commonwealth in the seventeenth century, and the middle ages. His attempt to reinterpret the first, to find the spiritual pressures which operated upon it, led to his Oliver Cromwell. And his reinterpretation of the second, the middle ages, became the historical tour de force which comprises Book II of Past and Present.

Carlyle's conviction that the historian must be able to plumb the spiritual depths of an age in order to understand it leads us into the second factor which has a bearing upon Past and Present, and here we must touch somewhat upon Carlyle's philosophy of history.

The attitude and personality with which a man views an

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<sup>87</sup> Loc. cit.  
<sup>88</sup> Ibid., X, 240.  
<sup>89</sup> Ibid., X, 239.

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object, whether it be a series of documents or a mountain, cannot help but influence the end result, the view itself. So with history. One might view history the Greek way, as a series of recurring cycles, the crest of each cycle neither lower nor higher than those before or those to follow. Or one could use the Hebrew view of a degenerating world. In either case, the facts are interpreted to fit the theory. The eighteenth century historians used neither of these grand views. In general they viewed history as a series of fortuitous accidents, each an entity in itself. If a pattern were discernible, it would emphasize the idea of progress. From these conceptions of history Carlyle fundamentally differed.

Though he outgrew most of the narrow dogmatism of his Calvinistic upbringing, Carlyle retained enough to insist that history is a long progression of events which unfold the divine will. And the task of the historian is to discern the patterns by which "his doings and plans [are]" manifested in completeness not by the year or by the century, on individuals or nations, but stretching through Eternity and over the Infinitude which he rules and sustains."<sup>90</sup> This historical pattern through which the divine will asserts itself Carlyle thought to be one of progressive periodicity, very much like that arrived at by Shelley. In brief, this cyclic theory interpreted history as a series of progressions and recessions tending generally toward perfection, each succeeding progression

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<sup>90</sup> Works, XXVI, 389; also see Letters to Mill, Sterling, and Browning, p. 82.



advancing a little, each new recession not falling quite so deep. "Find Mankind where thou wilt," Carlyle wrote in Sartor Resartus, "thou findest it in living movement, in progress faster or slower: the Phoenix soars aloft, hovers with outstretched wings, filling Earth with her music; or, as now, she sinks, and with spherical swan-song immolates herself in flame, that she may soar the higher and sing the clearer."<sup>91</sup> Sometimes Carlyle referred to these progressions and recessions in Goethe's terminology, as periods of "Belief" and "Unbelief;" often he employed the labels of the Saint-Simonians, organic and critical periods. For our purposes we need not concern ourselves with attempts to determine which was the greater influence;<sup>92</sup> the important thing about this view of history is that Carlyle continually referred to the medieval period as one of belief, or organic,<sup>93</sup> that is to say constructive; while he viewed the present age as an "Era of Unbelief"<sup>94</sup> or an "inorganic"<sup>95</sup> period. This indicated to

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<sup>91</sup> Works, I, 197.

<sup>92</sup> For the person interested in following the ramifications of the question Hill Shine's Carlyle and the Saint-Simonians is the book to read. But, as stated earlier, René Wellek's "Carlyle and the Philosophy of History" should be read as a control upon the narrow scope of Shine's work.

<sup>93</sup> "Belief and Unbelief are two opposite principles in human nature. The theme of all human history, as far as we are able to perceive it, is the contest between these two principles. . . . In the Middle Ages we see . . . Belief gaining the victory over Unbelief."--Lectures on the History of Literature, or the Successive Periods of European Culture, ed. R. P. Karkaria (London, 1892), p. 54; the "organic . . . Feudal Ages."--Works, X, 249.

<sup>94</sup> Works, I, 91.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., X, 249.

Carlyle something that would not have occurred to an eighteenth century historian, that the present could learn a lesson from study of the medieval past. If that medieval period was an era in which man and society were better oriented to their god, if it was an organic period of "Belief"--and Carlyle never doubted that this was the case--then the nineteenth century, this inorganic era of "Unbelief," might be hastened through the nadir of its recessive period if it could be made to see and feel and thirst for the blessed social orderliness of the middle ages. And by employing the medieval-modern contrast Carlyle attempted to do just that.

A third factor dealing broadly with Carlyle's theory and practice of history and influencing the kind of book we get in Past and Present grows out of his desire to make the reader see vividly and feel intensely those till now "sacrilegiously mishandled"<sup>96</sup> middle ages.

Carlyle would present his histories as realities, poetic realities. "Is not," he wrote to John Stuart Mill ten years before the publication of Past and Present, "all Poetry the essence of Reality (could one but get at such essence), the true History the only possible Epic?"<sup>97</sup> Historiographer Gooch in describing Carlyle's subsequent French Revolution employs similar terms. "It is," says Gooch, "the most dramatic work in historical literature, the most epic of historical narratives."<sup>98</sup> This same poetic realism can be found in the second

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., X, 239.

<sup>97</sup> Letters to Mill, Sterling, and Browning, p. 80.

<sup>98</sup> History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century, p. 324.

book of Past and Present.

Carlyle had once said that "History is the essence of innumerable Biographies."<sup>99</sup> In Jocelin's Chronicle Carlyle found what is in large part the biography of Abbot Samson, a biography congenial to his pet theories: hero worship, right synonymous with might, a society guided by reverence to the divine will, in short, a picture of social and ethical balance. Yet that picture set in crabbed medieval Latin was but dimly illuminated. Jocelin's "light," wrote Carlyle, "is most feeble, intermittent, and requires the intensest kindest inspection; otherwise it will disclose mere vacant haze."<sup>100</sup> So, donning the "Time-annihilating Hat" which Teufelsdröckh had wished for,<sup>101</sup> Carlyle spanned seven centuries and entered subjectively into his subject. His task then was to present, intensely illuminated, that dim picture he found in Jocelin, to present it to his readers with such a sense of reality that they could actually see and feel the essence of medieval order. "Behold therefore," he told his readers,

this England of the year 1200 was no chimerical vacuity or dreamland, peopled with mere vaporous Fantasms, Rymer's Foedera, and Doctrines of the Constitution; but a green solid place, that grew corn and several other things. The Sun shone on it; the vicissitude of seasons and human fortunes. Cloth was woven and worn; ditches were dug, furrow-fields ploughed, and houses built. Day by day all men and cattle rose to labour, and night by night returned home weary to their several lairs. In wondrous Dualism, then as now, lived nations of

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<sup>99</sup> Works, XXVII, 86.  
<sup>100</sup> Ibid., X, 44.  
<sup>101</sup> Ibid., I, 208.

breathing men; alternating, in all ways, between Light and Dark; between joy and sorrow, between rest and toil,--between hope, hope reaching high as Heaven, and fear deep as very Hell. Not vapour Fantasms, Rymer's Foedera at all! Coeur-de-Lion was not a theatrical popinjay with greaves and steel-cap on it, but a man living upon victuals.<sup>102</sup>

Other users of the medieval-modern contrast had merely affirmed to their readers that the middle ages were superior to the present; Carlyle went one step further. By means of his acute historic sense--defined by George Saintsbury as "the power of seizing, and so of portraying a historic character, incident or period as if it were alive, not dead"<sup>103</sup>--he allowed his readers to experience that superiority. "There is," says an eminent student of Carlyle's historical technique, "over all a sense of reality which not only parts the curtains of the past but persuades the reader that he is actually experiencing life as it was lived in the twelfth century."<sup>104</sup>

We have spent considerable space dealing with the historical territory out of which grew Carlyle's Past and Present. It did not grow out of a vacuum, but was, instead, a product which energetically reflected the historiographical atmosphere of his age. No medieval scholar himself,<sup>105</sup> Carlyle seized

<sup>102</sup> Works, X, 44.

<sup>103</sup> A History of Nineteenth Century Literature (New York, 1896), p. 251.

<sup>104</sup> Young, p. 125; in this same respect a contemporary reviewer wrote, "The Picture to the eye, he gives with marvellous vividness; and he puts forth, with equal power, that sort of world-wide reflection which a thinking being might be supposed to make on his first visit to our planet."--"Past and Present, by Carlyle," Blackwood's Magazine, LIX (July, 1843), 123.

<sup>105</sup> Hill Shine, the most thorough student of Carlyle's reading,

upon a work of the Camden Society, one which manifested England's growing interest in the editing of medieval texts, and transformed that work into a severe castigation of his century. Nor was the sympathetic picture of the middle ages which one finds in Past and Present uniquely Carlyle's. Here too Carlyle was going along with the historical tendencies of his time and was demonstrating that the revolt against the dreary medieval picture conceived by the rationalist historians was gaining strength in England. Likewise, Carlyle kept step with the demands of continental historians who demanded a lively, vivid, and subjective representation of past ages instead of mere objective comment. Even the idea of a medieval-modern contrast was not new to him, but had been used earlier in the century by authors whose works he knew. These factors, all of which aggrandized the middle ages, fortified Carlyle's conception of divinely inspired progressive periodicity, a notion born of transcendental optimism, and help to explain the use of the medieval-modern contrast in Past and Present.

Let us consider next the religious implications of Past and Present, for that work, like all of Carlyle's utterances, was strongly colored by religious sentiment of a distinctive kind. It is important that we come to understand these religious implications; in a very real sense they undercut, as I shall demonstrate later, all the social ideas which grow out

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(cont.) even speaks of his "slight interest in English medieval literature."--Carlyle's Early Reading, p. 28. Also, "The count [of Carlyle's reading] for the English Middle Ages . . . is slight."--Ibid., pp. 26-27.

of Past and Present.

That Carlyle found nineteenth century religion a sham is at once obvious. Brought up in the severe, Calvinistic atmosphere of Ecclefechan's Burgher sect, Carlyle himself was intended for the ministry. But in October of 1814, then eighteen years old, he was already experiencing the start of his religious tergiversation. He wrote to his friend, Robert Mitchell, who apparently was experiencing a similar dilemma, "My sentiments on the Clerical profession are like yours, mostly of the unfavourable kind. Where would be the harm, should we both stop?"<sup>106</sup> Shortly afterward, Carlyle was deep in Hume's Essays and found them "better than anything I have read these many days."<sup>107</sup> The result was that when in December of 1815 Carlyle delivered his second student sermon, the "weary, flat, stale, and unprofitable" Num detur religio naturalis, it was without conviction.<sup>108</sup> But it was not until March of 1817 that Carlyle made his final break with plans for a ministerial career, and that almost by chance.<sup>109</sup> In the following year he cemented his disbelief by reading Edward Gibbon's The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, which he borrowed from Edward Irving. Many years later he

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<sup>106</sup> Early Letters of Thomas Carlyle, pp. 20-21.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>109</sup> "On one of those visits [to Edinburgh with Edward Irving] my last feeble tatter of connection with Divinity Hall affairs or clerical outlooks was allowed to snap itself and fall definitely to the ground. Old Dr. Ritchie 'not at home' when I called to enter myself. 'Good!' answered I; 'Let the omen be fulfilled.'"--Reminiscences, p. 59.

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commented, "It was, of all the books, perhaps the most impressive on me in my then state of investigation and state of mind."<sup>110</sup> The young Carlyle's state of mind was causing no little alarm to his mother, who warned him repeatedly to read that "best of books"<sup>111</sup> and to reconsider the ministry as a career. "Do," she pleaded in April of 1819, "make religion your great study, Tom; if you repent it, I will bear the blame for ever."<sup>112</sup>

In a broad way she had her wish, for Carlyle's life work was spent in an attempt to get the nineteenth century to believe. Sartor Resartus is, in its highest sense, a deeply religious book, yet a book which ejects the scribes and pharisees from the contemporary temple and proclaims an austere personal faith in lieu of a Christianity which had "gone dumb with old age, or which only mumbles delirium prior to dissolution."<sup>113</sup> Nineteenth century Church-Clothes, "the Forms, the Vestures, under which men have at various periods . . . invested the Divine Idea of the World with a sensible and practically active Body, so that it might dwell among them as a living and life-giving Word,"<sup>114</sup> these Church-Clothes, "in our era of the World . . . have gone sorrowfully out-at-elbows: nay, far worse, many of them have become mere hollow Shapes,

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>111</sup> Early Letters of Thomas Carlyle, p. 229.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

<sup>113</sup> Works, I, 171.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., I, 170.

or Masks, under which no living Figure or Spirit any longer dwells; but only spiders and unclean beetles, in horrid accumulation, drive their trade."<sup>115</sup>

With this unflattering view of contemporary Christianity, it is only natural for one who wanted to believe in a "Divine Idea" to look for ages past during which a religious sentiment was an active, living instrument, one which permeated the total life of the age. That he found in the middle ages. But he would not go back, like Pugin, to twelfth century Catholicism as a goal toward which again to aspire. Carlyle was too much a believer in a concept of historical periodicity for that.<sup>116</sup> In fact, of all the people who had used or were to employ the medieval-modern contrast, Carlyle is the only one who does not advocate some sort of retrogression pure and simple. He only asks that nineteenth century men awake to their nineteenth century duties.

No, he would not have twelfth century Catholicism, he would merely demonstrate to his contemporaries the necessity of finding some Divine Idea by which to live. Odin and Mahomet, he told his readers in On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., I, 172.

<sup>116</sup> Of course, not only historical periodicitists oppose reaction. Believers in any historical theory embracing a concept of progress or causal succession would rule out retrogression as a solution for contemporary problems. Thus Sir Francis Palgrave, a contemporary of Carlyle who specifically rejected any cyclic pattern in history, wrote that "no era which has once gone by, can ever be brought back. . . . The same combinations will never recur, so long as the world endures."--Truths and Fictions of the Middle Ages. The Merchant and the Friar (London, 1837), p. 104.

the Heroic in History (1841), were once fit objects of worship, had truth in them,<sup>117</sup> truth which no longer survives. Likewise, the Catholicism which he presented in Past and Present; it once had truth, but that truth was no longer possible. It was the thing: the truth, the Divine Idea, the worship which Carlyle was interested in reproducing, not a particular manifestation of the thing, not Catholicism, not Islam, not Norse Paganism.

That Carlyle himself considered Past and Present to possess religious significance is obvious in a letter to Emerson written just three days after he had finished writing the book. "It is," Carlyle told his friend across the Atlantic, "a somewhat fiery and questionable 'Tract for the Times,' not by a Puseyite."<sup>118</sup> This at a time when pro- and anti-Oxford Movement "Tracts for the Times" were in abundance.<sup>119</sup>

The second chapter of Past and Present, that entitled "The Sphinx," sets up an idea which was later in the book to be used in the religious medieval-modern contrast. Here Carlyle asserted the existence of an ethical absolute, a law supreme which transcends all earthly--and spiritual--considerations. But just what that ethical absolute was, Carlyle did not say.<sup>120</sup> He merely insisted on its supremacy. No

<sup>117</sup> Works, V, 30, 45.

<sup>118</sup> Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 22.

<sup>119</sup> Joseph Ellis Baker, The Novel and the Oxford Movement (Princeton, 1932), pp. 9-22.

<sup>120</sup> He did, however, assign it many names. The following variations appear in the chapter referred to above: Nature, Destiny, Existence, Supreme Power, the grand unnamable Fact, the Adamant Tablet, Court of the Universe, Court of Courts, Throne of God, the eternal Substance.

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individual, no body of individuals can escape punishment at the hands of the "destroying fiend" if they fail to observe "this grand unnamable Fact."<sup>121</sup> Parliament, said Carlyle, and the Courts of Westminster, "gray with a thousand years of honourable age . . . are venerable; but if they correspond not with the writing on the 'Adamant Tablet,' what are they?"<sup>122</sup> Then follows the optimistic reassertion that justice, that veracity will always triumph over injustice, unverity.<sup>123</sup> Enforce unverity, wrote Carlyle, by

statuting, three readings, royal assents; blow it to the four winds with all manner of quilted trumpeters and pursuivants, in the rear of them never so many gibbets and hangmen, it will not stand, it cannot stand. From all souls of men, from all ends of Nature, from the Throne of God above, there are voices bidding it Away, away! Does it take no warning; does it stand, strong in its three readings, in its gibbets and artillery-parks? The more woe is to it, the frightfuler woe. It will continue standing for its day, for its year, for its century, doing evil all the while; but it has One enemy who is Almighty: dissolution, explosion, and the everlasting Laws of Nature incessantly advance towards it; and the deeper its rooting, more obstinate its continuing, the deeper also and huger will its ruin and over-turn be.<sup>124</sup>

In fact, Carlyle asserted, the wise man, the man who takes the long view, realizes that "there is nothing else but justice."<sup>125</sup>

But though justice and veracity will triumph over injustice

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<sup>121</sup> Works, X, 7.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., X, 9.

<sup>123</sup> Reassertion because this is in essence the "right is might" formula of Sartor Resartus, French Revolution, Heroes, and Chartism.

<sup>124</sup> Works, X, 10-11.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., X, 11.

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and unveracity in the end, the latter may have "its century" or perhaps even two. Certainly, Carlyle thought, cant and unveracity had ruled the eighteenth century, in which "Faith is gone out; Scepticism is come in."<sup>126</sup> And the nineteenth century continued the godless ways of the eighteenth. With one difference! Although "God's Laws are become a Greatest-Happiness Principle,"<sup>127</sup> although fear of hell has become in the new Gospel of Mammonism a fear "of not making money,"<sup>128</sup> although "man has lost the soul out of him," yet "now, after the due period,--[he] begins to find the want of it!"<sup>129</sup> The new German literature--Goethe in particular--had risen out of "our poor distracted Europe"<sup>130</sup> to proclaim the reality of a transcendental faith, an ethical absolute at whose bar all men, all societies, all centuries must ultimately stand. There can be no doubt that Carlyle considered himself in this band of prophets who were to lead Mammon worshipping Europe back to God.

In Sartor Resartus Carlyle had shown his countrymen how the individual might attain to faith; in The French Revolution and in Chartism he demonstrated the ways by which the wrath of God might descend on a world which persisted in godless ways; in Heroes and Hero-Worship he pointed out the necessity of faith in the proper selection of governors (a sham people

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<sup>126</sup> Works, II, 14.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., X, 136.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., X, 146.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., X, 137.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., X, 236.

will worship sham heroes); now in Past and Present he contrasted a faithless age with one of faith.

"It was," Carlyle had said in his Lectures on the History of Literature, "a great and fertile period. . . . In the Middle Ages we see the great phenomenon of Belief gaining the victory over Unbelief. . . . Thus in the Middle Ages, being in contact with fact and reality, . . . that is the great fact of the time, Belief."<sup>131</sup> This attitude toward the medieval period was given added impetus by his reading of Jocelin's Chronicle late in 1842. For there Carlyle saw in its pure and unromanticized form the unconscious working out of medieval belief.<sup>132</sup>

In the middle ages Carlyle found men with souls who observed an ethical absolute; that ethical absolute was a working Christianity. "In those [medieval] days," Carlyle said after criticising the nineteenth century parliament whose only limitation was force of public opinion, "a heavenly Awe overshadowed and encompassed, as it still ought and must, all earthly Business whatsoever."<sup>133</sup> He did not find a noisy, braying Christianity hypocritically displaying its wares on

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<sup>131</sup> Pp. 54-55.

<sup>132</sup> It is interesting to note that Carlyle was not so taken over by Froissart, who dealt in his Chronicle with medieval happenings of the grand scale, battles, coronations, revolts, tournaments, etc. Much more important to Carlyle was Jocelin, who recorded the historical minutiae from which Carlyle felt he could more adequately read the spirit of the age. For evidence that Carlyle had read Froissart, see Hill Shine, Carlyle's Early Reading, item 2178, p. 210.

<sup>133</sup> Works, X, 106.

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Sunday to a society with a "No-God hypothesis."<sup>134</sup> Instead he found real piety operating on an everyday basis. He found suppliants "prostrate . . . at the Church-door," with "nothing on but their breeches, omnino nudi praeter femoralia."<sup>135</sup> "Figure that!" he added ironically. Carlyle found in Abbot Samson a man who simply would not follow unverity, who, when he was convinced that right was on his side, dared the world, dared even the fury of Richard Coeur-de-Lion.<sup>136</sup>

Here was a man after Carlyle's hero-loving heart, this hair-shirted Abbot Samson. Strong, silent, seeing his duty and doing it; looking for no universal happiness principle, believing with Carlyle the words of Schiller with which he inscribed Past and Present, "Ernst ist das Leben."<sup>137</sup> One who neither hid nor made a show of his worship, yet one who did worship his God, his ethical absolute, in the only manner the pious man can, by doing his work in this world. "It might seem," Carlyle warned the unperceptive reader,

from Jocelin's Narrative, as if he [Abbot Samson] had his eye all but exclusively directed on terrestrial matters, and was much too secular for a devout man. But this too, if we examine it, was right. For it is in the world that a man, devout or other, has his life to lead, his work waiting to be done. The basis of Abbot Samson's, we shall discover, was truly religion, after all.<sup>138</sup>

Samson's was "Not a talking theory," it was instead "a silent

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., X, 137.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., X, 112.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., X, 114.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., X, title page.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., X, 115.

practice."<sup>139</sup>

"And," Carlyle added,

. . . is not this comparative silence of Abbot Samson as to his religion precisely the healthiest sign of him and of it? 'The Unconscious is the alone Complete.' Abbot Samson all along a busy working man, as all men are bound to be, his religion, his worship was like his daily bread to him;--which he merely ate at stated intervals, and lived and did his work upon! This is Abbot Samson's Catholicism of the Twelfth Century;--something like the Ism of all true men in all true centuries, I fancy!<sup>140</sup>

Much better, thought Carlyle, this monastic Catholicism that followed the motto "Laborare est Orare, Work is Worship,"<sup>141</sup> that went about its tasks as Abbot Samson did his, building houses, schools, churches, steeples, barns, and manifesting his devotion to his patron, St. Edmund, by building a safer repository for that martyr's remains; better this than modern religions.

Here Carlyle put the medieval-modern contrast to full effect. This Catholicism of twelfth century Bury St. Edmunds has no like in "these poor days."<sup>142</sup> What have we now in its stead, Carlyle asked? We have a "morbid, struggling Methodism . . . with its eye forever turned on its own navel; asking itself with torturing anxiety of Hope and Fear, 'Am I right? am I wrong? Shall I be saved? shall I not be damned?'"<sup>143</sup> We have the "galvanised Dilettantism" of Puseyism; "Oh heavens,"

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<sup>139</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., X, 116-117.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., X, 200.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., X, 117.

<sup>143</sup> Loc. cit.

said Carlyle, "what shall we say of Puseyism, in comparison to Twelfth-Century Catholicism? Little or nothing; for indeed it is a matter to strike one dumb."<sup>144</sup>

And not only did he attack by means of this medieval-modern contrast the Protestant faiths of his century, from the lowest, Methodism, to the highest, Puseyism; but he also unleashed his verbal fury on contemporary Catholicism. Even the Pope has become sham. Carlyle read as a sign of the times how

The old Pope of Rome, finding it laborious to kneel so long while they cart him through the streets to bless the people on Corpus-Christi Day, complains of rheumatism; whereupon his Cardinals consult;--construct him, after some study, a stuffed cloaked figure, of iron and wood, with wool or baked hair; and place it in a kneeling posture. Stuffed figure, or rump of a figure; to this stuffed rump he, sitting at his ease on a lower level, joins, by the aid of cloaks and drapery, his living head and outspread hands: the rump with its cloaks kneels, the Pope looks, and holds his hands spread; and so the two in concert bless the Roman population on Corpus-Christi Day, as well as they can.<sup>145</sup>

No hair-shirted Abbot Samson this Pope of Rome! Merely an ordinary man well trained in histrionics, "the greatest Play-actor that at present draws salary in this world."<sup>146</sup> "Here," said Carlyle in introducing his impression of contemporary Catholicism, "is a Supreme Priest who believes God to be--What, in the name of God, does he believe God to be?--and discerns that all worship of God is a scenic phantasmagory of wax-candles, organ-blasts, Gregorian chants, mass-brayings, purple

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<sup>144</sup> Loc. cit. A somewhat more favorable attitude toward Puseyism can be found in New Letters of Thomas Carlyle, I, 215-216; also see Froude, Life in London, I, 114.

<sup>145</sup> Works, X, 138.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., X, 138-139.

monsignori, wool-and-iron rumps, artistically spread out,-- to save the ignorant from worse."<sup>147</sup> A far cry, this "Scenic Theory of Worship,"<sup>148</sup> from the "unnoisy, unconscious, but practical, total, heart-and-soul demonstration"<sup>149</sup> of religion in the pious middle ages.

Carlyle's denunciation of abstract philosophy, the screwing of "one's self up into high and ever higher altitudes of Transcendentalism,"<sup>150</sup> applied to faith as well. He would have no abstract religion standing aloof from the affairs of the world, too intent upon its own navel, its thirty-nine articles, or its Papal Bulls. His religion was of Abbot Samson's kind, a bread and butter absolute which governed man's total life, not only his otherworldly but his worldly considerations as well. True religion of the Everlasting Yea kind, of the Abbot Samson kind, of the kind followed by true men in all true centuries manifested itself in the recognition of duty. The "great Law of Duty"<sup>151</sup> observed by Abbot Samson and "the latest Gospel in this world, . . . Know thy work and do it,"<sup>152</sup> were one and the same.

The part which work plays in worship leads us naturally into the next, though closely related, line of inquiry; for work, being of this world and in this world, is a social thing.

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., X, 138.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., X, 139.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., X, 117.

<sup>150</sup> Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 12.

<sup>151</sup> Works, X, 116.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., X, 196.

And I have said that the medieval-modern contrast of Past and Present has social implications.

The social condition of Carlyle's England appalled him. Here was a paradox! "England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition,"<sup>153</sup>--inanition physical and spiritual. Twelve-hundred-thousand laborers, men willing and able to work, lay idle in workhouses, unable to enjoy the Midas wealth of England; other hundred thousands are without even workhouse relief; human mothers and human fathers poison their children to gain three pounds, eight shillings from a burial-society;<sup>154</sup> Irish widows are forced to infect seventeen Scotchmen with typhus in order to prove human relationship with them.<sup>155</sup> Nor is the Master Worker (the middle class), with guineas jingling in his pockets, any better off. He drinks more and costlier wine, eats better food; but he is no "better, beautifuler, stronger, braver."<sup>156</sup> Not even happier. So also with the Master Unworker (the aristocracy), "his mouth full of loud futilities, and arguments to prove the excellence of his Corn-law; and in his heart the blackest misgiving, a desperate half-consciousness that his excellent Corn-law is indefensible."<sup>157</sup> The entire social structure was diseased, and from lack of a working, active faith. "You touch," said Carlyle,

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., X, 1.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., X, 2-4.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., X, 149.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., X, 5.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., X, 6.

the focal-centre of all our disease, of our frightful nosology of diseases, when you lay your hand on this. There is no religion; there is no God; man has lost his soul, and vainly seeks antiseptic salt. Vainly: in killing Kings, in passing Reform Bills, in French Revolutions, Manchester Insurrections, is found no remedy. The foul elephantine leprosy, alleviated for an hour, reappears in new force and desperateness next hour.<sup>158</sup>

The remedy for this social dislocation in his contemporary England, thought Carlyle, lay in its being taught properly to select and worship its heroes. Carlyle never doubted the existence of a few "elect of the world;" these were the "born champions, strong men, and liberatory Samsons"<sup>159</sup> that the nineteenth century must learn to follow or, he thought, the nineteenth century would perish. Here we come to the core reason why Carlyle looked back to medieval days in Past and Present.

It was not to convince his countrymen that they should return to a feudal, pre-industrial society, for Carlyle knew, as Cobbett did not, as Ruskin and Morris did not, that it was futile to resist industrialization. He even spoke of industrialism poetic words which could never have issued from his two disciples, Ruskin and Morris. "Hast thou heard, with sound ears," he wrote in Chartism, "the awakening of a Manchester, on Monday morning, at half-past five by the clock; the rushing off of its thousand mills, like the boom of an Atlantic tide, ten thousand times ten-thousand spools and spindles all set humming there,--it is perhaps, if thou knew it well, sublime as a Niagara, or more so."<sup>160</sup> He would have this poetry

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., X, 137.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., X, 290.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 181-182.

of industry extended to epic proportions, even "an infinitely wider kind of Epic"<sup>161</sup> than had hitherto been sung; and he warned the rulers of his society to look for this new epic. He said in Past and Present, "May it please your Serene Highnesses, your Majesties, Lordships and Law-wardships, the proper Epic of this world is not now 'Arms and the Man'; how much less, 'Shirt-frills and the Man': no, it is now 'Tools and the Man': that henceforth to all time, is now our Epic;-- and you, first of all others, I think, were wise to take note of that!"<sup>162</sup> For the Brindleys, the Watts, and the Arkwrights of his industrial nineteenth century Carlyle had high praise;<sup>163</sup> praise enough to equate them as heroes along with Wellington, Washington, Shakespeare, Milton, Pitt, Crocket, Bacon, and Sidney.<sup>164</sup> For in these men Carlyle saw might, the might to conquer cotton, steam, and the ocean. And might, by Carlyle's definition, always partook to some extent of the divine.<sup>165</sup>

No, he would not turn away from the age of mechanism to find refuge in a non-mechanized medieval past. He would only change mechanism from its present state as a "hard taskmaster" to a better state when it would be man's "all-ministering

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., X, 250.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., X, 209.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., X, 159; XXIX, 182-183.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 172, 181.

<sup>165</sup> The "might is right--right is might" formula is, of course, familiar to all Carlyle readers. A somewhat clearer than usual statement of the formula can be found in Chapter V of Chartism, entitled "Rights and Might." (Works, XXIX, 144-155).

servant."<sup>166</sup> And this forced him to look to the past. As early as 1829, in "Signs of the Times," he appealed to the industrialist Whig readers of the Edinburgh Review to recover in this Mechanical Age some of "the heroic worth of our forefathers."<sup>167</sup> As the feudal lords were the true rulers of medieval society, so should industrial barons be true rulers of modern society.

Industrial society he would keep, but upon it he would superimpose medieval hero worship and social order. He had begun to look at the aristocracy of "the most perfect Feudal Ages"<sup>168</sup> in Chartism (1839), several years before he came into contact with the Chronica Jocelini de Brakelonda. In the Norman Conquest, about which he was in 1845 tempted to write a history,<sup>169</sup> Carlyle was beginning to see a "cause which pleased the gods."<sup>170</sup> The new Norman aristocracy ruled because "the strong thing is the just thing."<sup>171</sup> It may not have been perfect, but it was at least an active pursuit of an ideal, and for Carlyle any ideal acted upon though imperfect, is infinitely better than a perfect ideal unacted upon. In the "Feudal Ages," he said, "the Ideal of Aristocracy nowhere lived in vacant serene purity as an Ideal, but always as a poor imperfect Actual, little heeding or not knowing at all that an Ideal lay

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<sup>166</sup> Works, XXVII, 81.

<sup>167</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 165.

<sup>169</sup> Wilson, Carlyle on Cromwell and Others (1837-48), p. 313.

<sup>170</sup> Works, XXIX, 173.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 174.

in it,--this . . . we will cheerfully admit."<sup>172</sup>

By the time Carlyle wrote Past and Present he was even more sure that the carefully patterned society of the middle ages was preferable to the disordered nineteenth century social structure. He had developed now an "indestructible regard for Willelmus Conquaestor"<sup>173</sup> and feudalism. "Monachism," he said, "Feudalism, with a real King Plantagenet, with real Abbots Samson, and their other living realities, how blessed!"<sup>174</sup> Blessed because in the task of "governing, which is man's highest work,"<sup>175</sup> they had not fumbled. "Truly," said Carlyle, who was, by virtue of his theory of heroes, temperamentally a feudalist, "we cannot enough admire, in those Abbot-Samson and William-Conqueror times, the arrangement they had made of their Governing Classes."<sup>176</sup> The middle ages would tolerate no laissez-faire do-nothingism, no "Corn-Law Debatings and other jargon."<sup>177</sup> "Dost thou think," Carlyle asked his readers, "Willelmus Conquaestor would have tolerated ten years' jargon, one hour's jargon, on the propriety of killing Cotton-manufacturers by partridge Corn-Laws?"<sup>178</sup> No! not a minute. The medieval aristocrats were men of action, men of decision who governed,

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 165.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., X, 215.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., X, 129.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., X, 87.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., X, 244.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., X, 251.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., X, 214.



guided, and protected their subjects in an active way; "they existed as an Aristocracy because they were found adequate for that."<sup>179</sup>

Opposed to this governing, guiding, and protecting aristocracy of the medieval period was the do-nothing, game-preserving, Corn-Law defending sham aristocracy of the present. Holders of the land still (and Carlyle, like Cobbett, never argued against the right of private property), this modern aristocracy refused to comply with the obligations which that land-ownership imposed upon them, namely, that they govern. "I say," Carlyle warned this imaginary, present day aristocracy,

you did not make the Land of England; and by the possession of it, you are bound to furnish guidance and governance to England! That is the law of your position on this God's-Earth; an everlasting act of Heaven's Parliament, not repealable in St. Stephen's or elsewhere! True government and guidance; not no-government and Laissez-faire; how much less, mis-government and Corn-Law!<sup>180</sup>

It was incredible to Carlyle that things could long continue in this condition, "that a class of men entitled to live sumptuously on the marrow of the earth; permitted simply, nay entreated, and as yet entreated in vain, to do nothing at all in return, was never heretofore seen on the face of this planet."<sup>181</sup> Certainly it was not seen in medieval times when, according to Carlyle, the ownership of the land was contingent upon ability to govern.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 162.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., X, 176.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., X, 178.

No imaginary Aristocracy would serve their turn; and accordingly they attained a real one. The Bravest men, who, it is ever to be repeated and remembered, are also on the whole the Wisest, Strongest, everyway Best, had here, with a respectable degree of accuracy, been got selected; seated each on his piece of territory; which was lent him, then gradually given him, that he might govern it. These Vicekings, each on his portion of the common soil of England, with a Head King over all, were a 'Virtuality perfected into an Actuality' really to an astonishing extent.<sup>182</sup>

The movement toward democracy Carlyle did not interpret as a great era of human liberation, but as a sign that two centuries of "Quackocracy" had begun.<sup>183</sup> Born of a poverty that "at no time, since the beginnings of Society, was . . . so entirely unbearable as it is . . . in the days now passing over us,"<sup>184</sup> democracy was, Carlyle wrote late in life, "the gradual uprise, and rule in all things, of roaring, million-headed, unreflecting, darkly suffering, darkly sinning 'Demos,' come to call its old superiors to account, at its maddest of tribunals."<sup>185</sup> An effort, though not very effective, to throw out sham leaders and replace them with true heroes, this was democracy. And Carlyle warned the aristocracy of England that unless they furnished that guidance, unless they became a true rather than an imaginary aristocracy, democracy would relieve them of their trust; "one way or other, the world will absolutely need to be governed; if not by this class of men, then by that."<sup>186</sup> For all men want to be guided, have

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., X, 244.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., II, 134.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., X, 210.

<sup>185</sup> Reminiscences, p. 199.

<sup>186</sup> Works, XXIX, 160.

even a right to be led. "Surely," Carlyle said in Chartism, "of all 'rights of man' this right of the ignorant man to be guided by the wiser, to be, gently or forcibly, held in the true course by him, is the indisputablest."<sup>187</sup>

This right to find and recognize heroes, to submit to their guidance, Carlyle thought the most important business on earth. In Heroes and Hero-Worship he said,

The finding of your Ableman and getting him invested with the symbols of ability, with dignity, worship (worth-ship), royalty, kingship, or whatever we call it, so that he may actually have room to guide according to his faculty of doing it,--is the business, well or ill accomplished, of all social procedure whatsoever in this world! Hustings-speeches, Parliamentary motions, Reform Bills, French Revolutions, all mean at heart this; or else nothing. Find in any country the Ablest Man that exists there; raise him to the supreme place, and loyally reverence him: you have a perfect government for that country; no ballot-box, parliamentary eloquence, voting, constitution-building, or other machinery whatsoever can improve it a whit. It is the perfect state; an ideal country.<sup>188</sup>

This is precisely the business which Carlyle thought modern England--modern Europe as well--had failed to do well.

"Huge French Revolutions, Napoleonisms, then Bourbonisms with their corollary of Three Days, finishing in very unfinal Louis-Philippisms: all this," said Carlyle, "ought to be didactic! All this may have taught us, That False Aristocracies are insupportable; that No-Aristocracies, Liberty-and-Equalities are impossible; that true Aristocracies are at once indispensable

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<sup>187</sup>

Ibid., XXIX, 157.

<sup>188</sup>

Ibid., V, 196-197.

and not easily attained."<sup>189</sup>

No liberty-and-equalities in the middle ages; no "Democracy, which means despair of finding any Heroes to govern;"<sup>190</sup> for those ages, thought Carlyle, had a way, though sometimes rude, of singling out heroes and worshiping them. The rise to power of Abbot Samson as recorded in the Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelonde was for Carlyle worth a thousand pages of Dryasdust's comment on the dark ages, for it indicated to him that "A most 'practical' Hero-worship went on, unconsciously or half-consciously, everywhere. A Monk Samson, with a maximum of two shillings in his pocket, could, without ballot-box, be made a Viceking of, being seen to be worthy. The difference between a good man and a bad man was as yet felt to be, what it forever is, an immeasurable one."<sup>191</sup> In another place Carlyle makes a lengthy medieval-modern contrast of that same recognition of Abbot Samson's worth:

What political and social capabilities, nay, let us say, what depth and opulence of true social vitality, lay in those old barbarous ages, That the fit Governor could be met with under such disguises, could be recognised and laid hold of under such? Here he is discovered with a maximum of two shillings in his pocket, and a leather script round his neck; trudging along the highway, his frock-skirts looped over his arm. They think this is he nevertheless, the true Governor; and he proves to be so. Brethren, have we no need of discovering true Governors, but will sham ones forever do for us? These were absurd superstitious blockheads of Monks; and we are enlightened Ten-pound Franchisers, without taxes on knowledge! Where, I say, are our superior, and our similar

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., X, 241.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., X, 215.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., X, 246.

or at all comparable discoveries? We also have eyes, or ought to have. . . . Great souls, true Governors, go about under all manner of disguises now as then.<sup>192</sup>

But today we find that "George the Third is head charioteer of the Destinies of England . . . and Robert Burns is Gauger of ale in Dumfries."<sup>193</sup>

Carlyle's view of the ideal social structure was, I have said, fundamentally that of a feudalist. That the changeover from an agrarian, middle age economy to an industrial, nineteenth century economy should cause any fundamental change in sociological structure he did not believe. The divine law of duty, the divine right to be ably governed were absolutes which remained inviolate under any economy. Both required a structured society in which each human recognised his rightful place as governor or governed and assumed it without grumbling. "True enough," he said in Past and Present, "man is forever the 'born thrall' of certain men, born master of certain other men, born equal of certain others, let him acknowledge the fact or not. It is unblessed for him when he cannot acknowledge this fact; he is in the chaotic state, ready to perish, till he do get the fact acknowledged."<sup>194</sup>

This being his view of the ideal society, it was only natural for him to look back at the feudal society of the middle ages with admiration and to contrast what he considered

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., X, 85.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., X, 86.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., X, 251.

its "beautiful" and "human" social structure<sup>195</sup> with the confused and sordid society of the nineteenth century. But he saw a new force at work in his own time which did not exist in the middle ages; that is, an industrial middle class. So he sought to fit them somehow into the feudal pattern.

With the lower classes and the landed aristocracy Carlyle had been rather vague. The latter he had told to act as a true aristocracy rather than an imaginary one, to assume in an active way the responsibilities of governorship which their lands demanded of them. The lower classes were to follow not sham heroes, but real ones; they were to ascertain and execute their heaven-ordained duties. To the new industrial middle class, however, Carlyle, struggling to make a place for them in his ideal feudal society, offered more specific suggestions.

They must abandon their Mammon worship once for all and submit themselves to a code of ethics much higher than a "greater-happiness principle" or the Benthamite gospel of "enlightened selfishness." They must accept the great responsibility to govern, guide, and provide for the mass of English workers who had helped them to create their wealth.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., X, 274.

<sup>196</sup> It seems odd that Carlyle did not cite Robert Owen as an example of an enlightened industrialist who was attempting to put a noble theory into practice. He had heard "the famous Mr. Owen" speak, and he and Edward Irving, both of whom were familiar with Owen's works, had visited the New Lanark Mills. See Letters of Thomas Carlyle, II, 5; Fredrick William Roe, The Social Philosophy of Carlyle and Ruskin (New York, 1921), p. 47.

This responsibility Carlyle felt he could teach them, in part at least, by means of the medieval-modern contrast. Middle class industrialists, since they had replaced agriculture with industrialism, should take over some of the governing responsibility and should assume the chivalrous code of the medieval lord of the manor. True "Captains of Industry" they must become.<sup>197</sup>

In order to do this, they must abandon their laissez-faire disregard for the worker during periods of overproduction. No law of supply and demand had ever been passed in Carlyle's eternal parliament. The master's duty was not dispensed with when he had paid, to the last sixpence, wages kept at starvation level by that same atheistic law of supply and demand. "Cash-payment is not," Carlyle said again and again, "the sole relation of human beings."<sup>198</sup> No, a stronger human relationship was needed, one like that of Gurth and Wamba to Cedric in Scott's Ivanhoe, which Carlyle must have read with extreme satisfaction. "The Feudal Baron," Carlyle told his potential Captains of Industry,

. . . how could he subsist with mere temporary mercenaries round him, at sixpence a day; ready to go over to the other side, if sevenpence were offered? He could not have subsisted;--and his noble instinct saved him from the necessity of even trying! The Feudal Baron had a Man's Soul in him; to which

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Carlyle's employment of a military title here is significant. He considered the soldier the one powerful "fact and not a shadow" in contemporary civilization. (Works, X, 261).

<sup>198</sup>

Works, X, 146, 188-189, 194.

anarchy, mutiny, and the other fruits of temporary mercenaries, were intolerable: he had never been a Baron otherwise, but had continued a Chactaw and Bucanier. He felt it precious, and at last it became habitual, and his fruitful enlarged existence included it as a necessity, to have men round him who in heart loved him; whose life he watched over with rigour yet with love; who were prepared to give their life for him, if need came. It was beautiful; it was human!<sup>199</sup>

This beautiful and human social arrangement between worker and master could, Carlyle thought, be accomplished again in the nineteenth century, but never if middle class industrialists continued in their view that cash payment was the sole nexus. Cash payment there must be in a society which was no longer agrarian, Carlyle knew, but that cash payment must be more permanent than the day to day or week to week arrangements then in vogue. The Master Worker must make a more humane arrangement with his men, one which provided for them even though the spindles and shuttles were temporarily stopped after a period of overproduction. This arrangement for a better social organization, for a more humane relationship between master and worker was "the principle of Permanent Contract instead of Temporary."<sup>200</sup>

That his ideal of "permanent contract" came dangerously close to--in fact, could be--slavery did not bother Carlyle in the least. His participation in the Governor Eyre trial, and better still, his essay on "The Nigger Question" make Carlyle's position perfectly clear. "Except by Mastership and Servant-

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., X, 274.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., X, 277.

ship," he said in that essay, "there is no conceivable deliverance from Tyranny."<sup>201</sup> Slavery itself, then, is an escape from tyranny, for it was predicated upon a master-servant relationship. And that Carlyle connected the permanent contract of negro slavery with the relationship between master and serf in the middle ages is also clear in that essay. After talking about life tenure and the possibility for the able slave to purchase freedom, Carlyle said, "Look at the Serfs of the Middle Ages: they married and gave in marriage, nay they could not even be divorced from their natal soil; had home, family, and a treatment that was human. Many laws, and gradually a whole code of laws, on this matter could be made! And will have to be made."<sup>202</sup>

Thus Carlyle, who was "for permanence in all things, at the earliest possible moment, and to the latest possible," who preached the vicious, conservative maxim, "Blessed is he that continueth where he is,"<sup>203</sup> looked with certain satisfaction upon the permanent contract entered into in feudal times. And capitalizing upon the tremendous popularity of Sir Walter Scott's Ivanhoe, he pointed out to nineteenth century England, so deluded by the cry of liberty, that Gurth, Cedric's permanent swineherd, existed in a far more blessed state than the modern worker:

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 362.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 372; my italics in the last sentence of the quotation.

<sup>203</sup> Works, X, 280.



Gurth, with the sky above him, with the free air and tinted boscage and umbrage round him, and in him at least the certainly of supper and social lodging when he came home; Gurth to me seems happy, in comparison with many a Lanchashire and Buckinghamshire man, of these days, not born thrall of anybody! Gurth's brass collar did not gall him: Cedric deserved to be his Master. The pigs were Cedric's, but Gurth too would get his parings of them. Gurth had the inexpressible satisfaction of feeling himself related indissolubly, though in a rude brass-collar way, to his fellow-mortals in this Earth. He had superiors, inferiors, equals.--Gurth is now 'emancipated' long since; has what we call 'Liberty'. Liberty, I am told, is a Divine thing. Liberty when it becomes the 'Liberty to die by starvation' is not so Divine.<sup>204</sup>

Slavery, black or feudal, was not, for Carlyle, an evil thing. For he viewed it the romantic way: the latter was long ago, the former far away. He saw in the permanent master-man relationship something which was both just and, like Jonathan Edward's Calvinism, exceedingly sweet.

Yet when he made his specific suggestion to the middle class as to how this permanent contract could be effected within the framework of the nineteenth century industrial economy, the suggestion was not reactionary, as was the argument from which it was drawn. Instead, it was radical in its day--still liberal in our own. For Carlyle would not only have a permanent contract between master and worker based on loyalty to one another, but he would have that contract strengthened and

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Ibid., X, 212. Carlyle conveniently overlooks the fact that Gurth was transported with joy when he received his liberation; so much so that he "twice bounded aloft to almost his own height from the ground."--Walter Scott, The Waverly Novels, intro. and notes by Andrew Lang (The New Abbotsford Edition), (Boston, 1900), XVII, 137.

cemented by means of the very cash which he had so inveighed against. He asked the middle class industrialist if it were not "possible, and needful, to grant his Workers permanent [financial] interest in his enterprise and theirs? So that it become, in practical result, what in essential fact and justice it ever is, a joint enterprise; all men, from the Chief Master down to the lowest Overseer and Operative, economically as well as loyally concerned for it."<sup>205</sup>

In addition to this proposal that the Master-Worker admit his workers to profit sharing, a plan not yet widely realized in our twentieth century, Carlyle offered in Past and Present other specific and far-sighted suggestions. First, that industrialists should accept governmental interference into their factories.<sup>206</sup> Just as the feudal barons were not completely free to do as they liked, but instead had a "Head King over all,"<sup>207</sup> a real King Plantagenet who would not for an hour allow an unjust situation to exist; so the industrial barons must also submit to guidance by the present day government. "All men," Carlyle wrote, "are beginning to see, that Legislative interference, and interferences not a few are indispensable; that as a lawless anarchy of supply-and-demand, on market-wages alone, this province of things cannot longer

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<sup>205</sup> Works, X, 282.

<sup>206</sup> Cazamian believes that Carlyle was an important force in favor of State Socialism in that he placed emphasis upon intervention into industry by a strong central government. This kicks the props from under individualistic laissez-faire. (Carlyle, p. 186).

<sup>207</sup> Works, X, 244.

be left."<sup>208</sup> The Factory Act of 1833, which was pushed through largely by the efforts of Lord Ashley,<sup>209</sup> Carlyle approved of. He would, in fact, have it extended. "Interference has begun;" he wrote, "it must continue, must extensively enlarge itself, deepen and sharpen itself."<sup>210</sup> Anticipating Disraeli's cry of Sanitas sanitatum, omnia sanitas, Carlyle desired the Parliament "to order all dingy Manufacturing Towns to cease from their soot and darkness; to let-in the blessed sunlight, the blue of Heaven, and become clear and clean; to burn their coal-smoke, namely, and make flame of it. Baths, free air, a wholesome temperature, ceilings twenty feet high, might be Ordained, by Act of Parliament, in all establishments licensed as Mills."<sup>211</sup> He would also have British lawmakers order factory towns to set aside parks "for its little children to disport in; for its all-conquering workers to take a breath of twilight air in."<sup>212</sup> Also, he would have a parliamentary bill making universal education mandatory, an ideal not to be realized in England until 1870; the bill to be administered by some "Captain-General of Teachers, who will actually contrive to get us taught."<sup>213</sup>

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., X, 264.

<sup>209</sup> "Lord Ashley . . . [is] the only man that Carlyle praises in his book Past and Present." (Wilson, Carlyle on Cromwell and Others, p. 232).

<sup>210</sup> Works, X, 264.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., X, 265.

<sup>212</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., X, 266; the military title, as with "Captains of Industry," is interesting. See note 197, p. 116.

Another project which Carlyle outlined in Past and Present as a way out of contemporary social difficulties might deserve some special attention, for it handles the problem of overpopulation. It is interesting that Carlyle answers the Malthusian argument and its social result, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, in a much different manner than did his predecessors in the use of the medieval-modern contrast.

Cobbett had attempted to show the nineteenth century worker that his medieval counterpart was much better off than he. The medieval worker dressed better, ate better, and in all respects lived better than the modern worker. And lest the Malthusians invalidate his argument by claiming that the entire cause of modern misery was an ever-increasing population, Cobbett argued vehemently that the medieval period had, in fact, a much larger population than did the nineteenth century. Not overpopulation, thought Cobbett, had caused the miserable condition of the poor in modern times, but the Reformation, because it had dissolved the religious houses. One-third of the large incomes which came to the monastic establishments was set aside, Cobbett believed, for the just provision of the poor, the aged, and the infirm. This noble charity gone, inhuman poor houses were the result.

Southey, although he did not specifically attack the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, did follow Cobbett in his sincere admiration for the part which the medieval monasteries played in alleviating the distresses of the poor. Their great incomes, Southey said in Colloquies, were "beneficially employed"

to give employment to the able-bodied men and to provide for the old and helpless as well.<sup>214</sup> Pugin too, the third to use the medieval-modern contrast, had called the nineteenth century's attention to the superiority of the medieval monastic way of dealing with the poor over the contemporary way, that of the Malthusian poor house.

Carlyle, on the other hand, has surprisingly little to say in Past and Present about the monastic function of caring for the poor; surprising because the main source of his medieval picture, Jocelin's Chronicle, contains here and there sufficient mention of alms to warrant at least an approximation of the claims which Cobbett, Southey, and Pugin had made for the humanitarianism of the monastic establishments. Yet Carlyle chose generally to ignore the subject.

Instead, Carlyle countered Malthusianism by suggesting a modern and workable plan for mass emigration. As early as Sartor Resartus (1836), Carlyle, like most of the radicals of his day, had struck out against Parson Malthus and his followers in the chapter entitled "Helotage." The Malthusian hypothesis, which, since it made poverty a natural law, condoned it, Carlyle thought lacking in human dignity. Furthermore, Carlyle was never much interested in theory per se. The "condition of England" question was not to be solved by the passive explanation of an automatically operating natural law, but by active, human guidance. Malthusianism, the passive

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<sup>214</sup> Colloquies, I, 84.

explanation, would never alleviate the plight of the poor; champions who would lead the surplus poor to new portions of the "terraqueous Globe,"<sup>215</sup> who would actively guide, these were needed badly to help the poor of England rise from their squalor.<sup>216</sup>

This feeling that active guidance is what the poor needed, when coupled with Carlyle's veneration of work, shaped his attitude toward the workhouses which had resulted from the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 and in large part accounted for his solution, emigration. With those who could work and would not Carlyle had no sympathy; they should not be given relief. Therefore, he considered the Poor Law Amendment Act, though "heretical and damnable as a whole truth," yet "laudable as a half-truth."<sup>217</sup> "If paupers are made miserable," observed Carlyle in Chartism, reflecting one of the aims of the Amendment Act, "paupers will needs decline in multitude. It is a secret known to all rat-catchers: stop up the granary-crevices, afflict with continual mewing, alarm, and going-off of traps, your 'chargeable labourers' disappear, and cease from the establishment."<sup>218</sup> For these, the able-bodies who refused to work, Carlyle had no pity, "refusal of out-door relief was the one thing needful."<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Works, I, 183.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., I, 184.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 131.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 130.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 131.

Yet, though he viewed the Amendment Act as a "laudable . . . half-truth," he could not, as could many of his contemporaries, accept it as a final answer to England's pauper problem. To do so would have required him to think of pauperism as a bad disease which paupers brought upon themselves by intemperate, indolent living and by excessive propagation.<sup>220</sup> This post hoc, ergo propter hoc reasoning he did not accept. And the law which punished the paupers for conditions beyond their control he could not laud. "That this Poor-law Amendment Act . . . ," he said in Chartism, "should be, as we sometimes hear it named, the 'chief glory' of a Reform Cabinet, betokens, one would imagine, rather a scarcity of glory there."<sup>221</sup>

By the time Carlyle wrote Past and Present he had become even less sympathetic toward the Poor Law Amendment Act and its workhouses. The term workhouse itself, "pleasantly so-named, because work cannot be done in them,"<sup>222</sup> carried for Carlyle a bitter irony. "Poor-law Prisons," "workhouse Bastille[s]" he now called them, and the problem of the "two millions, it is now counted, [who] sit in Workhouses,"<sup>223</sup> was the first specific issue he took up in Past and Present.

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<sup>220</sup> His contemporaries spoke of the "germs of pauperism." See Report to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, from the Poor Law Commissioners, on the Training of Pauper Children (London, 1841), p. 19. This work, which Carlyle read and quoted from in Past and Present, expresses throughout the attitude that pauperism is a disease consequent upon the depravity and indolence of the poor themselves.

<sup>221</sup> Works, XXIX, 130.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., X, 2.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., X, 1-2.

In September of 1842, a time when Carlyle was having difficulty being "in the seventeenth century [work on Oliver Cromwell] and the nineteenth century at one and the same moment,"<sup>224</sup> he visited the workhouse at St. Ives in Huntingdonshire. The impact of that scene, the pathos of able-bodied men with, as he had said in Sartor Resartus, "blinded, dwarfed stupefied, almost annihilated"<sup>225</sup> souls, men who wanted to work but could not, is vividly recorded in the first chapter of Past and Present.

'Passing by the Workhouse of St. Ives in Huntingdonshire, on a bright day last autumn,' says the picturesque Tourist, 'I saw sitting on wooden benches, in front of their Bastille and within their ring-wall and its railings, some half-hundred or more of these men. Tall robust figures, young mostly or of middle age; of honest countenance, many of them thoughtful and even intelligent-looking men. They sat there, near by one another; but in a kind of torpor, especially in a silence, which was very striking. In silence: for, alas, what word was to be said? An Earth all lying round, crying, Come and till me, come and reap me;--yet we here sit enchanted! In the eyes and brows of these men hung the gloomiest expression, not of anger, but of grief and shame and manifold inarticulate distress and weariness; they returned my glance with a glance that seemed to say, "Do not look at us. We sit here, we know not why. The sun shines and the Earth calls; and, by the governing Powers and Impotences of this England, we are forbidden to obey. It is impossible, they tell us!" There was something that reminded me of Dante's Hell in the look of all this; and I rode swiftly away.'<sup>226</sup>

But though Carlyle "rode swiftly away" from this dismal scene, he did not forget it. Here were potential workers and

<sup>224</sup> Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 10.

<sup>225</sup> Works, I, 182.

<sup>226</sup> Works, X, 2.

potential work--unused. For Carlyle, always preacher of the gospel of work, this was sin. He was appalled by the waste of this system, the waste "of noble and thrice-noble national virtues; peasant Stoicisms, Heroisms; valiant manful habits, soul of a Nation's worth."<sup>227</sup> These poor were crying for work, crying in a pathetic and inarticulate way for guidance out of their enchanted dilemma. The new poor law, that of 1834, was not the guidance they sought, thought Carlyle; it was merely another of the Morrison's Pills England was fond of using for its social pains, another plan which might temporarily ease the pressure, but could not give permanent relief. "A Poor-law," Carlyle said early in Past and Present, "any and every Poor-law, it may be observed, is but a temporary measure; an anodyne, not a remedy: Rich and Poor, when once the naked facts of their condition have come into collision, cannot long subsist together on a mere Poor-law."<sup>228</sup>

A more permanent measure, thought Carlyle, would be a well planned and strongly guided system of emigration. And again, as with his other proposals, Carlyle would have the government of England assume the responsibility of implementation. The state should place a strong man of decision--an Abbot Samson in short--at the head of this "Emigration Service;" it should equip him "with adjuncts, with funds, forces, idle Navy-ships, and ever-increasing apparatus; in fine, an

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., X, 3.

<sup>228</sup> Loc. cit.

effective system of Emigration."<sup>229</sup> This "free bridge for Emigrants" would be available to every willing English worker who, by the iron-law of supply and demand, was unable to find work in his native land, "every willing Worker that proved superfluous, finding a bridge ready for him."<sup>230</sup>

Carlyle pointed out to the upper and middle classes that the plan had its advantages for them. The most important was that England would be given time to avert its French Revolution. By his calculations, emigration could continue to function effectively for six thousand years, for it would take that long to fill the potential productive areas of the world. During that interval England could go about organizing labor on a more equitable basis than was presently the case without the fear that Britain would "perish unless we effected it within year and day." And not only did Carlyle urge his emigration plan as a safety valve against the increasing pressure of Physical-Force Chartism, but he assured his mammon-conscious countrymen that the transplanted English would create new and vast markets for English goods "in all quarters of the Globe."<sup>231</sup> An argument designed to carry weight!

I have examined the social implications of Past and Present in some detail because more than anything else Carlyle thought the work a comment upon social conditions of his nineteenth century England. I have demonstrated insofar as

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<sup>229</sup> Works, X, 266.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., X, 267.

<sup>231</sup> Loc. cit.

possible the use that he made of the medieval-modern contrast. The unity and order which he considered characteristic of the medieval social structure were lacking in his age, so he sought to teach his century by means of the contrast to straighten out its chaotic ways. The workers, the lower classes, he told to recognize, follow--even worship--their heroes, to accept a true and just master-worker relationship such as had existed in the middle ages, and to perform their divinely appointed mission in life, work. The do-nothing, game-preserving Aristocracy Carlyle ordered to become again what it had been in the times of Abbot Samson, an active and responsible governorship, one which, as it inherited the land of England, must also inherit the burdens which that land carried, namely, the obligation to lead. The new industrial and mercantile middle class, though it had no medieval counterpart, could still learn a lesson from that age. Mammon worship they must abandon for a higher ethical code. They must cease to believe in cash payment as the sole nexus; instead, they must take on many of the responsibilities of the feudal lord, the most important of which was to establish and maintain a permanent and humane relationship with their workers. Legislative interference they must cheerfully accept, factory laws, education laws, and emigration laws were, Carlyle warned them, necessary to solve the problems posed by the "strange new Today"<sup>232</sup> of industrial nineteenth century England.

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<sup>232</sup> Works, X, 7.

I have said that Carlyle was less a reactionary than others who had used the medieval-modern contrast before him. In matters religious he would not, like Pugin, have his nineteenth century England return to medieval Catholicism--or any kind of Catholicism. He merely wanted his age to accept and follow some kind of an ethical absolute which, like medieval Catholicism, could furnish a synthesizing rationale for England's total life. In matters social, and by this I mean economic as well, he only asked that the nineteenth century adapt some praiseworthy characteristics of the medieval period to the exigencies of contemporary life. Cobbett, Southey, and Pugin before him, Ruskin and Morris after him, were all fundamentally anti-industrial; they refused to accept an industrial revolution which was definitely here to stay. It is important to realize that Carlyle was the only literary figure to employ the medieval-modern contrast who did accept the new industrial economy. He would not do away with it; he would merely teach it to conform better to the divine code.

In Carlyle's hands the tradition of the medieval-modern contrast gained self-respect. Artistically, Past and Present stands at the top of the century's work in that tradition. The absurd claims made about the middle ages by Cobbett and Pugin have largely disappeared in Carlyle's energetic presentation of twelfth century Bury St. Edmunds. Cobbett's History of the Protestant Reformation, Southey's Colloquies, and Pugin's Contrasts have been relegated by a critical posterity to an obscure and almost forgotten position as literary curiosities

on the bookshelf of nineteenth century intellectual trends. Carlyle's Past and Present, however, continues to be read and studied as a strong and influential comment upon Victorian disorders by an acknowledged prophet of the day.

Certainly John Ruskin and William Morris, the two figures yet to be treated, were profoundly influenced by this work which Emery Neff has said "aroused thought and action to an extent unparalleled by books of the time."<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Carlyle, p. 207.

### CHAPTER III

JOHN RUSKIN

"Those ages were feudal, ours free; those reverent, ours impudent; those artful, ours mechanical; the consummate and exhaustive difference being that the creed of the Dark Ages was, 'I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;' and the creed of the Light Ages has become, 'I believe in Father Mud, the Almighty Plastic; and in Father Dollar the Almighty Drastic.'"--  
Fors Clavigera

In a sense John Ruskin lies outside the scope of this study. Southey, Cobbett, Pugin, and Carlyle all wrote works which employed as a key device the contrast of the medieval and modern periods. In no one work does Ruskin use this medieval-modern contrast as his structural point of departure, as Carlyle, for example, had used it in Past and Present, Pugin in Contrasts, or Southey in Colloquies.

In a larger and more important sense, however, Ruskin does deserve consideration. His awareness of the shortcomings of the modern, industrial society, an awareness which became more acute as he advanced in years, places him immediately in sympathy with those figures we have already studied. His contact, though often misinterpreted, with that great outlet for nineteenth century medievalistic energy, the Gothic Architectural Revival, certainly demonstrates his vigorous anti-modern attitude. His attempts, both theoretical and practical, to superimpose upon the nineteenth century the social, political, economic, and to some extent, the religious conditions of the pre-industrial middle ages logically place him within the tradition we are attempting to study. In addition, Ruskin did employ the medieval-modern contrast as a literary device. Though he did not use it to form the structure of any single book, yet he found opportunity in many of his books to drive home his arguments by contrasting the two periods in a sentence, a paragraph, or a chapter.

Granted that Ruskin is one of the nineteenth century's great medieval enthusiasts and that he not only deserves but

demands a place in this study, our first task is to ascertain the influences which helped shape his thought.

The first such influence is the work of Sir Walter Scott. E. T. Cook, the principal hand in the editorship of the monumental Library Edition of Ruskin's Works, has said truly that "Scott was the author whom Ruskin knew first, and loved best and longest and unvaryingly."<sup>1</sup>

Although we do not, as we do with William Morris, know exactly when Ruskin was introduced to Scott's work, it was certainly early. In the Praeterita--the very first page of the work--Ruskin mentioned his childhood acquaintance with Scott's novels. "I had Walter Scott's novels . . . for constant reading when I was a child, on week days: on Sunday, their effect was tempered by Robinson Crusoe and the Pilgrim's Progress."<sup>2</sup> By the age of ten Ruskin had translated half of Scott's Monastery into rhyme.<sup>3</sup> At the ages of twelve and thirteen Ruskin wrote two short poems to Scott, the second a lament for Scott's recent death.<sup>4</sup> And in January, 1839--Ruskin was not yet twenty--there appeared in The Architectural Magazine an article by a presumptuous Kata Phusin, who took it upon himself to legislate upon "Whether Works of Art May, with Propriety, be Combined with the Sublimity of Nature; and What would Be the Most

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<sup>1</sup> The Works of John Ruskin, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London, 1903-1912), I, 363n.--hereafter cited as Works.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., XXXV, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 539.

<sup>4</sup> The two poems are entitled "To the Memory of Sir Walter Scott" and "The Grave of the Poet." See Ibid., I, 327, 337.

Appropriate Situation for the Proposed Monument to the Memory of Sir Walter Scott, in Edinburgh?" This article not only demonstrates the presumptuous egoism noticeable in Ruskin's later work, but also the sincere enthusiasm he possessed for Sir Walter, Scotland's "noblest child."<sup>5</sup> And this early enthusiasm for his "master"<sup>6</sup> Ruskin did not outgrow. In fact, Ruskin's letters make it obvious that his interest in Scott grew stronger with age.<sup>7</sup> He complained in 1887 to the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette, "It is one of the griefs of my old age that I know Scott by heart; but still, if I take up a volume of him, it is not laid down again for the next hour."<sup>8</sup>

Such a long and thorough acquaintance with the work of Scott could not fail to produce a strong effect upon Ruskin's thought. Although he does not stop to analyze that influence in any one place, he does hint occasionally of it. In Fors Clavigera, for example, Ruskin indicates that his religious ideas were affected by Scott.<sup>9</sup> In the Praeterita he sufficiently demonstrates the influence of Scott upon his political principles. From Scott he received "a most sincere love of kings,"<sup>10</sup> an attitude which is strongly reflected in the paternalistic feudalism of his political theory. And though

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., I, 264.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 167, 168; XXXV, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., XXXVII, 143, 281, 288, 292, 315, 317, 320, 373.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., XXXIV, 606.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., XXVIII, 548.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., XXXV, 14.

Ruskin nowhere so specifies, we can expect that Scott's gaudy medievalism had some bearing upon the "many a day-dream and night-dream" Ruskin experienced as a result of reading him.<sup>11</sup> The very weight of Scott's impact upon Ruskin might be gauged by the fact that in late life Ruskin claimed human sympathy with but four masters: Tintoret, Turner, Carlyle--and Scott.<sup>12</sup>

Scott's medievalism Ruskin knew. We need now to probe Ruskin's acquaintance with the particular brand of medievalism which is the subject of this study. Accordingly, we will attempt to determine the extent to which Ruskin knew his fore-runners in the use of the medieval-modern contrast: Cobbett, Southey, Pugin, and Carlyle. First, let us consider his knowledge of Cobbett.

The political disparity between Cobbett, who believed that a broadened elective franchise would cure England's social ills, and Ruskin, who placed his hope not in the vote, but in a return to governmental paternalism, was indeed great. So great was it that at first glance the two men would seem to have had nothing in common. Such, however, is not quite true. Both were champions of the common people and both addressed the people directly.<sup>13</sup> Both feared, fulminated against, and waged practical battle against the mechanization and industrialization of nineteenth century England. Both fought

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., I, p. xxix.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 539.

<sup>13</sup> For Ruskin this, of course, is not totally true. However, some of his significant works of social criticism, Time and Tide, Fors Clavigera, and the famous "Nature of Gothic" chapter in Stones of Venice, were so directed.

to reorganize society upon a strong agrarian foundation. Both saw in the medieval worker a freedom and happiness far surpassing that of the nineteenth century laborer. And both drew that comparison in strong language for the nineteenth century to read.

George Bernard Shaw, himself a master of strong language, has pointed to the two--he adds Karl Marx--as the nineteenth century's three masters of invective, though, thinks Shaw, "Ruskin beats them hollow."<sup>14</sup> This mastery of invective which Cobbett surely possessed had previously led William Morris to call him "the master of plain-speaking,"<sup>15</sup> and, still earlier, Carlyle to name him "a most brave phenomenon."<sup>16</sup> We would expect Ruskin to have been attracted likewise.

He was. We know, for example, that Ruskin was acquainted with the History of the Protestant Reformation, the work in which Cobbett most effectively used the medieval-modern contrast. In a letter to the Reverend A. A. Isaacs, Ruskin suggested that his friend purchase "Cobbett's little History of the Reformation, the only true one ever written."<sup>17</sup> High praise indeed! Significantly, Ruskin was then at work upon the lecture entitled "Protestantism," which was to be the last of a series later published as The Pleasures of England. Isaacs, apparently afraid that Cobbett would influence the lecture too

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<sup>14</sup> Ruskin's Politics (London, 1921), p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> The Letters of William Morris, p. 179.

<sup>16</sup> Carlyle, Works, XXIX, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Works, XXXVII, 503.

much, offered to send Ruskin a refutation of Cobbett's work. Ruskin courteously assented to read the refutation, but warned his correspondent that "the sum of my forty-four years of thinking on the matter [the Reformation]. . . has led me to agree with Cobbett in all his main ideas."<sup>18</sup>

Cobbett impressed his stamp upon another work issued immediately before The Pleasures of England, the series of lectures entitled The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century. In this work Ruskin assailed "that thin, scraggy, filthy, mangy, miserable cloud" of industrial smoke which figuratively and literally was casting a blight upon England's once beautiful countryside.<sup>19</sup> One is strongly reminded of Cobbett's escape from the industrial Wen of London in his Rural Rides. A letter which Ruskin wrote to a friend who had just finished reading the Storm-Cloud seems to make the influence obvious. "What I say at Oxford,"<sup>20</sup> Ruskin wrote, "must be the sum of my present conclusions--which Cobbett accurately, though vulgarly expressed."<sup>21</sup>

These mentions of Cobbett, however, occur in 1884 and 1885, late in Ruskin's life. His great work--the Praeterita excepted--had been completed long since. Fors Clavigera, irregularly published in 1884, ceased with the Christmas letter. Storm clouds of quite another kind than those he described in his Oxford lectures were occasionally darkening the bright

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., XXXVII, 507.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., XXXIV, 39; note that even the language is reminiscent of Cobbett.

<sup>20</sup> The Storm-Cloud was originally delivered as a series of two lectures on February 4 and 11, 1884.

<sup>21</sup> Works, XXXVII, 670.

fertility of Ruskin's mind and soon enveloped him in ten years of almost total mental darkness. The influence of Cobbett coming at this late date, regardless of how strong it might have been, could not be considered a potent factor in Ruskin's intellectual development.

There is no external evidence to indicate that he knew Cobbett earlier. We might reason that Ruskin's extremely warm and devoted attitude toward Carlyle would have led him to an earlier study of Cobbett. Ruskin's friendship with Carlyle and his great interest in the work of Sir Walter Scott made it almost inconceivable that he would have passed by Carlyle's "Essay on Scott," which contains Carlyle's abundant praise of Cobbett, "one of the healthiest of men."<sup>22</sup> It might, therefore, be logical to assume that Ruskin was directed to Cobbett long before 1884, but there is no corroboration for the assumption.<sup>23</sup>

Ruskin's acquaintance with Robert Southey, the second Englishman to use the medieval-modern contrast, came early in his life. While very young, Ruskin had, in the words of his editor, "hero-worshipped at the shrine of Southey."<sup>24</sup> With his father, young John had in 1830 made a pilgrimage to Crosthwaite Church in the Lake Country to catch a glimpse of Southey

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<sup>22</sup> Carlyle, Works, XXIX, 81.

<sup>23</sup> In fact, one could argue the complete incompatibility of Cobbett's friendly attitude toward Catholicism with what Ruskin called "my own pert little Protestant mind" when talking about his early works, especially Stones of Venice. (Works, XXIV, 277). The early Ruskin would have been repelled by Cobbett's History of the Reformation and would never have said, as in The Pleasures of England (1884), that "Protestant history is always the falsest." (Ibid., XXXIII, 516).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., I, 413n.

at Sunday services.<sup>25</sup> And before he was twelve Ruskin had recorded that glimpse and had paid high tribute to Southey in The Iteiad,<sup>26</sup> a poem built, significantly enough, with the dimensions of a Southey epic.

We cannot be quite sure just how early Ruskin met with Sir Thomas More; or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society, the work in which Southey had employed the medieval modern contrast as a structural device. It may have been as early as 1840. On July 31 of that year he wrote to a college friend describing a certain walk near Keswick. After describing the long walk in great detail, Ruskin pointed out that it was one of Southey's favorites.<sup>27</sup> In the Colloquies Southey had written about that same walk; there he had had one of his meetings with Sir Thomas More.<sup>28</sup> We can be sure, however, that Ruskin knew the Colloquies three years later. A diary entry for December 4, 1843 tells us that he had been reading (or rereading) the work "with much pleasure."<sup>29</sup> As was his habit, Ruskin made immediate use of his reading, for on the same day he inserted a lengthy quotation from the Colloquies into an answer to a criticism of Modern Painters in The Artist and Amateur's Magazine.<sup>30</sup> And when he shortly afterward wrote his

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., II, 286n.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., II, 297.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., I, 413.

<sup>28</sup> Colloquies, I, 124; there is an engraving of a view from the walk on the same page.

<sup>29</sup> Works, III, 653n.

<sup>30</sup> Loc. cit.

preface to the second edition of Modern Painters (1844), he again made use of Southey.<sup>31</sup> In 1846 Ruskin knew Colloquies well enough to misquote a passage from it in a letter to George Richmond.<sup>32</sup> Later than this I can find no reference or allusion to the work. In fact, there are only two or three scattered and insignificant mentions of Southey in all of Ruskin's writing after 1846. The ex-laureate, struck down with brain fever in 1843, was rapidly losing favor not only with Ruskin, but with the rest of England as well. It is interesting that in 1886 Ruskin scratched Southey from the list of the "Best Hundred Books" suggested by the Pall Mall Gazette.<sup>33</sup>

Ruskin knew the medieval-modern contrasts of both Cobbett and Southey. Cobbett's History of the Protestant Reformation had an impact upon him late in life; Southey's Colloquies, early. With each Ruskin had experienced a period of sympathy. However, with Pugin, the third person in the century to assault modernity through the use of the medieval-modern contrast, Ruskin could or would not sympathize.

To explain his vituperative attitude toward Pugin we must first examine Ruskin's attraction to architecture and his place in the Gothic Architectural Revival, of which he is too often considered the grand and glorious champion.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., III, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., XXXVI, 63. Ruskin: "Disease is contagious, madness and folly infectious, but health incommunicable, wisdom and virtue hardly to be communicated." Southey: (Colloquies, I, 37) "Disease, vice, folly and madness are contagious; while health and understanding are incommunicable."

<sup>33</sup> Works, XXXIV, 583.

Ruskin's first sustained effort at prose was his The Poetry of Architecture (1837).<sup>34</sup> The work not only demonstrates the passion for architecture which was later to produce his Stones of Venice and Seven Lamps and to remain with him throughout his life, but it also indicates certain characteristic attitudes or points of view from which Ruskin approached the architectural science. First, he considered "the Science of Architecture . . . one of the noblest . . . creations of human minds."<sup>35</sup> Second, this early volume shows throughout Ruskin's preoccupation with ornament and decoration rather than with structure.<sup>36</sup> Third, it displays Ruskin's propensity to read a moral or ethical lesson into architecture, a habit which caused Carlyle to call a later work of Ruskin's a "Sermon in Stones."<sup>37</sup> When talking about Italian buildings, Ruskin complained that there was "no soul in their chimneys."<sup>38</sup> "One feels," Ruskin said in describing a Swiss cottage, "that the peasants whose hands carved the planks so neatly, and adorned their cottage so industriously, and still preserve it so perfectly, and so neatly, can be no dull, drunken, lazy boors."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> The full title was The Poetry of Architecture; or the Architecture of the Nations of Europe Considered in its Association with Natural Scenery and National Character, by Kata Phusin.

<sup>35</sup> Works, I, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Clark believes that this emphasis upon decoration is caused by the simple fact that Ruskin was never a practicing architect. (The Gothic Revival, p. 275).

<sup>37</sup> Works, IX, p. xlv1.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., I, 57.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., I, 37.

These three attitudes toward architecture Ruskin never fundamentally changed, and in two of them, the first and third, he was in substantial agreement with Pugin, who, incidentally, had anticipated Ruskin in their proclamation.<sup>40</sup> His architectural subject matter, however, did change. In The Poetry of Architecture one discovers no particular interest in gothic. Aside from a normal attraction for the old and picturesque building, Ruskin manifested no stylistic favoritism; he insisted only that a building fit well with natural scenery and national character. Much later Ruskin himself recognized his early indifference to the grandeur of gothic architecture; in an epilogue added to Modern Painters in 1883 he admitted that until 1845 his only interest in gothic was for its lace work.<sup>41</sup>

If we examine Ruskin's shift of interest to gothic, we will discover that it placed him in a very uncomfortable position, one which helps explain his vituperative attitude toward Pugin.

Just exactly what it was that caused Ruskin to become interested in gothic architecture is difficult to ascertain. Partly, I suppose, he was falling in line with a general awakening of interest in gothic which struck all England in the forties.<sup>42</sup> But his interest was triggered by his rereading of Alexis Francois Rio's De La Poésie Chrétienne dans son principe,

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<sup>40</sup> Pugin, although he was a master of decoration, could not as a practicing architect overlook the importance of structure. Therefore, in the second point Ruskin and Pugin differ.

<sup>41</sup> Works, IV, 346.

<sup>42</sup> Clark, The Gothic Revival, passim, see especially pp. 204-239.

dans sa matière et dans ses formes (1836) in the winter of 1844-45.<sup>43</sup> Ruskin, who, it must be remembered started Modern Painters as a champion of the moderns, perceived, after reading Rio's book, "what a blind bat and puppy I had been . . . [and I] determined that at least I must see Pisa and Florence again before writing another word of Modern Painters."<sup>44</sup> Ruskin therefore returned to Italy in the spring to study the early Christian painters whom Rio had praised so abundantly. Not only was the majesty of Tintoret revealed to Ruskin for the first time on this trip, but also he became enamored of gothic architecture, a subject about which Rio had said little. Looking back upon this 1845 trip in the Praeterita, Ruskin wrote, "Absolutely for the first time I now saw what mediaeval builders were, and what they meant."<sup>45</sup> The seeds which ultimately grew into The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849) and Stones of Venice (1851) were sown on this visit to Italy.

So, likewise, did Ruskin's uncomfortable position in the Gothic Revival grow. His esthetic sense told him that gothic was the noblest form of architecture. His theory of art told him that a great and noble piece of art, be it of stone or on canvas, reflected the ethical and moral worth of its creator. The nobler the building, the nobler the builder. This led to a conclusion about medieval Catholicism, the impulse behind

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<sup>43</sup> I say rereading here because as early as November, 1843, Ruskin noted in his diary that he had read "a little bit of Rio." (E. T. Cook, The Life of John Ruskin [New York, 1911], I, 158).

<sup>44</sup> Works, XXXV, 340.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., XXXV, 350.

the great gothic cathedrals, which was incompatible with Ruskin's low-church Protestantism. He was, therefore, driven to the incongruous position of being forced to find a Protestant ethic in Catholic cathedrals. The result often bordered upon the absurd, as in the following description of cornices on St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice:

Now look to the last cornice (g). That is Protestantism,--a slight touch of Dissent, hardly amounting to schism, in those falling leaves, but true life in the whole of it. The forms all broken through, and sent heaven knows where, but the root held fast; and the strong sap in the branches; and, best of all, good fruit ripening and opening straight towards heaven, and in the face of it, even though some of the leaves lie in the dust.

Now, observe, the cornice f represents Hea-thenism and Papistry, animated by the mingling of Christianity and nature. The good in it, the life of it, the veracity and liberty of it, such as it has, are Protestantism in its heart; the rigidity and saplessness are the Romanism of it. It is the mind of Fra Angelico in the monk's dress,--Christianity before the Reformation. The cornice g has the Lombardic life element in its fulness, with only some good colour and shape of Classicalism mingled with it--the good of Classicalism; as much method and Formalism as are consistent with life, and fitting for it: The continence within certain border lines, the unity at the root, the simplicity of the great profile,--all these are the healthy classical elements retained: the rest is reformation, new strength, and recovered liberty.<sup>46</sup>

Shortly after the publication of Ruskin's Seven Lamps in 1849, the Cambridge Camden Society, undisputed dictator of proper gothic taste to mid-century England, was glad "to welcome the aid of his eloquent and earnest pen in our more

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., IX, 371-372.

peculiar department."<sup>47</sup> The Camdenians, thinks Kenneth Clark, were at first "deceived by Ruskin's superficial resemblance to themselves."<sup>48</sup> But they did not long remain so deceived. The fierce attacks upon Catholicism which had marked Seven Lamps became still stronger in Ruskin's next architectural work, Stones of Venice. These attacks did not sit well with the Camdenians, just as they did not sit well with the later Ruskin, who years afterward, removed them from the revised Stones of Venice and in St. Mark's Rest (1877) apologized for his early "pert little Protestant mind."<sup>49</sup> In its first review of Stones the Ecclesiologist, organ for the Camdenians, called attention to the Ruskin paradox we have mentioned. "His speculations concerning questions of art," wrote the reviewer, "lead him to one conclusion; his religious prejudices drive him to another, wholly irreconcilable. He cannot harmonize the two, nor part with either."<sup>50</sup> And lest its readers misunderstand its interest in Ruskin, the reviewer explained, "We may adopt, almost without reserve, Mr. Ruskin's principles of criticism without in the least sharing his hatred of Catholicity . . . [and we may] loathe all that is false, and mean, and meretricious in art, without being led thereby to idolize so unreal and impossible an 'ideal' as Mr. Ruskin's vision of

<sup>47</sup> "Mr. Ruskin's Seven Lamps of Architecture," Ecclesiologist, O.S. X (October, 1849), 111.

<sup>48</sup> The Gothic Revival, p. 293.

<sup>49</sup> Works, XXIV, 277.

<sup>50</sup> "Review of Ruskin's Stones of Venice," Ecclesiologist, O.S. XII (August, 1851), 276.

a truthful and art-loving Protestantism."<sup>51</sup> And in 1853, when reviewing the second volume of Stones, the reviewer started by warning his readers not to accept Ruskin on matters of "theology, upon which we ourselves are as hopelessly as ever at issue with our author."<sup>52</sup>

Pugin, we will remember, had been reared in the low-church Protestantism of the Rev. Edward Irving, Carlyle's friend. He had met with the same paradox and had resolved it by becoming a Catholic. The Camdenians, though they did not travel the entire distance to Rome, were satisfied only with the highest of high-church Anglicanism, which to many Protestants of Ruskin's stamp was strongly tainted with popery. Ruskin, however, refused to take the step toward which he was unquestionably led by his principles of art criticism and his love of medieval art. Nor could he marshal a logical argument to remove him from his inconsistent position. His only defence was to vent his best spleen against the Camdenians in general and Pugin in particular. Thus arose the twelfth appendix to Stones, in which he lashed out at those who were being led Romeward by gothic architecture and by modern research into the ecclesiastical properties of the middle ages. "The basest [of religious fatuities]," he said in this appendix, "is the being lured into the Romanist Church by the glitter of it, like larks into a trap by broken glass; to be blown into a change of religion by the whine of an

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<sup>51</sup>

Loc. cit.

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"Review of Ruskin's Stones of Venice," Ecclesiologist, O.S. XIV (December, 1853), 415.

organ-pipe; stitched into a new creed by gold threads on priests' petticoats; jangled into a change of conscience by the chimes of a belfry. I know nothing in the shape of error so dark as this, no imbecility so absolute, no treachery so contemptible."<sup>53</sup> He then turned to Pugin. "I had hardly believed that it was possible, though vague stories had been told me of the effect on some minds, of scarlet and candles, until I came on this passage in Pugin's Remarks on Articles in the Rambler."<sup>54</sup> Such a fellow Ruskin will not allow his countrymen to consider a great architect. "He is not a great architect, but one of the smallest possible or conceivable architects. . . . Employ him by all means, but on small work. Expect no cathedrals of him; but no one at present can design a better finial. . . . Only do not allow his good designing of finials to be employed as an evidence in matters of divinity,

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<sup>53</sup> Works, IX, 437.

<sup>54</sup> Loc. cit. The passage Ruskin cited is as follows: "Those who have lived in want and privation are the best qualified to appreciate the blessing of plenty: thus, to those who have been devout and sincere members of the separated portion of the English Church; who have prayed and hoped and loved, through all the poverty of the maimed rites which it has retained--to them does the realisation of all their longing desires appear truly ravishing. . . . Oh! then, what delight! what joy unspeakable! when one of the solemn piles is presented to them in all its pristine life and glory!--the stoups are filled to the brim; the rood is raised on high; the screen glows with sacred imagery and rich device; the sculptured shafts, the relics of saints repose beneath, the Body of our Lord is enshrined on its consecrated stone; the lamps of the sanctuary burn bright; the saintly portraits in the glass windows shine all gloriously; and the albs hang in the oaken ambries, and the cope chests are filled with orphreyed baudkins; and pix and pax, and chrismatory are there, and thurible and cross."

nor thence deduce the incompatibility of Protestantism and art."<sup>55</sup>

Another source of irritation to Ruskin was the charge that he had borrowed from Pugin. The charge had been raised in the Ecclesiologist more than once.<sup>56</sup> Ruskin answered it in "Plagiarism," an appendix to the third volume of Modern Painters: "It is . . . often said that I borrow from Pugin. I glanced at Pugin's Contrasts once, in the Oxford architectural reading-room, during an idle forenoon. His 'Remarks on Articles in the Rambler' were brought under my notice by some of the reviews. I never read a word of any other of his works,<sup>57</sup> not feeling, from the style of his architecture, the smallest interest in his opinions."<sup>58</sup>

It is interesting for the purposes of this study to know that Ruskin had read Pugin's Contrasts, for in that work Pugin had employed the medieval-modern contrast. It is also interesting to note that Ruskin employed the same device in his work.<sup>59</sup> In fact, Ruskin was accused of having borrowed the idea from

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., IX, 438-439.

<sup>56</sup> "Review of Ruskin's Stones of Venice," Ecclesiologist, O.S. XII (August, 1851), 276; "Review of Ruskin's Stones of Venice," Ecclesiologist, O.S. XIV (December, 1853), 415.

<sup>57</sup> Perhaps true at the time, but see Works, XXIII, 87, where Ruskin almost certainly alludes to Pugin's The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture.

<sup>58</sup> Works, V, 428-429. About this quotation Clark says, "The last sentence shows how an eminently truthful man can say what is precisely the reverse of true." (The Gothic Revival, p. 270).

<sup>59</sup> For example, the plates entitled "Modern and Mediaeval Landscape" in Modern Painters. (Works, V, facing p. 406).

Pugin, although he denied the charge. The following letter to Frederick J. Journival shows Ruskin's reaction to the inference:

I wish you would explain something to the Wedgwoods for me; I have never been quite at ease with them since it happened, and yet it was so absurdly trifling that I never liked to write about it. One day at their dinner-table Mr. Wedgwood said to me across it, 'So you have taken up Pugin's idea of comparisons!' I could not at the instant determine with myself whether Mr. Wedgwood really supposed that I never could have had the idea of putting an ugly and a pretty thing side by side, and saying, 'Which is best?' unless I had borrowed it from Pugin, or whether he merely meant that I had been carrying out the same idea; and as I never like to appear sensitive on the point of originality, and did not like to enter into a long assertion of my own independence across a dinner-table, I simply bowed, in a very confused manner, which I have often thought since must have appeared to all the company like the confusion of a person detected in a plagiarism--whereas it was, in fact, the confusion of a person not knowing whether it was worth while, or a proper occasion, to assert his non-plagiarism. I do not know what Mr. Wedgwood's impression was, but I wish you would now explain to him, and assure him that whatever I owe--and it is at least two-thirds of what I am--to other people, I certainly owe nothing to Pugin,--except two facts, one about Buttresses, and one about Iron-work. I owe, I know not how much, to Carlyle, and after him to Wordsworth, Hooker, Herbert, Dante, Tennyson, and about another dozen of people. But assuredly Nothing to Pugin.<sup>60</sup>

Whether or not we accept Ruskin's explanation of his confused bow is of little consequence. He is most assuredly correct when he asserts that there is nothing particularly new in placing the beautiful and the ugly in juxtaposition. On the other hand, it might be just as valid to suggest that there may have been an unconscious suggestion involved. After all,

Ruskin had "glanced at Pugin's Contrasts" and he does use in Modern Painters the same device he had found there. There is a certain similarity both of subject matter and execution between the engraved medieval-modern contrasts in Pugin's work and those in Ruskin.<sup>61</sup> One is even tempted to suggest that Pugin's engravings may have unconsciously revealed to Ruskin the potentialities of verbal medieval-modern contrasts. For example, Pugin's ninth set of engravings, that entitled "Contrasted Sepulchral Monuments," may well have given the cue to Ruskin's contrast in Modern Painters between the serene and beautiful medieval tomb of Ilaria di Caretto and "one of the vain and unkind encumbrances of the grave, which, in these hollow and heartless days, feigned sorrow builds to foolish pride."<sup>62</sup> But we can only conjecture.

I have shown that Ruskin was acquainted with the particular works of Cobbett, Southey, and Pugin in which the medieval-modern contrast figures as a prominent device. I have not insisted too strongly upon the direct and conscious influence of those works upon Ruskin. There remains to be considered Ruskin's contact with Thomas Carlyle, whose Past and Present entitles him to a conspicuous place in the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts. And here I shall be able to demonstrate the powerful influence of the man and his book upon John Ruskin.

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<sup>61</sup> See, for example, "True and False Griffins," (Ibid., V, facing p. 140); and "Modern and Mediaeval Landscape," (Ibid., V, facing p. 406). Wedgwood may well have had these two prints in mind when he surprised Ruskin at the dinner table.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., IV, 124.

To the casual reader of Ruskin and Carlyle there might seem to be differences great enough to exclude any possibility of a friendship between the two men. And that the delicate Ruskin, lover of art, measurer of gothic gargoyles, sponsor of May-queen festivals, collector of colorful rocks, should become the avowed disciple of the stern Carlyle, transcendental mystic, scoffer at art, popularizer of German metaphysics, seems as incongruous as would a discipleship of Washington Irving to Herman Melville.

The differences, indeed, were great! Carlyle, eldest of nine children born to a poor Ecclefechan stone mason, encountered from his childhood a struggle with adversity. The poverty of his rude environment imposed conditions which made extremely difficult his subsequent rise to fame. A bag of oatmeal under his arm, he walked ninety miles to Edinburgh and a university education. And after years of hardship as schoolmaster, tutor, translator, and hack writer, his imposing genius transported him--via America--from Craigenputtock obscurity to London fame. No such struggles had the genius of Ruskin. Born the only son of a comfortably situated London wine merchant, Ruskin's early life was spent in a sheltered atmosphere of delicacy and refinement. His doting parents, certain of their son's precocity, nurtured him carefully; contact with the rude, the sordid, and the ugly they cautiously avoided, while yearly travels both in England and on the Continent maintained his steady acquaintance with the beauties of nature and of art. His earliest writings were taken by his eager

father to publisher friends and found their way into print. His mother took rooms at Oxford, where Ruskin had been entered as a gentleman-commoner, in order to watch carefully her frail son. And in 1843, the year after he received his degree, Modern Painters catapulted "a graduate of Oxford" to fame.

One could, of course, continue to point out differences between the two men. If style is the man, then Carlyle and Ruskin were irreconcilably foreign to each other. The rude, irregular, masculine force of Carlyle's prose, through which shines a kind of noble complexity, is the very antithesis of Ruskin's festooned and cadenced periods.<sup>63</sup> Also their early intellectual interests seem widely divergent. While Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh waged fierce battle with das ewige Nein, Ruskin classified rocks and minerals, sketched flowers, and wrote sentimental Byronic poems. While Carlyle searched twelfth century Bury St. Edmund for a social pattern to impose upon the sick society of the nineteenth century, Ruskin measured the effectiveness of Turner's meadows.

These differences, however, are largely surface, and they are somewhat unfair to Ruskin in that they consider mainly his early work. The careful student, although cognizant of these superficial differences, is aware of an underlying sympathy--even biographical--between the two men. Both were of Scottish

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This is particularly true of Ruskin's early prose style. In his later works Ruskin's style becomes harder, the purple passages fewer.

parentage; both attained an intellectual supremacy over their fathers, whom, nevertheless, they continued to respect with a kind of awe;<sup>64</sup> both were subjected maternally to a rigid, Calvinistic interpretation of God and his book; both were first intended for the ministry,<sup>65</sup> later abandoned those hopes, and finally lost contact completely with conventional Christianity.

Similar also was their intellectual affinity; and though I shall deal in some detail later with specific similarities, it may serve a useful purpose to generalize here. Although they abandoned the Christian ministry, both became preachers-at-large to their generation, and the sermons they preached were strong denunciations of the existing state of society. Both sought as the solution for present day social problems an ethical certitude such as had existed in the middle ages, and both thought that the way to regain that ethical certitude was through individual reformation and regeneration.

Throwing aside for the moment similarities and differences between the two men, let us investigate the nature and extent of the relationship they did have. Just how early Ruskin met Carlyle, his senior by almost twenty-five years, is not known. So biographers have either admitted defeat upon the question, as does Cook;<sup>66</sup> have, like Froude, avoided it

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<sup>64</sup> Carlyle, Reminiscences, pp. 3-33; Ruskin, Works, XXXV, 44.

<sup>65</sup> Characteristically, Ruskin's parents had hopes that he would become a bishop. (Works, XXXV, 25).

<sup>66</sup> "I do not know when, or how, they first met--it was certainly before 1851, as is proved by Carlyle's letter of March 9 in that year, about The Stones of Venice." (Works, XXXVI, p. xcv).

carefully;<sup>67</sup> or, like Quennell and Albers, have brazened a guess without any basis of fact.<sup>68</sup> Although it would be difficult to pinpoint the exact date of meeting, I believe it possible to arrive at a more accurate approximation than has been previously reached.

In establishing a terminus a quo I am assuming that Ruskin met Carlyle's work before he met the man. In a letter which Ruskin wrote to George Richmond in February, 1881, the month of Carlyle's death, we find the following sentence: "Do you know that you were the first person who ever put a book of Carlyle's into my hand?"<sup>69</sup> In another letter Ruskin made it clear that Past and Present was the book referred to,<sup>70</sup> Therefore, our terminus a quo would be the publication date of Past and Present, March, 1843. The terminus ad quem also carries an assumption, and that is that Ruskin would not present a gift to Carlyle before he had met him personally. For we know that the Albert Dürer engraving of Frederick the Wise which the Duke of Saxe-Weimar admired on a visit to Carlyle's home in June, 1847, was "a present from John Ruskin."<sup>71</sup> If the

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<sup>67</sup> James A. Froude, Thomas Carlyle, Life in London, II, 150.

<sup>68</sup> Speaking of March, 1851, Quennell writes about "Carlyle (whom he [Ruskin] had recently met)." (Peter Quennell, John Ruskin, the Portrait of a Prophet [New York, 1949], p. 74). Albers misinterprets a passage by Wood in which he is obviously talking of Ruskin's reading of Carlyle (Works, IX, p. xxi) and writes of Carlyle, "mit dem er [Ruskin] seit dem Winter 1849/50 befreundet war." (Helma Albers, Studien zu Ruskins Sozialismus [Hamburg, 1938], p. 39).

<sup>69</sup> Works, XXXVII, 341.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., XXXVII, 361.

<sup>71</sup> Wilson, Carlyle on Cromwell and Others, p. 383.

assumptions are valid, and they seem reasonably so, then Carlyle and Ruskin met some time between March 1843 and June, 1847. Furthermore, a check into the physical location of the two men during that period demonstrates that the meeting had to take place during one of two extended periods. From August, 1844 until April, 1845 the two were together in London, as they were during the period between September, 1846 and June of 1847.<sup>72</sup> And since Ruskin was socially active during the latter period, it seems to be the more logical choice.

The friendship thus started later developed into one of the most influential literary associations of the nineteenth century. In 1849 Ruskin seems to have spent considerable time making a serious study of Carlyle's then published works.<sup>73</sup> In 1851, just after the publication of the first volume of Stones, the first extant letter passed between them, from Carlyle to Ruskin, in which the elder man urged his younger friend to continue his "very gratifying" work in the "quite new 'Renaissance'. . . we are getting into just now."<sup>74</sup> In 1854, just one year after Ruskin had in his famous "Nature of Gothic" chapter in the second volume of Stones made manifest the social implications of his art theory, Ruskin made the first public admission of his discipleship to Carlyle.<sup>75</sup> The following year he felt it necessary to explain to Carlyle that many things in

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<sup>72</sup> That is, except March, when Ruskin toured the Lake Country.

<sup>73</sup> Works, IX, p. xxiii.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., IX, p. xlv.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., XII, 507.

his own writings which "corresponded very closely to things that you had said much better" were not deliberate plagiarisms.<sup>76</sup> And in 1856 an appendix to which we have already referred in connection with Pugin was attached to the third volume of Modern Painters. This appendix answers the general charge of plagiarism in his works. There Ruskin admits being "quite unable to say to what extent my thoughts have been guided by Wordsworth, Carlyle, and Helps; to whom (with Dante and George Herbert, in olden time) I owe more than to any other writers;--most of all, perhaps to Carlyle, whom I read so constantly, that, without wilfully setting myself to imitate him, I find myself perpetually falling into his modes of expression, and saying many things in a 'quite other,' and, I hope, stronger, way, than I should have adopted some years ago."<sup>77</sup> Ruskin continued, "I find Carlyle's stronger thinking colouring mine continually."<sup>78</sup>

The friendship was not without its misgivings for Ruskin's parents, who were fearful that Carlyle would pervert their son.<sup>79</sup> And they were right, if one considers perversion to mean (as they certainly did) a shift in emphasis from problems of art to problems of society. I think there can be little doubt that Carlyle's influence played a large part in quickening the shift, which started in the late fifties and

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., XXXVI, 184.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., V, 427.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., V, 428.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., XXXVI, 396, 460.

was completed in 1860 with the publication in Cornhill Magazine of a series of essays entitled "Unto this Last."<sup>80</sup>

Certainly some of the Carlyle "colouring" Ruskin had spoken of can be found in A Joy for Ever, a series of lectures on the political economy of art which he delivered in Manchester in 1857. The following is characteristic:

I wish to plead for your several and future consideration of this one truth, that the notion of Discipline and Interference [by the government] lies at the very root of all human progress or power; that the 'let-alone' principle is, in all things which man has to do with, the principle of death; that it is the ruin to him, certain and total, if he lets his land alone--if he lets his fellow-men alone--if he lets his own soul alone. . . . I believe that the masses have a right to claim education from their government. . . . I believe they have a right to claim employment from their governors.<sup>81</sup>

Carlyle's letters, once Ruskin had manifested his interest in social matters, offered constant encouragement and urged the younger man to continue in his assault against "those unfortunate dismal-science people."<sup>82</sup> After reading the first essay of Unto this Last, Carlyle wrote, "I have read your paper with

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Albers cautions, "Man darf auf keinen Fall Carlyle allein verantwortlich machen für Ruskins Hinwendung zu sozial-ökonomischen Themen." (Studien zu Ruskins Sozialismus, p. 26). She is, of course, right; for Ruskin's theory of morality in art carried the embryo of his later social criticism. However, without Carlyle's strong influence it seems likely that Ruskin would not have made the shift so early.

<sup>81</sup>

Works, XVI, 26-27. That Ruskin had Carlyle in mind when he wrote this passage becomes even more apparent as one continues reading. A few lines later Ruskin alludes to Carlyle's comparison of a modern worker and an English horse in Past and Present. (Carlyle, Works, X, 157).

<sup>82</sup>

Works, XVII, p. xxxii.

exhilaration, exultation, often with laughter, with bravissimo! Such a thing flung suddenly into half a million dull British heads on the same day, will do a great deal of good. I marvel in parts at the lynx-eyed sharpness of your logic, at the pincer-grip (red-hot pincers) you take of certain bloated cheeks and blown-up bellies. . . . Stand to that kind of work for the next seven years, and work out then a result like what you have done in painting."<sup>83</sup> And when Unto this Last was discontinued by the publishers of Cornhill Magazine in November, 1860, it was Carlyle who encouraged his good friend and then editor of Fraser's Magazine, James Anthony Froude, to solicit from Ruskin something else in the political-economy line.<sup>84</sup> The result was Munera Pulveris, which Ruskin significantly dedicated "to the friend and guide who has urged me to all chief labour, THOMAS CARLYLE."<sup>85</sup>

The friendship between master and disciple which had ripened in the fifties and early sixties did not diminish with time. If anything, it grew more solid, assuming, in fact, the aspects of a father-son relationship. Ruskin's father had died in 1864. Accustomed throughout his life to a strong parental tie, Ruskin cast Carlyle into the vacant position. As early as 1867, in a passage written for Time and Tide but removed from the book publication of that work, Ruskin had

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., XVII, pp. xxxii-xxxiii. (My italics).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., XXXVI, 382.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., XVII, 145. This work was also ill-starred. After four parts of the work had appeared, the publishers of the magazine forced Froude to put an end to the series in April, 1863.

spoken of Carlyle "as a son might speak of his father."<sup>86</sup> The first direct mention of the relationship to Carlyle occurred in a birthday letter to him in 1873. Ruskin signed it off, "Ever your loving disciple--son, I have almost now a right to say."<sup>87</sup> In the next year, when Ruskin toured the Continent, he accelerated his correspondence to Carlyle to the point of an almost daily letter, as was his habit with his own father.<sup>88</sup> All of these letters after that of May 21, 1874 were addressed "Dearest Papa" or "My dearest Papa."<sup>89</sup> Apparently Carlyle did not mind the new relationship, for in answering a letter from Carlyle which is no longer extant, Ruskin wrote, "I have your lovely letter, so full of pleasantness for me; chiefly in telling that I give you pleasure by putting you in the place of the poor father who used to be so thankful for his letter."<sup>90</sup> The habit of addressing Carlyle as Papa continued until his death in 1881, and in a manuscript intended for Fors Clavigera but never so used Ruskin wrote that his relationship with Carlyle had been "as a child with its father or mother, not as friend with friend."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., XVII, 476.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., XXXVII, 75. It may be significant that this first direct mention of Carlyle as father comes in a birthday letter. It was Ruskin's habit, while his own father lived, to commemorate his birthday always with a long letter, a poem, or a rhymed letter. (Ibid., II, p. xxxv).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., XXXVI, p. xcvi.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., XXXVII, 99, 115, 118, 120, 123, 124, 126, 130, 132, 148, etc.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., XXXVII, 123-124.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 539. There are interesting Freudian implications in this desire of Ruskin's for a father. Immediately

I have spoken at some length about the close and influential relationship which existed between Ruskin and Carlyle. Still remaining to be considered, however, is the special impact upon Ruskin of Carlyle's one great contribution to the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts, his Past and Present. It was, we have seen, the first work of Carlyle's with which Ruskin came in contact. It continued to be the work which he prized most highly. In 1887, just a short time before ten years of darkness descended upon Ruskin, he sent his marked and worn copy of Past and Present to a friend, Alfred Macfee, with the following note: "I have sent you a book which I read no more because it has become a part of myself, and my old marks in it are now useless, because in my heart I mark it all."<sup>92</sup>

There are throughout Ruskin's works many references to Past and Present; the greatest tribute to that work, however, is to be found in the Fors Clavigera letters and the closely associated Guild of St. George. It requires no acute literary sensitivity to agree with Cook that Fors Clavigera "from its first page to the last is deeply coloured by the influence of Carlyle."<sup>93</sup> Carlyle himself was extremely pleased with the

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(91 cont.) after Carlyle's death in February, 1881--ten days later, in fact--Ruskin transferred the father role to another friend, F. S. Ellis. (Ibid., XXXVII, 342). From that time forward, every letter addressed to Ellis called him Papa except two (Ibid., XXXVII, 346, 362), and in both those letters Carlyle is mentioned. Conversely, in none of the letters which addressed Ellis as Papa is Carlyle's name mentioned.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 179n.

<sup>93</sup> The Life of John Ruskin, II, 320.

work and wrote of it to Emerson, "There is nothing going on among us as notable to me as those fierce lightning-bolts Ruskin is copiously and desperately pouring into the black world of Anarchy all around him."<sup>94</sup> Among those lightning-bolts is Ruskin's exhortation to his readers to "Read your Carlyle . . . with all your heart, and with the best of brain you can give."<sup>95</sup> Especially Past and Present! In the tenth Fors letter, published for October, 1871, Ruskin pronounced:

A good law is one that holds, whether you recognize and pronounce it or not; a bad law is one that cannot hold, however much you ordain and pronounce it. That is the mighty truth which Carlyle has been telling you for a quarter of a century--once for all he told it you, and the landowners, and all whom it concerns, in the third book of Past and Present <sup>96</sup> (1845 [sic], buy Chapman and Hall's second edition if you can, it is good print, and read it till you know it by heart) . . . I tell you once for all, Carlyle is the only living writer who has spoken the absolute and perpetual truth about yourselves and your business; and exactly in proportion to the inherent weakness of brain in your lying guides, will be their animosity against Carlyle.<sup>97</sup>

In addition to the strong general coloring of Carlyle in the work, in addition to Ruskin's plea that his followers read their Past and Present until they know it by heart--in addition to these things the very frequency with which Ruskin employs the medieval-modern contrast in Fors demonstrates the particular impact of Carlyle's Past and Present upon the work. In

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<sup>94</sup> Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 352.

<sup>95</sup> Works, XXVII, 180.

<sup>96</sup> Carlyle also enforces the same truth in the first book of Past and Present. (Carlyle, Works, X, 10-11).

<sup>97</sup> Works, XXVII, 179.

this respect Cook has said, "Fors Clavigera may be described, under one aspect of it, as a resumption, at the latter part of the century, of the contrast between Past and Present which Carlyle had drawn three decades before."<sup>98</sup>

Likewise, Carlyle's influence is immediately obvious in Ruskin's Guild of St. George. There can be no doubt that the Guild was to be a practical application of Carlyle's social doctrine as Ruskin understood it. In 1874, when the idea of a St. George Society was beginning to take shape in his mind, Ruskin wrote, "That it should be left to me to begin such a work, with only one man in England--Thomas Carlyle--to whom I can look for steady guidance, is alike wonderful and sorrowful to me."<sup>99</sup> And in 1885--the Guild had then become a feeble reality--Ruskin wrote in a "Master's Report,"

The object principally and finally in my mind in founding the Guild, was the restoration, to such extent as might be possible to those who understood me, of this feeling of loyalty to the Land-possessor in the peasantry on his estate, and of duty, in the Lord, to the peasantry with whose lives and education he was entrusted. . . . Carlyle's grander exhortation to the English landholders in Past and Present, I put . . . with reiterated and varied emphasis forward in connection with a definite scheme of action.<sup>100</sup>

We have now completed our discussion of Ruskin's knowledge of those who preceded him in the use of the medieval-modern contrast. With all of them he was acquainted either personally or through reading; in addition, he knew in every case

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<sup>98</sup> Life of John Ruskin, II, 321

<sup>99</sup> Works, XXVIII, 22.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., XXX, 94-95.

the work which had used the contrast as a social corrective. Cobbett's History of the Protestant Reformation Ruskin called "the only true one ever written;"<sup>101</sup> Southey's Colloquies he read "with much pleasure."<sup>102</sup> Pugin's Contrasts he read, although he vigorously disclaimed any influence therefrom.<sup>103</sup> And Carlyle's Past and Present, the greatest work in the tradition, had, Ruskin admitted, "become a part of myself."<sup>104</sup> Added to this complete knowledge of the tradition as he inherited it was his thorough knowledge of Sir Walter Scott's novels, the medievalism of which played so strong a part upon backward-looking movements in the nineteenth century.

We have seen also that Ruskin's intellectual conviction that only a morally and ethically sound society can produce great art caused him to shift his attack from art criticism to the reformation of society. And when we couple with this his esthetic conviction that medieval art was great art, we can more readily see why he would reform nineteenth century society to approximate more closely the social conditions of the middle ages.

In previous chapters I have found it necessary to consider in some detail the religious implications of the medieval-modern contrast, and I have dealt with those religious implications only insofar as they contributed to social

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., XXXVII, 503.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., III, 653n.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., V, 428-429.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 179n.

theory, toward the betterment of life on this earth. Cob-  
bett, for example, came to the defence of medieval Catholicism  
not for doctrinal reasons or because he thought the medieval  
stood a better chance of attaining heavenly bliss than did  
the modern; he used it because he was convinced that the mo-  
nastic establishments within the framework of medieval Catho-  
licism had served a useful and now neglected social function;  
they had provided liberally for the poor. Southey, too,  
though he could not sanction Catholicism per se, appreciated  
the alms-giving function performed by the medieval monasteries  
and even suggested the establishment in the nineteenth cen-  
tury of comparable Protestant religious houses. Pugin not  
only advocated a revival of monasticism, but a return to medi-  
eval Catholicism with all its ecclesiastical trappings. And  
Carlyle exhorted his contemporaries to assume a transcendental  
faith, which, like twelfth century Christianity, required the  
submission in all areas of life to the dictates of an ethical  
absolute.

Ruskin too contrasted medieval and modern religious prac-  
tice, but sparingly. And like his master Carlyle, he was not  
much interested in the alms-giving function of the medieval  
monasteries. He approvingly mentioned their charity to the  
poor,<sup>105</sup> but nowhere did he plead for a revival of that monas-  
tic function as a solution for contemporary social dislocations.  
For Ruskin would not allow charity to take the place of justice;

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., XXXIII, 195; XXXV, 481.

since human degradation is not attributable to natural causes, "but to the habitual preying upon the labour of the poor by the luxury of the rich,"<sup>106</sup> his ideal society would have no need of charity.

No, Ruskin did not single out certain excellences in medieval faith and insist that they be incorporated into nineteenth century society. Instead, much like Carlyle, he only contrasted an age of belief with one of disbelief. Carlyle had pointed to the middle ages, in which "a heavenly Awe overshadowed and encompassed, as it still ought and must, all earthy Business whatsoever."<sup>107</sup> And Ruskin, who accepted Carlyle's medieval picture without reservation,<sup>108</sup> emphasized the worth of a faith which permeated the total life of society. In "Pre-Raphaelitism" he drew a medieval-modern contrast to that effect:

What do you suppose was the proclaimed and understood principle of all Christian governments in the Middle Ages? . . . You will find that all treaties, laws, transactions whatsoever, in the Middle Ages, are based on a confession of Christianity as the leading rule of life; that a text of Scripture is held, in all public assemblies, strong enough to be set against an appearance of expediency; and although, in the end, expediency might triumph, yet it was never without a distinct allowance of Christian principle, as an efficient element in the consultation. . . . Now what is the custom of your British Parliament in these days? You know that nothing would excite greater manifestations of contempt and disgust than the slightest attempt to introduce the authority of Scripture in a political consultation. That is denying Christ. It is intensely and peculiarly Modernism.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., XXVIII, 374.

<sup>107</sup> Carlyle, Works, X, 106.

<sup>108</sup> Works, XXIII, 37.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., XII, 142.

This "want of faith"<sup>110</sup> which characterized modern times must go; man must transfer his worship from Mammon back to God, must again allow the Christian principle a place in all considerations, secular or sacred. With irony worthy of Cobbett, Ruskin drew this contrast in Fors Clavigera: "Those ages were feudal, ours free; those reverent, ours impudent; those artful, ours mechanical; the consummate and exhaustive difference being that the creed of the Dark Ages was, 'I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;' and the creed of the Light Ages has become, 'I believe in Father Mud, the Almighty Plastic; and in Father Dollar, the Almighty Drastic.'"<sup>111</sup>

And lest the reader think that by these contrasts he advocated modern Catholicism, Ruskin was careful to point out that the movement toward infidelity had "nothing whatever to do with the Reformation. . . . It is a far broader thing than the Reformation. It is a change which has taken place, not only in reformed England, and reformed Scotland; but in unreformed France, in unreformed Italy, in unreformed Austria."<sup>112</sup> Nor did he want his sympathetic portrayal of medieval Catholicism to be misinterpreted. After describing in Stones of Venice a medieval altar dedicated to the Madonna, Ruskin added:

"And is this," it will be asked of me, "the time, is this the worship, to which you would have us

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., V, 322.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 388.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., XIII, 139; XI, 122.

look back with reverence and regret?" Inasmuch as redemption is ascribed to the Virgin, No. Inasmuch as redemption is a thing desired, believed, rejoiced in, Yes,--and Yes a thousand times. As far as the Virgin is worshipped in place of God, No; but as far as there is the evidence of worship itself, and of the sense of a Divine presence, Yes. For there is a wider division of men than that into Christian and Pagan: before we ask what a man worships, we have to ask whether he worships at all.<sup>113</sup>

Even paganism, if it embraced and actually worshipped some divine idea, had value. So with medieval Catholicism. "Grant," wrote Ruskin in "Pre-Raphaelitism," "that Roman Catholicism [of the middle ages] was not Christianity--grant it, if you will, to be the same thing as old heathenism--and still I say to you, whatever it was, men lived and died by it, the ruling thought of all their thoughts; and just as classical art was greatest in building to its gods, so mediaeval art was great in building to its gods, and modern art is not great, because it builds to no God."<sup>114</sup>

The argument that medieval religion was irrational did not in the least bother Ruskin, who in Val D'Arno had insisted that true religion must essentially be "apart from reason, and often superior to it."<sup>115</sup> In St. Mark's Rest, his apology for his early Protestant bigotry, Ruskin faced the impossibility of St. Mark's bones actually being preserved in Venice by saying, "I suppose one must allow much to modern English zeal for genuineness in all commercial articles. Be it so. Whether God ever

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., X, 66-67.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., XII, 144.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 134.

gave the Venetians what they thought He had given, does not matter to us; He gave them at least joy and peace in their imagined treasure, more than we have in our real ones."<sup>116</sup>

I have said earlier that Ruskin's theory of art and his early religious convictions were not easily reconcilable. Ultimately he came to realize the inconsistency, and he repented. In Fors Clavigera he told the story of his conversion in 1858 to "the religion of Humanity."<sup>117</sup> Significantly enough, the crisis was brought about by art. After viewing the "God-given power" of a Paulo Cagliari painting, Ruskin visited "a Waldensian chapel, where a little squeaking idiot was preaching to an audience of seventeen old women and three louts."<sup>118</sup> The contrast proved too much for the sensitive Ruskin, and he left the chapel no longer a Protestant. And so thorough was the conversion that he ever afterward spoke depreciatingly of the "Protestant egotism and insolence" of his early books. "The Religious teaching of those books," Ruskin wrote in 1877, "and all the more for the sincerity of it, is misleading--sometimes even poisonous; always, in a manner, ridiculous; and shall not stand in any editions of them republished under my own supervision."<sup>119</sup>

The basis of Ruskin's new faith was, if we exclude the slight Christian coloring, essentially the know-thy-work-and-

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., XXIV, 278.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 90.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 91.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 90.

do-it formula of Carlyle's faith. Still talking of his conversion in 1858, Ruskin wrote in Fors, "I found, and have always since taught, and do teach, and shall teach, I doubt not, till I die, that in resolving to do our work well, is the only sound foundation of any religion whatsoever: and that by that resolution only, and what we have done, and not by our belief, Christ will judge us, as He has plainly told us He will (though nobody believes Him) in the Resurrection."<sup>120</sup> This, of course, removes religion from the realm of metaphysical speculation or of sectarian dogma and makes it a social thing. Thus Ruskin's religious theory led him into the contemplation of social conditions at approximately the same time that his artistic theory was driving him to a like position.

We have now come logically to an examination of Ruskin's social theory insofar as it was influenced by a contrast between the medieval period and the nineteenth century.

Although the year 1860<sup>121</sup> has generally been accepted as ✓✓ the date of Ruskin's shift of interest from art to social criticism, the notion is somewhat misleading. It forgets that as ✓ early as 1852 Ruskin spoke out strongly in two letters to the Times on the subjects of taxation and suffrage.<sup>122</sup> In the first Ruskin asserted "that the luxury of the richer classes is, in nine cases out of ten, the cause of the downfall of

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 88; see also XXXIII, 174.

<sup>121</sup> Date of the publication in Cornhill Magazine of Ruskin's "Unto this Last" articles.

<sup>122</sup> The letters, however, were never published in that paper. Ruskin's father insisted that they be withheld, and his son obliged. (Works, XII, pp. lxxx-lxxxv).

kingdoms, at once undermining the moral strength of those classes themselves, and provoking the envy and cupidity of the poor."<sup>123</sup> Therefore, the government should prevent that luxury by establishing a strongly graduated income tax.<sup>124</sup> Rank heresy this was! The second letter advocated universal--though unequal--suffrage. Another pre-1860 social utterance of Ruskin's was the series of lectures which he delivered to an audience of Manchester industrialists in 1857.<sup>125</sup> There, in the den of England's laissez-faire lion, Ruskin began his assault upon the then reigning political economy by asking that the government be allowed to enter into industry. Private manufacturers, since they valued so highly their principle of competition, could compete with the government.<sup>126</sup> Again, here was economic heresy. Still another pre-1860 work fraught with social criticism, and one which used the medieval-modern contrast for a social purpose, was the famous "Nature of Gothic" chapter which appeared in the second volume of Stones of Venice (1853).

In this chapter, which William Morris published separately in 1892, calling it "one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century," and one which "seemed to point out a new road on which the world should travel,"<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., XII, 597.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., XII, 598.

<sup>125</sup> Published in the same year as The Political Economy of Art; reissued in 1880 under the title A Joy for Ever.

<sup>126</sup> Works, XVI, 44-45.

<sup>127</sup> John Ruskin, The Nature of Gothic, a Chapter of the Stones of Venice (Hammersmith, 1892), p. 1.

Ruskin proclaimed in unmistakable terms his quarrel with the modern social system. Earlier works had hinted of Ruskin's concern for the workmen who produced a product,<sup>128</sup> but here he gives them a place of primary importance. In the medieval architecture he loved so much, Ruskin saw signs of a happiness and a freedom which far transcended that of nineteenth century workers. The modern demand for machine-like precision in all things was making of the modern worker a tool, no more; and Ruskin knew this to be evil.

You must either make a tool of the creature, or a man of him. You cannot make both. Men were not intended to work with the accuracy of tools, to be precise and perfect in all their actions. If you will have that precision out of them, . . . you must unhumanize them. . . . On the other hand, if you will make a man of the working creature, you cannot make a tool. Let him but begin to imagine, to think, to try to do anything worth doing; and the engine-turned precision is lost at once. Out come all his roughness, . . . but out comes the whole majesty of him also; and we know the height of it only when we see the clouds settling upon him.<sup>129</sup>

Ruskin challenged his contemporaries to

look round this English room of yours, about which you have been proud so often, because the work of it was so good and strong, and the ornaments of it so finished. Examine again all those accurate mouldings, and perfect polishings, and unerring adjustments of the seasoned wood and tempered steel. Many a time you have exulted over them, and thought how great England was, because her

<sup>128</sup> For example, in Seven Lamps (1849): "I believe the right question to ask respecting all ornament is simply this: was it done with enjoyment--was the carver happy while he was about it?" (Works, VIII, 218). In "Pre-Raphaelitism" (1851): "It is written, 'in the sweat of thy brow,' but it was never written, 'in the breaking of thine heart,' thou shalt eat bread." (Ibid., XII, 341).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., X, 192.

slightest work was done so thoroughly. Alas! if read rightly, these perfectnesses are signs of a slavery in our England a thousand times more bitter and more degrading than that of the scourged African, or helot Greek. Men may be beaten, chained, tormented, yoked like cattle, slaughtered like summer flies, and yet remain in one sense, and the best sense, free.<sup>130</sup>

Contrasted to this slavery of the modern worker caused by the demand for precision were the irregularities, the roughness, the freedom of individual expression which he saw "legibly expressed" in the gothic architecture of the middle ages. He urged his readers to turn from the slave-born perfection of their Victorian rooms, to

go forth again to gaze upon the old cathedral front, where you have smiled so often at the fantastic ignorance of the old sculptors: examine once more those ugly goblins, and formless monsters, and stern statues, anatomiless and rigid; but do not mock at them, for they are signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone; a freedom of thought, and rank in the scale of being, such as no laws, no charters, no charities can secure; but which it must be the first aim of all Europe at this day to regain for her children.<sup>131</sup>

To achieve this "first aim" Ruskin was forced to turn his attention to social questions; he was forced to storm the existing economic system, which, with its iron law of supply and demand, its worship of competition and laissez-faire, condoned division of labor; he was forced to attack democratic liberalism, which would substitute, Ruskin thought, the social isolation of political freedom for the higher and truer freedom "to obey another man, to labour for him, yield reverence to him

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., X, 193.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., X, 193-194.

or to his place;"<sup>132</sup> in short, a freedom from care. He was forced, in fact, to assault modernity.

Ruskin's all-out attack upon modernity had, certainly, something of the "good-old-days," cracker barrel twang to it. A man who refused to visit America because he "could not, even for a couple of months, live in a country so miserable as to possess no castles,"<sup>133</sup> and who admitted "loving old things because they are old, and hating new ones merely because they are new"<sup>134</sup> is always to be distrusted when he speaks of the glories of the past. Yet nostalgic longing for the past will not alone explain Ruskin's all-pervasive and unrelenting attack upon "the beastly, blockheady, loggerheady, doggish, loggish, hoggish-poggish, filthy, fool-begotten, swindler-swallowed abominations of modern existence."<sup>135</sup>

I have said that Ruskin was forced to storm the existing economic system. Carlyle had told him in Past and Present that the theory of supply and demand was atheistic, that it neglected ethical considerations, that, in short, there were far more important things for England to consider than that it should undersell other nations in cotton.<sup>136</sup> And in contrast to this nineteenth century atheism Carlyle had pointed to a medieval period in which an ethical absolute governed not only religious,

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., X, 194.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 170.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., XXXVI, 239.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., XXXVII, 327.

<sup>136</sup> In Munera Pulveris Ruskin borrows just this argument from Past and Present. (Ibid., XVII, 280-281).

but economic life as well.<sup>137</sup> So, "Carlyle having led the way, as he does in all noble insight in this generation,"<sup>138</sup> Ruskin trained his verbal guns upon the "Science of Political Economy, . . . the most cretinous, speechless, paralysing plague that has yet touched the brains of mankind."<sup>139</sup> The four essays entitled Unto this Last, which he called in 1862 "the truest, rightest-worded, and most serviceable things I have ever written,"<sup>140</sup> became the first major volley.

In the first of these four essays Ruskin attempted to demonstrate that there is more to political economy and to the relationship between worker and employer than the cash nexus. Human affections, human responsibilities also play a part. He pleads with the merchants and industrialists to accept their rightful place in the social pattern: "In his office as governor of the men employed by him, the merchant or manufacturer is invested with a distinctly paternal authority and responsibility."<sup>141</sup> He must be bound by the same code of honor that requires the soldier to die rather than desert his post, that requires the captain to be the last to leave his sinking ship. "So," Ruskin said, "the manufacturer, in any

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<sup>137</sup> It must be remembered here and throughout our discussion that Ruskin accepted without question Carlyle's portrait of medieval England as essentially true. (Ibid., XXIII, 37).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., XVII, p. xxxiv.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., XVIII, p. lxxxii.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., XVII, 17.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., XVII, 41. This is, of course, almost identical with Carlyle's exhortation to industrial "captains of industry" to accept the responsibilities of the feudal lord.

commercial crisis or distress, is bound to take the suffering of it with his men, and even to take more of it for himself than he allows his men to feel; as a father would in a famine, shipwreck, or battle, sacrifice himself for his son."<sup>142</sup> In the second essay Ruskin drew a dichotomy between political economy and mercantile economy; political economy is social in nature, has as its aim "the production, preservation, and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful or pleasurable things."<sup>143</sup> Mercantile economy, on the other hand, aims at "the accumulation, in the hands of individuals, of legal or moral claim upon, or power over, the labour of others; every such claim implying precisely as much poverty or debt on one side, as it implies riches or right on the other."<sup>144</sup> True political economy, therefore, can lead to riches for all; mercantile economy, by its very nature, can only enrich some while it impoverishes others. The former is ethically just, the latter ethically unjust. The third essay of Unto this Last Ruskin initiated with a medieval-modern contrast. Speaking of Biblical distinctions between well-gotten and ill-gotten wealth, Ruskin pointed out, "They were held in considerable respect by the most active traders of the Middle Ages." However, he continued, "Of late years these writings have fallen into disrepute, being opposed in every particular to the spirit of modern commerce."<sup>145</sup> Here, in effect, is the same

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., XVII, 42.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., XVII, 44.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., XVII, 45.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., XVII, 57.

demand Carlyle had made for the inclusion of ethical considerations in economic theory.<sup>146</sup> Ruskin's attack upon the principle of supply and demand took up the remainder of the third and the greater part of the fourth essay as well. And to combat the cruelty of supply and demand he was forced, just as Cobbett, Carlyle, and Pugin had been, to strike at the heart of the theory, the doctrine of overpopulation as expounded by Parson Malthus.<sup>147</sup> "There is not yet," Ruskin wrote, "nor will yet for ages be, any real over-population in the world."<sup>148</sup> Man was not an animal, and Ruskin insisted that the "law of human population differs wholly from that of animal life."<sup>149</sup> Ruskin went on to suggest three remedies, two of which, colonization and development of waste lands, would serve to postpone an over-population crisis, the third, discouragement of marriage, would furnish a permanent check.<sup>150</sup> Human remedies

<sup>146</sup> J. F. Flubacher's The Concept of Ethics in the History of Economics (New York, 1950) furnishes an excellent discussion of the nineteenth century's attempt to reassert the worth of ethical values in economic theory. Significantly, Carlyle and Ruskin are pitted together as leaders of the ethical assault upon the laissez-faire economics of the Victorian Period. (pp. 198-199, 429).

<sup>147</sup> Ruskin's attack upon Malthus was inevitable. It may have been hastened, however, by the fact that he was obliged to initial his first essay in this series because "the editor [Thackeray] would not be answerable for opinions so opposed to Malthus and the Times and the City of Manchester." (Works, XVII, pp. xxvi-xxvii).

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., XVII, 73. Ruskin does admit the existence of local overpopulation problems which were brought about by manufacturers hoping to gain by the law of supply and demand. (Loc. cit.).

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., XVII, 105.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., XVII, 108. The first of these remedies had been suggested by Carlyle in Past and Present, where he

these, not the inhuman check of starvation, which, since it was believed by economists to be the only solution, prompted Ruskin to say, "In all the ranges of human thought I know of none so melancholy as the speculations of political economists on the population question."<sup>151</sup>

Ruskin's abortive Unto this Last was largely an attempt to discredit current notions concerning political economy. His next important economic work was Munera Pulveris,<sup>152</sup> the work Ruskin modestly called "the first accurate analysis of the laws of Political Economy which has been published in England."<sup>153</sup> Here he aimed at more than mere criticism of the present system; he intended Munera Pulveris to be "an exhaustive treatise on Political Economy,"<sup>154</sup> one which would substitute his economic theories for the accepted economy of the day. As usual with Ruskin, however, this grandiose scheme was not achieved. Ruskin accomplished only what he called "the preface of the intended work,"<sup>155</sup> a series of definitions which were to furnish the point of departure for the unrealized

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(150 cont.) called for a "Captain-General" for an "Emigration Service." (Carlyle, Works, X, 266). Of course, Ruskin did not need Carlyle to tell him that emigration was a solution for the over-population problem, but that Carlyle did have an influence is apparent in a letter Ruskin wrote to the Daily Telegraph, in which he asked for "Captains of Emigration." (Works, XXXIV, 498).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., XVII, 106.

<sup>152</sup> Published seriatim in Frazer's Magazine from June, 1862, until April, 1863, at which time they were suspended. The essays were not published in book form until 1872.

<sup>153</sup> Works, XVII, 131.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., XVII, 143.

<sup>155</sup> Loc. cit.

magnum opus.

In its finished state the work might well have been rich in medieval-modern contrasts; however, as it stands--little more than a set of definitions--the work yields only one contrast per se. However, it does show traces of Ruskin's medieval interests. His interest in medieval art comes to the fore when he refers to the paintings of Tintoret--in fact, contrasts them with modern French lithographs--to demonstrate his point that "wealth" is independent of market value.<sup>156</sup> Later in the work Ruskin called upon his thorough knowledge of Dante; he cited the Italian poet to show that the medieval mind distinguished between worthy and unworthy use of riches.<sup>157</sup> And when Ruskin argued against the principle of usury, he claimed to be "supported by the view taken of the matter throughout the Middle Ages;" Dante's Inferno he cited in particular.<sup>158</sup>

Thus Ruskin's medieval interests did play some part in shaping the definitions of Munera Pulveris; so also did the contrast between modernity and the middle ages which Carlyle had made in his Past and Present. I have mentioned earlier that Munera Pulveris was inscribed to "the friend and guide who has urged me to all chief labour, THOMAS CARLYLE."<sup>159</sup> And

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., XVII, 132-133.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., XVII, 209.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., XVII, 220n. The medieval argument that money cannot breed money is the basis of Ruskin's attitude toward usury. His clearest statement of this can be found in Fors Clavigera. (Ibid., XXVIII, 670).

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., XVII, 145.

in an appendix to the work Ruskin disclaims originality for the economic theories implicit in Munera Pulveris, Carlyle having said on the subject "all . . . that needs to be said, and far better than I shall ever say it again." Significantly, he mentions Past and Present.<sup>160</sup> In addition, Ruskin twice recommends that work to his readers. Carlyle's chapter upon "Permanence,"<sup>161</sup> in which Carlyle had pleaded for a resumption in nineteenth century England of the sort of permanent contract which bound Cedric to Gurth, Ruskin cites in connection with his definition of "slavery."<sup>162</sup> Again Past and Present is recommended (and quoted from) in Ruskin's definition of "mastership,"<sup>163</sup> a definition permeated by Carlyle's demand that the modern, industrial master should assume the responsibilities of the feudal lord.

Added to the evidence of Ruskin's own medieval interests and to his citations of Carlyle's Past and Present is still another indication of the part medievalism played in Munera Pulveris. The definitions themselves would be far more workable in a medieval, agrarian society than in the complex, industrial society of the nineteenth century. One senses, for example, in his discussion of the merchant, that Ruskin tolerates the middle-man only as a necessary evil, and, like the medieval theorists, Ruskin placed severe restrictions upon

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., XVII, 287.

<sup>161</sup> Carlyle, Works, X, 277-282.

<sup>162</sup> Works, XVII, 261.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., XVII, 280-281.

him. He must expect for his efforts not profit, but only a wage commensurate with his risk, knowledge, and quantity of labor.<sup>164</sup> He must not buy at a cheap and sell at a dear market;<sup>165</sup> to do so is to violate the merchant's social function, which is to exchange local products and local skills on an equitable basis.<sup>166</sup> All this smacks somewhat of the medieval attitude--in theory--toward the middle-man.<sup>167</sup> One might further generalize. Ruskin propounded, when all the inconsistencies have been taken into account, a labor theory of value. Nowhere does he state this in so many words, but his insistence that the cost and price of an article depend upon "quantity of labour,"<sup>168</sup> his definition of money as fundamentally a claim upon labor,<sup>169</sup> his veneration (throughout his works) for hand labor, mark him as a follower of a labor theory of value.<sup>170</sup> This theory is compatible with the simplified social and economic structure of an agrarian, pre-industrial society in which commodities were few and limited largely to necessities. Such a society was that of the middle ages.<sup>171</sup> So, likewise, was

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., XVII, 219.

<sup>165</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., XVII, 217.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. R. H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (New York, 1926), pp. 33-36.

<sup>168</sup> Works, XVII, 219.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., XVII, 158, 202.

<sup>170</sup> Ruskin's emphasis upon quantity of labor is sufficiently demonstrated in many of the examples by which he supports his definitions. (See, for example, Ibid., XVII, 187-188).

<sup>171</sup> Tawney was aware of the affinity of the labor theory of value with the scholastic economic doctrine. In making the comparison he calls Karl Marx "the last of the Schoolmen." (Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, p. 36).

the society which Ruskin wished to reconstruct in nineteenth century England.

Ruskin's next major work of social import was Time and Tide, a series of twenty-five letters which appeared in various newspapers early in 1867.<sup>172</sup> Unto this Last and Munera Pulveris had both failed to receive any immediate public approval.<sup>173</sup> So in this next work Ruskin shifted his attack in three ways. First, he shifted his approach. The two previous works had consisted of rather formalized essays designed for leading periodicals: Time and Tide consists of a series of informal letters aimed for newspaper publication. Second, Ruskin shifted to a new audience. Munera Pulveris and Unto this Last were generally aimed at the upper middle classes; Time and Tide was directed, though not too successfully, at the working classes, in the person of Thomas Dixon, a Sunderland cork cutter. Third, Ruskin shifted his subject matter. Unto this Last and Munera Pulveris had dealt with political economy. The first had attacked the existing economic theory; the second had

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<sup>172</sup> The somewhat complicated bibliographical history of these letters is covered in Works, XVII, 299. They were collected and published in book form later in the same year.

<sup>173</sup> Both were, as previously explained, canceled by publishers in their periodical form. Munera Pulveris was not published in book form until nine years after its discontinuance in Fraser's, probably because of the poor sale of Unto this Last, which had been issued as a small volume in 1862. In 1873 more than a hundred of the original one thousand volume edition remained unsold. Only a few years later, however, the sale increased tremendously. From 1875 until the turn of the century the rate of sale increased to approximately two thousand volumes per year. (Ibid., XVII, pp. xxxi-xxxi).



defined terms for a new. Time and Tide departs from a discussion of theory and takes up instead practical suggestions toward a Ruskinian utopia.<sup>174</sup>

The work is important to us for three reasons: first, it marks in a sense a departure from Carlyle; second, it brings to fruition some characteristic Ruskinian attitudes toward society; third, it looks forward to Ruskin's later attempts in Fors Clavigera and the Guild of St. George to put into practice his suggestions for a model society.

First, Time and Tide marks a departure from Carlyle. By this I do not mean a departure from Carlyle's fundamental social theory. If there is any one impression one receives from a close study of the two men, it is that they stand together upon almost every social issue.<sup>175</sup> I mean, instead, that Ruskin extends the message of Carlyle by removing it from the realm of pure theory and carrying it into the realm of practice. Carlyle, social prophet par excellence of the nineteenth century, knew better than Ruskin the first principle of the prophetic profession: the prophet must never attempt to practice his prophecies. He was content to storm and rail about the course society must take, but seldom, and then with

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One is always subject to error when attempting to classify particular works of Ruskin. They are all desultory in the extreme, and Time and Tide is no exception. It handles social, economic, biblical, literary, artistic, geographical, and religious problems. One can look only for common denominators. (For the accuracy of the above classification Cf. Ibid., XVII, pp. xix-xx).

175 Cf. Henry Rose, The New Political Economy: the Social Teaching of Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and Henry George: with Observations on Joseph Mazzini (London, 1891), p. 75.

extreme reluctance, did he ever condescend to chart that course in concrete terms. "Disciples," wrote Cook, "who went to sit at his feet often came away, filled, it may be, with divine rage, but no wiser, for any positive directions, than they went."<sup>176</sup> The same could not be said of Ruskin, who, like Morris after him, had a passion for practice, and that passion manifested itself in many practical experiments. He opposed exorbitant profits for middle-men, so he established for his books a single, fair price at which not only book dealers, regardless of volume purchases, but direct consumers as well could purchase them.<sup>177</sup> He felt that physical energy of college undergraduates should be expended not only in field sports, but also in necessary manual labor for the benefit of society; the famous and much ridiculed Hincksey road building experiment of 1874 was the result. Likewise demonstrative of his instinct toward practice were his tea shop experiment,<sup>178</sup> his London street sweeping experiment,<sup>179</sup> his slum rental project,<sup>180</sup> and a series of other minor experiments, all of which culminated with his grandiose scheme for a model society, the Guild of St. George. Time and Tide marks better than any of his other works this shift of interest from the theoretical to the practical, and thus it marks a very real difference

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<sup>176</sup> Works, XXVII, p. xviii.

<sup>177</sup> The experiment began in 1872 and continued, with slight modifications, throughout Ruskin's life.

<sup>178</sup> Works, XXVIII, p. xviii.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., XXVIII, 204.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., XVII, p. cx, 437.

between Ruskin and Carlyle.

A second reason that the work is important to us is that it brings to fruition some of Ruskin's attitudes toward the ideal social structure.

That ideal society was not to be the loosely structured social organism of the nineteenth century in which class distinctions were breaking down and in which the lower as well as the upper classes were asserting their God given privilege of, as Matthew Arnold ironically called it, "doing as one likes."<sup>181</sup> Instead, Ruskin's utopia was a rigidly structured society; it condoned no class jumping; it had no truck with universal and equal suffrage; it required that each man do as he ought. Of course, no careful reader of Ruskin's earlier works can fail to recognize his attraction to a closely knit and rigidly organized society such as had existed in the middle ages, a society without widespread political liberty. As early as 1849 Ruskin had written:

How false is the conception, how frantic the pursuit, of that treacherous phantom which men call Liberty: most treacherous, indeed, of all phantoms; for the feeblest ray of reason might surely show us, that not only its attainment, but its being, was impossible. There is no such thing in the universe. There can never be. The stars have it not; the earth has it not; the sea has it not; and we men have the mockery and semblance of it only for our heaviest punishment.<sup>182</sup>

No political liberty and equality for Ruskin; instead, a true liberty, that which the medieval worker enjoyed. He wrote

<sup>181</sup> Culture and Anarchy, an Essay in Political and Social Criticism (London, 1875), pp. 47-83.

<sup>182</sup> Works, VIII, 248-249.

approvingly in the Stones of Venice of that medieval liberty "to obey another man, to labour for him, yield reverence to him or to his place, . . . [a] liberty from care."<sup>183</sup>

This liberty gave the medieval the satisfaction of "rank in the scale of being,"<sup>184</sup> a satisfaction Ruskin thought denied to nineteenth century workers.

These early pleas for hero-worship and recognition of one's rightful place in the scale of being Ruskin followed up with an assurance to his aristocratic readers of Unto this Last that he was not a leveler.

If there be any one point insisted on throughout my works more frequently than another, that one point is the impossibility of Equality. My continual aim has been to show the eternal superiority of some men to others, sometimes even of one man to all others; and to show also the advisability of appointing such persons or person to guide, to lead, or on occasion even to compel and subdue, their inferiors according to their own better knowledge and wiser will.<sup>185</sup>

This view of society as a rigid and rather static organism assumes a place of major importance in Time and Tide. In Ruskin's ideal society there will be no clamoring by the lower classes for a voice in government. "Your voices are not worth a rat's squeak, either in Parliament or out of it," Ruskin told his lower class readers at a time when agitation for the Reform Bill of 1867 was at its peak.<sup>186</sup> Nor will there be any

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., X, 194.

<sup>184</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., XVII, 74. See also, in this respect, the entire sixth chapter of The Cestus of Aglaia, which is a vigorous denunciation of liberty in general and Mill's On Liberty in particular. (Works, XIX, 120-134).

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., XVII, 326.

class jumping. "The healthy sense of progress," Ruskin wrote, ". . . does not consist in the anxiety of a struggle to attain higher place, or rank, but in gradually perfecting the manner, and accomplishing the ends, of the life which we have chosen, or which circumstances have determined for us."<sup>187</sup> Even education--and state education for all is provided in his utopia<sup>188</sup>--cannot erase the "divinely-appointed differences, eternal as the ranks of the everlasting hills,"<sup>189</sup> between ranks of society. It is good, it is moral to do one's work without grumbling; and in a passage worthy of Carlyle, Ruskin wrote,

Yonder poor horse, calm slave in daily chains at the railroad siding, who drags the detached rear of the train to the front again, and slips aside so deftly as the buffers meet; and, within eighteen inches of death all day long, content, for eternal reward, with his night's rest, and his champ'd mouthful of hay;--anything more earnestly moral and beautiful one cannot image--I never see the creature without a kind of worship.<sup>190</sup>

The social structure, then, was to be rigidly stabilized, each class recognizing its duties and its responsibilities to those both above and below it. But when Ruskin attempted to describe that structured social organism, to reduce it to a pattern, he was often inconsistent and vague. However, out of the chaos of Time and Tide we can gather this much about his ideal state. It was to be a monarchy, the king exercising a final authority over all matters of the state.<sup>191</sup> The state

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., XVII, 321.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., XVII, 394-401.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., XVII, 457.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., XVII, 335.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., XVII, 440-441.

itself held broad powers; it controlled the land,<sup>192</sup> it controlled national education,<sup>193</sup> it controlled religious offices,<sup>194</sup> it controlled commerce and manufacture,<sup>195</sup> it controlled even marriage.<sup>196</sup> Directly under the king came an hereditary, landed aristocracy, to which the state had granted land in perpetuity. Members of this group derive no income, however, from the rent of that land to a large class of peasant farmers, to whom the landed aristocrats are paternalistically responsible. Instead, they are paid a fixed income by the state.<sup>197</sup> From this group the leading functionaries of the state are selected, the judges,<sup>198</sup> high law enforcement officers, church dignitaries, commissioned military officers, and superintendents of public instruction.<sup>199</sup> They are, with the exception of the church dignitaries, for whom Ruskin seems to retain ecclesiastical titles, to bear the titles of prince, lord, or duke. This highest social class must be composed of real "rulers and guides of the people,"<sup>200</sup> much like the medieval aristocracy before it was corrupted at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>201</sup> One social step below

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., XVII, 438-439.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., XVII, 377, 397.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., XVII, 378.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., XVII, 383-385.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., XVII, 419-422.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., XVII, 430.

<sup>198</sup> "Law-ward or Lord" Ruskin calls them following Carlyle's Past and Present etymology. (Ibid., XVII, 440).

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., XVII, 441.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., XVII, 430.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., XVII, 431.

this aristocracy Ruskin placed the merchants and large manufacturers. These, because of their superior forethought and industry, have for their function to be the protectors and guides of the foolish, the weak, and the idle; and to establish such systems of trade and distribution of goods as shall preserve the lower orders from perishing by famine, or any other consequence of their carelessness or folly, and to bring them all, according to each man's capacity, at last into some harmonious industry.<sup>202</sup> Each is to be a true master, "responsible, as a minor king or governor, for the conduct as well as the comfort of all those under his rule."<sup>203</sup> And to keep this group from becoming a mammon-worshiping middle class like that of his nineteenth century, Ruskin would have the state place fixed limits upon their holdings and incomes.<sup>204</sup> Below this group in Ruskin's social stratification were the skilled laborers, those who would belong to craft guilds. The duty of these guild craftsmen is to set, through the individual guilds, standards of workmanship and conditions of work. They set also price and wage ceilings within each particular trade.<sup>205</sup> This attraction which Ruskin felt for the voluntary cooperation of a guild system, called by Hobson "a harking back to mediaevalism"<sup>206</sup> represents a development in Ruskin's thought;

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., XVII, 430.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., XVII, 320. Ruskin's interpretation of the word "comfort" was liberal. It included profit sharing, sick benefits, and old age pensions. (Ibid., XVII, 319).

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., XVII, 322.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., XVII, 384-386.

<sup>206</sup> John Hobson, John Ruskin, Social Reformer (London, 1898), p. 163.



earlier he had insisted that standards be set in particular trades by the state.<sup>207</sup> Actually, the conflict is never completely resolved, but we will see in Fors Clavigera that Ruskin develops even stronger faith in the standard-setting function of the medieval guild system. Below these guild craftsmen and at the very bottom of his social pattern are the unskilled laborers. There will always be in the world a certain amount of dangerous, servile, and irksome work to be performed by this class. In Munera Pulveris he had suggested that "criminals should . . . be set to the most dangerous and painful forms of it, especially to work in mines and at furnaces."<sup>208</sup> But some must still remain for those who "are fit for nothing better,"<sup>209</sup> who, as children, "could be made nothing of."<sup>210</sup> And they should be forced to do it. That this amounted to human slavery did not in the least bother Ruskin, who announced himself to be "a fearless defender of some forms of slavery."<sup>211</sup> "I am prepared," he said, "if the need be clear to my own mind, and if the power is in my hands, to throw men into prison, or any other captivity--to bind them or to beat them--and force them, for such periods as I may

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<sup>207</sup> Actually Ruskin had asked in A Joy for Ever (1857) for a form of state socialism. The state was to enter into each trade. It would set standards for working conditions, quality of product, price of product. Private manufacturers were then to compete with the state. (Works, XVI, 44-45).

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., XVII, 234.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., XVII, 236.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., XVII, 405.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., XVII, 438.



judge necessary, to any kind of irksome labour: and on occasion of desperate resistance, to hang or shoot them."<sup>212</sup>

The social stratification thus set forth in Time and Tide represents what Ruskin thought to be the ideal. Certainly, Ruskin's proposal that craft guilds should have a place in that social scheme is indicative of its medieval nature. And its feudal pattern, in which hero-worship operated upward and paternalism operated downward through clearly demarcated social ranks, is a throwback to what he and Carlyle thought the blessed and organized social structure of the middle ages. "A struggle is approaching," Ruskin said in 1869, just two years after the Time and Tide letters, "between the newly-risen power of democracy and the apparently departing power of feudalism."<sup>213</sup> And so admirable did he consider the social balance of the feudal middle ages,<sup>214</sup> that he aligned himself with the feudal side.

"A certain fallacy of mediaeval picturesqueness," wrote Hobson, "has sometimes carried Mr. Ruskin, with Carlyle and other good company, into extravagant work of 'restoration.'"<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Loc. cit. Ruskin's realism caused him to face the fact that a certain degree of servile labor was necessary and that a few must be forced to perform that labor. His broad humanitarian sympathies, however, mitigate the hard-hearted feeling expressed above. He urged the upper classes to cut to a minimum their demand for products which necessitated degrading labor. Chiefly, Ruskin thought, these products were luxuries. (Ibid., XVII, 424-425).

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., XVIII, 494.

<sup>214</sup> See, for example, his statement in Val D'Arno of ideal social balance in the middle ages. (Ibid., XXIII, 46).

<sup>215</sup> John Ruskin, Social Reformer, p. 213.



I agree. But with this difference. Carlyle's restoration was limited largely to theory. Ruskin, however, was possessed of what we might call an unpractical passion for the practical; he attempted to carry the restoration into actual practice. The desire in Time and Tide to give positive direction to his social theories led Ruskin directly into a new and final stage of their development, the application of theory to practice. In short, it led Ruskin to Fors Clavigera and the Guild of St. George.

Fors Clavigera, like Time and Tide before it, is composed of a series of letters addressed to the workmen of England. However, it is much more ambitious than the series of twenty-five short letters which comprised the earlier work. While Time and Tide records Ruskin's thoughts over a period of a few months in a space of little more than a hundred pages, the Fors Clavigera letters were published over a period extending from January, 1871 to December, 1884,<sup>216</sup> and their 650,000 words<sup>217</sup> fill three bulky volumes. And the discursiveness of those three volumes makes Time and Tide appear to be a well developed outline.

"Fors is Ruskin's Hamlet," wrote Frederic Harrison in discussing the work as a revelation of an author's mind.<sup>218</sup> So in a sense it is. It certainly reveals Ruskin's character-

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<sup>216</sup> They were published monthly from January, 1871 until Ruskin's severe attack of brain fever in March, 1878. They were taken up again in February, 1880 and published irregularly until December, 1884.

<sup>217</sup> Works, XXVII, p. xxxii.

<sup>218</sup> John Ruskin (London, 1932), p. 182.



istic inability mentally to organize his materials. The discursiveness of Fors, both in tone and content, is almost overwhelming. The tone ranges from the fiery petulance of his diatribes against that "mad dog's creed of modernism,"<sup>219</sup> to the quiet and restrained introspection of the many autobiographical passages. The range of subject matter is likewise broad and covers just about every interest Ruskin ever had in life.<sup>220</sup> "I can well conceive," Ruskin said in one of the letters, and any scholar will agree, "how irritating it must be to any one chancing to take special interest in any one part of my subject, to find me, or lose me, wandering away from it for a year or two."<sup>221</sup>

But bulky though it be, discursive though it be, Fors has its relevance for this study.<sup>222</sup> It not only carries on but carries forward as well the tradition of medieval-modern

<sup>219</sup> Works, XXVIII, 649. Passages like this Carlyle probably had in mind when he wrote to Emerson of the "fierce lightning-bolts Ruskin is desperately pouring into the black world of Anarchy all around him." (Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson, II, 352.

<sup>220</sup> Cook makes the following broad classifications: "(1) It is a Miscellany. (2) It is a treatise on Social Economy in the form of a criticism of the nineteenth century. (3) It is an essay in social reconstruction, or a study in Utopia; in which connexion it becomes (in its later numbers) the monthly organ of a Society, the St. George's Guild. (4) It is an Essay on the Principles of Education. (5) It is a book of Personal Confessions. (6) And, finally, it is a Confession of Faith." (Works, XXVII, p. xxxiii).

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., XXVIII, 254.

<sup>222</sup> It is actually impossible to separate Fors Clavigera and the Guild of St. George, which grew out of the work. Therefore, I shall often find it necessary to speak of the two as a single effort.

contrasts. It extends that tradition from theory to practice. And it extends the tradition another way also. First used as a tool primarily to criticize the present, the medieval-modern contrast then became useful as a solution for contemporary problems, and now in Ruskin it furnishes a pattern for the future.

First let us consider Fors as a continuation of the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts. I have shown that by the time Ruskin initiated Fors Clavigera he had come into contact with all but one of the major works which employ the device.<sup>223</sup> Ruskin knew the tradition. And I have demonstrated the tremendous impact which one of those medieval-modern contrasts, Carlyle's Past and Present, had upon him.

Cook, Ruskin's editor, early recognized that Fors could be described "as a resumption, at the latter part of the century, of the contrast between Past and Present which Carlyle had drawn three decades before."<sup>224</sup> Both Fors and its correlate, the Guild of St. George, are, by Ruskin's admission, an attempt to "forward in connection with a definite scheme of action" what he called "Carlyle's grander exhortation to the English landholders in Past and Present."<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> The one exception was Cobbett's History of the Protestant Reformation. He may have known even this work in 1871; however, I can find no positive evidence that he knew it earlier than 1884.

<sup>224</sup> Works, XXVII, p. xlvi.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., XXX, 95. Though Ruskin considered St. George's Guild a practical application of Carlylean theory, Carlyle himself was apparently indifferent to the idea. Significant, I think, is the fact that Carlyle did not



The first letter of Fors, like the first chapter of Past and Present, surveyed the condition of England's poor and found it distressing. "There is," Ruskin wrote, "agonizing distress even in this highly favoured England, in some classes, for want of food, clothes, lodging, and fuel."<sup>226</sup> And just as Carlyle had been deterred from his Cromwell studies to speak out upon the social question, so Ruskin felt that the social distresses of contemporary England turned him from more agreeable tasks. He wrote in the initial letter of Fors, "I simply cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like, and the very light of the morning sky, when there is any--which is seldom, nowadays, near London--has become hateful to me, because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where I know it not, where no imagination can interpret too bitterly."<sup>227</sup>

Nor does the medieval-modern contrast take long to assert itself in Fors. After lashing modernity in the second letter, principally the aristocracy for failing actively to guide the lower orders, Ruskin turned to medieval England in the next letter, entitled, appropriately, "Richard of England." Ruskin

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(225 cont.) join in St. George's work. In fact, he even wrote in 1878 to William Allingham, "The St. George's Company is utterly absurd. I thought it a joke at first." (William Allingham: a Diary [London, 1907], p. 263).

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 19.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 13. Still more to the point is a later comment: "I began the writing of Fors as a byework to quiet my conscience, that I might be happy in what I supposed to be my own proper life of art-teaching." (Ibid., XXVIII, 485).

asked his readers to learn more of eleventh century England, for, he wrote, "I believe you would care more for her, and less for yourselves . . . if you knew a little more about her."<sup>228</sup> The rough nobility which Carlyle had found in Richard, who could recognize a real man when he saw one,<sup>229</sup> Ruskin found too. Likewise this Coeur-de-Lion could recognize a thief,<sup>230</sup> and he inflicted severe punishments upon those he found guilty of selling short measures, misrepresenting a product, or lending money at interest--forms of thievery condoned by the nineteenth century.<sup>231</sup> These, Ruskin wrote, were "Richard's rough and unreasonable, chancing nevertheless, being wholly honest, to be wholly right, notions of business."<sup>232</sup> In the next letter the medieval-modern contrast again found a place. He quotes at length from Froissart's Chronicle, then contrasts medieval with modern warfare:

We fight inelegantly as well as expensively, with machines instead of bow and spear; we kill about a thousand now to the score then, in settling any quarrel--(Agincourt was won with the loss of less than a hundred men; only 25,000 English altogether were engaged at Crécy; some say only 8000, at Poitiers); we kill with far ghastlier wounds, crashing bones and flesh together; we leave our wounded necessarily for days and nights in heaps on the fields of battle; we pillage districts twenty times as large, and with completer destruction of more valuable property; and with a destruction as irreparable as it is complete.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 52.

<sup>229</sup> Carlyle, Works, X, 115.

<sup>230</sup> Works, XXVII, 57.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 54-55.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 56.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 74.



The next letter contrasts the indifference of modern husbands toward their wives with the chivalric code toward women in the middle ages.<sup>234</sup> And so throughout many of the ninety-six letters. Ruskin never tired of telling his readers the vast difference between his own century and the middle ages, which "we in our vain folly are pleased to call the dark ages, when we ourselves are about as really dark as need be."<sup>235</sup>

I have said that Ruskin not only continued the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts; by turning from theory to practice he extended it as well. Ruskin's first step toward the reconstruction of society through the Guild of St. George was his solicitation in the eighth Fors letter of funds for the new experiment.<sup>236</sup> There can be little doubt, Ruskin's statements to the contrary notwithstanding, that he entertained glorious hopes for the future of his new society. In 1875, when the Guild was offered its first piece of land,<sup>237</sup> Ruskin's hopes were high. He wrote to William Barnes Tarrant, "The small piece of land now offered us is the first of which we take possession, but once at work I do not doubt rapid increase."<sup>238</sup> Six years later--the "rapid increase" had not materialized--Ruskin maintained his abundant expectations for

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 80.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 289.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 132-145. Originally organized as St. George Company, Ruskin in 1877 changed the name to the Guild of St. George. The word "company" connoted profit, and he wanted to escape that concept. (Ibid., XXIX, 182).

<sup>237</sup> This first gift consisted of a cottage at Walkley, near Sheffield, and approximately one acre of ground with it.

<sup>238</sup> Works, XXXVII, 163.

the Guild, but he projected them further into the future. His "Master's Report: 1881" emphasized the long range potential of the Guild, "a company designed to extend its operations over the continent of Europe, and number its members, ultimately, by myriads."<sup>239</sup>

Ruskin's grandiose schemes for the reconstruction of society upon a solid agrarian foundation were never, however, to become much of a reality. The gap between the ideal and the real was exceedingly large. Those who enrolled themselves as Companions in the Guild were few and uninfluential.<sup>240</sup> Its properties were negligible.<sup>241</sup> Its "ludicrous failures" were ridiculed by contemporary periodicals.<sup>242</sup> By 1885 even Ruskin had become disillusioned by the lack of support shown the Guild. His "Master's Report" for that year reflects his irritation at the mere lip-support he was receiving.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., XXX, 32.

<sup>240</sup> The list of charter members numbers thirty-two, of which eighteen were women. A list drawn up in 1883 shows an increase of only nine names. Of the forty-one members twenty-four were women. (Ibid., XXXIV, 703; XXIX, 477).

<sup>241</sup> They were, listed in order of acquisition: (1) A cottage at Walkley, near Sheffield, and approximately one acre of ground; (2) eight cottages at Barmouth; (3) twenty acres of woodland at Bewdley in Worcestershire; (4) thirteen acres of garden and fields at Totley in Derbyshire; (5) three-quarters of an acre with a cottage at Cloughton.

<sup>242</sup> See, for example, P. G. Hubert, "Mr. Ruskin's Guild of St. George," Lipponcott's Monthly Magazine, XLI (1888), 839-845.

<sup>243</sup> "I will not," he wrote, "stand this any more. . . . To the numbers of people who write to express their gratitude to me, I have only this one general word,--send your gratitude in the form of pence, or do not trouble me with it; and to my personal friends, that it seems to



Because it never developed into more than an inauspicious token of Ruskin's ideal society, we cannot search for medieval elements in the actuality of St. George's Guild; instead, we are forced to turn again to the theory of the Guild as expressed primarily in the Fors letters.

Students of Ruskin have generally noticed the medieval nature of Ruskin's theoretical Guild of St. George. Representative is Frederic Harrison's comment that the Guild was to be "not so much an advance upon the Present as a revival of the Past. It was in spirit Mediaeval, but purged from the cruelty of Feudalism and the superstition of Catholicism. . . . It was to be a glorified mediaeval lordship."<sup>244</sup> These students have not, however, done more than generalize; they have neither pointed out nor elaborated upon specific elements in Ruskin's Guild of St. George which are characteristically medieval. This I shall attempt to do.

In its totality the Guild of St. George was an attempt ✓ to revert to a medieval, feudal organization of society. Ruskin admitted just that when he wrote to a friend in 1871, "My chief hope is, indeed, to get the proprietors of land, on which there is still an uncorrupted English race of peasants, to look upon these as their greatest possession, and to bring back for good, instead of evil, the organization of the Feudal System."<sup>245</sup> And it is important to realize that when Ruskin

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(243 cont.) me high time their affection should take that form also, as it is the only one by which they can also prove their respect." (Works, XXX, 96-97).

<sup>244</sup> John Ruskin, pp. 170-171.

<sup>245</sup> Works, XXIX, 532.

employed the terms "feudal ages" or "feudal system," he referred distinctly to the middle ages, never to a subsequent period.<sup>246</sup> The rigidly structured social pattern that we have discussed in connection with Time and Tide was, with one significant change, to be carried into practice by the Guild.

The new social structure was to be agrarian, its roots deep in the soil of England. The change mentioned above concerned the ownership of that land. In Time and Tide Ruskin had advocated state ownership, although to some few families the land was to be leased in perpetuity. In the Fors letters Ruskin rejects state in favor of private ownership. For Henry George's plan of land nationalization, which was creating considerable stir during the eighties, Ruskin lacked sympathy. "'Nationalization of Land,' like other nonsense," he wrote, "must have its day, I suppose,--and I hope, soon, its night. All healthy states from the beginning of the world . . . are founded on hereditary tenure."<sup>247</sup> Like Carlyle,

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<sup>246</sup> Ruskin considered the feudal period to have begun in the tenth century (Ibid., XXVII, 264) and to have terminated with the Reformation (Ibid., XXIX, 387-388).

<sup>247</sup> There exists some confusion of terms here. Actually, Henry George's land plan was not identical with "land nationalization" as that term was understood by socialists. Yet he was generally considered a land nationalizer by the British; indeed, Lawrence has pointed out "that up to the end of his third visit to Great Britain George did not repudiate land nationalization as a British label for his views because he thought of his scheme for taxing land values as virtually the same thing as nationalization." (Elwood P. Lawrence, "Uneasy Alliance: The Reception of Henry George by British Socialists in the Eighties," American Journal of Economics and Sociology, II /October, 1951/, 63).

whose "grander exhortation to the English landholders in Past and Present" Ruskin was attempting to put forward "in connection with a definite scheme of action,"<sup>248</sup> he came to place more and more confidence in the English landed aristocracy. Decayed they may be, but yet Ruskin felt that they possessed the potential to lead England back to the good life. He wrote in the second letter of Fors:

The present holders [of the land] are quite the best men you can now look to for leading: it is too true that they have much demoralized themselves lately by horse-racing, bird-shooting, and vermin-hunting; and most of all by living in London, instead of on their estates; but they are still (without exception) brave; nearly without exception, good-natured; honest, so far as they understand honesty; and much to be depended on, if once you and they understand each other.<sup>249</sup>

In addition to allowing outright ownership of the land by individuals, Ruskin suggested in Fors that the laws of England be amended to make it possible for corporate bodies, such as his Guild of St. George, to purchase and hold land in perpetuity. He cited a medieval precedent. "The first thing you have to bring in by your new Parliaments--" he wrote to the workers, "[is] a system of land tenure, namely, by which your organized classes of labouring men may possess their land as corporate bodies, and add to it--as the monks once did."<sup>250</sup>

Land furnishes the basis of a feudal, agrarian society;

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<sup>248</sup> Works, XXX, 95.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 30.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 411. It should be clearly understood that Ruskin did not advocate a monastic revival, as did others in his century. Twice in the Fors letters he makes it quite clear that the Guild of St. George will have no monastic asceticism. (Ibid., XXVIII, 440, 643).

so too does the produce of that land and the labor of those who till it provide the foundation of economic value. "A man and a woman, with their children, properly trained," Ruskin felt, "are able easily to cultivate as much ground as will feed them; to build as much wall and roof as will lodge them, and to spin and weave as much cloth as will clothe them."<sup>251</sup> A society composed of these self-sufficient family units, characteristic of medieval economy, Ruskin considered admirable. There was to be in his new society "as little trade or importation as possible,"<sup>252</sup> and the price of those few outside commodities which were necessary were to "be founded on the price of food. The price of what it takes a day to produce, will be a day's maintenance; of what it takes a week to produce, a week's maintenance."<sup>253</sup> A simple economy this-- "fatuous" Hobson calls it<sup>254</sup>--and one singularly inapplicable to the complexities of a dynamic, industrial age.

For Ruskin, however, no incongruity was involved; his ideal society, like the medieval society he so admired, was largely devoid of industrialization. As early as Modern Painters he had proclaimed that "the great mechanical impulses of the age, of which most of us are so proud, are a mere passing fever."<sup>255</sup> The real sources of happiness for man were never, Ruskin thought, contingent upon mechanical progress. "To watch

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 87.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., XXVIII, 21.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., XXVIII, 38.

<sup>254</sup> John Ruskin, Social Reformer, p. 290.

<sup>255</sup> Works, V, 380.

the corn grow, and the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over ploughshare or spade; to read, to think, to love, to hope, to pray,--these are the things that make men happy. . . . The world's prosperity or adversity depends upon our knowing and teaching these few things: but upon iron, or glass, or electricity, or steam, in no wise."<sup>256</sup> This early view Ruskin never changed, and in Fors he reasserted his firm conviction that a society with machinery for all tasks "will neither be so good nor so happy as without the machines."<sup>257</sup> And to promote "simplicity of life" Ruskin decreed that "no machines moved by artificial power are to be used on the estates of the St. George society; wind, water, and animal force are to be the only motive powers employed."<sup>258</sup>

The same prohibition Ruskin extended to non-farm labor as well; he would have manufacturing, but in its original sense, the making of an article with the hands. Division of labor, the use of a human soul "in making the point of a pin or the head of a nail," was abhorrent to Ruskin.<sup>259</sup> He would have his laborers return to a system of hand labor in which they could feel the pride that accompanies individual creation, a pride which Ruskin saw in the medieval worker.<sup>260</sup> So he asked for a revival of the medieval craft guild. There were to be twenty-

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., V, 382.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 87. See also in this respect Ruskin's scorn of "Lord Macaulay and his school" in Pleasures of England. (Ibid., XXXIII, 444).

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., XXVIII, 21; see also XXVIII, 423.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., X, 196.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., XVI, 436.

one essential occupations, each individually organized and each setting standards within the particular craft. Organize yourselves this way, Ruskin told his nineteenth century laborers, "and the world is yours, and all the pleasures of it."<sup>261</sup>

Still another medieval element in Ruskin's Guild of St. George was its social hierarchy. We have seen that Ruskin's admiration for the rigidly stratified social organization of the middle ages led him to outline in Time and Tide a similar social structure for the nineteenth century, one in which each person recognized and maintained his rank in the scale of being. In the seventy-first Fors, entitled "The Feudal Ranks," he again demonstrated his conviction that the carefully demarcated structure of medieval society was worthy of emulation in the nineteenth century.<sup>262</sup> The social structure of the Guild is pretty nearly identical with that outlined in Time and Tide; a few titles have been changed, and we must, of course, assume that the Guild is the state.<sup>263</sup> At its head, in place of the

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., XXIX, 410. The twenty-one were: "1. Shepherds. 2. Fishermen. 3. Ploughmen. 4. Gardeners. 5. Carpenters and Woodmen. 6. Builders and Quarrymen. 7. Shipwrights. 8. Smiths and Miners. 9. Bakers and Millers. 10. Vintners. 11. Graziers and Butchers. 12. Spinners. 13. Linen and Cotton-workers. 14. Silk-workers. 15. Woollen-workers. 16. Tanners and Furriers. 17. Tailors and Milliners. 18. Shoemakers. 19. Musicians. 20. Painters. 21. Goldsmiths." (Loc. cit.).

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., XXVIII, 732-746. We can be certain that Ruskin is talking of the middle ages because he points out that the admirable system of feudal rank broke down with the Reformation. (Ibid., XXVIII, 739).

<sup>263</sup> Ruskin always considered the Guild of St. George as a political unit in itself. It was to have its own laws (Ibid., XXVIII, 23), its own coinage (Ibid., XXVIII, 429-432), its own ruler (Ibid., XXVIII, 424). If the Guild had a relationship to the larger political unit, England, it was never explained.



king of Time and Tide, is the Master, Ruskin himself. The Master is to be an absolute monarch, the decision-maker and final authority on all Guild affairs, wielding a dictatorial power.<sup>264</sup> The ranks of society below the Master, descending from the "lord of lands" to the "hired labourer," were each to accept the responsibilities commensurate with their station; and Ruskin pointed admiringly to the medieval relationship between superior and inferior as a pattern to be copied.<sup>265</sup>

The impulse which caused Ruskin to inscribe "on the blank leaves of an eleventh-century MS."<sup>266</sup> the names of those who had joined him in St. George's work is in a sense indicative of the spirit behind the Guild. By design it was a reversion to medieval feudalism. Its agrarian economy centered around the self-sufficient family unit, its rigid social hierarchy, its scorn of usury and middle men, its exclusion of machine labor, its adulation of hand labor, its craft guilds, even its laws,<sup>267</sup> marked its medieval spirit.

Ruskin's social reforms, wrote a contemporary in 1872, "have as much chance of being realized as the discovery of the philosopher's stone."<sup>268</sup> The Guild of St. George was an anach-

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., XXVIII, 649.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., XXVIII, 424-425.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., XXVIII, 657.

<sup>267</sup> "The laws of Florence in the fourteenth century," wrote Ruskin zestfully, "for us in the nineteenth!" (Ibid., XXVIII, 30; see also Ibid., XXVIII, 23).

<sup>268</sup> Charles Eastlake, A History of the Gothic Revival; an Attempt to Show how the Taste for Mediaeval Architecture which Lingered in England During the Two Last Centuries Has Since Been Encouraged and Developed (London, 1872), p. 271.

ronism, and like all social schemes born out of their due time, it was doomed to failure. Two gigantic forces of his nineteenth century Ruskin chose to repudiate, the rise of democratic liberalism and the increasing mechanization of life. And to escape the social dislocations which attended the growth of these new and inexorable social forces, Ruskin turned his back upon them and sought refuge in a bygone age. In the middle ages Ruskin saw a happiness, a faith, a devotion to duty, a social balance, an economic and political stability which he thought his own century lacked. Admirable qualities these, and whether or not they did exist in those blessed middle ages, they are certainly worthy of pursuit. What Ruskin did not understand is that these qualities can and must exist concurrent with the social forces which shape any given age. Economic and political stability, for example, is just as possible--or impossible--in a democratic and industrial age as it is in a feudal, pre-industrial age. But instead of accepting democracy and industrialization, the two giant forces of his century, Ruskin attempted the impossible; he tried to oppose them and substitute in their stead the economic and social conditions of the middle ages.

If Ruskin had possessed a more accurate historical perspective, he might not have been lured into his anachronistic experiment. He would have realized the utter futility of attempting to turn away from these forces. It is significant that Carlyle, an historian by profession, accepted the inevitability both of democracy and industrialization. He too saw admirable qualities in the middle ages, qualities worthy of

emulation, but he did not ask his century to revive either the social or economic conditions of that past period. He only asked, as I have said before, that the nineteenth century adapt some praiseworthy characteristics of the medieval period to the forces operative upon contemporary society. Likewise, Carlyle's historical insight enabled him to present a much more realistic picture of the middle ages than did Ruskin. There is something hard and substantial and real about Carlyle's portrayal in Past and Present of twelfth century Bury St. Edmunds. One sees there no knights in shining armor talking in soft tones to the wayside flowers; one sees no carvers whistling merry tunes expressive of their indescribable joy as they chisel a gargoyle out of rough stone.

Perhaps, however, I am being too hard upon Ruskin. He saw the middle ages as they were not; others of his century had been equally culpable: Scott, Keats, Cobbett, Southey, Kenelm Digby, Richard Hurrell Froude, and Lord John Manners to mention only a few. He fashioned a social experiment ill calculated to survive the tremendous upheavals of nineteenth century society; but Robert Owen, Auguste Comte, Bronson Alcott bear him good company. The important fact is that Ruskin did possess an acute social conscience, one that told him that there were great social inequities in his England which needed desperately to be made right. He might have turned away from these inequities and devoted his life to sketching flowers, collecting minerals, and writing elaborate treatises upon paintings and gothic arches--these were his loves. Instead he

threw the full strength of his prolific pen and his abundant fortune into the battle for social reform.

And though the end result of his efforts for social reform was reactionary and unworkable in the modern world, his efforts nonetheless served liberal British thought.<sup>269</sup> Ruskin's ethical assault upon the laissez-faire economy of his age certainly assisted the cause of English Socialism. One early Socialist wrote, "His imagination and his humor pardoned, his digressions and unpractical speculations overlooked, it may be fair to say that the rest of his economic writing present thinkers may do well to read; for, though the future political economy may not build from him directly, yet it will be rather with Ruskin's earth than with Ricardo's straw that its bricks for building shall be made."<sup>270</sup> In discussing Ruskin's affinity with the Socialist Movement, Harrison wrote,

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<sup>269</sup> This paradox of the reactionary-liberal, which we will see again in William Morris, exists throughout Ruskin's social criticism. Partly it resulted from his natural disposition to quarrel. He once wrote to his father: "I must mind and not get too sympathising with the Radicals. Effie says with some justice that I am a great conservative in France, because there everybody is a radical, and a great radical in Austria, because there everybody is conservative. I suppose that one reason why I am so fond of fish (as creatures, I mean, not as eating) is that they always swim with their heads against the stream. I find it for me the healthiest position." (Works, XII, p. lxxix). Partly also it was his habit of using political labels without adequate definition. In one letter of Fors he can say, "I am myself a Communist of the old school;" then three letters later, "I am . . . a violent Tory of the old school." (Ibid., XXVII, 116, 167).

<sup>270</sup> F. J. Stimson, "Ruskin as a Political Economist," Quarterly Journal of Economics, II (1888), 445. Cf. Edith J. Morley, John Ruskin and Social Ethics, Fabian Tract No. 179 (London, 1917), *passim*.



Although Ruskin is not a Socialist--indeed, he is rather a mediaeval reactionist or an aristocratic absolutist, if label has to be found for him--there is in all his social theories that element of the ascendancy of the State, or of Society, over the individual, the precedence of moral over material and practical aims, the necessity for organisation of labour, and a moral and spiritual control over self-interest, which is the fundamental essence of Socialism.<sup>271</sup>

Ruskin's impact upon individuals and, through them, upon the Socialist Movement was indeed strong.<sup>272</sup> "I have met in my lifetime," wrote George Bernard Shaw, "some extremely revolutionary characters; and quite a large number of them, when I have asked, 'Who put you on this revolutionary line? Was it Karl Marx?' have answered, 'No, it was Ruskin'."<sup>273</sup> It is significant in this respect that Ruskin exercised considerable influence upon the rise of the British Labour Party. The Parliament of 1906 was the first to which a large contingent of Labour Party candidates was elected. The great concern taken of the fact in conservative circles prompted the Review of Reviews to poll the laborites to determine which books had influenced their political thought. The book which appeared at the head of most lists was Ruskin's Unto this Last.<sup>274</sup> Certainly too, Orage and Penty, the founders of Guild Socialism, owe a debt to Ruskin. Cole and Hobson as well, socialist historian

<sup>271</sup> John Ruskin, pp. 106-107.

<sup>272</sup> Ernest Barker wrote, "If Ruskin was not the begetter of English Socialism, he was a foster-father to many English Socialists." (Political Thought in England from Herbert Spencer to the Present Day [New York, 1915], p. 196).

<sup>273</sup> Ruskin's Politics, p. 8.

<sup>274</sup> Cook, Life of John Ruskin, II, 14.

and economist respectively, have felt his influence.

The person, however, upon whom Ruskin exerted the strongest and most pervasive influence was William Morris, socialist and artist. Ruskin's "Nature of Gothic" Morris read as a young man, and he wrote of it in 1892, "To some of us when we first read it, now many years ago, it seemed to point out a new road on which the world should travel."<sup>275</sup> That this new road was paved with medieval stones made it all the more attractive to Morris, who was without doubt the most thorough medievalist among the literary men of his century. And it seems quite fitting that it was to this William Morris, medieval-modern contraster par excellence and subject of our next chapter, that the aging Ruskin, his productive days near an end, passed the torch of social reform when he wrote to his disciple, "You younger men must found a new dynasty."<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> John Ruskin, The Nature of Gothic (Hammersmith, 1892), p. 1.  
<sup>276</sup> Works, XXXVII, 315.

## CHAPTER IV

WILLIAM MORRIS

"My ordinary work has forced on me the contrast between times past and the present day, and has made me look with grief and pain on things which many men notice but little, if at all. . . . Little by little I was driven to the conclusion that all these uglinesses are but the outward expression of the innate moral baseness into which we are forced by our present form of society, and that it is futile to attempt to deal with them from the outside." ("Preface" to Signs of Change)

William Morris (1834-1896) was the last of nineteenth century England's literary medievalists to use extensively the medieval-modern contrast. Chronologically, the tradition culminates with him. Of those who had previously used the medieval-modern contrast, only Ruskin, in a physical sense alone, outlived him. In other ways too the tradition culminates with Morris. The contrast was first used by Cobbett and Southey merely to castigate contemporary conditions; in the hands of Carlyle and Pugin it became a tool for social reform of those present conditions. Ruskin extended the contrast's use into the future; that is, he used it to work up enthusiasm for a future pattern of feudal society. Morris too looked forward to a medievalistic future, but without feudalism. Thus, instead of fighting, as did Ruskin, the swing toward democratic liberalism, Morris joined hands with that force by fitting his medievalism into the framework of the Socialist Movement. The use of this tool, the medieval-modern contrast, could be carried no further.

There remains yet another reason why Morris should end this study. The tradition of looking back to a glorious and ordered medieval past was made possible largely by two intellectual trends which stamped themselves legibly upon the nineteenth century. The first of these was the Romantic Movement in literature. Without Gray, without Scott, without Coleridge and Keats, without Tennyson--romantic born late--the nineteenth century view of the middle ages would certainly have been



considerably different.<sup>1</sup> The second was what one contemporary of Carlyle's called "the new era in the writing of history."<sup>2</sup> Thomas Preston Peardon's The Transition in English Historical Writing 1760-1830 has carefully delineated the rather complex historiographical changes which prepared nineteenth century Englishmen to take a more sympathetic view of the middle ages than had been possible during the Enlightenment. Reaction to both these trends was inevitable. "Time enough," wrote Charles Kingsley with reference to the middle ages, "has been lost in ignorant abuse of that period, and time enough also, lately, in blind adoration of it. When will we learn to see it as it was?"<sup>3</sup> The last decade of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth centuries witnessed such an attempt. The historical work of André Réville, George Traveledyan, and George Gordon Coulton, for example, contributed a great deal toward removing the romantic glow from the medieval period. A writer in the twentieth century would find it increasingly difficult to pass off as truths about the middle ages many of the ideas which passed without question in the nineteenth.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry A. Beers' A History of English Romanticism in the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1918) furnishes the most complete treatment of literary medievalism during the period, for he narrowly defines romanticism as interest in things medieval. Yet he is interested only in medievalism as an esthetic tradition and neglects completely the social and political implications of the nineteenth century medieval revival.

<sup>2</sup> "M. Guizot's Commission Historique and the English Record Commission," Foreign Quarterly Review, XVII (1836), 362.

<sup>3</sup> Kingsley, Works (London, 1893), VII, 7.

<sup>4</sup> I might cite one example from Morris. His Dream of John Ball, as I shall point out later in this chapter, hinges fundamentally on Thorold Rogers' interpretation of the causes

It used to be fashionable to look at William Morris from one of two viewpoints. On the one hand he could be seen as a reactionary dreamer who had lost his nineteenth century identity while dreaming of days which were never to return. Proponents of this view apologized for Morris' socialist work by calling it a passing enthusiasm into which he was led by his love of art. On the other hand, he could be seen as an advanced liberal who had lost himself almost completely to the world of art, but had, although at a late age, finally come to see the socialist light. Neither view is any longer tenable. Morris scholarship in the last quarter century has been working toward a synthesis of his many activities, a synthesis which will at once unify the reactionary dreamer and the advanced liberal. And when that final synthesis appears, it will pivot upon Morris' medievalism.

The great love which Morris felt for the middle ages is a commonplace which hardly requires documentation. So much a commonplace is it, that with the exception of Küster, Litzenberg, and Grennan, scholars have largely overlooked its implications and have merely perpetuated the generalizations made about it

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(4 cont.) and results of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. In the nineties, however, after André Réville's Le Soulèvement des Travailleurs d'Angleterre en 1381 (Paris, 1898), Edgar Powell's The Rising in East Anglia in 1381 (London, 1896), Powell and George Trevelyan's The Peasants' Rising and the Lollards (London, 1899), Trevelyan's England in the Age of Wycliffe (London, 1899), all of which were followed in 1906 by Charles Oman's The Great Revolt of 1381, the simple interpretations of Rogers and Morris became untenable. "After Oman, Réville, Powell, and Trevelyan," wrote Grennan, "it was no longer possible to consider the revolt as a rising of serfs against those who would renew the old villeinage." (William Morris, Medievalist and Revolutionary [New York, 1945], pp. 88-89).

by Mackail, Morris' first biographer. But Grennan has demonstrated that Morris' medieval interests permeate all of his work, and in so doing has pointed out the direction which Morris scholarship must take.

Born into a century which, according to one scholar, "seems to have written its autobiography . . . in terms of its medieval enthusiasm,"<sup>5</sup> William Morris came into contact with practically every outlet by which that enthusiasm enforced itself upon nineteenth century life. I shall attempt in this chapter to indicate his contact with these various facets of medievalism, particularly the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts, and show how they all contribute ultimately toward the social theory of his later years.

First, let us examine Morris' knowledge of those who had previously used the medieval-modern contrast for a social purpose.

William Cobbett, who in his History of the Protestant Reformation, Rural Rides, and Legacy to Labourers had energetically put the contrast to work, was well known to Morris. Like Ruskin, however, Morris probably met with Cobbett's works rather late in life, too late to justify our considering Cobbett a formative influence. I have been able to find in Morris' early work no mention of or allusion to Cobbett. May Morris tells of her father having read a "good deal of Cobbett's strenuous pronouncements;"<sup>6</sup> and Mackail, after talking of the "prose authors

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<sup>5</sup> Grennan, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> The Collected Works of William Morris, introductions by his daughter May Morris (London, 1910-1915), XXII, p. xvii--hereafter cited as Works.

under whose influence he [Morris] had fallen at Oxford," mentions "William Cobbett, with whom he had many tastes and prejudices in common, and whose 'Rural Rides' he knew almost by heart."<sup>7</sup> But May Morris' comment gives no indication of the period in which her father became acquainted with those "strenuous pronouncements," and Mackail's statement seems likely to be in error. If Morris had known of Cobbett's works as early as his Oxford years, it seems strange indeed that there is not a single mention of the man in the whole of The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, which was produced by Morris and his university friends, and in which the heroes of the group were mentioned again and again. Nor is Cobbett mentioned in the correspondence or diaries of Edward Burne-Jones, Morris' reading companion, who mentions many of the other books they read together while at Oxford. Nor is there a single reference to Cobbett in any of Morris' works or personal letters until the eighties, after which there are many.

On September 4, 1883, Morris wrote to his daughter Jane, "I have got a lot of W. Cobbett's books; such queer things they are, but with plenty of stuff in them."<sup>8</sup> This reads very much like the letter of a man who had recently acquired and was getting acquainted with Cobbett's works for the first time. Corroboration for this view might be the fact that Morris' first mention of Cobbett occurred in a letter written to The Daily

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<sup>7</sup> John W. Mackail, The Life of William Morris (New York, 1922) I, 226.

<sup>8</sup> The Letters of William Morris, p. 183.

News on August 14, 1883, just three weeks earlier than the above letter to his daughter, who had for more than a month been vacationing in Hertfordshire. In his Daily News letter Morris complained of a "malodorous and insanitary" ditch near Hammersmith and wished that William Cobbett, "the master of plain-speaking," were able to apply his pen to the issue.<sup>9</sup>

All of Morris' other references to Cobbett follow the above period, none precede it. In November of the same year he delivered the lecture "Art Under Plutocracy," in which he referred to "London, the wen of all wens, as Cobbett called it."<sup>10</sup> In 1886, three years later, Morris again alluded to the "Great Wen"<sup>11</sup> and in the opening paragraph of A Dream of John Ball mentioned Cobbett by name.<sup>12</sup>

Whether or not the "lot of W. Cobbett's books" Morris purchased in 1883 included the History of the Protestant Reformation I have not been able to determine. The work is nowhere specifically mentioned. Mackail wrote that Morris knew Cobbett's Rural Rides "almost by heart." May Morris wrote of Cobbett's "Rural Rides, a book that amused my father very much. He used to quote largely from it to us, as well as from his 'Cottage Economy' and 'Advice to Young Men.'"<sup>13</sup> I think it is likely in view of Morris' reading habits--he usually read everything by an author he liked--that he did read the History, but

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> Works, XXIII, 181.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., XVI, 288.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., XVI, 215.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., XVIII, p. xxiii.



even if he had not, he had found repeated use of the medieval-modern contrast in Rural Rides. There too Morris could have found the "flashes of insight as to social matters far before his time" that he and Bax attributed to Cobbett in Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome.<sup>14</sup>

Morris had an acquaintance, although it probably started when he was almost sixty years old, with the medieval-modern contrasts of Cobbett. His knowledge of Southey, who in the Colloquies became the second nineteenth century Englishman to employ the device, is easier to delineate. There seems to be none. In the whole of William Morris there is not one mention of Southey or his works. Nor have I been able to find even a hint that Morris ever read a book of Southey's. Indeed, negative evidence seems strongly to suggest that he did not. Southey had written a play about Wat Tyler and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, a subject dear to Morris. If Morris had known the work, he almost certainly would have mentioned or alluded to it somewhere. Southey had presented in the Colloquies a Sir Thomas More who defended the establishment. One would expect some criticism of Southey's false picture of the sixteenth century martyr. The ex-laureate's reputation, as I have mentioned in connection with Ruskin's knowledge of him, had declined rapidly after his death. Morris' total neglect of him only serves to indicate the oblivion to which Southey had been relegated.

Southey did, however, make one great contribution to

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<sup>14</sup> William Morris and E. Belfort Bax, Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome (London, 1893), pp. 175-176.

Morris' medievalism. Though Morris seems to have been totally unacquainted with Southey's original works, it was through Southey's edition of Morte d'Arthur that he came to know Malory.<sup>15</sup> In 1855 Burne-Jones had found the work in a book store, and Morris had purchased it.<sup>16</sup> The impact of this work upon Morris I shall discuss in connection with other medieval authors by whom he was inspired.

One would expect William Morris to know of Pugin, the third in the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts. Morris' interest in gothic architecture remained strong throughout his life. His early letters,<sup>17</sup> his contributions to The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine,<sup>18</sup> his abortive vocational venture as an architect of gothic under George Street, and his vigorous activity late in life on behalf of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings betray an enthusiasm which was certain to have brought him into contact with Pugin's work.

He did know of it. In 1876 Morris spoke of Pugin in a letter to Mrs. Burne-Jones.<sup>19</sup> In 1888 Morris wrote for the Fortnightly Review an article entitled "The Revival of Architecture," which manifested his very thorough knowledge of the gothic revival in the nineteenth century. In it few names are mentioned,

<sup>15</sup> Southey's name appeared as editor; actually, the bulk of the editorial work seems to have been done by Upcott. (Thomas Malory, Le Morte Darthur, ed. Sir Edward Strachey [London, 1925], pp. xxxiii-xxxiv).

<sup>16</sup> Georgiana Burne-Jones, Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones (New York, 1906), I, 116-117.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Letters of William Morris, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> See especially "The Story of the Unknown Church" (pp. 28-33) and "The Churches of North France" (pp. 99-110).

<sup>19</sup> Letters of William Morris, p. 76.

but one thinks immediately of Pugin when Morris writes of those architects who "by dint of sympathetic study had more or less grasped the principles on which the design of that period [the middle ages] was founded," and who thought that gothic architecture "could be artificially replanted in a society totally different from that which gave birth to it."<sup>20</sup> A few pages later in the same article Morris mentions Pugin's Contrasts in a context which makes it obvious that he was well acquainted with the contents of the work. "We have come down a weary long way from Pugin's 'Contrasts.' We agree with him still, but we are driven to admire and imitate some of the very things he cursed, with our enthusiastic approbation."<sup>21</sup>

Other than this, however, Morris is strangely silent about Pugin. Two reasons might be adduced. First, as Morris progressed in life he grew more and more out of sympathy with Christianity. He had started Oxford, as Canon Dixon wrote, "an aristocrat, and a High Churchman."<sup>22</sup> His Puseyite leanings, however, were corrected by his reading of Ruskin,<sup>23</sup> and Morris remained an agnostic to the end of his life. His interest in gothic architecture likewise shifted. Unlike Pugin, who moved in the opposite direction, Morris came to admire medieval architecture less for religious and more for social reasons. The religious spirit which produced the medieval cathedrals became

<sup>20</sup> Works, XXII, 319.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., XXII, 328.

<sup>22</sup> Mackail, I, 48.

<sup>23</sup> Letters of William Morris, p. 185.

much less important to Morris than the freedom and joy which individual workmen experienced in building them. A second possible reason for Morris' ostensible disregard of Pugin might well lie with Ruskin. As we shall see, Ruskin was regarded by Morris' Oxford set as "a Luther of the Arts,"<sup>24</sup> both "a hero and a prophet."<sup>25</sup> Morris himself said that Ruskin's works "were at the time a sort of revelation to me."<sup>26</sup> Part of that revelation consisted of Ruskin's vicious denunciation of Pugin in Stones of Venice. Certainly Morris' attitude toward Pugin must have been tempered by his acknowledged prophet's statement that Pugin was "one of the smallest possible or conceivable architects."<sup>27</sup> There is a curious unconscious bit of irony in the fact that News from Nowhere pictures the Houses of Parliament, which it is now clear that Pugin designed, as a manure storage depot.<sup>28</sup>

After Pugin, Thomas Carlyle became the next Englishman to apply the medieval-modern contrast on an extensive scale. I have said that his Past and Present represents what is probably the high point of the tradition. And Morris was well acquainted with the work.

There can be no doubt that during his Oxford years Morris

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<sup>24</sup> "Ruskin and the Quarterly," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (May, 1856), 359.

<sup>25</sup> Mackail, I, 40; see also Burne-Jones, Memorials, I, 142.

<sup>26</sup> Letters of William Morris, p. 185.

<sup>27</sup> Ruskin, Works, IX, 438.

<sup>28</sup> Works, XVI, 32; for the clearest presentation of the argument that Pugin, not Charles Barry, is responsible for the Houses of Parliament designs, see Clark, The Gothic Revival, pp. 174-181.

was strongly influenced by Carlyle. Burne-Jones named Carlyle on the list of the Oxford set's favorite reading.<sup>29</sup> Mackail wrote that in 1853 they placed "Carlyle's 'Past and Present' . . . alongside of 'Modern Painters' as inspired and absolute truth."<sup>30</sup> And in the autumn of 1855 the members of the group reread and rediscussed Past and Present.<sup>31</sup> The esteem in which Carlyle was held by the group of young university men can be illustrated by the following quotation from their Oxford and Cambridge Magazine:

The most true, the most complete view to take of him is this. A Great Man born in these years in Britain to be a Guide to British Men. Behind him lies the citadel of Unbelief, stormed in his youth--the citadel which wore away the souls of so many heroes with hopeless strivings: now he heads his fellow countrymen, and seeks to lead them home--through many strange cities; over tempestuous seas of thought--to old forgotten Truth, to ancient Worth.<sup>32</sup>

According to Mackail, the influence of Carlyle continued into Morris' later life. "Among the great prose authors," the biographer wrote, "under whose influence he had fallen at Oxford, Carlyle and Ruskin were the two who continued to hold him most strongly."<sup>33</sup> I cannot completely agree with this view; I do not believe that Carlyle exerted a strong influence upon Morris much beyond his Oxford years. Certainly Carlyle intro-

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<sup>29</sup> Memorials, I, 142.

<sup>30</sup> Mackail, I, 40.

<sup>31</sup> Burne-Jones, Memorials, I, 116.

<sup>32</sup> "Carlyle, His Lamp for the New Years," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (December, 1856), 743.

<sup>33</sup> Mackail, I, 226.



duced Morris to the use of the medieval-modern contrast; certainly Morris admired him as one of the few who had led the "open rebellion against . . . Whiggery."<sup>34</sup> Too, Morris in 1886 placed Carlyle on his list of favorite authors submitted to the Pall Mall Gazette.<sup>35</sup> Yet in the broader sense of social theory, Morris and Carlyle grew wider apart with the passing years. There were elements of Carlyle's teachings which were not only irreconcilable, but downright repugnant to the social views of the later Morris. In 1856 Morris could speak of "loyal free-men, honoring their heroes" as a desirable thing,<sup>36</sup> but Morris in 1883 found Carlyle's master-man relationship untenable. "To my mind," he wrote to Maurice in that year, "no man is good enough to be any one's master without injuring himself at least, whatever he does for the servant."<sup>37</sup> Carlyle thought of work as man's duty, an obligation to be pursued with stern seriousness; Morris thought of work as man's joy. Carlyle was largely insensitive to art; Morris considered it the key to the better life. These are cardinal principles with the two men--and they are antithetical. Carlyle, and Ruskin as well, saw in the middle ages a beautiful, ordered social relationship between master and worker and sought in their different ways to impose the same sort of relationship upon the nineteenth century. Not

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<sup>34</sup> Works, XXIII, 279.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., XXII, p. xvi.

<sup>36</sup> William Morris, "Men and Women, by Robert Browning," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (March, 1856), 163.

<sup>37</sup> Mackail, II, 115.

Not Morris. Feudalism, like the capitalism which grew out of it was distasteful to him, and one wonders if he might have had Carlyle and Ruskin in mind when he wrote in 1888,

Then there are others who, looking back on the past, and perceiving that the workmen of the Middle Ages lived in more comfort and self-respect than ours do, even though they were subjected to the class rule of men who were looked on as another order of beings than they, think that if those conditions of life could be reproduced under our better political conditions the question would be solved for a time at least. Their schemes may be summed up in attempts, more or less preposterously futile, to graft a class of independent peasants on our system of wages and capital.<sup>38</sup>

The person in the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts to whom Morris owed the most was John Ruskin. Here Morris found a kindred spirit! Both were lovers of art, and both felt that the problems of society could best be approached through art. Both considered freedom and happiness of the individual workman to be the key not only to good art, but to the good life as well. Both hated modern, commercial civilization, and both were vigorously anti-industrial. Both looked longingly back to the middle ages, and, although what they saw differed, both contrasted the medieval with the modern in an attempt to lead their sick century back to social health.

There is ample testimony by which to measure the impact of Ruskin upon Morris. The influence started during Morris' undergraduate years in the early fifties and never ceased to be felt. His last tribute to Ruskin was the publication in

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<sup>38</sup> Works, XXIII, 77-78.

1892, four years before he died, of Ruskin's Nature of Gothic by the Kelmscott Press. "One of the few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century," Morris called it in the introduction to that edition; and he added, "To some of us when we first read it, now many years ago, it seemed to point out a new road on which the world should travel."<sup>39</sup> Mackail wrote with regard to the effect of that "celebrated chapter" upon Morris that it "kindled the beliefs of his whole life."<sup>40</sup>

The influence thus started at Oxford had immediate effects. Morris wrote that when he entered the university he "fell under the influence of the High Church or Puseyite school." This, he added, "was corrected by the books of John Ruskin which were at the time a sort of revelation to me."<sup>41</sup> But there were other immediate effects as well. No doubt the Oxford reading of Ruskin quickened Morris' social consciousness. In the letter which he wrote to his mother explaining his decision to give up a clerical career Morris spoke of thoughts "for the bettering of the world,"<sup>42</sup> a forecast perhaps of his later socialist activities. "Through him," Morris wrote years later in a little essay entitled "How I Became a Socialist," "I learned to give form to my discontent."<sup>43</sup> "My master," Morris called him in the same letter, but for whom "how deadly dull the world would have been

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<sup>39</sup> John Ruskin, The Nature of Gothic (Hammersmith, 1892), p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Mackail, II, 289.

<sup>41</sup> Letters of William Morris, p. 185.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Works, XXIII, 279.

twenty years ago!"<sup>44</sup>

That Ruskin, though not a Socialist himself, contributed to that cause, Morris was certain. "'Unto this Last' and 'The Political Economy of Art,'" wrote May Morris, "were books deeply admired by him as direct and eloquent statements of the condition of Art & Labour in the century."<sup>45</sup> The master's effect upon the working classes, thought Morris, had been great. "I have been surprised," he wrote in "Art and Socialism," "to find . . . such a hearty feeling toward John Ruskin among working-class audiences: they can see the prophet in him."<sup>46</sup> And to Bel-fort Bax, who was unsympathetic to Ruskin, Morris wrote,

I think that whatever damage Ruskin may have done to his influence by his strange bursts of fantastic perversity, he has shown much insight even into economical matters, and I am sure he has made many Socialists; his feeling against Commercialism is absolutely genuine and his expression of it most valuable.<sup>47</sup>

But the economic theory was not the part of Ruskin which most attracted and influenced Morris.<sup>48</sup> The major point of contact between the two men was art. I have pointed out in the previous chapter that one of the impulses which led Ruskin

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<sup>44</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., XVI, p. xvii.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 202.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., XIX, p. xxxvi.

<sup>48</sup> In fact, Morris experienced difficulty in becoming interested in any economic theory. His socialist lectures are noticeably uneconomic, although he did go to some trouble attempting to learn the economic side of socialism. He read, for example, Marx's Das Kapital and "suffered agonies of confusion of the brain over reading the pure economics of that great work." (Ibid., XXIII, 278).

into the work of social reform was his love of art. Great art he thought impossible under present social conditions, so he sought to reorder society. He insisted that the individual worker be allowed complete freedom of expression in his appointed task, a thing impossible in the nineteenth century's division-of-labor industrialism. Only insofar as the laborer is allowed this freedom of expression, can he be happy in his work; only if the laborer is happy in his work, can he produce true art.

The same things could be said of Morris. His love of art led him to contemplate the conditions under which art is possible. "It is impossible to exclude socio-political questions from the consideration of aesthetics," he wrote in "The Revival of Handicraft."<sup>49</sup> And Morris, like Ruskin, over and over again demanded freedom of expression and joy in one's labor. He himself practiced dyeing, designing, glass cutting, weaving, and a good many other handicrafts in an attempt to put the theory to a test.<sup>50</sup> Nor did Morris claim originality for the idea. In Hopes and Fears for Art Morris wrote, "I cannot help feeling continually as I speak that I am echoing his [Ruskin's] words."<sup>51</sup> In "Art Under Plutocracy," which emphasizes the relationship between a political system and the art produced under it, he said, "ART IS MAN'S EXPRESSION OF HIS JOY IN

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., XXII, 332.

<sup>50</sup> Speaking of his handicraft activities, Holbrook Jackson writes, "William Morris was Ruskin in practice." (William Morris, Craftsman--Socialist [London, 1908], p. 27).

<sup>51</sup> Works, XXII, 59.

LABOUR. If those are not Professor Ruskin's words they embody at least his teaching on this subject."<sup>52</sup> And in "The Lesser Arts," a lecture delivered in 1877, Morris reminded his audience that the essence of what he had to say had already been said by Ruskin. He told his workingman auditors that as for the use of the lesser arts in

giving us pleasure in our work, I scarcely know how to speak strongly enough of it. . . . I remember how a great man now living has spoken of it: I mean my friend Professor John Ruskin: if you read the chapter in the 2nd vol. of his "Stones of Venice" entitled, "On the Nature of Gothic, and the Office of the Workman therein," you will read at once the truest and the most eloquent words that can possibly be said on the subject. What I have to say upon it can scarcely be more than an echo of his words, yet . . . there is some use in reiterating a truth, lest it be forgotten.<sup>53</sup>

Certainly the impact of Ruskin's writings upon Morris was a strong one, especially that of the older man's "Nature of Gothic" chapter, in which he most effectively contrasted the medieval with the modern. In addition, a friendship grew between them. Judging from the available evidence, it was not an extremely close personal relationship,<sup>54</sup> certainly nothing like the friendship which developed between Ruskin and Burne-Jones. The first meeting with the hero of their Oxford years occurred in November, 1856, when Morris and Burne-Jones called upon him in London. The excitement which this first meeting produced upon them was recorded by Burne-Jones: "Isn't that

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 173.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., XXII, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Joan Evans, Ruskin's latest biographer, characterizes it as "very slight." (John Ruskin [London, 1954], p. 15).

like a dream? think of knowing Ruskin like an equal and being called his dear boys. Oh! he is so good and kind--better than his books, which are the best books in the world."<sup>55</sup> The friendship between the two younger men, who were then living together at Red Lion Square, and their idol quickly became a matter of regularly exchanged visit. Ruskin praised Burne-Jones' art as well as Morris' poetry. Of the latter Ruskin wrote in a letter to the Brownings in 1858, "I've seen his poems, just out, about old chivalry, and they are most noble--very, very great indeed--in their own peculiar way."<sup>56</sup>

The friendship thus started the two men seem to have maintained, and Morris always spoke of the personal relationship with something of pride.<sup>57</sup> They exchanged occasional letters, and Ruskin seems to have done some business with "the firm." In one letter written shortly after Morris and Company announced its intention of dealing in stained glass, a letter addressed "For the Rustic-Russet / and Hurly-Surly Carle / Guillelmus Mauritius," Ruskin wrote, "You bad boy, why haven't I any bits of glass yet?"<sup>58</sup>

Morris' acquaintance with both the works and the man had one very tangible result, the formation of the Society for the

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<sup>55</sup> Memorials, I, 147.

<sup>56</sup> Ruskin, Works, XXXVI, 280; Ruskin undoubtedly refers to Morris' Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems, which had just been issued.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Letters of William Morris, p. 204; Works, XXII, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Letters of William Morris, p. 168n.; "bad boy" Morris was at the time in his fiftieth year.

Protection of Ancient Buildings, or Anti-Scrape, as Morris called it.<sup>59</sup> In 1854 Ruskin had written an essay, "The Opening of the Crystal Palace," which was in essence a plea for a society to protect ancient buildings from the work of the restorers.<sup>60</sup> This is precisely the idea that Morris carried out twenty-three years later when he formed the S.P.A.B. Morris believed with Ruskin on the matter of restoration; it was impossible to "restore" medieval churches because "since that time the whole structure of society has altered, and the position of the workman changed; . . . the long chain of tradition which was unbroken till the end of the Middle Ages has been snapped."<sup>61</sup> In 1877 Morris founded Anti-Scrape; Ruskin added his powerful influence to the organization when he became a charter member.<sup>62</sup> Two years later, while Ruskin and Count Zorzi were in Venice making spirited protests on the restorations being made on St. Mark's, William Morris and Burne-Jones spoke at an Oxford meeting designed to add English voices to the same protest. The following year, 1880, Ruskin bowed out of active Anti-Scrape work. He wrote to Morris, who had asked him to speak at a meeting of the society,

Please recollect--or hereafter know--by these presents--that I am old, ill, and liable any day to be struck crazy if I get into a passion. And,

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<sup>59</sup> Mackail, I, 357.

<sup>60</sup> Ruskin, Works, XII, 417-432.

<sup>61</sup> Works, XXII, 432.

<sup>62</sup> As did Carlyle, who--Morris must have grimaced--joined in the hope that Wren's buildings might be preserved. (Mackail, I, 355).



therefore, while I can still lecture--if I choose--on rattlesnakes' tails, I can't on anything I care about. Nor do I care to say on this matter more than I have done, especially since I know that the modern mob will trample to-morrow what it spares to-day. You younger men must found a new dynasty--the old things are passed away.<sup>63</sup>

We have now completed our examination of Morris' contact with those who had contributed to the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts; we have seen that with the exception of Robert Southey's, Morris knew their work. Cobbett's writings he was fond of, especially Rural Rides, a work which contains many contrasts of the medieval with the modern. Pugin's Contrasts he knew. Carlyle's works, Past and Present in particular, had exerted a powerful influence on the young Morris; although that influence tended to fade as he advanced in years. Last, the work of Ruskin and the tremendous impact of the "Nature of Gothic" chapter remained an abiding influence with Morris throughout his life.

Morris' contact with the tradition, however, only partly explains his total medievalism. The habit of contrasting the medieval with the modern represented only one manifestation of the nineteenth century's considerable enthusiasm for the middle ages; there were others as well. The contrasts of Cobbett, Pugin, Carlyle, and Ruskin only augmented Morris' already established interest in the medieval period; they were but tributaries which swelled a larger stream. Let us now turn to an examination of the other influences which helped shape Morris' medieval interests.

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<sup>63</sup> Ruskin, Works, XXXVII, 315.

"The love of the Middle Ages," wrote Mackail, "was born in him."<sup>64</sup> We have no record of such genealogical influence, but we do have evidence that very early in his life Morris came into contact with the medieval spirit of his century. An early reader who "by the time I was 7 years old . . . had read a very great many books, good, bad and indifferent,"<sup>65</sup> Morris was "deep in the Waverley novels"<sup>66</sup> at the age of four and had finished them by the age of seven. And like Ruskin, who also had read all of Scott's novels at an early age, Morris continued to read them throughout his life. When recounting the many winter evenings spent in family reading "round the great fireplace, Father reading aloud . . . the family classics," May Morris wrote, "We have many times been through the whole of Scott this way."<sup>67</sup> In 1886 Morris submitted to the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette a list of his favorite books. Scott's novels, "except the one or two which he wrote when he was hardly alive," are accompanied by the comment, "I should like to say here that I yield to no one, not even Ruskin, in my love and admiration for Scott."<sup>68</sup> It is not surprising that the young Morris, thoroughly saturated with the gaudy romance of Scott's medievalism, should have had among his toys "a little suit of armour, in which he rode on his pony in the park."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Mackail, I, 10.

<sup>65</sup> Letters of William Morris, p. 185.

<sup>66</sup> Mackail, I, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Works, XXII, p. xvii.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., XXII, p. xvi.

<sup>69</sup> Mackail, I, 10.

Yet we know that the reading of Scott and playing in a suit of armor need not have any more enduring influence on Morris than the reading of Cooper and playing in an Indian suit need have an influence on a modern American youth. Such enthusiasms, without mature reinforcement, can fade; however, Morris found not only reinforcement, but also intellectual stimulation for his medieval interests when he entered Oxford in 1853. The town itself, "still in all its main aspects a mediaeval city,"<sup>70</sup> was conducive to medievalism. Years later Morris wrote in "The Aims of Art," "The memory of its grey streets as they then were has been an abiding influence and pleasure in my life."<sup>71</sup>

At an Oxford where English literature was still an extra-curricular activity and "all reading men were Tennysonians,"<sup>72</sup> Morris came under the medieval spell. With his new friend, Edward Burne-Jones, Morris "discovered" books which were to remain major influences throughout his life. Speaking of this period, Küster says, "Malory, Froissart, Chaucer: these are the great names which became influential in the formation of his medievalism."<sup>73</sup>

So strong was the impact of these three medievals upon Morris, that it will be profitable for us to discuss their

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., I, 30.

<sup>71</sup> Works, XXIII, 85.

<sup>72</sup> Mackail, I, 46.

<sup>73</sup> "Malory, Froissart, Chaucer: das sind die grossen Namen, die für die Formbestimmung seines Mediaevalismus entscheidend wurden." (E. C. Küster, Mittelalter und Antike bei William Morris [Berlin, 1928], p. 33).



individual influence upon him. Together the two friends read through Malory's Morte d'Arthur which Burne-Jones had found in a second-hand book store and Morris had purchased. On the strength of Malory and the early poetry of Tennyson, the young Morris designed "a complete Arthur cycle,"<sup>74</sup> a plan which was not given up until the first four parts of Tennyson's Idylls of the King appeared in 1859.<sup>75</sup> But even though the young Morris gave up his scheme for an Arthurian cycle, we have plenty of evidence to demonstrate the impact of Malory upon him. The Defence of Guenevere volume (1858) contains predominately Arthurian material, and May Morris, the poet's daughter, has preserved several Malory-inspired fragments which were written during her father's Oxford years. When Morris later took to painting, the influence of Malory continued. His first painting was entitled "Sir Tristram after his illness in the Garden of King Mark's Place, recognized by the dog he had given to Iseult;" his contribution to the ill-fated murals in the Oxford library was called "How Sir Palomydes loved La Belle Iseult with exceeding great love out of measure, and how she loved not him again but rather Sir Tristram;" and after he had married and purchased Red House, he and his Pre-Raphaelite brothers "painted the walls with scenes from the Round Table histories."<sup>76</sup>

The second of the abiding primary sources of medievalism

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<sup>74</sup>

Works, I, p. xix.

<sup>75</sup>

Mackail, I, 39.

<sup>76</sup>

Works, I, p. xiv.

with which Morris came into contact at Oxford was Froissart. While talking of the books which Morris and Burne-Jones read to each other, Mackail, who is the only real source for a good deal of information concerning Morris' early life, says, "Among the works thus read through were . . . masses of mediaeval chronicles."<sup>77</sup> Froissart's Chronicle was certainly one of them. There is an allusion to Froissart in "Svend and his Brethren," one of Morris' contributions to The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine.<sup>78</sup> And in a poem entitled "Concerning Geffray Teste Noire," written either during or shortly after his Oxford years, Morris mentions Froissart by name. The speaker in this dramatic monologue set in the middle ages ends the poem with these words:

John Froissart knoweth he is dead by now,  
No doubt, but knoweth not this tale just passed;  
Perchance then you can tell him what I show.<sup>79</sup>

This mention of the Anglo-French chronicler, however, does not indicate the lasting influence which Froissart was to have on Morris' medieval picture. In 1868, in reply to a German who had written to ask if Chaucer had been his model, Morris wrote:

I admit that I have been a great admirer of Chaucer, and that his work has had, especially in early years, much influence on me; but I think not much on my style. . . . I may say that I am fairly steeped in mediaevalism generally; but the Icelandic Sagas, our own Border Ballad, and Froissart (through Berner's translation of about 1520) have had as much influence on me as (or more than) anything else.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Mackail, I, 39.

<sup>78</sup> I (August, 1856), 499.

<sup>79</sup> Works, I, 81.

<sup>80</sup> Mackail, I, 203-204. (This letter and many others are preserved only in Mackail's Life).

And May Morris, when looking back on the influence of family reading, mentions "Lord Berner's Froissart, from whose pages we learnt much of the colour and movement of Anglo-French life in the fourteenth century."<sup>81</sup> When near the end of their lives Burne-Jones and Morris were printing on the Kelmscott Press the books they loved, an edition of Froissart was projected. It was to be started "directly the Chaucer was finished," but all that remains of the ambitious project are "thirty-two pages in type and two splendid pages with cusped ornamented letters and shields in the borders."<sup>82</sup>

In addition to Malory and Froissart, Morris and Burne-Jones met with Chaucer's works while at Oxford. In 1855, their third year at the university, the two read through all of Chaucer,<sup>83</sup> and the excitement of that experience was never to fade completely. We have already seen Morris' admission "that I have been a great admirer of Chaucer, and that his work has had, especially in early years, much influence on me."<sup>84</sup> The same sort of tribute can be found in his poetry. The "L'envoi" to The Earthly Paradise in 1870 contains Morris' most eloquent praise of "My Master, GEOFFRY CHAUCER,"<sup>85</sup> and he drew a parallel between his own poems and those of Chaucer.

Death have we hated, knowing not what it meant;

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<sup>81</sup> Works, V, p. xviii.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., XV, p. xxix.

<sup>83</sup> Mackail, I, 63.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., I, 203.

<sup>85</sup> Works, VI, 331.



Life have we loved, through green leaf and through  
sere,

Though still the less we knew of its intent:  
The Earth and Heaven through countless year on year,  
Slow changing, were to us but curtains fair,  
Hung round about a little room, where play  
Weeping and laughter of man's empty day.<sup>86</sup>

Yet the greatest tribute Morris paid to his master came in 1895, more than forty years after he and Burne-Jones had read Chaucer for the first time. In that year the Kelmscott Chaucer, a work of love for the two men, was issued after five years of preparation. Burne-Jones had designed all of the eighty-seven wood-cuts; Morris had done the type, the illuminations, and the initial letters; both looked upon the work as their greatest printing achievement. Looking back through the years, Burne-Jones said that he and Morris had finally achieved at the end of their lives what they would have done at Oxford had they the opportunity.<sup>87</sup>

These three medieval authors, Malory, Froissart, and Chaucer, were the most important primary sources for Morris' early picture of the middle ages. From them he captured the external spirit of the medieval England he loved so well. In them he found no puzzling metaphysical speculations, but only an active panoramic view of medieval life. For Morris' was not a philosophic mind; he was far more interested in the design

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., VI, 332.

<sup>87</sup> Memorials, II, 278.

on Launcelot's shield, the sore on a cook's shin, or the stained glass of a medieval church than he was in the medieval metaphysics.<sup>88</sup>

But the discovery of these three authors was not the young Oxford students' only contact with medievalism. Both Morris and his friend Burne-Jones entered the university with the intention of taking orders in the Church of England, and they entered while vestiges of the Puseyite movement still remained. Mackail tells us that their high church enthusiasm led them to plan the foundation of a monastic order with Sir Galahad as its patron saint. It was in Morris' words to be a "Crusade and Holy Warfare against the age."<sup>89</sup> Soon, however, the young men found that they could use in their war against the age more agreeable weapons than celibacy.<sup>90</sup>

In 1856 Morris and his friends organized and published a new journal, The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine. The original intention was that members of both universities should share the burden, but actually only two Cambridge men, Vernon Lushington and Wilfred Healy, contributed; the bulk of the labor fell upon the Oxford group and in particular upon Morris and William Fulford.<sup>91</sup> Altogether twelve monthly issues were

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<sup>88</sup> Works, XVI, 265.

<sup>89</sup> Mackail, I, 65.

<sup>90</sup> Not Morris, but Burne-Jones seems to have been the real spark behind the monastic experiment. (Memorials, I, 77, 102).

<sup>91</sup> The Oxford group was composed of William Morris, Richard W. Dixon, William Fulford, Charles Joseph Faulkner, Cormell Price, Harry MacDonald, Edward Burne-Jones, and Godfrey

published.

For the most part the magazine makes dull reading today. The many tales of thwarted love and early death by broken heart indicate only the emotional immaturity of the contributors.<sup>92</sup> However, the magazine does have interest insofar as it helps to explain the intellectual milieu of the young William Morris. The young enthusiasts purposed to improve the character of their age, to expose its ugliness, and to point the way to a more beautiful society. Dissatisfaction with the turmoil of their own nineteenth century is an element which can be found throughout the twelve issues. The very first page speaks of "this nineteenth century, in the midst of which God has placed us, with its whirl of conflicting principles, its tossing sea of theories and anachronisms, beliefs and disbeliefs, truths of Heaven and falsehoods of the Pit, each struggling in its own direction, and the whole mass drifting--whither?"<sup>93</sup> Victorian admiration for material progress the young enthusiasts attacked at every turn. Macaulay, who "delights in comparing the past with the present, in showing how what once

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(91 cont.) Lushington. The magazine is often called in literary histories a Pre-Raphaelite organ, but this is only partially true. It did represent in spirit the sentiments of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; actually, however, it started as an independent project, Morris and Burne-Jones not yet having come under the Rossetti spell.

92 In this respect, see Morris' comment years later that the magazine "was very young indeed." (Letters of William Morris, p. 185).

93 "Sir Philip Sidney," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (January, 1856), 1.

was of mud is now of marble," is charged with having "no sympathy with the grand simplicity of the mediaeval times."<sup>94</sup> An age--and here is unmistakably the influence of Ruskin--which "regarded the electric telegraph or the steam-engine as the noblest production of the human mind" is asked to take stock of itself, for "with all our boasting and the boasting of the last few generations, our safety lies in imitating in much that Past which they and we have too much despised and neglected; in imitating it so far as we are yet able, for in some things we are almost hopelessly behind it."<sup>95</sup>

Reformers convinced of the wickedness of their century and with their minds deep in the middle ages could not find better inspiration than in the work of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin. Carlyle's Past and Present, wrote Mackail, the group accepted "as inspired and absolute truth;" Ruskin became to them "a hero and a prophet."<sup>96</sup> The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine contributions abundantly justify the statements. Carlyle and Ruskin are given credit for having led a "godly crusade against falsehood, doubt, and wretched fashion, against hypocrisy and mammon, and lack of earnestness."<sup>97</sup> Carlyle's Past and Present is "part of our English Bible;"<sup>98</sup> Ruskin, as I

<sup>94</sup> "Mr. Macaulay," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (March, 1856), 182.

<sup>95</sup> "A Few Words Concerning Plato and Bacon," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (March, 1856), 189-190.

<sup>96</sup> Mackail, I, 40.

<sup>97</sup> "The Newcomes," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (January, 1856), 53.

<sup>98</sup> "Carlyle, His Lamp for the New Years," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (December, 1856), 747.



have mentioned earlier, is called "a Luther of the Arts."<sup>99</sup> And as one would expect, these young devotees of Carlyle and Ruskin eloquently praised the feudal principle of the middle ages. "The world never saw such an organized society as was fashioned under its sway. . . . Kings were good kings, nobles true nobles, priests true priests, subjects true subjects; the methods they chose were fit methods, and they did great things; a brave, devout and manly spirit bore rule."<sup>100</sup> The feudal principle was called "a beautiful Theory of universal Loyalty from man to man through all the grades of society," which, "in a wiser, larger shape [should be] fitted to our own times."<sup>101</sup>

The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine indicates sufficiently that the group had been turned by Carlyle and Ruskin to examine closely the medieval period; it indicates as well the outlet which that medieval interest took. William Morris' contributions, for example, are saturated with medievalism. It is significant that his first published prose, "The Story of an Unknown Church," is set in the middle ages. Not only does the little story demonstrate Morris' interest in gothic architecture, but it demonstrates also the ease with which he could project himself into his beloved medieval period. "I was," the first sentence of the story reads, "the master-mason of a church

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<sup>99</sup> "Ruskin and the Quarterly," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (May, 1856), 359.

<sup>100</sup> "Carlyle, His Lamp for the New Years," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (December, 1856), 746-747.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 768. For other passages extolling at length the feudal principle, see pp. 235, 304, 305.

that was built more than six hundred years ago."<sup>102</sup> In three other stories, "A Dream," "Lindenberg Pool," and "The Druid and the Maiden," Morris employed the dream technique of escaping into the past, a device he was later to use so successfully in A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere. Likewise, his poetical contributions betray his medieval enthusiasm. Certainly his first published poem, "Winter Weather," which tells the story of two medieval knights tilting by moonlight outside the town walls, looks forward to the Defence of Guenevere volume two years later. In unexpected places as well, Morris' medieval interests are betrayed. In "Frank's Sealed Letter," a dismal failure and the only narrative Morris ever wrote which was set in the nineteenth century, Hugh reads to Mabel, his love, a medieval tale of knights and their ladies. In his review of Browning's Men and Women, which contained only one poem written on a medieval subject, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," Morris said of it, "In my own heart I think I love this poem the best of all in these volumes."<sup>103</sup>

The magazine was the product of youthful idealism and like most such products was doomed to eventual failure. Shortly before its termination Burne-Jones rationalized, "The Mag. is going to smash--let it go! the world is not converted and

<sup>102</sup> "The Story of an Unknown Church," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (January, 1856), 28.

<sup>103</sup> "Men and Women, by Robert Browning," The Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I (March, 1856), 169. (Men and Women was originally published in two volumes, hence "these volumes.")

never will be."<sup>104</sup> Reforming zeal had permeated its pages; Carlyle and Ruskin had been accepted as prophets of the new life. These things are important to an understanding of William Morris. In Carlyle's Past and Present and in Ruskin's work, especially the Stones of Venice, Morris saw the medieval past used as a basis for criticism of the social dislocations of the present. The "Nature of Gothic" chapter of the latter, Morris wrote many years afterward, pointed out to the Oxford men "a new road on which the world should travel."<sup>105</sup> Except for a short lapse after Rossetti had persuaded him that he could not reform the world and should take up painting instead, except for that short period, Morris was to use his medieval materials with a social purpose for the rest of his life.

The work of John Ruskin, however, was to have one immediate effect on the young Oxford student; it turned him away from his Puseyite leanings. Years later, when recalling his Oxford experience in a biographical letter to Andreas Scheu, the German Socialist, Morris wrote,

I went to Oxford in 1853 as a member of Exeter College; I took very ill to the studies of the place; but fell to very vigorously on history and especially mediaeval history, all the more perhaps because at this time I fell under the influence of the High Church or Puseyite school; this latter phase . . . was corrected by the books of John Ruskin which were at the time a sort of revelation to me.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Mackail, I, 111.

<sup>105</sup> May Morris, William Morris; Artist, Writer, Socialist (Oxford, 1936), I, 292.

<sup>106</sup> Letters of William Morris, p. 185.

It was this revelation that changed Morris' mind about taking orders; instead he apprenticed himself to G. E. Street, an Oxford architect who was engaged at the time in the construction of gothic buildings.

I believe we can say that Morris by the time he left Oxford had come into contact with virtually every outlet by which the nineteenth century expressed its medieval enthusiasms. He had met with the romantic action of Scott's medievalism, the emotional beauty of Keats'.<sup>107</sup> He had, with the England of his day, been thrilled by Tennyson. He had come to know and love medieval writers, especially Chaucer, Malory, and Froissart. He had come under the influence of the Puseyite Movement, if only to be rescued by John Ruskin and a growing interest in both the Pre-Raphaelites and the Gothic Architectural Revival. Finally, he had come into contact with Carlyle's and Ruskin's use of medievalism as a social corrective.

Yet the early work of Morris was not to display his medievalism as a social corrective. That art-for-art's-sake strain in the Pre-Raphaelite movement overpowered his reforming zeal, or at least turned it in an artistic direction. His early poetry is characterized by a complete detachment from Victorian England. He tries in The Earthly Paradise to

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The dichotomy is from Beers, p. 129. That Morris admired Keats is apparent in a letter he wrote to Charles Cowden Clarke, in which he spoke of "Keats, for whom I have such boundless admiration, and whom I venture to call one of my masters." (Mackail, I, 206).

Forget six counties overhung with smoke,  
 Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,  
 Forget the spreading of the hideous town;  
 Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,  
 And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,  
 While nigh the thronged warf Geoffrey Chaucer's  
     pen  
 Moves over bills of lading--mid such times  
 Shall dwell the hollow puppets of my rhymes.<sup>108</sup>

The Defence of Guenevere volume, a curious mixture of poems ✓  
 written with the spirit of Keats, the matter of Malory and  
 Froissart, the manner of Browning, is composed of medieval  
 material throughout. Another early work, The Fall of Troy,  
 though classic in origin, is medieval in treatment. Morris'  
 Troy "is a medieval town; the warriors are knights," remarked  
 Douglas Bush,

He instinctively saw the Trojan story as it had  
 come down from Dares and Dictys to Caxton and Lydgate.  
 With medieval freedom he mixed and greatly embel-  
 lished his sources so that the result was something  
 quite new. In medieval fashion he emphasized ro-  
 mantic incidents, individual rather than national  
 fortunes, and above all, the feelings of the char-  
 acters, especially in regard to love.<sup>109</sup>

As late as 1868 when Morris published The Earthly Paradise, we  
 still see the detached romanticism of his Pre-Raphaelite herit-  
 age, a romanticism which he was later to abandon.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Works, III, 3.

<sup>109</sup> Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry (Cam-  
 bridge, Mass., 1937), p. 299.

<sup>110</sup> Summing up the medievalism in Morris' early work, Küster  
 says, "In der ersten Phase seines Mediaevalismus ist  
 Morris flamboyanter Gotiker. Er ist der Auffassung vom  
 ausgehenden Mittelalter, wie wir sie jetzt haben: als  
 einer Zeit der Polarität des Gefühls der heftigen Leiden-  
 schaften und Spannungen, der Dürsterkeit und Schwermut und  
 Zerrissenheit vor dem Hintergrund einer wesentlich aristo-  
 kratischen Lebensauffassung, nie wieder so nahe gekommen,  
 wie in diesen kostbaren frühen Stücken." (p. 53).

But Morris was not always to be the "idle singer of an empty day." He had read his Ruskin and Carlyle too closely for that, and his later work amply answers the question he had posed: "Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time, / Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?"<sup>111</sup> Starting with the early sixties, Morris' medievalism found two other outlets. First, he turned his attention to the manufacture of decorative articles. Second, and a bit later, he was to become a socialist.

I have mentioned earlier that John Ruskin's medievalism resulted in a strong anti-industrial, anti-commercial feeling. William Morris' scorn for the mammon-worship of nineteenth century commerce, although not couched in the vitriolic language of Munera Pulveris or Unto this Last, was every bit as genuine as that of Ruskin. Like his master he realized that commerce was destroying the clean and the beautiful. In "The Lesser Arts," a lecture delivered in 1877, Morris ironically wrote,

Is money to be gathered? cut down the pleasant trees among the houses, pull down ancient and venerable buildings for the money that a few square yards of London dirt will fetch; blacken rivers, hide the sun and poison the air with smoke and worse, and it's nobody's business to see to it or mend it: that is all that modern commerce, the counting-house forgetful of the workshop, will do for us herein.<sup>112</sup>

For this filth the commercial spirit was largely responsible, and Morris liked to "leap back across the intervening years,

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<sup>111</sup> Works, III, 1.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., XXII, 24.

across the waste of gathering commercialism, into the later Middle Ages,"<sup>113</sup> to an England which was clean and neat and beautiful. Often, as in A Dream of John Ball, Morris contrasted the beauty of pre-commercial, medieval England with the ugliness prevalent in his own day. And it is no coincidence that Hammond tells Morris in News from Nowhere, "Like the mediaevals, we like everyhing trim and clean, and orderly and bright."<sup>114</sup>

Correlative to Morris' anti-commercialism was an equally strong anti-industrialism. Here again the influence of John Ruskin can be seen. To both Ruskin and Morris, as George Tiltonson has pointed out, "machines brought misery and boredom into workshops" which in pre-industrial days "were jolly as any scene out of News from Nowhere."<sup>115</sup> Both looked back at the pre-industrial middle ages with an anti-machine nostalgia. Indicative of this feeling in Morris is a letter he wrote to a friend in 1891. Speaking of the Kelmscott Press work--and he used hand presses only--Morris wrote, "Pleased as I am with my printing, when I saw my two men at work on the press yesterday with their sticky printers' ink, I couldn't help lamenting the simplicity of the scribe and his desk, and his black ink and blue and red ink, and I almost felt ashamed of my press after all."<sup>116</sup> Yet Morris was not quite as irrational as Ruskin in

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., XVI, p. xx.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., XVI, 73.

<sup>115</sup> "Morris and Machines," Fortnightly Review, CXLI (1934), 464.

<sup>116</sup> Letters of William Morris, p. 338.

his scorn of machinery. One suspects that in Ruskin's utopia there would be no machines whatsoever. In Morris', and I speak here of News from Nowhere, machines were allowed, but only for work which "would be irksome to do by hand." However, "in all work which it is a pleasure to do by hand machinery is done without."<sup>117</sup> The goal, Morris pointed out in "Art and Its Producers," was that "we should be the masters of our machines and not their slaves, as we are now."<sup>118</sup> Perhaps he had Ruskin in mind when he wrote in Signs of Change:

I know that to some cultivated people, people of the artistic turn of mind, machinery is particularly distasteful, and they will be apt to say you will never get your surroundings pleasant so long as you are surrounded by machinery. I don't quite admit that; it is the allowing machines to be our masters and not our servants that so injures the beauty of life nowadays.<sup>119</sup>

As early as 1861 this anti-industrial, anti-commercial feeling of which I have been speaking manifested itself in a physical way. In April of that year Morris and his money joined hands with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown, Edward Burne-Jones, Charles Faulkner, Peter Marshall, and Philip Webb to form a firm dedicated to the ideal of medieval craftsmanship. In their England this small but dignified group saw ugliness everywhere, and they sought in their little way to beautify that England by the manufacture of hand-woven carpets and tapestries, hand-painted wallpaper and stained glass,

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<sup>117</sup> Works, XVI, 97.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., XXII, 352.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 24.

hand-carved furniture, and hand-printed books. From its very inception Morris shouldered the bulk of the work,<sup>120</sup> but it was not until 1875 that the original organization was dissolved and Morris formed his own company to continue the rebellion against the industrialization of his age. For it was his strong belief--stated hundreds of times in his prose works--that man to be happy must work with his hands and must execute from start to finish his own creation. None but the simplest tools should be used, and those not to substitute for but to work with the craftsman. Ruskin, who thought Morris the only person who thus went "straight to the accurate point of the craftsman's question,"<sup>121</sup> had earlier suggested the theory; Morris put it into operation.

The second activity into which Morris threw all of his energies, the Socialist Movement, was in his case an outgrowth of the first. Morris and Company, as Holbrook Jackson has pointed out, was more than a business venture, it was a social movement.<sup>122</sup> And Morris, who believed it "impossible to exclude socio-political questions from the consideration of aesthetics,"<sup>123</sup> was attracted to socialism not by economic but by artistic considerations.<sup>124</sup> Dignity of labor he felt necessary for the production of a work of art, so it became--even prior

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<sup>120</sup> Mackail, I, 315.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., II, 212.

<sup>122</sup> William Morris, Craftsman-Socialist, p. 20.

<sup>123</sup> Works, XXII, 332.

<sup>124</sup> On this point see Anna von Helmholtz-Phelan, The Social Philosophy of William Morris (Durham, North Carolina, 1927), p. 47.

to his conversion in 1883--impossible for him "to speak about Art without speaking of the conditions under which it was produced."<sup>125</sup> In this way "the lecturing on Art," wrote May Morris, ". . . grew insensibly into lecturing and preaching for Socialism."<sup>126</sup>

These lectures and the ones which followed during his years of active socialism abundantly employed the medieval-modern contrast, a fact which makes particularly apt Ellen's comment in News from Nowhere: "You have begun again your never-ending contrast between the past and this present."<sup>127</sup> Like Cobbett and Ruskin, Morris never tired of contrasting the nineteenth century worker with his medieval predecessor. The rude and degraded worker of today, Morris said in "Dawn of a New Epoch," "is certainly no better as to material condition than the serf of the Middle Ages, perhaps he is worse."<sup>128</sup> Following generally the theory of "rough plenty" as expounded by Thorold Rogers, of whom I shall say more later, Morris painted for his audiences an attractive picture of the medieval worker's lot: "Life was easy, and common necessities plenteous; the holidays of the Church were holidays in the modern sense of the word, downright play-days, and there were ninety-six obligatory ones: nor were the people tame and sheep-like, but as rough-handed and bold a set of good fellows as ever rubbed

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<sup>125</sup> Works, XIX, p. xv.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., XVI, p. xvii.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., XVI, 203.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 125.

through life under the sun."<sup>129</sup> However, the most important advantage that the medieval laborer enjoyed was freedom in his work, a freedom to lavish "treasurers of human hope and thought" on anything he made, "from a cathedral to a porridge-pot."<sup>130</sup> Here is certainly the key to Morris' view of the medieval worker, and it inspired in Lectures on Art and Industry one of his most explicit and sustained medieval-modern contrasts:

Here . . . is a strange contrast, which I most seriously invite you to consider, between the craftsman of the Middle Ages and him of to-day. The mediaeval man sets to work at his own time, in his own house; probably makes his tool, instrument, or simple machine himself, even before he gets on to his web, or his lump of clay, or what not. What ornament there shall be on his finished work he himself determines, and his mind and hand designs it and carries it out; tradition, . . . the custom of his craft, does indeed guide and help him; otherwise he is free. . . . But he who has taken his place, how does he work and live? . . . He has to be at the factory gates by the time the bell rings, or he is fined or "sent to grass." Nay, not always will the factory gate open to him; unless the master, controlled himself by a market of which he knows little and the "hand" nothing, allows him space to work in and a machine to work at, he must turn back and knock about the streets, as many thousands are doing to-day in England. But suppose him there, happy before his machine; up and down he has to follow it, day in, day out, and what thoughts he has must be given to something else than his work. I repeat, 'tis as much as he can do to know that thing the machine (not he) is making. Design and ornament, what has he to do with that? . . . Need I say how and where he lives? Lodged in a sweltering dog-hole, with miles and miles of similar dog-holes between him and the

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 60.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 90; the contrast continued with the plight of the modern worker--"His minutes are too rich with the burden of perpetual profit for him to be allowed to waste one of them on art; the present system will not allow him--cannot allow him--to produce works of art."

fair fields of the country, which in grim mockery is called "his." Sometimes on holidays, bundled out by train to have a look at it, to be bundled into his grimy hell again in the evening. Poor wretch!<sup>131</sup>

Before his death in 1896 Morris delivered hundreds of lectures for the socialist cause. And in almost all of them he hammered home the same message to the dirty Victorian workers in his audience: man must be allowed to turn to his work in the spirit of a fourteenth century craftsman, and any system which stood in the way of such a return must be destroyed. In the preface to a collection of his Lectures on Socialism, he wrote,

I have only to say that these lectures put some sides of Socialism before the reader from the point of view of a man who is neither a professional economist nor a professional politician. My ordinary work has forced on me the contrast between times past and the present day, and has made me look with grief and pain on things which many men notice but little, if at all. . . . I was driven to the conclusion that all these uglinesses [of the nineteenth century] are but the outward expression of the innate moral baseness into which we are forced by our present form of society.<sup>132</sup>

Such a conclusion could have come straight out of Ruskin, for he too had seen in medieval art indications of moral goodness far superior to that of the present day. But the parallel stops here, for in Ruskin's view that moral goodness was contingent upon a feudal organization of society, one which Morris would not endorse.

Instead of concentrating as did all the previous users of

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., XXII, 312-313.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 1-2.

the medieval-modern contrast, upon the medieval period's evidences of social stability, Morris tended to concentrate upon signs of social unrest in that period. His active socialism, of course, forced him into a position where he could not condone social hierarchy in any form, feudal or otherwise. He was forced, indeed, to interpret movements in the middle ages in terms of the class struggle which would ultimately "bring about the end of mastery and the triumph of fellowship."<sup>133</sup>

In this light we must examine Morris' attitude toward the guilds, the history of which he thought "is practically the history of the people in the Middle Ages."<sup>134</sup> Morris interpreted the guild movement as the struggle on the part of free laborers to acquire collective rights within the framework of the feudal structure. The movement was, Morris wrote in Lectures on Art and Industry, "a new and mighty force . . . of secular combination among free men, producers, and distributors."<sup>135</sup> This spirit of association and fellowship which Morris thought characterized early guild development was, of course, akin to socialism; and had that spirit not been sidetracked by the growth, within the guilds, of a commercial middle class, the historical development of a true socialist society would have been accelerated. In a lecture entitled "Art and Industry in the Fourteenth Century" Morris wrote,

If the leading element of association in the life of the mediaeval workman could have cleared

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 58.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., XXII, 382-383.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., XXII, 303.

itself of certain drawbacks, and have developed logically along the road that seemed to be leading it onward, it seems to me it could scarcely have stopped short of forming a true society founded on the equality of labour: the Middle Ages, so to say, saw the promised land of Socialism from afar, like the Israelites, and like them had to turn back again into the desert.<sup>136</sup>

As the guilds expanded in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, Morris thought, they lost sight of their original ideals. They had "contributed largely to the death of the feudal hierarchy," but they substituted only a capitalistic system with its "so-called free-labourer" and its philosophy of production for profit rather than for use.<sup>137</sup>

It was to the period before the decay of the guilds, before the original spirit of fellowship and organization had disappeared, that Morris most often turned. As Mackail pointed out, Morris went back to the late fourteenth century not to stay there, but to reorient a principle which had gone astray.<sup>138</sup> Morris himself expressed a hope that his nineteenth century England would "take up the chain [of development] where it fell from the hands of the craft-guilds of the fifteenth century."<sup>139</sup> No coincidence is it that in News from Nowhere Morris' utopia bears strong resemblances to fourteenth century England. The houses were so constructed that, wrote Morris, "I fairly felt as if I were alive in the fourteenth century."<sup>140</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., XXII, 388.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., XXII, 347.

<sup>138</sup> Mackail, II, 358.

<sup>139</sup> Works, XVI, p. xxi.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., XVI, 23.

The clothing worn by both the women <sup>141</sup> and the men "would have served very well as a costume for a picture of fourteenth century life."<sup>142</sup>

But the work which most effectively returned to the late fourteenth century, that period during which the spirit of association and fellowship was still alive, was Morris' semi-historical romance, A Dream of John Ball. Whether or not we accept Jackson's statement that it represents "perhaps the highest point of all his work as a writer,"<sup>143</sup> Morris' A Dream of John Ball is certainly the most successful medieval-modern contrast to grow out of what he called his many attempts "to realize the face of mediaeval England."<sup>144</sup>

The work represents a synthesis of all Morris' medieval interests, and it is, therefore, deserving of detailed study. First, A Dream of John Ball is a strong medieval-modern contrast. In it the trim and neat medieval countryside and village of Medway are held up as a striking contrast to the smoke and filth of modern London. The home of Will Green, medieval worker, stands in stark contrast to the hovels of Victorian factory hands, the Medway tavern to dirty, modern pubs, the newly carved gothic church to the present day sham gothic.

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In pointing out the fourteenth century nature of the female attire Morris cannot resist a contrast--"They were clothed like women, not upholstered like arm-chairs, as most women of our time are." (Ibid., XVI, 14).

<sup>142</sup>

Ibid., XVI, 7.

<sup>143</sup>

William Morris, p. 58.

<sup>144</sup>

Works, XXIII, 61.

Second, the work exhibits Morris' extensive knowledge of the middle ages. Of all the persons to contrast the middle ages against the nineteenth century, Morris was undoubtedly the most thoroughly acquainted not only with the secondary but also with the primary material of that past period. Third, Morris' lingering descriptions of handicraft in the work amply show his lifelong love of medieval art. Last, Morris' A Dream of John Ball fuses the reactionary dreamer and the advanced liberal in him. The work looks back to the middle ages and finds something there that Cobbett, Southey, Pugin, Carlyle, and Ruskin had not found--the seeds of socialism.

In January of 1885 Morris broke with the Democratic Federation and helped to establish the Socialist League and its organ, The Commonweal. Here his A Dream of John Ball was first published in parts running from November 13, 1886 to January 22, 1887. It was a work with a socialist message, just like his later News from Nowhere, but in it he allowed free reign to his love of the middle ages.<sup>145</sup>

Morris felt that socialism was the means by which human dignity would be ultimately achieved, and he was convinced that the Peasant's Revolt of 1381 was somewhat analogous to the revolution which nineteenth century workers would have to fight. The speaker of this dream allegory tells John Ball,

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<sup>145</sup> Litzenberg called it Morris' "unqualified acceptance of the spirit of the Middle Ages." (Karl Litzenberg, Contributions of the Old Norse Language and Literature to the Style and Substance of the Writings of William Morris 1858-1876 /unpublished dissertation, University of Michigan, 1933/, p. 327).

the priest who was one of the revolt's leaders, "Thou hast seen beforehand what the remedy should be, even as those of later days have seen it."<sup>146</sup>

Our first question is, where did Morris get his material? Certainly the history of the revolt was not new to him, for he had met with it at least as early as the fifties when he and Burne-Jones read through Froissart's Chronicle while they were students at Oxford. But he could very easily have met with other accounts in the reading of "masses of mediaeval chronicles" Mackail mentions.<sup>147</sup> The Chronicle of John Hardyng and Thomas Hearnius' Historia Vitae et Regni Richard II were available to Morris early; and the Rolls Series made available editions of Thomas Walsingham's Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani and Historia Anglicana, the Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, and the Chronicon Henrici Knighton, all of which contain material on the revolt. In fact, the only important primary source which Morris could not have used in 1886 is The Anonimalle Chronicle, which was not discovered until the nineties.

But Froissart was undoubtedly Morris' favorite chronicler. We have already seen that his interest in Froissart, like his interest in Chaucer, was an enduring one. In fact, at the time of Morris' death an edition of the Anglo-French chronicler was being prepared for the Kelmscott Press. It is significant that when he was asked by the editor of the Pall Mall Gazette

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<sup>146</sup> Works, XVI, 277.

<sup>147</sup> Mackail, I, 39.

to submit a list of his favorite books, Morris included Froissart and did not mention specifically any of the other chroniclers who had dealt with the revolt. He says of the section in which Froissart appeared, "Uncritical or traditional history: almost all these books [there are six of them] are admirable pieces of tale-telling: some of them rise into the dignity of prose epics, so to say, especially in parts. Note, for instance, . . . the great rally of the rebels of Ghent in Froissart."<sup>148</sup> This list was drawn up in February, 1886, at which time Morris was most probably at work on his A Dream of John Ball. The fact that he refers specifically to the uprising at Ghent, if coupled with the fact that Froissart's few pages on the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 appear right in the middle of the Ghent material, might indicate that Morris was at the time rereading Froissart as background for his work.<sup>149</sup>

In the same letter Morris spoke of another "kind of book which I think might be excluded in such lists. . . . Such books are rather tools . . . one reads them . . . for extracting information . . . of some special kind. Among such books I should include works on philosophy, economics, and modern or critical history."<sup>150</sup> Some of these tool books Morris speaks

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<sup>148</sup> Works, XXII, p. xiv.

<sup>149</sup> "The Lord Mayor's Show," an article which Morris wrote for Justice in 1884 also demonstrates his ready acquaintance with Froissart's account of the revolt. Attempting to give his socialist readers a sympathetic picture of Wat Tyler, Morris quoted liberally from Froissart. (May Morris, William Morris; Artist, Writer, Socialist, II, 143-147).

<sup>150</sup> Works, XXII, p. xi.

of may have contained material on the revolt; certainly some of the "critical" histories did. We can be quite certain that Morris had been reading some of these tool books shortly before the composition of his A Dream of John Ball. For Morris had entered into the socialist cause with little more than an intuitional sentiment for it. He later commented, "When I took that step I was blankly ignorant of economics; I had never so much as opened Adam Smith, or heard of Ricardo, or of Karl Marx."<sup>151</sup> In 1884, the year after he joined the Democratic Federation, he wrote to Andreas Scheu, "I feel myself weak as to the Science of Socialism on many points, . . . I want statistics terribly."<sup>152</sup> During that same year he turned to many books of economic theory in an attempt to find the statistics he needed; for example, he mentions John Carruthers' Commercial and Communal Economy, Henry George's Progress and Poverty, Alfred Wallace's Land Nationalization, and Frederic Harrison's Order and Progress.<sup>153</sup> In themselves, these books are not important to us since they do not contain material on the Peasants' Revolt, but they do indicate the type of books Morris was reading at the time.

If Morris felt the need for statistics, and if he was reading economic studies, one would hardly expect him to pass up a work issued in that year by James E. Thorold Rogers, Six

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 277.

<sup>152</sup> Letters of William Morris, pp. 211-212.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 215; George's Progress and Poverty Morris knew as early as June, 1883, at which time he called it "a new Gospel." (Ibid., p. 174).

Centuries of Work and Wages. He didn't. In "Architecture and History," a paper which Morris read before the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings on July 1, 1884, Morris said,

We who have studied the remains of his [the medieval craftsman's] handicraft have been, without any further research long instinctively sure that he was no priest-ridden, down-trodden savage, but a thoughtful and vigorous man, and in some sense, at least, free. That instinct has been abundantly confirmed by painstaking collectors of facts, like Mr. Thorold Rogers, and we now know that the gild [sic] craftsman led the sort of life in work and play that we should have expected from the art that he produced.<sup>154</sup>

Both this and Rogers' one other work, the seven volume History of Agriculture and Prices in England, contain an economic interpretation of the Peasant's Revolt, and it is possible to demonstrate that Morris used them in his A Dream of John Ball.

The chroniclers, or as Morris called them, "the uncritical historians," present widely divergent accounts of the revolt. As members of widely scattered monastic orders, they suffered from a lack of reliable communication, and their degree of authority varies directly with their proximity to the events which they handle.<sup>155</sup> One thing they had in common as members of the established order; they looked with fear at this movement which threatened their very security. Also, they had not the advantage of historical perspective to enable

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<sup>154</sup> Works, XXII, 305-306.

<sup>155</sup> The student interested in the historical validity of the various accounts should consult George Kriehn, "Studies in the Sources of the Social Revolt of 1381," American Historical Review, VII (January, April, 1902), 254-285, 458-484.

them to detect either the complexity or the causes of the uprising. Like historians of contemporary events in any age, they sought rather simple explanations. If they did see any explanation beyond the mistreatment of a man's daughter by a tax collector or the desire of "Iake Strawe & Wat Tiler / To be made dukes of Essex and Kente,"<sup>156</sup> it was in the preaching of John Ball; and as good conservative theologians of the time, they were more than willing to apply to him the contemporary smear word, Wycliffite.<sup>157</sup> Ball is exhibited in the chronicles as a lesson in the wickedness of Lollardry, and many subsequent historians followed this interpretation.

In 1865 Thorold Rogers advanced a new theory which was to be accepted until the nineties.<sup>158</sup> Briefly, Rogers believed that the revolt was caused by the attempt of the lords to reassert their power over the peasants. Before the plague of 1347, the lords were glad to accept fealty payments in money

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<sup>156</sup> John Harding, The Chronicle of Iohn Hardyng, ed. Henry Ellis (London, 1812), p. 339.

<sup>157</sup> Typical of this and in capsule form is the following stanza written by an anonymous cleric of the fourteenth century:

Johannes Balle hoc docuit,  
Quando mortis succubuit  
Propter suam nequitiam.  
Quod quidem nidus tenuit  
Pullos pravos, et aluit  
In regni ignominiam.  
Monstrans Wycleffe familiam,  
Causam brigae primariam,  
Quae totum regnum terruit.  
(Political Poems and Songs, ed. Thomas Wright [London, 1859], I, 235).

<sup>158</sup> Or until the work of Réville, Powell, and Trevelyan demonstrated the inadequacy of Rogers' view. See Charles Oman, The Great Revolt of 1381 (Oxford, 1906), p. 5.

rather than in labor; but those same money payments became almost worthless after the plague when a very much reduced labor force was making, in spite of the laws passed against them, higher wage demands. The lords saw that the only way they could keep from being financially ruined--the law of supply and demand working for once in favor of labor--was to reinstitute the practice of labor rent. "Was it not," Rogers wrote,

an attempt to transmute the pecuniary compensation into labour-rent, and so revive the tenures of the labour-prices of the earlier part of the century, which led to the insurrection? . . . I cannot account for the outbreak on any other ground than that of an attempt on the part of the customary tenants to vindicate their right to pecuniary commutation against a threatened invasion of the custom.<sup>159</sup>

Morris accepted this view of the revolt not only because it offered an escape from the complexity of the varying chronicle accounts, but also because he was not at all interested in a doctrinal interpretation which made Ball, his central character, no more than a Wycliffite rabble-rouser. Of course, he was to attach to the cause a more noble aspiration, socialist fellowship, yet Rogers' theory was at the core. Morris, shortly after waking in medieval Kent, says,

I must tell you that I knew somehow, but I know not how, that the men of Essex were gathering to rise against the poll-groat bailiffs and the lords that would turn them all into villeins again, as their grandfathers had been. And the people was weak and the lords were poor; for many a mother's son had fallen in the war in France in the old

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<sup>159</sup> History of Agriculture and Prices in England (Oxford, 1866), I, 81.



king's time, and the Black Death had slain a many; so that the lords had bethought them: "We are growing poorer, and these upland-bred villeins are growing richer, and the guilds of craft are waxing in the towns, and soon what will there be left for us who cannot weave and will not dig? Good it were if we fell on all who are not guildsmen or men of free land, if we fell on socage tenants and others, and brought both the law and the strong hand on them, and made them all villeins in deed as they are now in name."<sup>160</sup>

In another place, a lecture delivered in 1887 to an audience of nine, Morris expressed with greater clarity the Rogers theory:

Toward the close of the fourteenth century, after the country had been depopulated by the Black Death and impoverished by the long war the feudal lords of these copyholders and tenants began to regret the slackness with which their predecessors had exploited their property, the serfs, and to consider that under the new commercial light which had begun to dawn upon them they could do it much better if they only had their property a little more in hand; but it was too late, for their property had acquired rights, and therewithal had got strange visions into their heads of a time much better than that in which they lived, when even those rights should be supplanted by a condition of things in which the assertion of rights for any one set of men should no longer be needed, since all men should be free to enjoy the fruits of their own labour.<sup>161</sup>

In addition to accepting Rogers' theory as to the cause of the revolt, Morris also accepted his explanation of the effects. Rogers believed that the revolt resulted in the dissolution of villeinage. He says in the History of Agriculture, "The rebellion was put down, but the demands of the villains were silently and effectually accorded; as they were masters for a week of the position, the dread of another servile war

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<sup>160</sup> Works, XVI, 222.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 55-56.

promoted the liberty of the serf."<sup>162</sup> That Morris accepted this effect of the revolt is apparent in his lecture "Feudal England," where he claims that through the revolt "a death-wound was inflicted on the feudal system."<sup>163</sup> Too, in A Dream of John Ball; during the long talk after the battle, Morris tells John Ball of the revolt's effects:

Yet when the lords have vanquished, and all England lieth under them again, yet shall their victory be fruitless; for the free men that hold unfree lands shall they not bring under the collar again, and villeinage shall slip from their hands, till there be, and not long after ye are dead, but few unfree men in England; so that your lives and your deaths both shall bear fruit.<sup>164</sup>

This view was, of course, foreign to the chroniclers, who were too close to see and too biased to describe anything but a complete victory for the lords. Nor do modern historians accept such a view; Charles Oman, after describing Thorold Rogers' theories, says, "Villeinage disappeared by slow degrees, and from economic causes. It was not killed once and for all by the armed forces of rebellion in June, 1381."<sup>165</sup>

Though Morris took his over-all view of the revolt from Thorold Rogers, he took many of the details from the chroniclers themselves, a fact which demonstrates his thorough medievalism. Froissart, of course, was his leading source among the "uncritical historians," but there are many details which

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<sup>162</sup> History of Agriculture, I, 8.

<sup>163</sup> Works, XXIII, 56.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., XVI, 270.

<sup>165</sup> Political History of England (London, 1920), IV, 64.

cannot be explained by him alone. Morris, we must constantly remember, wrote A Dream of John Ball with a socialist bias, and he did not hesitate, if he could better achieve his purpose, to draw from and even to amalgamate various chronicle sources. Indeed, I have shown elsewhere that the work owes a debt not only to Froissart, but as well to Walsingham and Knighton among the chroniclers.<sup>166</sup>

Morris' treatment of John Ball, the rebel priest and central character of his historical romance, reflects his attempt to interpret medieval materials in the light of nineteenth century socialist thought. In general Morris seems to follow Froissart for material on Ball himself. This is especially true in the subject matter and tone of the speech at the cross, although Morris greatly lengthens that speech.<sup>167</sup> And Morris follows Froissart with good reason. Froissart was the only chronicler who had directly stated a communist element in Ball's preaching; he had quoted Ball as saying, "A ye good people, the maters gothe nat well to passe in Englande, nor shall nat do

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<sup>166</sup> Charles H. Kegel, "William Morris's A Dream of John Ball; a Study in Reactionary Liberalism," Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters, XL (1955), 307-310.

<sup>167</sup> One finds even verbal similarities. For example, Morris' Ball demands equality on the grounds that all men are descendants of Adam and Eve: "Ye are gathered here in harness to bid all bear witness of you that ye are the sons of one man and one mother, begotten of the earth." (Works, XVI, 235). In Froissart's account of the Ball sermon we find, "We be all come fro one father and one mother." (The Chronicle of Froissart, trans. Sir John Bouchier, Lord Berners; ed. William Paton Ker [London, 1901-1902], III, 224).

tyll every thyng be common."<sup>168</sup> Morris seized upon this, and the rebel priest's sermon in Morris' A Dream of John Ball stresses throughout the socialist ideal of common ownership of all property and a resultant social equality.

But social equality is not the only socialistic aim; there is another, fellowship. In a letter to the Rev. George Bainton, Morris outlined this dual goal. "Socialism aims . . . at realizing equality of condition as its economical goal, and the habitual love of humanity as its rule of ethics."<sup>169</sup> This love of humanity--or fellowship--Morris was determined to find in the Peasants' Revolt.

"In the report of this commotion chronographers doo somewhat varie," wrote Holinshed, trying desperately to create some order out of the widely divergent chronicle accounts of London events during the revolt.<sup>170</sup> Morris, well read in the chronicles, certainly recognized the complexity of the accounts,<sup>171</sup> and perhaps it was to escape from that complexity that he set A Dream of John Ball in a small country village, away from the storm centers of the actual revolt. However, I think there are more important reasons for his departure from the chronicle accounts.

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<sup>168</sup> The Chronicle of Froissart, III, 224.

<sup>169</sup> Letters of William Morris, p. 282.

<sup>170</sup> Raphaell Holinshed, Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (London, 1807), II, 742.

<sup>171</sup> Morris treatment of Jack Straw is a case in point. "I should say," wrote Morris, "that I knew that there were at least three 'Jack Straws' among the fellowship of the discontented." (Works, XVI, 247).

The first hinges on the purpose for which Morris wrote the work. He was attempting to lend dignity to the socialist cause and he was preparing the socialist readers of Commonweal for a future social revolt in which they might take part. In a sense Morris' A Dream of John Ball is a handbook for revolutionaries. As such, Morris was forced to depart from the chroniclers' accounts of the revolt in London or St. Albans, for example, for they had described the populace as a turbulent, unprincipled mass drunk with power as well as the Savoy's best wines. Morris removes his action to the small town of Medway in Kent, and the skirmish he describes has absolutely no historical justification. Likewise, his band of rebels is a bit too orderly and high-idealed to be realistic.

There is, however, a second and still more important reason for Morris' departure from the chroniclers in the setting of his A Dream of John Ball. And this second reason brings us back to what Morris designated as the second aim of socialism, fellowship. Through Thorold Rogers he had learned that "there were no villains in Kent, the birth of a person in that county having been held by the law-courts as a bar to the process by which a lord reclaimed his villain, that known by the name of the writ 'de nativitate probanda.'"<sup>172</sup> Knowing that the Kentish were traditionally free, Morris apparently interpreted their uprising as a sign of fellowship with the villeins of the other counties. In fact, it is an

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<sup>172</sup> History of Agriculture, I, 84.

appeal for fellowship which Morris' Ball makes at the cross:

Men of Kent, I wot well that ye are not so hard  
bested as those of other shires, by the token of  
the day when behind the screen of leafy boughs  
ye met Duke William with bill and bow as he wend-  
ed Londonward from that woeful field of Senlac;  
but I have told of fellowship . . . whereby ye  
know that ye are fellows of the saints in heaven  
and the poor men of Essex.<sup>173</sup>

Translated into nineteenth century terms, Morris was making a plea for socialist solidarity; he was telling those Victorian workers fortunate enough to possess satisfactory positions that they must assist the unfortunate in their struggle for the new social life.

All this makes much better socialist propaganda than it does history. In the first place, John Ball had no business being at large in Kent immediately before the outbreak of the actual revolt in London; instead, he should have been in the archbishop's prison at Maidstone. Morris' Ball thanks the people of Kent, "Ye [did] take me out of the archbishop's prison but three days agone, when ye lighted the archbishop's house for the candle of Canterbury."<sup>174</sup> Actually, Ball was not released until June eleventh when the Kentish mob under the leadership of Wat Tyler was on its way back to London from Canterbury. Certainly there was no reason for Ball to be in Kent stirring up sentiment for the cause on June fourteenth; nor was he there, for all the chronicles clearly state that he was at London during the meeting with the king at Blackheath.

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<sup>173</sup> Works, XVI, 236.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., XVI, 229.

Morris could easily have worked his way out of this error in chronology by following Froissart, who said, "The archbishop set him [Ball] at liberty, for he could not for conscience sake have put him to death."<sup>175</sup> For obvious reasons, however, Morris would rather forsake chronology in order to have the rebels release Ball, so he followed the account in Knighton.<sup>176</sup> Also, by elevating Ball to the position of Kentish leader, Morris had to dispense with Wat Tyler, the actual leader of the Kentish rebels. To keep him on the scene would have detracted from the ideological appeal of the priest.

Morris' socialistic purpose merely affected the historical section of A Dream of John Ball; it formed the second part, approximately half of the entire piece. Here Morris, the narrator, and the rebel priest go to the village church and spend the entire night talking about the state of society. Morris unfolds to Ball a vision of the future, which as Philip Henderson has pointed out, is "close in its account of the growth and development of capitalistic society, and its final overthrow by the workers, to the historical sections of Marx's Capital."<sup>177</sup> During this long talk it becomes increasingly clear why Morris selected John Ball as his subject; he saw in the aspirations of this spiritual leader the nobility which is

<sup>175</sup> Chronicles of England, France, and Spain, trans. Thomas Johnes (New York, 1880), p. 283.

<sup>176</sup> "Dicti vero populares carcerem fregerunt, et eum extraxerunt, atque abire eum secum fecerunt, nam in archiepiscopum eum sublimare proposuerunt." (Chronicon, II, 132).

<sup>177</sup> Letters of William Morris, p. lvi.

connected with the doctrine of the fellowship of men; he saw in John Ball qualities which he saw in William Morris, the socialist lecturer; he saw in Ball the same dream which he himself expounded to sweaty workers at Hammersmith on Saturday nights. And Morris assured the fourteenth century priest that his dream of universal fellowship would some day become reality. "The time shall come, John Ball, when that dream shall . . . be . . . and thou shalt not be forgotten."<sup>178</sup>

William Morris was too much of an artist to step out of the framework of his dream allegory to exhort his readers to immediate action. But that he connected the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 with the immediate revolt he desired is clear from a socialist lecture which he published in The Commonweal just a few months after the appearance of A Dream of John Ball. In it Morris contended that "men like Wat Tyler, Jack Straw, and John Ball . . . suffered for daring to be before their time."<sup>179</sup> And after alluding to the failure of the peasants in 1381, he wrote,

With us it is different. A few years of wearisome struggle against apathy and ignorance; a year or two of growing hope--and then who knows? Perhaps a few months, or perhaps a few days of the open struggle against brute force, with the mask off its face, and the sword in its hand, and then we are over the bar. . . . Ahead of us . . . lies the inevitable social revolution, which will bring about the end of mastery and the triumph of fellowship.<sup>180</sup>

If Morris' A Dream of John Ball can be called an attempt on his part to find in the middle ages the seeds of socialism,

<sup>178</sup> Works, XVI, 285.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 56.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 58.



his later News from Nowhere is a description of the fruit thereof. In several important respects the two are companion pieces.

Both A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere are permeated with socialist purpose. Published less than four years apart in the same socialist organ, The Commonweal, the two works complement each other. The first, with its medieval priest preaching that "fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell,"<sup>181</sup> depicts the incipient stage of man's universal fellowship; the second, set in "the new day of fellowship, and rest, and happiness,"<sup>182</sup> pictures the triumphant stage.

Another reason to consider the two works as companion pieces is that they demonstrate perhaps better than any of his other writing Morris' devotion to the middle ages. "The leading passion of my life," Morris wrote in "How I became a Socialist," has been and is hatred of modern civilization."<sup>183</sup> Hence it is no surprise that his utopia in the twenty-first century bears strong resemblances to fourteenth century England. Yet in spite of this apparent contradiction of his belief that "history never returns on itself,"<sup>184</sup> it is not quite fair to accuse Morris of being a reactionary. And statements like Henderson's, that "the mediaeval past was to him [Morris] like a golden mask hiding the face of reality,"<sup>185</sup> require some qualification.

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., XVI, 230.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., XVI, 211.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 279.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 230.

<sup>185</sup> Letters of William Morris, p. xxxvii.

We must always remember that the medievalism of News from Nowhere rigidly excludes the violence and tyranny which Morris knew often characterized the middle ages. "I am not," he once wrote, "a mere praiser of past times. I know that in those [medieval] days of which I speak life was often rough & evil enough, beset by violence, superstition, ignorance, slavery."<sup>186</sup> Never for a moment did Morris follow Carlyle and Ruskin in praising the feudal organization of society. His ideal society was one of equals, and the government--or perhaps I should say lack of government--of that society owes nothing to the medieval period. If in these important aspects he avoided reaction, we can certainly forgive him for desiring a return to the external conditions of the middle ages: fresh, clean air to breathe, trim homes to admire, pleasant rural roads to travel, unpolluted streams to fish.

In still a third way News from Nowhere deserves to be considered the companion piece of A Dream of John Ball. The two works extended the technical possibilities of the medieval-modern contrast as a device. Let me explain. Both of these prose romances employ a dream device to remove Morris temporarily from his own nineteenth century.<sup>187</sup> A Dream of John Ball took him back to the fourteenth century; News from Nowhere projected him forward to the twenty-first. Both begin and end in what Morris considered his dismal, sordid nineteenth

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<sup>186</sup> Works, XXII, 163.

<sup>187</sup> Of course, the dream device was not new to literature. Nor was it to Morris, who had used it to escape into the medieval period as early as 1856 in "Lindenberg Pool." (Oxford and Cambridge Magazine, I, 530-534).

century. The former begins in the present, goes to the past, returns to the present; the latter begins in the present, goes to the future, returns to the present. Thus the framework provides for a past-present contrast in the first work, a future-present contrast in the second.

This arrangement, however, becomes more complicated. During that large part of A Dream of John Ball which is set in the past, the fourteenth century past becomes the present while Morris' own nineteenth century present becomes the future. While in that past period, Morris is then elevated to the position of a prophet. "In some way that I cannot name," said John Ball, "thou knowest more than we; as though with thee the world had lived longer than with us."<sup>188</sup> A two way interpretation of history results from this novel arrangement. Morris, while taking part in past events, can comment upon them and interpret them presciently. On the other hand, the arrangement allows John Ball, puzzled over Morris' vision of the nineteenth century future, to ask naive questions concerning it, questions stinging in their irony. Morris tells Ball of the ultimate disappearance of villeinage and the appearance of the "free worker" in a factory system. Ball sees nothing free about him.<sup>189</sup> And when Morris explains the great scientific advancements of the nineteenth century, the fruits of which were shared by a very few while the workers lived in abject poverty, Ball says sadly, "Strong shall be the tyranny of the latter days. And

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<sup>188</sup> Works, XVI, 267-268.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., XVI, 273.

now meseems, if thou sayest sooth, this time of the conquest of the earth shall not bring heaven down to the earth, as erst I deemed it would, but rather that it shall bring hell up on to the earth. Woe's me, brother, for thy sad and weary foretelling!"<sup>190</sup> Thus in A Dream of John Ball the nineteenth century is not only criticized by a comparison with the fourteenth century, but it is criticized as well by a thinker in that period.

Much the same situation obtains in News from Nowhere, but in reverse. Here the nineteenth century becomes the past; the twenty-first century becomes the present. Morris becomes the naive questioner, Hammond the sage who explains the development from nineteenth century capitalism to twenty-first century communism. There is in News from Nowhere, however, a further complexity, one which allows still greater experimentation with the medieval-modern contrast as a device. For that twenty-first century present, as has been pointed out, strongly resembled in external matters the medieval past. Thus the nineteenth century could be criticized and contrasted from both sides in one and the same work.

In their socialist purpose, in their medieval enthusiasm, and in their versatile use of the medieval-modern contrast, A Dream of John Ball and News from Nowhere are companion works. And they are Morris' most important contributions to the tradition which is the subject of this study.

After the publication of News from Nowhere in 1890, Morris never again called upon the medieval-modern contrast to

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., XVI, 284

castigate his nineteenth century. Medievalism there is aplenty in the seven prose romances which followed, but the strong social purpose for which Morris had utilized his medievalism in the earlier works has disappeared. They were, wrote the author's daughter, "holiday-work,"<sup>191</sup> and Morris himself warned his readers not to look for a social allegory in them.<sup>192</sup> In these late romances Morris allowed himself, unburdened by social purpose, the joy of spinning tales of the medieval period he had loved throughout his life, and it is no coincidence that William Butler Yeats in his Ideas Good and Evil concentrated upon these works in discussing Morris as "the happiest of the poets."<sup>193</sup>

Of the literary men of the century there can be little doubt that William Morris was the most thorough medievalist. Nurtured on the novels of Scott, stimulated by the work of Malory, Froissart, and Chaucer, strongly influenced by Carlyle, Ruskin, and Cobbett within the medieval-modern contrast tradition, conversant with the historical and linguistic scholarship of his period, gifted with a sensibility for medieval art and a sensitivity for the condition of the should-be producers of modern art, Morris inscribed his name in large letters on the scroll of the nineteenth century's medieval enthusiasts.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., XVII, p. xvi. The seven romances which followed News from Nowhere were: The Story of the Glittering Plain (1891), The Wood beyond the World (1894), Child Christopher and Goldilind the Fair (1895), The Well at the World's End (1896), The Water of the Wondrous Isles (1897) and The Sundering Flood (1897).

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., XVII, p. xxxix.

<sup>193</sup> Essays (New York, 1924), pp. 64-78.



Before all else, Morris was a lover of art--art in its broadest and most widespread sense. "I do not," he once wrote, "want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few."<sup>194</sup> He was convinced, first intuitively, then by the work of Thorold Rogers, that art was widespread in the middle ages, that "the possession of some skill in it was the rule and not the exception."<sup>195</sup> Hence his use of the terms "mediaeval" and "artistic times" synonymously.<sup>196</sup> Hence also his "hatred of modern civilization,"<sup>197</sup> which prompted him to look back to a time before the rise of the capitalistic ethic in the fifteenth century, the ethic which ultimately gave rise to industrialization in that "slough of despond which we call the eighteenth century."<sup>198</sup> For he was convinced that industrialization, since it took away from the individual worker the joy of creation, meant the death of art.<sup>199</sup>

This strong conviction that to be happy, to produce works of art, man must work with his hands led Morris to embrace socialism. For he realized, as Ruskin had before him, that the economic theory behind industrialization must be attacked. It is, he wrote in Lectures on Art and Industry, "the great intangible machine of commercial tyranny" which must be abolished

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<sup>194</sup> Works, XXII, 26; see also 39, 79.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., XXII, 306.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., XXII, p. xxxii.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., XXIII, 279.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., XXII, 147.

<sup>199</sup> In this connection see John Drinkwater, William Morris, A Critical Study (London, 1912), p. 37.

first, not "this or that tangible steel or brass machine."<sup>200</sup> Destroy capitalism first, Morris thought, and the need for machine production disappears; art not unlike that produced by the fourteenth century guildsman would again become possible. Morris justified his socialism on the grounds that it would produce the conditions necessary for a widespread English art.<sup>201</sup>

I have pointed out that in the deindustrialized, communistic England of his News from Nowhere certain medieval conditions prevail.<sup>202</sup> These are largely physical. Other medieval conditions, namely spiritual and social, are noticeably absent. Morris, who would have wanted his god to be "a big-hearted, jolly chap, who'd want to see everybody jolly and happy like Himself,"<sup>203</sup> was quite unprepared to plumb the spiritual depths of the middle ages. Ralph, the young adventurer in The Well at the World's End, speaks Morris' sentiments when he accuses monasticism of being escape from reality and, therefore, undesirable.<sup>204</sup> Unlike Carlyle, Morris could not conceive

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<sup>200</sup> Works, XXII, 352.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., XXII, p. xxxii.

<sup>202</sup> It should be mentioned that Morris used the terms communism and socialism with very little or no distinction. "Between complete Socialism and Communism there is no difference whatever in my mind. Communism is in fact the completion of Socialism: when that ceases to be militant and becomes triumphant, it will be Communism." (Ibid., XXIII, 271).

<sup>203</sup> Bruce Glasier, William Morris and the Early Days of the Socialist Movement (London, 1921), p. 166.

<sup>204</sup> Works, XVIII, 36.

of a reality transcending that of the empirically observable.<sup>205</sup> To write the second book of Past and Present would have been an impossibility for him.

The spiritual order of the middle ages he could not understand; the social order he understood, but could not approve. He did not go back to the period preceding capitalistic tyranny only to submit to a feudal tyranny of social status. So in A Dream of John Ball Morris concentrated his considerable knowledge of the Peasants' Revolt into an attempt to demonstrate that the socialist aims of equality and fellowship existed in the fourteenth century he loved so well.

As Eshleman has pointed out, Morris' kind of socialism "differed widely from the accredited forms of Socialism commonly recognized by students of that phenomenon."<sup>206</sup> His shifts from the Social Democratic Federation to the Socialist League and from there to the comparative quiet of the self-directed Hammersmith Socialist Society might well indicate, I think, the difficulty which Morris experienced in finding the kind of socialism to fit his artistic and medievalistic temperament.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Hence his unwillingness to speculate about death. "As for death," Morris wrote, "I find that, never having experienced it, I have no conception of what it means, and so cannot even bring my mind to bear upon it. I know what it is to live; I cannot even guess what it is to be dead." (Ibid., XXIII, 81). The same attitude can be found in A Dream of John Ball. (Ibid., XVI, 265-266).

<sup>206</sup> Lloyd Wendell Eshleman, A Victorian Rebel, the Life of William Morris (New York, 1940), p. 351.

<sup>207</sup> There cannot be much doubt that had Morris lived another quarter century he would have found his proper socialistic place in the Guild Socialism of Arthur J. Pentty, who, like Morris and influenced by him, was a lover of the middle ages.

It is, therefore, quite difficult to measure accurately Morris' contribution to the total movement.

George Bernard Shaw, who was not only personally attracted to Morris himself, but established as well an amusing "mystic betrothal" to Morris' daughter,<sup>208</sup> tended as a good Fabian to play down the impact of other socialist organizations. The Social Democratic Federation and the Socialist League, to both of which Morris had contributed, spent their time, according to Shaw, "making speeches and collecting pennies without making the smallest impression in practical politics."<sup>209</sup> Perhaps this is true, but it does not deny the possibility--abundantly illustrated by Shaw himself--that Morris' personal influence aided the cause. Certainly his Hammersmith Socialist Society attracted many notable socialists.<sup>210</sup> And Morris' name, "the greatest Socialist of that day,"<sup>211</sup> Shaw called him, gave dignity to the Socialist Movement.

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<sup>208</sup> Shaw's account of this relationship to May Morris can be found in "Morris as I Knew Him," the preface to the second volume of May Morris' William Morris; Artist, Writer, Socialist, pp. xxvii ff.

<sup>209</sup> G. B. Shaw, Lord Passfield (Sidney Webb), Graham Wallas, The Lord Olivier, William Clarke, Annie Besant, Hubert Bland, Fabian Essays, Jubilee Edition (London, 1948), p. 209.

<sup>210</sup> Eshleman lists many of them: George Bernard Shaw, Prince Peter Kropotkin, Sergius Stepniak, Lawrence Gronlund, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Mrs. Annie Besant, Graham Wallas, John Carruthers, J. A. Hobson, Philip Webb, Henry Mayers Hyndman, Herbert Burrows, John Burns, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, Pete Curran, R. B. Cunninghame-Graham, and Ramsay MacDonald. (A Victorian Rebel, p. 313).

<sup>211</sup> G. B. Shaw, Essays in Fabian Socialism (London, 1932), p. 305

Too, Morris' works were not without their influence. As great a socialist as G. D. H. Cole was converted by News from Nowhere,<sup>212</sup> and it is significant that along with Progress and Poverty, Fabian Essays, and Marx's Capital, the library of Reverend James Mavor Morell, the radical preacher of Shaw's Candida, contains A Dream of John Ball.<sup>213</sup> Two socialist historians, Beer<sup>214</sup> and Cole,<sup>215</sup> testify to Morris' impact upon the Guild Socialist Movement, and Penty's A Guildsman's Interpretation of History bears unmistakable traces not only of Morris' influence, but of Ruskin's and Cobbett's as well.<sup>216</sup> Likewise, Eshleman gives Morris credit for having had "an unusually important part" in the founding of the British Labor Party.<sup>217</sup>

As time removes us further and further from the early days of the Socialist Movement per se and closer to the ultimate triumph of the socialist ideal, creeping or otherwise, Morris will probably be remembered less for the particular kind of socialist he happened to be and more for the fact that he was a socialist. The very latest history of the movement tends in this

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<sup>212</sup> Grennan, p. 22.

<sup>213</sup> G. B. Shaw, Candida, A Pleasant Play (Baltimore, 1952), p. 6.

<sup>214</sup> Max Beer, A History of British Socialism (New York, 1948), p. 258.

<sup>215</sup> Asa Daniel Sokolow, The Political Theory of Arthur J. Penty (New Haven, 1940), p. 12.

<sup>216</sup> See Ibid., pp. 7-12 for a perceptive discussion of Morris and Ruskin as Penty's "teachers." Cobbett's History of the Reformation is mentioned as the work which first exposed "the conspiracy about things Mediaeval." (Arthur J. Penty, A Guildsman's Interpretation of History [New York, 1920], p. 102).

<sup>217</sup> A Victorian Rebel, pp. 364-365.

direction. After discussing Morris' inability to profoundly affect the course of his nineteenth century, Cole adds, "Such men may not be very good at making the kingdom of heaven, but they are of it. And that is much; for even if they fail to make movements in their own day, their record survives, and helps to keep the cause sweet."<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> G. D. H. Cole, Socialist Thought, Marxism and Anarchism 1850-1890 (London, 1954), p. 424.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

We have now completed a rather exhaustive discussion of six nineteenth century figures, four of them literary, who for various reasons looked back upon a glorious and unified medieval period and contrasted it, again for various reasons, with an ugly and confused nineteenth century. With such persistence and with such surface similarity did the phenomenon assert itself throughout the century that four scholars, Emery Neff, A. M. D. Hughes, Margaret Grennan, and Grace Calder, have generalized its existence as a tradition. The initial impulse behind this investigation was to determine with what validity the term "tradition" can be applied to the phenomenon and to delineate accurately its scope, its esthetic and / or intellectual temperament, and its purposes.

Let us first answer the question, was this a tradition? I have perhaps anticipated the answer to this question, for I have throughout the study employed the term to describe the particular kind of backward-lookingness involved; I have called it a tradition of medieval-modern contrasts. Such it was except within certain narrowly defined limitations.

In no way, for example, could these men, Cobbett, Southey, Pugin, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris, be considered members of a school. English literary men have not taken much to the formation of schools--the Tribe of Ben being a notable exception--and our group demonstrates generally the literary independence characteristic of Englishmen. They had no common champion, medieval or modern, to whom they paid allegiance and whose teachings they consciously followed. So different were their

backgrounds, interest, and messages that they could not find--nor indeed did they look for--any common hero or teacher. Among the six men there existed only one intense discipleship--that of Ruskin to Carlyle--and even here the point of departure for Ruskin's attitude toward the middle ages, art, differed radically from Carlyle's.

No, the habit of using a medieval-modern contrast did not exist as a school. Nor did it exist as a tradition if one means by that word a succession men possessed fundamentally, though perhaps independently, of the same ideas, men who start at the same place and merely ramify and intensify a common viewpoint. There is, of course, some coherence in the fact that these writers all used the same tool, the medieval-modern contrast; it is true as well that each saw in the middle ages lessons for the present, but those lessons were often widely different, even contradictory. The medieval-modern contrast was used as ammunition for diversified social and religious positions. With it Cobbett fought for the radical cause, Southey strengthened the forces of paternalistic Toryism, Pugin argued for a return to medieval Catholicism, Carlyle labored for the recognition of an ethical absolute which transcended church or state, Ruskin argued for a feudal, agrarian economy, and Morris used it to popularize Socialism. And if they used the middle ages for different purposes, it was because they saw different things there. Carlyle and Ruskin, for example, looked at the medieval villein and saw a kind of bovine acquiescence to social conditions, an acquiescence which might well be emulated

by the nineteenth century worker. Morris looked at that same medieval villein and detected in him signs of social unrest which might well assist the Socialist Movement.

Within these rather limited and, I think, inadequate definitions of the word, the phenomenon was not a tradition. It was certainly not a school. Nor did the phenomenon possess the homogeneity of purpose that many people like to associate with traditions.

Yet in a broader sense, these men, different though their outlooks were, did operate within a tradition. They were all, if we are careful of the term, reactionaries. That is, when confronted with new and complex problems, they turned to the past if not for complete, yet for partial solutions. They were part of what Muller, in his excellent The Uses of the Past, calls "the curious spectacle of civilized man forever marching with his face turned backward--as no doubt the cave-man looked back to the good old days when men were free to roam instead of being stuck in a damn hole in the ground."<sup>1</sup> They were, however, selective. They did not turn to any past, but specifically to the medieval past. In this they were alike.

They were alike as well in that they did not turn to the middle ages for sheer escape as, for example, Richard Hurrell Froude did. Certainly there is some element of escape in them, particularly in Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris, the art enthusiasts of the group; but generally they turned there to find lessons

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<sup>1</sup>

Herbert J. Muller, The Uses of the Past, Profiles of Former Societies (New York, 1952), p. 65.

by which the present might benefit. All were intensely interested and intensely distressed by social conditions contingent upon the industrial revolution, and all of them used their medieval enthusiasm toward the melioration of those conditions.

Not only did they look to the past, but from within that vast temporal panorama they centered upon the middle ages. Not only did they employ their medieval interest in the spirit of social reform, but they were alike also in that they fashioned, experimented with, and employed a tool, a literary device, by which to demonstrate to their century the superiority of certain aspects of medieval life. That tool I have called the medieval-modern contrast, and its repeated use throughout the century I have called a tradition.

I do not contend that those who cultivated the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts in the nineteenth century did so in the consciousness of following an established pattern. Those who inherit and continue traditions are very often quite unconscious not only of their predecessors, but of the very tradition in which they are operating. It may appear paradoxical to say that a vital and living tradition requires on the part of each continuator a kind of individual spontaneity, a kind of unconsciousness in the transmission of his heritage. If consciously cultivated, if consciously continued, a tradition becomes artificial and often loses the vitality which once justified its existence.

Those who followed Cobbett in contrasting the medieval with the modern were, with one possible exception, not

conscious of the fact that they were carrying on a tradition. That possible exception was Ruskin, who was accused of having copied Pugin's idea of pictorial medieval-modern contrasts and, indeed, may have. Other than this, I have found not a single bit of evidence which would indicate any conscious cultivation of the tradition. Though they used the same device, they seem to have been unaware of it.

But this unawareness, this unconsciousness of which I speak must not be equated with ignorance or lack of contact with the tradition. A fine distinction must be drawn. The continuator of a literary tradition can possess a knowledge of his predecessors' work without necessarily being conscious of the tradition's properties, of the devices it uses.

So it seems to have been with those who employed the medieval-modern contrast. Though they were not conscious of their parts in the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts, they generally had had contact with those who had preceded them. I have taken considerable pains to demonstrate the existence of that contact, and the evidence is particularly impressive with respect to the three major figures in the tradition, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris. Carlyle knew the medieval-modern contrasts of Cobbett and Southey; Ruskin knew those of Cobbett, Southey, Pugin, and Carlyle; Morris knew those of Cobbett, Pugin, Carlyle, and Ruskin.

In still another respect the phenomenon of juxtaposing the medieval with the modern deserves to be called a tradition. Traditions develop. They do not remain static. Essential to

traditions are change and development in both form and purpose. The successive uses of medieval-modern contrasts in the nineteenth century clearly exhibit this essential mutation. The form which the contrasts took continually varied. Likewise, the tradition experienced a kind of development. It exploited, one could almost say, all of its possibilities. Having grown out of a romantic interest in the past for its own sake, the medieval-modern contrast was employed by Cobbett and Southey merely as an indictment of the present. Their emphasis was to show their century that it had not progressed as much as it thought it had. In Pugin and Carlyle one notes a shift in emphasis. They used the medieval-modern contrast not only to criticize the present, not only to call progress into question, but also to show the nineteenth century that some of its contemporary problems could be solved by copying certain admirable qualities of the middle ages. In Ruskin and Morris the tradition developed still further. The emphasis shifted to the future. They used the contrast to point the way to a glorious future which would resemble in many respects their conceptions of the middle ages. Thus interest in the medieval period for its own sake gave way to interest in the medieval period for the sake of the present, first to castigate, then to cure its ills. In turn, this led to interest in the middle ages for the sake of the future.

For the reasons I have discussed, the phenomenon may justifiably be called a tradition. Possessed of tendencies toward backward-lookingness, the six subjects of this study focused

their attention upon the middle ages. All were aware of social problems in their own century, and all saw in the medieval period conditions or qualities which, if presented to their contemporaries, might help toward the solving of those problems. To accomplish this, the six men made use of the same device, the medieval-modern contrast. And they used it without having become conscious of the tradition they were transmitting. Yet transmitters of the device they were, as is evidenced by the rather impressive degree of contact they had with their forerunners in the tradition. And as it marched on down through the century, the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts changed and developed both in the forms it took and the purposes it served.

Granted the existence of the tradition, let us turn now to an examination of the impulse which gave it birth and the ideas which it conveyed.

Individually, Cobbett, Southey, Pugin, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris differed greatly. I have made every effort in this study not to hide their considerable heterogeneity. In spite of these individual differences, however, there was a transcendent unity in the tradition to which they contributed.

Dissatisfaction with the effects of the industrial revolution is the key by which the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts must be understood. Smoke-belching factories and mills were springing up everywhere, particularly in the North. Huge, dirty, sprawling industrial towns grew overnight while draining picturesque rural villages of their inhabitants.

Populations skyrocketed. Vice and disease flourished in unbelievably overcrowded slums. The nouveaux riches, vulgar, middle-class Philistines worshiping the dual gods of supply and demand and laissez-faire, asserted their right to do as they pleased: to send eight year olds down their mine shafts and into their factories, to pollute English air with their smoke and English streams with their waste, to throw hundreds or thousands of laborers out of work with the whim of the market, to usurp political power from a decadent aristocracy. And while that aristocracy defended its indefensible corn laws, the lower classes, now largely removed from the soil and at the mercy--though little there was--of their new industrial lords, found their way by the tens of thousands to Malthusian-inspired poor houses where they were punished for having the audacity to exist in England when cotton happened not to be selling well abroad.

Such were the results of "progress," and it is no wonder that the six subjects of this study looked back longingly to the pre-industrial middle ages. They simply could not understand or, understanding, could not sympathize with the new industrial and economic forces which were changing not only the face, but also the soul of England. And if the comparisons they made, the solutions they found, seem to us simple, even at times absurd, we must remember that we ourselves have not yet found the answers to many of the problems which puzzled them.

First, let us consider their attitudes toward the machine itself. I think it significant that with the exception of

Carlyle, not a one of them was favorably impressed with mechanical progress. William Cobbett had a simple, yet profound conviction that the replacement of men by machines, the former left then to starve or seek relief, was a "shocking state of things"<sup>2</sup> not to be endured. In his simple, almost naive, way he realized that unless the profits accruing from machines were distributed among the workers themselves, unless the lives of British workers were made easier, the factory system had done a disservice to England. Southey, though he said less against machines as such, was convinced that "the inevitable tendency of the manufacturing system" was to make the poor become "more numerous, more miserable, and more depraved."<sup>3</sup> Ruskin and Morris, of course, were vigorously anti-machinery. In addition to believing with Cobbett and Southey that the laborer had not materially benefited by the introduction of mass production machines, their artistic sensibilities told them--and Pugin would almost certainly have agreed had he written directly on the subject--that machinery made an automaton of man, that it took from the individual workman the joy of creation, and that for these reasons it rendered art impossible. Of those who contributed to the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts only Carlyle spoke enthusiastically of the Brindleys and the Watts as nineteenth century heroes, or spoke poetically of the machines of Manchester, or accepted "Tools and the Man"

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<sup>2</sup> Rural Rides, I, 322.

<sup>3</sup> Select Prose, p. 421.

as the epic theme of the future.<sup>4</sup> Yet even he recognized that in their present state machines were producing only a Midas wealth, that industrial mechanization was serving as a "hard taskmaster" instead of man's "all-ministering servant."<sup>5</sup>

In discussing the attitude of the six men toward the machine, I have anticipated in part their attitude toward the plight of the worker in an industrial economy. Here indeed was a sorry sight. Severed from the land as agrarianism gave way to industrialism, cut off from the kindly consideration of a paternalistic master, the nineteenth century worker was indeed free. Yet from Cobbett through Morris was there an acute awareness that that freedom involved a bitter irony. Often it amounted to no more than, as Carlyle wrote in Past and Present, a "Liberty to die by starvation."<sup>6</sup> Opposed to the miserable conditions imposed upon the free nineteenth century worker was the enviable position of his medieval counterpart. Popish superstition's slave he may have been, vassal to a feudal lord he may have been, yet he had his claim on Cedric's bacon and enjoyed at least freedom in his work. Even Morris, who of all the contributors to the medieval-modern contrast was least in sympathy with the feudal contract, agreed that the laborer of the middle ages enjoyed a position far superior to that of the modern industrial worker.

Agreement throughout the tradition on the contrast between

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<sup>4</sup> Carlyle, Works, X, 209.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., XXVII, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., X, 212.

the medieval and the modern worker led to general agreement on other broad matters as well. None of the six, for example, considered that equal and universal suffrage would be a panacea for the social ills of their century. Four of them in fact, Southey, Pugin, Carlyle, and Ruskin, opposed it. All agreed, though their solutions varied, that England's difficulties lay with its economy and that freedom from a tyranny of social status was worthless unless accompanied by freedom from a more severe economic tyranny.

Hence all of them, but particularly Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris, attacked the foundations upon which the industrial economy rested. Laissez-faire, supply and demand, the wage-fund iron law, and the enlightened selfishness of Benthamite utilitarianism they considered godless, inhuman, and inadequate theories, theories which England could not long persist in holding. Two criticisms in particular they leveled against modern economic theory: it ignored the human affections, and it adhered to no ethical absolute. These criticisms, though best expressed in Ruskin's Munera Pulveris and Carlyle's Past and Present, respectively, were shared by the other four as well.

In the medieval period they saw, although only Pugin would return to it, a universal church which governed not only the religious, but also the economic activities of men. Here was the ethical absolute lacking in nineteenth century political economy. To cry laissez-faire then would have been to deny God the exercise of his infinite wisdom. Robbers were recognized as robbers, fraud as fraud, avarice as avarice. As both Ruskin and Morris delighted to point out, forestalling and

regrating were in those days--supply and demand notwithstanding--considered sins against God and man. Usury, that pet anathema of Cobbett, Ruskin, and to a lesser degree, Carlyle, was recognized as contrary to the law of nature; usurers were both social and religious outcasts. "In those days," wrote Carlyle in a sentence which adequately summarizes the attitude of the entire tradition, "a heavenly Awe overshadowed and encompassed, as it still ought and must, all earthly Business whatsoever."<sup>7</sup>

The ethical absolute which was missing from nineteenth century political economy they saw, rightly or wrongly, in the medieval church; the exercise of human affections and human responsibilities, also missing in their century's political economy, they found in the feudal structure of medieval society. It is significant that with the exception of William Morris, whose socialist views would not allow him to condone a social pattern without equality of condition, every person in the tradition was temperamentally a feudalist. Even the arch-radical Cobbett, notwithstanding all his agitation for political reform, possessed, as Pemberton has pointed out, an "essentially feudal conception of society,"<sup>8</sup> In the rigidly stratified society of the middle ages with its king at the top and its serfs at the bottom they saw order and stability. The principle of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., X, 106.

<sup>8</sup> W. Baring Pemberton, William Cobbett (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1949), p. 139.

responsibility operated downward through the social scale. Each individual recognized his rightful place as governor or governed, master or man, and accepted the responsibilities contingent upon that place; here was, as Carlyle thought, a "beautiful" and "human" social arrangement.<sup>9</sup>

Particularly advantageous to the lower classes, the workers, did they consider this blessed feudal structure. We have seen that all the contributors to the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts believed the position of even the medieval serf superior to the condition of the nineteenth century worker. Again excepting Morris, they thought this superiority of condition resulted from the feudal arrangement. Thus Cobbett looked back admiringly to the middle ages, "when master and man were the terms," and when "every one was in his place."<sup>10</sup> Thus Southey spoke with approbation of the medieval serf's lot: he was content; he was sure of work and "at all times sure of the same sufficient subsistence," and "if he belonged to the estate like the cattle, and was accounted with them as part of the live stock, he resembled them also in the exemption which he enjoyed from all cares concerning his own maintenance and that of his family."<sup>11</sup> Thus Carlyle, strongly convinced that "man is forever the 'born thrall' of certain men, born master of certain other men,"<sup>12</sup> insisted that the cash nexus could not be the sole

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<sup>9</sup> Carlyle, Works, X, 274

<sup>10</sup> Political Register, April 14, 1821; quoted from Cole, Life of William Cobbett, p. 267.

<sup>11</sup> Colloquies, I, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Carlyle, Works, X, 251.

relation between master and man; there must be instead a bond of permanent social responsibility between them, a bond of love and respect much like that which existed between Gurth and Cedric. Thus Ruskin not only admired but actually attempted to reestablish a society in which each person knew his "rank in the scale of being," in which each person enjoyed not the social isolation of political freedom, but what he considered the truer freedom "to obey another man, to labour for him, yield reverence to him or to his place."<sup>13</sup> Love, respect, reverence, obedience, recognition of one's obligations to those both above and below him in the social hierarchy--these were the human affections which, along with the recognition of an ethical absolute, our medieval-modern contrasters thought governed medieval political economy.

The six contributors to the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts were in substantial agreement on other matters as well. They had, if one does not look for complete unanimity, their common heroes and traitors. Sir Thomas More, Robert Owen, Sir Walter Scott, Coeur-de-Lion are among the former; John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham, David Ricardo, Parson Malthus among the latter. They generally liked or disliked the same periods of history. All were, of course, attracted to the middle ages. Conversely, all but Ruskin avoided or actively disliked the classical period; all but Carlyle found some fault with the period and principles of the English Reformation; the three art enthusiasts of the group, Ruskin, Pugin, and Morris, disliked

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<sup>13</sup> Ruskin, Works, X, 194.

the period of the renaissance; all--and with a hearty passion--detested what Morris characteristically termed "that slough of despond which we call the eighteenth century."<sup>14</sup>

Still another idea which all the medieval-modern contrasters shared, one which is inherent in much of what I have already discussed, was the conviction that history needed to be rewritten. Particularly incensed were they over the historical picture of the middle ages, which had in Carlyle's words been "sacrilegiously mishandled"<sup>15</sup> by eighteenth century historians. I have pointed out that they were not alone in this feeling. The medievalism within the Romantic Movement in literature, the broad historiographical changes taking place, the rise of a romantic school of historians, the increasing scholarly attention given to the medieval period, all these contributed to an intellectual climate which could not but lead to a revolt against the bleak conception of the middle ages held by the rationalist historians of the previous century. The tradition of medieval-modern contrasts constituted part of that revolt, and Pugin summed up rather adequately the tradition's attitude in this respect. "Present and popular ideas on the subject [Of the middle ages] must be utterly changed. Men must learn," he said, "that the period hitherto called dark and ignorant far excelled our age."<sup>16</sup>

From within the tradition, Cobbett's History of the

<sup>14</sup> Morris, Works, XXII, 147.

<sup>15</sup> Carlyle, Works, X, 239.

<sup>16</sup> Contrasts, pp. 16-17.

Protestant Reformation was the first direct assault upon the "dark age" view of the medieval period. "Cobbett was the first to expose," wrote Arthur Penty, "the conspiracy about things Mediaeval."<sup>17</sup> And the assault continued, indirectly in Southey's Colloquies, Pugin's Contrasts, and Ruskin's Fors Clavigera; directly in Carlyle's Past and Present and Morris' Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome. Individually, of course, their historical conceptions were assisted by forces from outside the tradition proper. Without Lingard, known also to Pugin and Carlyle, Cobbett's History of the Protestant Reformation would not have been written. Without the Camden Society, which published in 1840 the Chronica Jocelini de Brakelonda, there could have been no Past and Present. Without Thorold Rogers, without Karl Marx, without the Rolls publications, Morris' A Dream of John Ball and Socialism, Its Growth and Outcome simply would not be what they are.

We have seen first that the phenomenon of contrasting the medieval with the modern for a social purpose deserves to be called a tradition. In addition, we have seen that the various contributors to the tradition were in substantial agreement upon many ideas, attitudes, likes and dislikes. Distressed, even appalled, by the social and moral conditions which were growing out of the industrial revolution, dubious even of the value of the machine, the six men were strongly impressed by what they considered the material and spiritual superiority of the medieval worker's position over that of the

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<sup>17</sup> A Guildsman's Interpretation of History, p. 102.

nineteenth century industrial laborer. Unable to believe that universal suffrage would in any way alleviate the condition of the modern worker as long as the tyranny of a supply and demand economic theory remained unchallenged, they launched a vigorous attack upon the accepted political economy of the age. Not only must it learn to obey the dictates of an ethical absolute, but it must learn also that human affections and social responsibility cannot be excluded from economic theory. Finding these missing elements in the middle ages, the group drew in glorious colors a picture of that period, and from that picture they argued against the present. If history needed to be rewritten to buttress their arguments, then rewrite it they would--and did.

These were the ideas upon which there was almost total agreement, the elements which gave unity to the tradition. Yet I have spoken of the considerable heterogeneity of the six men who used the medieval-modern contrast. Born into different times, gifted with different sensibilities, committed to different causes, they often saw different merits in the middle ages, saw different problems in their own age, devised different solutions for those problems. To these variations within the tradition I now turn.

Certainly one, though by no means the only, explanation is time. We have already seen that the tradition experienced a kind of development, that interest in the medieval past for its own sake aroused an interest in that past for the sake of the present, and finally for the sake of the future. Depending,

therefore, upon one's temporal position in the tradition, his use of the medieval-modern contrast varied.

But in still another important way time contributed to the heterogeneity. One could contend that as traditions go, ours was temporally compact. Indeed, there was even an overlap in the lives of the first and the last contributors, Cobbett's death in 1835 having been preceded by Morris' birth in the previous year. Too, only seventy years elapsed between the History of the Protestant Reformation, the first of the nineteenth century's medieval-modern contrasts, and News from Nowhere, the last. Yet they were seventy years of rapid and tremendous change in almost all areas of English life. Religion, while it fought against the higher criticism and an ever spreading scientific agnosticism, witnessed the birth of the Oxford Movement, the Catholic Revival, and Christian Socialism. Politically, three reform bills had passed power from the aristocracy to the middle class and then down to the proletariat. Economically, recurring cycles of bubble and burst, even during the generally expanding prosperity between 1846 and 1873, marked the period, and Philistines, their eyes firmly focused on the main chance and the foreign market, won and lost huge fortunes. During those seventy years education became mandatory, the railroad replaced the horse, the flush toilet and the telegraph began to send their respective wares to and over the sea, suburban growth of the large cities gobbled up the countryside in giant chunks. And while the face of England was undergoing these tremendous changes, the mind

of England was learning to read Beowulf, to dissect the Pentateuch, to understand evolution, to interpret history as a record of class struggle. The England of the nineties which received News from Nowhere was a quite different England from that of the twenties which witnessed the publication of the History of the Protestant Reformation. And the temporal distance becomes still greater when one reflects that Cobbett was in reality a son of the eighteenth century; the London he once knew was inviting Boswell and Dr. Johnson to its dinner parties. Marx, Shaw, and Winston Churchill drew breath in Morris' London.

As the physical and intellectual environment changed, as the century's needs and problems changed, so too did the tradition of medieval-modern contrasts. If Cobbett used the contrast to propagandize for the cause of Catholic emancipation, there was no reason to use it so after the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828. Until the passage of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834 it would have been impossible for Pugin to draw the contrast of the medieval monasteries and the modern workhouse, or for Carlyle to use the modern workhouse as a point of departure for his Past and Present. Without the "new era of history" of the thirties, which gave impetus among other things to the editing of medieval texts by private societies, Carlyle would never have heard of Abbot Samson. After 1846, there would be no need for Ruskin and Morris, as there was for Carlyle, to use the contrast to fulminate against the Corn Laws. Without Carlyle, without the Gothic Architectural

Revival, Ruskin's medieval-modern contrasts could not have been born. Without Ruskin's explanation of the value of joy in one's labor, without Marx's of class struggle, without Rogers' theory of class struggle in the Peasant's Revolt of 1381, and without the Socialist Movement of the eighties, Morris' two major contrasts could not have been written.

One notices also that as time progressed, as it became more and more obvious that the century's various legislative and religious Morrison Pills were not going to solve the problems posed by the industrial revolution, the tradition and its contributors moved generally from right to left. Consider, for example, the broad difference between the first three contributors, Cobbett, Southey, and Pugin, and the last three, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris. The first three sought solutions for the century's problems from within the existing framework of ideas. Cobbett placed his faith in legislative action; Southey his in the Church of England, Pugin his in the Catholic Church. None of them questioned the basic worth of the English Constitution and the inviolate right of personal property. The really serious questioning of existing values, the serious search for new principles about which to reorient English society, remained for the second group, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris.

And even within this second group the same movement from right to left can be seen. Of these three social prophets Carlyle was farthest to the right. For all his scrutiny of present values, for all his vehement exhortations for Englishmen to change their ways, Carlyle would in reality disrupt the status

quo much less than either Ruskin or Morris. Revolutions, either military or legislative, he feared. He would, of course, extend the functions of the central government; teach the dismal-science people to observe the dictates of an ethical absolute; insist that his century abandon its mammon worship and accept the principle of social responsibility between man and master, hero and hero-worshiper, that he thought operative in the feudal system of the middle ages. Yet his direct and practical suggestions for social amelioration were few, as he was unwilling or unable to conceive of solutions which lay far outside the terms of the present order. His insistence that emigration furnished the solution for the overpopulation problem, an idea which receives less attention in Ruskin and absolutely none in Morris, is a case in point. For does not this admit a refusal to change social conditions at home in order to cope with a new problem; does not this admit, instead, a belief that those factors which disrupt the present framework of society must somehow be eliminated? I think it does. Preaching always his Calvinistic know-thy-work-and-do-it formula, which is in essence a gospel of resignation to that which is, Carlyle was far more reluctant than either Ruskin or Morris to change the existing order of things. He was less reactionary than they, yet he was also less radical. If, like his two followers in the tradition, he saw admirable qualities in the medieval period, he would only adapt those qualities to his own age.

The next contributor to the tradition, John Ruskin, stood to the left of Carlyle, to the right of Morris. A personal

friend and devoted disciple to the older man, Ruskin attempted to carry on the work which Carlyle had started, and in doing so, he moved considerably to the left of his master. While Carlyle was often content to rail and fume about existing conditions, Ruskin, though railing and fuming aplenty can be found in his works, attempted to make actual changes in those conditions. Not only did he vehemently criticize nineteenth century economic theory, but he constructed a substitute for it, a new economic orientation complete with new terms, new definitions of old terms, and a new ethic. And he went even further; he attempted to put the new economy into practice with his communistic Guild of St. George. Not only did he criticize the loose social stratification of his age, but he devised a system of social hierarchy which amounted to little more than a return to the medieval feudal structure. Far less willing than Carlyle was he to work out society's problems in terms of the "strange new Today"<sup>18</sup> of industrial nineteenth century England. For Ruskin, like Morris after him, was possessed of an artistic sensibility which told him that a true and widespread art simply could not flourish under present conditions. Art he considered to be a record of the worker's joy in labor, of his aspirations, of his sensitivity to beauty. Making one-tenth part of a pin, that worker could experience neither aspirations nor joy; living in an England of filth and smoke and soot, he could certainly not be sensitive to beauty. To make

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Carlyle, Works, X, 7.

art possible, the industrial base upon which Victorian society was built must, Ruskin thought, be destroyed.

Though Ruskin's schemes would have dealt severe blows to the status quo of nineteenth century England, though he faced up to the necessity for change much more than did Carlyle, yet in the last analysis he too refused to look beyond the framework of the present when he sought implementation for those schemes. He abhorred revolutions, either physical or legislative; and when he repudiated the rise of democratic liberalism, when he refused to join the Socialists, he shunned the causes which promised ultimately to bring about some of the effects for which he had fought. The Guild notwithstanding, he refused to believe in collective rather than individual action; as the Calvinism in him told him that man as an individual must make peace with his God, so too he believed that man as an individual must make peace with his society.

William Morris stood both at the end and at the left of the other five men who employed the medieval-modern contrast in the nineteenth century. Like the others, he saw great and pressing problems in his century, problems which needed desperately to be solved. Like the others, but with a greater love and a greater knowledge, he looked back at the middle ages and discovered partial solutions for present problems. Unlike the others, however, he was willing to take the final step; both the design and the implementation of his proposals for social reform extended far beyond the limitations of the status quo. He desired to move as far as possible from a

system of society which permitted such ugliness, unhappiness, and depravity as that which he saw on every side in his nineteenth century England. He would substitute for it a world in which beauty, happiness, equality, and fellowship reigned, a world free at once from the economic tyranny of modern times and the feudal tyranny of the middle ages. And if to create this world he would have to slaughter the sacred cows of the existing order, then slaughter them he would. Acutely perceiving that the new order was powerless to be born while established religion and private property existed, he repudiated their validity. Not only that, but he joined forces with the Socialist Movement because he saw that it too was attacking these same false gods, that it too was working toward the birth of a new and different concept of society. Morris was willing, as Carlyle and Ruskin were not, to place his hopes for the new society in a collective rather than an individual effort. Nor did he shrink from the possibility, or even the probability, that the rebirth of society, like that of the Phoenix, might be attended by fire.

Throughout the nineteenth century, enthusiasm for the medieval period was a characteristic of the age. So varied and many-sided were the ways by which that enthusiasm manifested itself in the century's novels, poems, architecture, art, scholarship, religion, politics, and even clothing styles, that no thinking or seeing Englishman could easily escape it. Even old John Durbeyfield, comparatively isolated on his Wessex farm, felt its impact. And within this total body of medieval

enthusiasm there existed for the last three-quarters of the century a tradition of contrasting the medieval with the modern for the purpose of social reform. The six men who contributed to this tradition and are the objects of this study looked back at the middle ages not as mere escapists, but as reformers--from their contemplations of that past age they formulated lessons for the present and ideals for the future.

Any attempt to measure the practical effectiveness of the tradition toward reform would be extremely difficult and certainly beyond the scope of this study. Nor would such a measurement be fair to those who participated in the tradition. They were not professional economists, sociologists, politicians, or priests; they were artists and men of letters. As such, their contributions ought not to be evaluated by the success or failure of this or that particular reform. For to the degree that they dealt with the transitory and turned their attention to particular reforms did they individually become less the artist, less the man of letters, more the journalist. Certainly one sees the journalist in them, particularly in Cobbett, but even he in Rural Rides and Legacy to Labourers was able to transcend the immediate and deal with the universal. Here, in the last analysis, the value of the tradition must be measured, in the realm of the universal, in the realm of human values. Seeing in their nineteenth century conditions which were destroying human dignity, they raised their voices against those conditions. Man, they knew, was more than an animal and more than a machine; and if industrialization had made him

either or both, then they would attack it. The merit of the tradition lies in that attack. It called to question, often in eloquent, even poetic language, the values of the industrial and commercial spirit. It asked its century to reevaluate the economy which sanctioned that spirit. It demanded that Englishmen look about them and observe the misery and depravity which an economic theory without ethical controls could not only cause, but condone. It asked that man be considered as man, a unique, creative creature with something of the divine in him; with hungers, thirsts, ambitions, loves which were not being satisfied under the existing order.

And were the contributors to the tradition wrong in thinking that man had fared better, both materially and spiritually, in the middle ages? Perhaps so--perhaps even certainly so. Yet given their age, given the complex problems which faced it, we may in part forgive them. It was an age of nostalgia, one which had lost the old and seemed powerless to gain the new. It was an age in which, along with all the self-congratulatory braying about progress by its new Philistine rulers, there was in the minds of sensitive individuals an acute awareness of the physical and moral ugliness attending the new industrialism, and there was a passionate yearning for the serenity, the beauty, the glory, the religious and social unity of an aristocratic and agrarian age, of a more or less imaginary medieval period.

Nor has this yearning entirely disappeared in our even more industrialized and Mammon-worshiping twentieth century.

Imaginations are still captivated, as Hollywood well knows, by tales of knighthood and chivalry. Penty's A Guildsman's Interpretation of History, a work which owes a great deal to Cobbett, Ruskin, and Morris, contains abundant praise of the position of the worker in the middle ages. Too, as Muller points out in his recent The Uses of the Past, "Religious thought is still seduced by the dream of the [medieval] Age of Faith."<sup>19</sup> The persistent sale of Walsh's The Thirteenth, Greatest of Centuries, which by 1952 had sold seventy-eight thousand copies, attests the accuracy of Muller's statement. And in 1954, just a year ago, Marquis W. Childs and Douglass Cater published their Ethics in a Business Society, a work which seeks, just as our medieval-modern contrasters sought, to find some governing ethic for the industrial economy. And where did they turn in their first chapter? Where else but to the middle ages, "The Age of Certitude!"

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<sup>19</sup> The Uses of the Past, p. 238.

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