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EBENEZER ELLIOTT: A STUDY OF HIS POETRY

1781 - 1849

KEITH CHARLES CHANDLER B.A.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
TO BE AWARDED BY COUNCIL FOR NATIONAL ACADEMIC AWARDS

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ABSTRACT

EBENEZER ELLIOTT: A STUDY OF HIS POETRY 1781 - 1849

- KEITH. C. CHANDLER

The intention of this study is to evaluate the writings of Ebenezer Elliott by particularly considering the response he makes in his poetry to his social environment as that is shaped by the impact of the Industrial Revolution on his native South Yorkshire during his lifetime (1781 - 1848).

While this response to context in his verse remains central, the particular quality of Elliott's techniques are analysed and assessed by reference to the appraisal of his contemporaries, his own estimate of his achievement and also with detachment from those contemporary values and expectations which shaped both the poetry and the estimate of it. The influence upon Elliott's work of his literary predecessors and contemporaries is referred to insofar as it facilitates an appreciation of Elliott's own work.

In placing Elliott in his social and historical context, and in considering the strengths and weaknesses of his verse, a thematic approach is adopted. Consideration of his treatment of the natural surroundings of his own locality is followed by an assessment of the development of his industrial muse as he strove to find a suitable manner in which to express the impact of the Industrial Revolution on himself and those around him. Thirdly, his political poetry, notably the forceful Corn Law Rhymes, their form and their implication are discussed, before a final consideration of his use of the narrative mode, which began in his early Gothic tales and reached its fulfilment in The Village Patriarch, in which his contemplation of man in society exhibits a distinctive humanitarianism and concern.

Insofar as this study provides a critical evaluation of Elliott's verse it breaks new ground and goes some way towards placing his achievement in both literary and historical terms.

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INTRODUCTION

In the years since he published his writing, little has been done in literary circles to place Ebenezer Elliott in a proper perspective. This thesis attempts to redress the balance by going some way towards placing his achievement in both literary and historical terms.

The response he makes in his poetry to his social environment, shaped by the impact of the Industrial Revolution during his lifetime (1781-1849) remains central. To consider this it is useful to sketch his biographical details.

Ebenezer Elliott was born in New Foundry, Greasborough Road, Masborough, Rotherham on 17th March 1781. His father was a whitesmith who migrated to South Yorkshire from the North East, attracted by opportunities opening up in the Iron Trade. His immediate ancestors are described as 'thieves, neither Scottish or English, who lived off the cattle they stole from both'. This wild streak continued to flourish, manifesting itself in a pattern of extreme politics and ultra calvinistic religion. Elliott's father was known locally as Devil Elliott and not unknown to the yeomanry for his Jacobinism during the years of the French Revolution. Significantly, his mother had some wealth deriving from a freeholding near Huddersfield.

This enabled his father to capitalize some of his skills in the form of New Foundry, where Elliott was born, one of eleven children, and eight successfully reared. His mother was not a healthy woman and exerted little influence in the family. His early years were quite dramatic and help to explain his particular sensibilities: difficult to educate, he did not settle to normal school life and, as a consequence he attended several for brief intervals. When he was six, he survived smallpox only to be left 'fearfully disfigured' with an increased fondness for solitude. His informal education was more valuable. From his father and his colourful friends; republicans and tinkers, he learned not only of fairy stories but of incidents and characters in the English Civil War, the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. The pictures which decorated the domestic room at the foundry were of Cromwell and Washington. Elliott spent many hours alone amongst the South Yorkshire countryside building a great passion for the local landscape at that transitory time when it was becoming industrialized and disfigured.

In his autobiographical memoirs and letters, Elliott often stressed the importance of the eighteenth Century tradition of radicalism. Sheffield's own tradition of radicalism, virility and democratic independence was also an important legacy. The structure of its cutlery and foundry industries, with many small craftsmen, employing only a few equally skilled hands, where the link between

master and man was cemented by common commercial aims, helped to shape Elliott's perspective. From the age of 14 he worked unpaid in his father's foundry, now struggling seriously with the poor trade in iron, and he maintained a share in the business until it went bankrupt.

At about this time he began to be aware of his educational deficiencies and educated himself in the writers available to him in a library bequeathed to his family: Schiller, Swift, Shakespeare, Thomson's Seasons, Milton, Tom Paine, Ossain and Junius. The literature he read at this stage then, does not reflect the new cult of Romanticism but illustrates more basic solid and provincial values. For leisure he studied botany and deeply moved by Thomson, tried to put local flower studies into verse with The Vernal Walk in 1801. This, in keeping with his other early work, is characterized by its lack of originality. He wrote stylised pieces after the manner of Wordsworth and Coleridge, with a liberal sprinkling of Gothic touches. The subject matter and the artificiality of this style do not work together however, although there is evidence of the powers of observation which were to characterize his later, more political verse.

Elliott married in 1805, by 1810 had five children and was to have eight more in later years. His wife's capital, like the capital of his parents, disappeared into the foundry. After 1815 came a commercial and emotional

crisis. In 1805 Elliott had taken over his father's foundry, and bought it on a mortgage, but with the post war depression, bad harvests and local competition, business fell off and the profits began to decrease. During this period his mother died and shortly afterwards his father.

The Corn Laws had been passed in 1815 by a predominantly land owning Parliament, their purpose being to guarantee a good return on wheat growing, by restricting imports of foreign corn, but one effect was to increase the price of bread. Elliott's first awareness of the so called 'bread tax' and its evils came when he diagnosed his own foundry's falling profits, believing that increased bread price meant a reduction in demand for other goods which had repercussions in his own industry. Even if there were additional reasons, this was to be a point of attack for Elliott in his later poetry.

By 1818, Elliott had been declared bankrupt, unable to keep up payments on the foundry, and he was obliged to live for some time dependent upon his wife's sisters. In 1821 he had been able to borrow some capital from them, and with this he set up house and a warehouse dealing with cutlery manufacture in Sheffield. So at the age of 40 he ceased to be a foundry man, took on workers and became a dealer in iron products. This move proved to be a shrewd piece of enterprise, for the warehouse in Gibraltar Street made profits reaching a highpoint in 1837, when he claimed he ought to have retired. He lost money for five years,

and left the trade to retire in 1842. At this point, having settled his sons, he cleared his debts, and with assets of about £6000 he found a quiet hillside home at Great Houghton, near Barnsley.

Interestingly, it was during this phase of successful enterprise that he produced his best writing. He left his derivative verse behind him in the move to Sheffield and found his own voice, and taking up images from the industrializing process, he began to write with originality. Centrally placed in the heart of the rapidly developing industrial city, Elliott lived and worked through four decades of dramatic change. The increase in population, the intensification of the processes of development, the sense of ever increasing pressure and the rage, passion and speed of the age became a subject for poetry.

Though he was perhaps conservative by nature and had brought up two of his sons as clergymen in the established church, he was critical of the land owners, seeing the revival of trade in the abolition of protection to agriculture, which he believed could only follow from the reform of Parliament, whereby industry and commerce would receive adequate representation, and that reform should come from an educated working class. This philosophy is reflected in his own political activity in Sheffield and gives the impetus to the political poetry he produced at this time.

Around 1830, Elliott formed the Sheffield Mechanics

Anti-Bread Tax Society which published a pamphlet of anti Corn Law Rhymes written by their founder, which ensured his fame in Sheffield. When agitation for the first Reform Bill began, he suspended the operation of the society to assist the recently formed Sheffield Political Union in promoting parliamentary reform measures. Elliott's celebratory poems on the passing of the Bill show that he thought that it would inevitably bring Corn Law repeal. One such, was a hymn The Triumph of Reform sung to the tune of Rule Britannia by a reported twenty thousand celebrating in Paradise Square, Sheffield.

Elliott was instrumental in trying to ensure that the new proposed seats for Sheffield would be fought by four Liberals. As a local speaker he was practical and vigorous and on the hustings he pledged his support for the philosophical radical Samuel Bailey; who advocated Corn Law repeal, the extension of the franchise, triennial parliaments, the ballot and the abolition of the newspaper tax and Thomas Asline Ward; a popular local figure with the working classes. Elliott had been enfranchised as he was by now at least a £10 householder and he voted for the two most interested in the worker. These two however were defeated in favour of two moderate Whigs. The working classes then, despite their numbers and their supporters could not prevail over middle class moral opinion and felt disillusioned by the results and implications of the Reform Bill and by their voting neighbours and employers. Elliott

continued to fuel this particular fire, speaking at every opportunity of aristocratic and Whig treachery and its effects.

He was now sought by and began publishing in middle class radical journals, Tait's Edinburgh Magazine and the Monthly Repository in particular. His Corn Law Rhymes which had been published in 1830, received favourable reviews, to be considered later in this study. Elliott was admired for his devotion to the cause for which he was fast becoming a national protagonist. The next decade saw him produce most of his poetry, and now at the age of 50 he was beginning to gain some national recognition.

He was now fully disillusioned with the move for parliamentary reform and the Sheffield Anti-Corn Law Society was formed in 1834, whose impetus was to make way for Corn Law repeal. Trade deteriorated however and a series of bad harvests resulted in acute unemployment and poverty and in 1837 came Elliott's second commercial setback. He lost a third of his savings over the next five years as trade declined, although he continued with his campaigns. He was in correspondence with the National Anti-Corn Law League in 1839, which had been formed ten years after his own Sheffield equivalent. In his letters at this time there is an indication of complaints of increasing middle class apathy towards repeal and a hint of fatigue from his lack of success, hinting that the main agents of reform were these middle commercial classes.

The Chartists had recently been formed for their own protection against increasing unemployment and low wages and a Sheffield Working Men's Association had been formed in 1837 to urge the extension of the franchise and the ballot. Elliott presided and spoke at all local meetings and was the local delegate at the National Working Mens Association had convention in New Palace Yard, Westminster in 1838. He still maintained that the most beneficial component of Reform was Corn Law Repeal. Many of the Chartist members of the W.M.A. disagreed with this, saying that as the Corn Laws were too beneficial to the land owners to be repealed, the franchise must come first and therefore the Charter. It was suggested that high wages could only be maintained by the protection of trade. Handbills were distributed at this time to attack the misguided philosophy of the Corn Law Rhymer.

Elliott now voted against the Charter and the extension of the franchise for the first time, and was to continue to do so, disagreeing with the Chartist economic theories and by now condemning their policy of physical violence. He resigned from the Sheffield W.M.A. and in a letter published in the Sheffield Iris on May 7th 1839 accused them of "fighting the battle of the aristocracy under the peoples colours.. .. it must not be supposed that I am one of a body of men who are willing to be represented by persons capable of supporting such barborous legislation".

He still kept up his contribution to periodicals and in 1840 William Tait brought out a collected edition of his poems. At sixty years old, he left Sheffield and in his letters there is evidence of weariness from politics and publishing. In retirement though he still sent poetry to the journals and continued productions for a later volume. He was to see the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and after a long and painful illness, often exacerbated by his quick temper and over excitement when learning of injustice, he died at his home in December 1849.

Elliott's poetry clearly draws on the experiences of his life and reference to this will be made throughout this study where appropriate.

In order to fully assess his verse by considering its strengths and weaknesses, a thematic, rather than a chronological approach is now adopted. I have not chosen to consider the poetry in the order in which it was written, because this would merely create an imbalance in the study, in that almost without exception the poetry most worthy of analysis was produced in the last two decades of his life. His poetry is more fruitfully divided in order to consider his use of varying poetic forms by which to deal with the themes of nature, history, industry, injustice and politics which provide the subject matter of his verse.

To this end the assessment has been broken down into the five chapters which follow. Chapter 1 looks at the verse, written both early and late in his life, which deals with

the natural surroundings of the locality, considers how his aesthetic awareness and perception was shaped and developed and analyses the poetic forms he chose to express this in.

In Chapter 2, perhaps the most important factor in his development as a poet, his reference to industry and its vitality are considered. Here, images from the natural world are expanded to encompass the growth, power and progressive nature of industrial development. The language in which this is framed is looked at in some detail, as it provides a key to Elliott finding a new subject for verse.

The third chapter is in more ways than one a central one, in that it considers the poetry through which he made his name, the Corn Law Rhymes. The reasons for their contemporary popularity, their form and implication are discussed as well as the way in which Elliott's explicit political stance here, draws upon the industrial, commercial and social context in which he worked and observed.

The final two chapters consider his use of a rather different form, the longer narrative poem. Chapter 4 highlights the weaknesses in his early Gothic and Romantic Tales and Chapter 5 looks in detail at his longest work The Village Patriach which exhibits clearly the way in which his themes are linked together and developed in a moral yet realistic tale of man in society. This seen in terms of the natural world, the transitions to a more urban and industrialized society and given political impetus via the contemplation and reactions of the central character.

The method in each chapter is similar; to provide contextual and historical background, where appropriate, before going on to analyse some of the verse in detail. Reference is made to the influence on his work of his literary predecessors and contemporaries and appraisal by contemporary critical opinion, where such reference facilitates the aim of this thesis; to analyse and assess the particular quality of Elliott's poetic techniques.

CHAPTER I

NATURAL SURROUNDINGS

An obvious and perhaps necessary starting point for any assessment of the poetry of Ebenezer Elliott lies in his nature poetry, and the verse which seeks specific inspiration in the local context of Elliott's life. The majority of his poems are rooted firmly in the context of the Sheffield region in which he lived and worked, even when their object is neither primarily descriptive nor evocative. In his industrial, political and narrative verse, there is almost invariably that reference to the natural scene which Elliott observed acutely, and to the immediate locality of his youth.

In this chapter therefore, I am concerned to consider the extent of Elliott's development as a purely local, provincial writer. Such consideration acknowledges the poetic limitations of the verse discussed here, recognises that he is often no more than a versifier, seeking to describe the local scene, and sometimes to evoke in his reader some sense of the beauty of the natural order. Elliott, the poet of national standing, admired by such writers as Carlyle and Mill, remains for consideration later in this thesis.

By looking at the verse itself my intention is to determine whether Elliott seemed to have any real aesthetic sense or whether his inspirations came only from familiar nature, and to discuss the closely associated query of to what extent he responded to beauty for its own sake or whether his strictly local sympathies led to a response based entirely on recognition.

Elliott's sensitivity was first aroused by nature, when as a boy he played truant and wandered the countryside around his native Rotherham, which is alluded to here in a paper produced after his death by a local scholar who uses language with the characteristic exaggeration of one who regarded Elliott as a local hero, by virtue of the local poetry which he produced.

'The Boy for all the ordinary purposes of school learning was dull, untoward, and unteachable; but, 'the Bard in his bosom', was even then developing unconscious, but highly precocious presence. The great mother Nature was impregnating the nascent spiritual sensibilities of the boy; (1) congenital nature, given by the natural mother, and the mild and illicit ramblings of these truant days were silently nurturing the poetic element into vigorous life, which some day, if tardily, was to win an unfading coronal of fame.'

Whether Elliott's subsequent fame can be traced to his early nature verse is debatable, yet there is no

(1) Guest, John, - a paper read before the Rotherham Literary and Scientific Society, Feb.23rd, 1880,p.10.

doubt as to the prominence of elements of local writing in his best verse. The first inspiration from his writing came from nature and in his autobiography there is specific reference to this. It merits quotation at length here, not least for its insight into Elliott's formative years and particularly his strong interest in the natural world; the wildlife around him; the opportunity for escape from a process of learning at school which proved so difficult for him, and the evidence of inspiration not first for poetry, but for a form of self education, so important a factor in Elliott's position in a tradition of writers on the 'poor'.

I was sent by my despairing parents to Dalton school, two miles from Masbro'; and I see at this moment, as vividly as if nearly fifty years had not since passed over me, the kingfisher shooting along the Don as I passed school-ward through the Aldwark meadows, eating my dinner four hours before dinner-time. But, oh! the misery of reading without having learned to spell. The name of the master was Brunskill, -- a broken-hearted Cumberland man, -- one of the best of living creatures, -- a sort of sad-looking, half-starved angel without wings; and I have stood for hours beside his desk, with the tears running down my face, utterly unable to set down one correct figure. I doubt whether he suspected that I had not been taught the preliminary rules. I actually did not know that they were necessary, and looked on a boy who could do a sum in vulgar fractions as a sort of magician, (another proof of my natural stupidity). Dreading school, I absented myself

(2)

(2) Elliott- 'Autobiographical Memoir', written June 1841 - appeared in The Athenaeum, 12 Jan. 1850 - here from holograph signed and dated June 21st, 1841 in Sheffield Local Studies Library.

from it during the summer months of the second year - 'playing truant' about Dalton-Deign, and Silverwood, or Thrybergh Park, where I stole duck eggs, mistaking them for eggs of wild birds, and was brought before Madam Finch. She, seeing what a simpleton I was, released me with a reprimand.

Let it not be supposed that these were happy days. I was utterly miserable. I trembled when I drew near home, for I knew not how to answer the questions which I feared my father would put to me. Sometimes I avoided them by slinking to bed without supper, -- which to a lad who took care to eat his dinner soon after breakfasting could not be convenient. It was impossible, however, to prevent my father from discovering that I was learning nothing but vagabondism, -- or from suspecting that my slow progress was owing more to idleness than to want of ability to learn. He set me to work in the foundry, as a punishment. But working in the foundry, so far from being a punishment to me, relieved me from the sense of inferiority which had so long depressed me; for I was not found to be less clever there than other beginners. For this there was a sufficient reason: I had been familiar from my infancy with the processes of the manufactory, and possibly a keen though silent observer of them. The result of his experiment vexed the experimenter, -- and he had good cause for vexation; for it soon appeared that I could play my part at the York Keelman with the best of its customers. Yet I never thoroughly relished the rude company and coarse enjoyments of the alehouse. My thoughts constantly wandered to the canal banks and my little ships; and -- I know not why, but -- I always built my fortresses, aye, and my castles in the air too, where the flowers were the finest. The 'yellow ladies' bed-straw' (I did not then know its name), was a particular favourite of mine; and the banks of the canal were golden with it. At this time I had strong religious impressions; and (when there was service) I seldom missed attending the chapel of parson Allard -- a character who might have sate for Scott's picture of Dominie Sampson. But I sometimes went to the Masbro' chapel, (Walker's, it was then called), to hear Mr. Groves, one of the most eloquent and dignified of men, but hated by my father (who was a capital hater) for some nothing or other of doctrine. I was on my way, I

believe, to hear him, when I called, one Sunday, on my aunt Robinson -- a widow, left with three children and about £30 a year, on which (God knows how), she contrived to live respectably, and to give her two sons an education which ultimately made them both gentlemen. I thought she received me coldly. She did not, I think, know that I had been tipsy a night or two before; but I was conscience-stricken. After a minute's silence, she rose, and laid before me a number of Sowerby's English Botany, which her son Benjamin, then apprenticed to Dr. Stainforth, of Sheffield, was purchasing monthly. Never shall I forget the impression made on me by the beautiful plates. I actually touched the figure of the primrose, half-convinced that the mealiness on the leaves was real. I felt hurt when she removed the book from me, -- but she removed it only to show me how to draw the figures, by holding them to the light, with a thin piece of paper before them. On finding that I could so draw them correctly, I was lifted at once above the inmates of the alehouse at least a foot in mental stature. My first effort was a copy from the primrose; under which, (always fond of fine words), I wrote its Latin name, Primula veris vulgaris. So, thenceforward, when I happened to have a spare hour, I went to my aunt's to draw. But she had not yet shown me all the wealth of her Benjamin. The next revealed marvel was his book of dried plants. Columbus when he discovered the New World was not a greater man than I at that moment; for no misgiving crossed my mind that the discovery was not my own, and no Americo Vespuccius disputed the honour of it with me. But (alas, for the strength of my religious impressions!), thenceforth often did parson Allard inquire why Eb was not at chapel -- for I passed my Sundays in gathering flowers, that I might make pictures of them. I had then, as now, no taste for the science of Botany; the classifications of which seemed to me to be like preparations for sending flowers to prison. I began, however, to feel mannish. There was mystery about me. People stopped me with my plants, and asked what diseases I was going to cure. But I was not in the least aware that I was learning the art of poetry, which I then hated -- especially Pope's, which gave me the headache if I heard it read aloud

My wanderings, however, soon made me acquainted with the nightingales in Basingthorpe Spring, -- where, I am told, they still sing sweetly; and with a beautiful green snake, about a yard long, which on the fine Sabbath mornings, about ten o'clock, seemed to expect me at the top of Primrose Lane. It became so familiar that it ceased to uncurl at my approach. I have sate on the style beside it till it seemed unconscious of my presence and when I rose to go, it would only lift the scales behind its head or the skin beneath them -- and they shone in the sun like fire. I know not how often this beautiful and harmless child of God may have 'sate for his picture' in my writings -- a dozen, at least; but wherever I might happen to meet with any of its brethren or sisters -- at Thistlebed Ford, where they are all vipers, black or brown -- or in the Aldwark meadows, on the banks of the Don, with the kingfisher above and the dragon-fly below them -- or on Boston Castle ridge -- or in the Clough dell, where they swarm -- or in the Canklow Quarry -- or by the Rother, near Hail-Mary Wood, -- whatever the scene might be, the portrait, if drawn, was sure to be that of my first snake-love. (My flower-hunting rambles also brought me acquainted with a plant called 'dead maid's fingers' -- the Latin name, I think, is Arum. I found it about halfway up Primrose Lane on the left hand. My sister Theresa was with me, so to show my botanical knowledge, I prevailed on her to taste part of a white one, which she instantly spat out. I, however, valiantly ate the whole of a red one, and the consequences were swelled throat and tongue, which for some hours threatened serious consequences).

I had now become a person of some note; and if I let my wondering adorers suppose that I copied my figures of plants, not at second hand, but from the plants which they saw I was in the habit of collecting -- pardon me, outraged spirit of Truth! for I had been so long a stranger to the voice of praise, and it sounded so sweetly in my unaccustomed ears, that I could not refuse to welcome it when it came. But my dried plants were undeniably my own; and so obvious was there merit, that even my all-praised and all-able brother sometimes condescended to look at and admire my Hortus Siccus -- as I pompously named my book of specimens. It was about this time that I first

heard him read the first book of Thomson's Seasons; and he was a capital reader, -- well aware, too, of that fact. When he came to the description of the polyanthus and auricula, I waited impatiently till he laid down the book; I then took it into the garden, where I compared the description with the living flowers. Here was another idea -- Botany in verse! -- a prophecy that the days of scribbling were at hand.

This extract tells us a number of things about Elliott himself and perhaps suggests how his nature and local verse may be best approached. Firstly, the events described are illustrative of the inquisitiveness and sensibility which were to be reflected in much of Elliott's political verse in later life; secondly, it reflects an individuality and sense of purpose, crucial to any conception of Elliott the man; thirdly the peculiarly local flavour of the extract and the wide eyed enthusiasm of the young boy is evident in the verse under consideration here and finally the precision of detail with which he describes the living plants, he attempted to reproduce in the actual verse itself.

During his adolescent years, Elliott's self education continued as he read widely from a small library bequeathed to him by his father⁽³⁾ and subsequently his first work was The Vernal Walk, published

(3) King, J.W. Ebenezer Elliott: A Sketch with copious extracts from his Descriptive Poems. Sheffield. 1854, p.14. viz. "Barrow's Sermons," "Herepin's Travels," "Denham's Physico-Theology," "Ray's Wisdom of God," "Young's Night Thoughts," "Hervey's Meditations," and three volumes of the "Royal Magazine" embellished with engravings.

The apostrophizing, hymnal style of the verse was to be used later in Elliott's more political verse, but the poem is of most interest in its showing the poet able to incorporate elements of Milton, Thomson, Gray and Goldsmith. His poetic education had, at least, provided a model, and as a juvenile work, despite its many defects, there is a hint of the enthusiasm toward Nature, which was to be seen in his more controlled, later Nature verse, and of the religious, laudatory tone, so much part of his early verse.

Hark! 'tis the hymn of nature! Love-taught birds
Salute, with songs of gratulation sweet,
The sweet May morning. How harmoniously, (5)
Over these meadows of the rising sun,
The music floats! O Love! Love ever young!
On the soft bosom of the Spring reclined,
Nurse of the tender thought and generous deed!
Thou com'st to bless thy children. Let me drink
Thy waters of elysium, and bless thee.
Oft have I passed yon cottage door at eve,
Where sat the swain, his daily labour done,
Nursing his little children on his knee,
And kissing them at times, while o'er him bent
His happy partner, smiling as she view'd
Her lisping babes; then have I blest thee, Love,
And fondly call'd thee Fount of Social Peace!
What art thou, deathless, all-pervading power,
That, like a meek, yet universal sun,
Through universal nature gently shin'st?
Art thou a ray from light's unclouded source?
An emanation of divinity?
No; thou art God, our God, th' Eternal One!
To thee I bow, Being all amiable,
On thee I call. Parent of every good,
Preserve me from the vices of the base,
And when I reach the dark and narrow house,
Let me have well deserved the good man's love!

(5). The Vernal Walk, second edition, printed in
Elliott - Poetical Works, 1840, lines 27-53.

Elliott then had taken his pursuit of nature to attempt to write 'botany in verse' and in his Collected Works are several poems which show his appreciation of Nature and his intimacy with the countryside around him. These poems, notably To the Bramble Flower; The Wonders of the Lane; Forest Worship; Leaves and Men; Rainbowed May; Ribbledin and Don and Rother were written at various periods in his life and exhibit some of his more delicate craftsmanship, using varying poetic forms to view nature from differing perspectives.

To the Bramble Flower is written in a conversational tone and the familiarity of the poet with the flower and its characteristics is evident throughout.

Thy fruit full-well the schoolboy knows,
Wild bramble of the brake!
So, put thou forth thy small white rose;
I love it for his sake.
Though woodbines flaunt and roses glow 5
O'er all the fragrant bowers,
Thou needst not be ashamed to show
Thy satin-threaded flowers;
For dull the eye, the heart is dull,
That cannot feel how fair, 10
Amid all beauty beautiful,
Thy tender blossoms are!
How delicate thy gauzy frill!
How rich thy branchy stem!
How soft thy voice, when woods are still, 15
And thou sing'st hymns to them;
While silent showers are falling slow
And, 'mid the general hush,
A sweet air lifts the little bough,
Lone whispering through the bush! 20
The primrose to the grave is gone;
The hawthorn flower is dead;
The violet by the moss'd grey stone
Hath laid her weary head;

But thou, wild bramble! back dost bring 25
 In all their beauteous power,
 The fresh green days of life's fair spring,
 And boyhood's blossomy hour. (6)
 Scorn'd bramble of the brake! once more
 Thou bid'st me be a boy,
 To gad with thee the woodlands o'er,
 In freedom and in joy.

The light, delicate tone is assisted by the ABAB rhyme scheme and by the close accurate description as the poet sees the flower, notably 'satin-threaded' (8), 'tender blossoms' (12), 'gauzy frill' (13), and 'sweet air' (19). The making of nouns into adjectives in lines 13 and 14 owes much to eighteenth century natural description in verse, as does much of the syntax throughout this short poem. In lines 21-23, Elliott catalogues the passing, spring flowers in order to praise the longer lasting bramble flower, whose orchestration of 'fresh green days of life's fair spring' (27), is compared with the youthfulness of the boy and his simple, yet precise memories of brightness and happiness.

In The Wonders of the Lane the observation is again precise yet here it is set within a hymn of praise to light and growth as Elliott responds to a familiar, recognizable nature, calling us to follow his guided tour,

Strong climber of the mountain's side,
 Though thou the vale disdain,
 Yet walk with me where hawthorns hide

(6). To the Bramble Flower in 'Kerhonah, The Vernal Walk, Win Hill and other poems'. Vol. III, London, 1835.
 - referred to hereafter as Collected Works - 1835.

The wonders of the lane.
 High o'er the rushy springs of Don 5
 The stormy gloom is roll'd;
 The moorland hath not yet put on
 His purple, green, and gold.
 But here the titling* spreads his wing,
 Where dewy daisies gleam; 10
 And here the sun-flower† of the spring
 Burns bright in morning's beam.
 To mountain winds the famish'd fox
 Complains that Sol is slow
 O'er headlong steep and gushing rocks 15
 His royal robe to throw.
 But here the lizard seeks the sun,
 Here coils in light the snake;
 And here the fire-tuft/ hath begun
 Its beauteous nest to make. 20
 O then, while hums the earliest bee
 Where verdure fires the plain, (7)
 Walk thou with me, and stoop to see
 The glories of the lane!
 For, oh, I love these banks of rock, 25
 This roof of sky and tree,
 These tufts, where sleeps the gloaming clock,
 And wakes the earliest bee!
 As spirits from eternal day
 Look down on earth secure, 30
 Gaze thou, and wonder, and survey
 A world in miniature!
 A world not scorn'd by Him who made
 Even weakness by his might;
 But solemn in his depth of shade,
 And splendid in his light.
 Light! not alone on clouds afar
 O'er storm-loved mountains spread,
 Or widely teaching sun and star,
 Thy glorious thoughts are read; 40
 Oh, no! thou art a wondrous book
 To sky, and sea, and land -
 A page on which the angels look,
 Which insects understand!
 And here, O light! minutely fair, 45
 Divinely plain and clear,
 Like splinters of a crystal hair
 Thy bright small hand is here.

* The Hedge Sparrow. + The Dandelion
 / The Golden-Crested Wren

The description is once again simple and subtle,
 notably with the notion of the sun giving life and colour
 to the hillside (7 and 8). The animals with whom Elliott

(7). The Wonders of the Lane, lines 1-48 - in Collected Works -
 1835 - ibid.

snows a familiarity, which takes us back to his own experiences with the snake, are seen in terms of their dependence on the sun as a life giving force. The footnotes, which are included, indicate Elliott's precision for detail, as in using familiar names he is aware that his reader may not have the same proximity to nature as he enjoys. The power of the sun, personified poetically in line 14 is suggested in the vocabulary, 'his royal robe to throw' (16), and 'where verdure fires the plain' (22). His focus then changes to look more closely at the 'world in miniature' (12), 'not scorn'd by Him who made / Even weakness in his might' (33/4). The sense of size is achieved through 'banks of rock' (25), and 'roof of sky and tree' (26), and then by moving immediately to the 'tufts' where the life he is to describe is enacted. 'Gloaming clock' (27) is rather ambiguous in that he could wish to suggest a dusky darkness or to see the miniature world as witness to the passage of time. Lines 33 to 43 could easily appear in a hymn book though their purpose as praise for all of nature is succinctly indicated with 'which insects understand' (44). Elliott is indeed inspired by familiar nature, yet his aesthetic awareness is prevalent here and his attempt in the following lines to convey minuteness in terms of greatness is an interesting and fairly original one,

Yon drop-fed lake, six inches wide,
 Is Huron, girt with wood; 50
 This driplet feeds Missouri's tide -
 And that Niagara's flood.
 What tidings from the Andes brings
 Yon line of liquid light,
 That down from heav'n in madness flings 53
 The blind foam of its might?
 Do I not hear his thunder roll -
 The roar that ne'er is still?
 'Tis mute as death! - but in my soul
 It roars, and ever will. 60
 What forests tall of tiniest moss
 Clothe every little stone!
 What pigmy oaks their foliage toss
 O'er pigmy valleys lone!
 With shade o'er shade, from ledge to ledge, 65
 Ambitious of the sky,
 They feather o'er the steepest edge
 Of mountains mushroom high,
 O God of marvels! who can tell
 What myriad living things 70
 On these grey stones unseen may dwell;
 What nations, with their kings? (8)
 I feel no shock, I hear no groan,
 While fate perchance o'erwhelms
 Empires on this subverted stone - 75
 A hundred ruin'd realms!
 Lo! in that dot, some mite, like me,
 Impell'd by woe or whim,
 May crawl some atoms cliffs to see -
 A tiny world to him! 80
 Lo! while he pauses, and admires
 The works of Nature's might,
 Spurn'd by my foot, his world expires,
 And all to him is night!
 O God of terrors! what are we? - 85
 Poor insects, spark'd with thought!
 Thy whisper, Lord, a word from thee
 Could smite us into nought!
 But should'st thou wreck our father-land
 And mix it with the deep, 90
 Safe in the hollow of thine hand
 Thy little ones would sleep.

Nature is universal and part of one great organic whole and lines 49 to 56 contain both literal observations and metaphorical implications. The driplet could indeed be linked with Missouri and Niagara and the sense of size is achieved by the observation contained within this. The six inch wide 'lake' is to the insect what Huron is to man.

(8). Ibid - lines 49 to 93 (end)

Elliott then widens his perception to see the lightning, cleverly described as a 'line of liquid lights' (54), as being wrought from the might of Andes' peaks. The analytical descriptions of the moss and ferns (61-8) shows an intricate use of vocabulary and idea. The moss in this minute world is as a forest, the repetition of the scale of size with 'tiniest, little and pigmy' focusing our attention on a precise, known detail. The moss covers the surrounding rocks and hills, seeking sunlight, succinctly given as 'ambitious of the sky' and the use of 'feather' as a verb portrays exactly its soft, delicate appearance. The poem ends with a reference to universality in that the plant 'kingdom' is seen in relation to man, who is by extension, a very small component of a greater whole (75-80). The eulogistic tone of the final ten lines conveys the feeling that here Elliott has a direct aesthetic response to nature, enlarged and made richer through his familiarity with it.

He can, however, adopt a different stance through which to convey this response as in Forest Worship and Leaves and Men. In the former, the simple rhythm, the use of a rhyme scheme where alternate lines rhyme and once again the praise to the Creator of the beauty, give the poem a religious, hymnal tone, which was to become a consistent one in much of his verse. Thus, in the first two stanzas,

Within the sun-lit forest,
Our roof the bright blue sky,
Where fountains flow, and wild flowers blow,
We lift our hearts on high:
Beneath the frown of wicked men
Our country's strength is bowing;
But, thanks to God! they can't prevent
The lone wildflowers from blowing!

High, high above the tree-tops, (9)
The lark is soaring free;
Where streams the light through broken clouds
His speckled breast I see:
Beneath the might of wicked men
The poor man's worth is dying;
But, thank'd be God! in spite of them,
The lark still warbles flying!

The verses are given a lyrical quality by the alliteration of the following stanzas, as the softness of the bird's song is contrasted with the oppressor and the natural world responds with angry thunder. Elliott thus moves subtly from the goodness of the birds, valleys and rivers to show the bad, human influences around them, and in doing, shows echoes of his political verse and the praise of the benefits of work over the wrongs of oppression.

How softly, in the pauses
Of song, re-echoed wide,
The cushat's coo, the linnet's lay,
O'er rill and river glide!
With evil deeds of evil men
Th'affrighted land is ringing;
But still, O lord! the pious heart
And soul-toned voice are singing!

(9) Forest Worship - stanzas 1 and 2 - in Collected Works - 1835.

Hush! hush! the preacher preacheth:
"Woe to the oppressor, woe!"
But sudden gloom o'ercasts the sun
And sadden'd flowers below:
So frowns the Lord! - but, tyrants, ye
Deride his indignation,
And see not in his gather'd brow
Your days of tribulation! (10)

Speak low, thou heaven-paid teacher!
The tempest bursts above:
God whispers in the thunder: hear
The terrors of his love!;
On useful hands, and honest hearts,
The base their wrath are wreaking;
But, thank'd be God! they can't prevent
The storm of heav'n from speaking.

In Leaves and Men, there is constant repetition of
'Old Leaf', which gives the verse a slow dirge-like
quality, as here in the first three stanzas of the
poem.

Drop, drop into the grave, Old Leaf,
Drop, drop into the grave;
Thy acorn's grown, thy acorn's sown -
Drop, drop into the grave.
December's tempests rave, Old Leaf,
Above thy forest-grave, Old Leaf;
Drop, drop into the grave!

The birds, in spring, will sweetly sing
That death alone is sad;
The grass will grow, the primrose show
That death alone is sad.
Lament above thy grave, Old Leaf!
For what has life to do with grief?
'Tis death alone that's sad.

(10). Ibid. stanzas 4, 5 and 6.

What then? We two have both lived through
The sunshine and the rain;
And bless'd be He, to me and thee,
Who sent his sun and rain! (11)
We've had our sun and rain, Old Leaf,
And God will send again, Old Leaf,
The sunshine and the rain.

The leaf is brittle and fragile and about to drop and die, a direct parallel to the retrospective poet, whose use of vocabulary indicates the prevalence of death, 'grave, drop, death, lament, grief, sad, lived'. The internal rhyme within the stanzas adds to the plaintive tone of the verse and Elliott, simply, achieves his purpose.

In much of his nature verse, Elliott is very aware of colour and sound, and his aesthetic sense is never more evident. In a short poem called A Thunder Storm in Winter, the storm is evoked in the following way, in a successful blend of colour and succinct observation

...Rooted in heaven, shot down the branchy flame,
While the blue moonlight vanish'd suddenly. (12)
Brighter than light on snow, the brightness came,
Filling the vales with forests of strange fire,
The streams with blood; and flinging o'er the cloud
Banners of crimson, laced with silver wire.
Down to mute earth the giant darkness bow'd,...

In Rainbowed May, his intention is other than descriptive, as he uses it to express a sentiment, which is to become a common feature of the verse to be considered

(11) Leaves and Men - Collected Works - 1835, lines 1 to 21

(12) A Thunder Storm in Winter - lines 2 to 8 - Ibid, 1835.

in this Chapter.

Now, over violets the chaffinch hops,
And bursts of sunshine startle wood and copse,
 With bluebells gay;
For heav'n is dim with showers, and mountain-tops
 Look down on rainbow'd May: 5
Haste then, mechanic, take thy spade and hoes;
Haste to thy garden, while thy soul o'erflows
 With hope and joy;
And with thee take, rejoicing as he goes,
 Thy heart-awaken'd boy. 10

Lo! his cheek reddens as he lifts his eyes!
He grasps his rusted rake with joyful cries (13)
 And sinews stark;
And to his shout his smoke-dried dog replies,
 With dusty frisk and bark; 15
For to the garden, where the red-breast hops,
Through gleams of light that startle wood and copse
 They take their way;
While, bathed in dewy air, the mountain tops
 Look down on rainbow'd May. 20

The components of May's beauty, the chaffinch, the sunshine and the 'gay' bluebells, are seen as inspiration for the mechanic to produce such colour in his garden and the vocabulary tells of happiness, 'soul oerflows; joy, rejoicing, heart-awaken'd'. The boy's response is a fitting one, and the image of the happy dog (14/15), and the robin all constitute this idyllic scene and even the mountain tops seem to physically benefit, 'bathed in dewy air'.

In places Elliott's descriptive passages show a freshness and richness so indicative of that which he is actually responding to, and this is achieved by the language he chooses for natural description. Sound,

(13). Rainbowed May - lines 1 to 20 - Ibid, 1835.

colour and even fragrance seem to coalesce to produce the sort of writing shown here in the first half of May. Once again, the precision of the details he provides suggest the intimacy which his autobiography had alluded to.

Shade-Loving Hyacinth! thou com'st again; (14)
And thy rich odours seem to swell the flow
Of the lark's song, the readbreast's lonely strain,
And the stream's tune - best sung where wild-flowers
 blow,
And ever sweetest where the sweetest grow.
Who hath condensed, O broom! in thy bright flowers
The light of mid-day suns? What virgin's cheek
Can match this apple bloom - these glowing showers
Of glistering daisies? How their blushes speak
Of rosy hues that red o'er ocean break,
When cloudy morn is calm, yet fain to weep,
Because the beautiful are still the frail!
Hark! 'tis the thrush! - he sings beneath the steep,
Where coolness ever charms the fountain'd vale!
How eloquently well he tells his tale,

Interestingly though, there is an abrupt change in the second half of this poem as Elliott contrasts the beauty of nature which he has described, with the wrongs of man, and he sees the song of the thrush, and the growth of a flower as outlasting and being more worthy than man. The poet then can moralize from the starting point of a humble, but lasting natural world, and thereby develop the various stances seen within this part of his verse, moving towards the moral tone arising from the rhetoric of his later political poetry.

Elliott's biographies and letters indicate the poet's pleasure at walking in the countryside around his

(14). May - lines 1 to 15 - Ibid, 1835.

native South Yorkshire and many of his 'nature' poems are personal responses. In Ribbledin;, or the Christening, he turns his address to a small stream which he then names, incidentally a name it retains to the present day, and his conversation **it.becaf^es** a lament **ar\d** at the same time contains an enthusiastic and deeply sincere perception of the river he knows so well.

No name hast thou! lone streamlet
 That lovest Rivilin.
 Here, if a bard may christen thee,
 I'll call thee "Ribbledin;"
 Here, where first murmuring from thine urn, 5
 Thy voice deep joy expresses;
 And down the rock, like music, flows
 The wildness of thy tresses.

Here, while beneath the umbrage
 Of Nature's forest bower, 10
 Bridged o'er by many a fallen birch,
 And watch'd by many a flower,
 To meet thy cloud-descended love,
 All trembling, thou retirest -
 Here will I murmur to thy waves 15
 The sad joy thou inspirest.

Dim world of weeping mosses!
 A hundred years ago,
 Yon hoary-headed holly tree
 Beheld thy streamlet flow: 20
 See how he bends him down to hear
 The tune that ceases never!
 Old as the rocks, wild stream, he seems,
 While thou art young for ever.

Wildest and lonest streamlet! 25
 Grey oaks, all lichen'd o'er!
 Rush-bristled isles! ye ivied trunks
 That marry shore to shore!
 And thou, gnarl'd dwarf of centuries,
 Whose snaked roots twist above me! 30
 O for the tongue or pen of Burns,
 To tell you how I love ye!

(15). Ribbledin, or the Christening in 'Miscellaneous Poems' - "1840 edition - Poetical Works.

Would that I were a river,
To wander all alone
Through some sweet Eden of the wild, 35
In music of my own;
And bathed in bliss, and fed with dew,
Distill'd o'er mountains hoary,
Return unto my home in heav'n
On wings of joy and glory! 40

Or that I were the lichen,
That, in this roofless cave,
(The dim geranium's lone boudoir,
Dwells near the shadow'd wave,
And hears the breeze-bow'd tree-tops sigh, 45
While tears below are flowing,
For all the sad and lovely things
That to the grave are going!

O that I were a primrose,
To bask in sunny air! 50
Far, far from all the plagues that make
Town-dwelling men despair!
Then would I watch the building-birds,
Where light and shade are moving,
And lovers' whisper, and love's kiss, 55
Rewards the loved and loving!

Or that I were a skylark,
To soar and sing above,
Filling all hearts with joyful sounds,
And my own soul with love! 60
Then o'er the mourner and the dead,
And o'er the good man dying,
My song should come like buds and flowers
When music warbles flying.

O that a wing of splendour, 65
Like yon wild cloud, were mine!
Yon bounteous cloud, that gets to give,
And borrows to resign!
On that bright wing, to climes of spring
I'd bear all wintry bosoms, 70
And bid hope smile on weeping thoughts,
Like April on her blossoms;

Or like the rainbow, laughing
 O'er Rivilin and Don,
 When misty morning calleth up 75
 Her mountains, one by one,
 While glistening down the golden broom,
 The gem-like dew-drop raineth,
 And round the little rocky isles
 The little wave complaineth. 80

O that the truth of beauty
 Were married to my rhyme!
 That it might wear a mountain charm
 Until the death of Time!
 Then, Ribbledin! would all the best 85
 Of Sorrow's sons and daughters
 See Truth reflected in my song.
 Like beauty on thy waters.

No longer, nameless streamlet,
 That marriest Rivilin! 90
 Henceforth, lone Nature's devotees
 Would call thee "Ribbledin,"
 Whenever, listening where thy voice
 Its first wild joy expresses,
 And down the rocks all wildly flows 95
 The wildness of thy tresses.

The verse has a lyrical quality which is assisted by the rhyming pairs of the second and fourth, sixth and eighth lines; the alliteration; and the reflective nature of the poetry. His description is once again well drawn: that of water in lines 5 to 8, which is repeated with effect in the final stanza; that of the aged oak trunks in stanza four; the trees, the lichen, primrose, skylark and cloud, all part of an integral beauty. The span of time seems important to the poet, the christening and 'first murmuring' (5) gives way to the 'tune that ceases never' (22) and the streamlet, however long it lasts will never expand, 'thou art young

for ever' (24). The tree 'gnarl'd dwarf of centuries (29) is but one of the 'sad and lovely things' which must die (47). His focus moves with each separate stanza, first to the stream, then away to the panorama which it s flowing provokes and his musing brings reference to the inadequacy of poetry to portray beauty (81-5). His verbal usage throughout with 'murmuring' river (5), 'distill'd' dew (38), 'basking' primrose (50), 'weeping thoughts' (71), 'laughing' rainbow (73) and so on; helps to convey the musical quality of the verse and once again his response to beauty is a sincere one, based on a familiarity with his subject.

A contemplative vein runs throughout Elliott's nature verse as the details he observes draw him into pensiveness and he is often inspired by a view or a place. Two examples of titles of poems will indicate this latter; "Lines - written after seeing, at Mr. John Heppenstall's of Uppertorpe, near Sheffield, the plates of Audubon's Birds of America", and "Lines - on seeing unexpectedly a new church, while walking on the sabbath, in Old-park wood, near Sheffield."

Don and Rother, one of Elliott's later poems is a retrospective one, as he addresses the rivers which have meant so much to him and have, seemingly, themselves, witnessed all around them,

Again we meet, where often we have met,
Dear Rother! native Don!
We meet again, to talk, with vain regret,
Of deedless aims! and years remember'd yet -
The past and gone! 5

We meet again - perchance to meet no more!
O Rivers of the heart!
I hear a voice, unvoyaged billows o'er,
Which bids me hasten to their pathless shore,
And cries, "Depart!" 10 (16)

"Depart!" it cries. "Why linger on the stage
Where virtues are veil'd crimes?
Have I not read thee, even from youth to age?
Thou blotted book, with only one bright page!
Thy honest rhymes! 15

"Depart, pale Drone! What fruit-producing flower
Hast thou rear'd on the plain?
What useful moments count'st thou in thine hour?
What victim hast thou snatch'd from cruel power?
What tyrant slain?" 20

He sees the longevity of the rivers as allowing them to question his successes, which he regards as his Corn Law Rhymes, 'only one bright page' (14). The bitterness of their denial of him is accepted, as he bows to their greater judgement, though first recalling his childhood memories,

I will obey the power whom all obey. (17)
Yes, Rivers of the heart!
O'er that blind deep, where morning casts no ray
To cheer the oarless wanderer on his way,
I will depart. 25

(16). Don and Rother - Collected Works, 1835.

(17). Ibid.

But first, O Rivers of my childhood! first
My soul shall talk with you;
For on your banks my infant thoughts were nursed;
Here from the bud the spirit's petals burst,
When life was new. 30

Before my fingers learn'd to play with flowers,
My feet through flowers to stray;
Ere my tongue lis'd, amid your dewy bowers,
Its first glad hymn to Mercy's sunny showers,
And air, and day; 35

When, in my mother's arms, an infant frail,
Along your windings borne,
My blue eye caught your glimmer in the vale,
Where halcyons darted o'er your willows pale,
On wings like morn. 40

Ye saw my feelings round that mother grow,
Like green leaves round the root!
Then thought, with danger came, and flower'd like woe!
But deeds, the fervent deeds that blush and glow,
Are Virtue's fruit. 45

The poem then continues for another ten stanzas in a sad, almost despairing tone, as Elliott regrets the wrongs which Man has committed, even widening out into a contemporary critique of the revolutions of his time. His cry is of a lost hope but at the same time the regret can be related to the long, lost days of the 'darting halcyon' (39), and the 'dewy bowers' (29). The interest in this poem here though is in the way his meditation leads to this exploration of nature in relation to himself, very much a trait of Romantic nature verse.

In the verse considered, some elements of poetic delicacy can be traced, and it is in Elliott's use of this aesthetic perception to enhance his verse on the locality around him, that we come to what can be described as his topographical poetry. There is a strong regional sense in Elliott's verse, as in much Romantic verse; Scott, Wordsworth, Clare being brought to mind here; although the language remains rooted in the eighteenth century. The local characteristics are deliberately dominant and the incorporation of historical and local association with incidental meditation is a prevalent one. A specific landscape is often used for retrospection or as a setting, or as a panorama, as in the works of the landscape painters. In this verse, Elliott seems aware of the picturesque. He is able to assess the quality of a view in poetic terms and in his recognition of the power of nature's variety and his concentration on the larger features of a scene; mountain, clouds, sky, sunrise, he shows himself very much part of the Romantic movement in verse. Examples of this blend of local observation and the sketching of a scene in terms of its wider more dominant characteristics are several, and here from The Ranter is one of them,

"Up! sluggards, up! the mountains, one by one
Ascend in light, and slow the mists retire
From vale and plain. The cloud on Stannington
Beholds a rocket. - No, 'tis Morthen spire.
The sun is risen! cries Stanedge, tipped with fire.
On Norwood's flowers the dew-drops shine and shake.
Up! sluggards, up! and drink the morning breeze;
The birds on cloud-left Osgathorpe awake,
And Wincobank is waving all his trees (18)
O'er subject towns, and farms, and villages,
And gleaming streams and woods, and waterfalls.
"Up! climb the oak-crowned summit! Hooper Stand
And Keppel's Pillar gaze on Wentworth's halls
And misty lakes that brighten and expand,
And distant hills that watch the western strand.
Up! trace God's footprints where they paint the mould
With heavenly green, and hues that blush and glow
Like angel's wings, while skies of blue and gold
Stoop to Miles Gordon on the mountain's brow.
Behold the Great Unpaid! the prophet. Lo!
Sublime he stands beneath the gospel tree,
And Edmund stands on Shirecliffe at his side!
Behind him sinks, and swells, and spreads a sea
Of hills and vales and groves. Before him glide
Don, Rivelin, Loxley, wandering in their pride
From heights that mix their azure with the cloud."

His topographical poetry was regarded highly by local critics, in much the same way as local artists are regarded today, that is, for productions which call favourite locations to mind. Poetically this could be rather limiting, in that it may encourage, banal, uninspired writing, yet Elliott manages to avoid this.

In an article, the Manchester poet, John Critchley Prince, referred to Elliott's local verse, seeing it as being part of a Romantic tradition and at the same time making the localities he described into a place of pilgrimage.

Ebenezer Elliott has given a celebrity to, and increased the interest of, many localities within

(18). The Ranter (1830) - printed in The Splendid Village; Corn Law Rhymes; and other poems, London, 1833.

fifteen miles of the district wherein he lives, almost, if not wholly, equal to that which Burns has given to that portion of Scotland which is poetically and emphatically called "The Land of Burns." I know it for a pleasing fact, that numerous spots which have been celebrated by the powerful pen of Ebenezer Elliott, as "Win Hill," the stream of "Rivelin," "Loxley Side," "Wharncliffe" and "Stanedge," have been visited by hundreds of his admirers, in consequence of the poetical charm which he has thrown around them. The places themselves are exceedingly romantic and beautiful, and needed not the descriptions of any man to call attention to them, but there is something in the alchymy of genius which appears to transmute all that it touches into superior matter, and like the hallowed light of a summer's moon, adds loveliness to that which was before lovely. How many a hill and vale, how many a flood and fountain, how many a wood and glen, would have remained unnoticed and unknown, had not the poets, by a divine instinct, sought them out, and transferred their beauties to their own glowing pages? Ought we not, then, to feel thankful that a Burns and an Elliott, with a host of other no less distinguished spirits, should have led us, by the force of sympathy and association, to the sweetest spots of God's creation? Ought we not to honour that peculiar power which can bring pilgrims from every corner of the earth to tread upon, what appears to them, hallowed and classic ground? (19)

Indeed, various modern local guides to the Sheffield region refer to Elliott, and in a nineteenth century guide a section is introduced in the following way,

The poetry of Elliott is everywhere tinged with the softening influence which the natural beauties of the neighbourhood must have had on his mind. (20)

This is followed by the authors suggesting walks in connection with the poetry, all of which are described

(19). Prince, John Critchley 'Random Readings from the Poets of the Nineteenth Century' - Bradshaw's Journal III (1842), p.300 to 303.

(20). Pawson and Brailsford. Illustrated Sheffield Guide, p.184, first published, 1862. Reprinted 1971.S.R. Publishers; Leeds, Wakefield.

prosaically and illustrated by engravings of local beauty spots and supplemented by extracts from the verse itself.

Also in a paper delivered to the Rotherham Literary and Scientific Society, the language in which these verses are couched, is alluded to by a local speaker, and particularly its fitness for polite reception, in direct contrast to the response which was to greet the harshness of his political verse,

in his poems will be found a flow of fresh, sparkling, fervid feeling for, and exquisite description of nature in her loftiest or loveliest forms. And this in felicity of language and elevation of sentiment rarely surpassed, and to which power, - pathos, - (21) and sweetest cadence, lend graphic force of delineation and richly appropriate charm. I am of opinion that the drawing room tables of Rotherham ladies could not be more suitably and ornamentally adorned than by the two volumes of Elliott's poems as published by his son, thereby honouring their native Bard, and honouring themselves .

In 1840, a one volume edition of Elliott's works appeared, with about thirty pages of new poems. Of these, there were a collection of descriptive sonnets, gathered under the title Rhymed Rambles, which had originally been published in the ,New Monthly Magazine in 1836, as The Corn Law Rhymer's Pilgrimage. The first part of these poems came as a result of a visit Elliott made to Harrogate in 1836. He writes sonnets on places of interest in the neighbourhood; Knaresborough,

(21). John Guest, - op. cit. p.20.

Plumpton, Studley, Bolton Abbey, Brimham and Fountains Abbey, with the final poem entitled 'Return to Sheffield'. This was followed by two more parts with sonnets on scenes from the Sheffield district; Walkley, Wentworth, Thryberg, Roche Abbey, Stanage, Kinder Scout and Conisborough Castle. These poems form Elliott's contribution to the sonnet form and in the preface to Rhymed Rambles, he outlined his complicated, rather unconventional theories on the sonnet.

'The sonnet, I believe, has become popular in those languages only in which it is more difficult to avoid similar rhymes than to find them. The Spenserian stanza, requiring four rhymes, is quite as difficult as the Petrarchan sonnet, the latter being little more than a series of couplets⁽²²⁾ and triplets; and I venture to suggest that - preceded by five lines, linked to it in melody, and concluding occasionally with an Alexandrine - or preceded by four lines only, if concluding with a triplet - the far-famed measure of Spenser is the best which the English sonneteer can employ. Of this the reader may judge for himself; as, in these sonnets, (if sonnets they are,) I have used the legitimate, the Spenserian, and other forms. '

Of the forty seven individual sonnets in his collection, only one has an accepted rhyme scheme; fifteen have an irregular octet form of abbaacca, with varying sestets; five are in a ababacacdcgcc, which Elliott describes as 'three elegaic stanzas and a couplet; and four illustrate Elliott using his proposed best form, a Spenserian stanza with five lines preceding it, ababb acaccdcd. The remaining twenty one poems defy

(22) Preface to Rhymed Rambles - Poetical Works, Edinburgh, 1840.

classification in any rigid way. Complications of form apart, the idea of a sonnet sequence drawn from observations of the locality is an interesting one.

In Bolton Abbey, the scene brings the poet into a reflective mood.

Spirits of wonder, loveliness, and fear, (23)
Dwell in these groves, beneath o'er-arching trees,
With the dim presence of their mysteries
Haunting the rocks and mountain shadows near:
They pass the lone enthusiast, wandering here, 5
By strangled Wharfe, or Barden's ancient tower;
Pass him, nor shake a dew-drop from a flower,
But with their whispers soothe his soul-taught ear,
As with a dream of prayer; until he starts,
Awaken'd from deep thoughts of Time's calm night 10
And Nature's beauty, and in awe departs;-
When, to the Abbey's moonlight-tinted walls,
The demon of the spectred river calls,
Mock'd by the voices of mysterious night.

Silence and peace is invoked through 'spirits,' 'mysteries', 'haunting', 'whispers', and 'Time's calm night'; and the historical associations of the ruined abbey call its ghosts to mind. Tranquility is preserved in his description with the 'moonlight-tinted walls' holding their own mysteries, though the solemnity of the final two lines brings with it an ominous recall of the past within the ancient building.

In many of the Rhymed Rambles, Elliott attempts a philosophical tone which unfortunately becomes obscure through his inability to provide testimony to his own experience. The meditating figure of the poet too

(23). Bolton Abbey from Rhymed Rambles , ibid.

often becomes clouded by a curious contemplative process by which he may attempt a reappraisal of society, an attack on privilege, or a panegyric on the virtues of worship, without justifying the inspiration he draws on from the observed feature, to the reader. In this elevated tone, his writing becomes remote from its purpose. Perhaps Brimham Rocks will serve as an example of this clouded, imprecise style.

Rocks! sacred deem'd to eldest fraud, when fear
 First darken'd death's reality with dreams!
 The spirit of your cruel worship seems, (24)
 Like a wolf's shadow, yet to linger here,
 Deepening the gloom with peril still too near;
 For guile and knowledge long have been allies,
 Most pious found when preaching blasphemies,
 Most treacherous when most trusted. But the year,
 Whose seasons are all winters, soon must close;
 Knowledge hath join'd the millions; and mankind
 Are learning to distinguish friends from foes;
 The eagle-eyed give sight unto the blind;
 The eagle-wing'd are chasing crime-made woes;
 The mighty-voiced are heard in every wind.

Indeed, Elliott had little success in assuming a subdued, contemplative tone in any of his poetry. For him any thought internalized within a poem needed the more concrete drive of political or social comment, which was to be most successfully achieved in The Splendid Village and The Village Patriarch. However, when he uses the natural perceptions seen earlier, he can achieve the evocative tone, for example, in the following, to create an atmosphere.

(24). Brimham Rocks - Rhymed Rambles, *ibid.*

Why, shower-loved Derwent! have the rainbows (25)
left thee?

Mam-Tor! Win-Hill! a single falcon sails
Between ye; but no airy music wails.

Who, mountains! of your soft hues hath bereft ye,
And stolen the dewy freshness of your dales? 5
Dove-stone! thy cold drip-drinking fountain fails;
Sun-darken'd shadows, motionless, are on ye;
Silence to his embrace of fire hath won ye;
And light, as with a shroud of glory, veils
The Peak and all his marvels. Slowly trails 10
One streak of silver o'er the deep dark blue
Its feathery stillness, while of whispered tales
The ash, where late his quivering shade he threw,
Dreams o'er the thoughtful plant that hoards its
drops of dew.

The extract, from Cloudless Stanage uses description well, to portray the moving sky, so that 'shower-loved' (1), becomes an apt way to suggest his memories of the river and 'single falcon' and the 'wailing of 'airy music' suggest a tranquility among the hills, which are seen as dull, deprived of their colour and freshness by the dark clouds. The poet's eye sees every detail, the stark shadow, and the 'veiling shroud' of the sun brightens his almost awestruck enthusiasm. What he beholds as the delicacy of the cloud is described 'streak of silver (11), 'feathery stillness' (12), and the ash tree, like the poet, dreams of the day and the life within it, represented here by 'the thoughtful plant that hoards its drops of dew' (14).

Elliott is concerned with the static features of the scene he surveys. Here from Trees at Brimham

(25). Cloudless Stanage - ibid

the observation is precise as the ancient tree and the rock seem as one. The poet looks with wonder on the everlasting granite form; and recalls mere human events of an ancient past, seen insignificant in terms of the longevity of rock and tree.

Gnarl'd oak and holly! stone-cropp'd like the stone!
Are ye of it, or is it part of you? (26)
Your union strange is marvellously true,
And makes the granite, which I stand upon,
Seem like the vision of an empire gone -
Gone, yet still present, thou it never was,
Save as a shadow - let the shadow pass!
So perish human glories, every one!

Here in Prospect from Thryberg, the mountains, and the meandering river coalesce in magnificent colour,

Thou only, Wincobank, reign'st undespoiled, (27)
King of the valley of my youth and prime,
Through which the river, like a snake uncoil'd,
Wanders, though tamed, a match for conquering
time.
Behind thee mountains, solemn and sublime, 5
Take from the stooping skies their purple gold;
And could I in that brightness steep my rhyme,
And steal yon glow of green and crimson, roll'd
Far o'er the realms of evening's western clime,
A tale of Nature's splendour should be told
Which Byron might transcribe for Scott, and deem lo
That earth, like heav'n, hath scenes which grow not
old;
O let me dip my pencil in thy beam,
Thou setting sun! ere death cut short this fever'd
dream.

He recalls the hills among which he was brought up and the serpentine river, which in its freedom seems to

(26). Trees at Brimham - lines 1 to 8 - ibid
(27). Prospect from Thryberg - ibid

defy time. The mountains 'solemn and sublime' (5) and skies, 'stooping' (6), assume human characteristics and once again the emphasis is on a lasting, unchanging earth (12). The written poetry is invoked, though Elliott admits his inadequacy to convey the 'glow of green and crimson' (8), as he draws his inspiration from the sun's brightness, 'O let me dip my pencil in thy beam' (13).

Elliott's verse here shows his attention to detail and his awareness of colour in terms of visual art. It may well be that in his verse an extra range of expression available to painting was denied by the way language tended to abstract, yet the grouping and colouring of objects in a way akin to painting is produced in much of the poetry. This ability was alluded to in a biographical 'memoranda of the poet',

My first walk with him on the banks of the (28) Don, under Shirecliffe Wood, illustrated the close attention he paid to such matters: 'Observe, said he, 'the effect of the light on the water, as we stand on a level with it - it is like the gleaming of heated steel; I have not seen that effect in any painting'. Having crossed the river, and ascended the opposite hill, he said, 'Now look at the water'. I observed it was a beautiful blue. 'Do you perceive the cause of the change?'.....'It is the blue of the sky imaged down on the water - that is reflection; you have the light from above. Before, when on the same level, it was refraction .

Elliott showed himself aware too of the fit

(28) Lister, Thomas - 'Remarks upon Elliott's Poetry and Memoranda of the Poet' - included in Phillips, G.S. (January Searle, pseud). The life, character and genius of Ebenezer Elliott, the corn-law rhymist. London, 1850.

constituents for a prospect, and particularly of the picturesque elements within it.

'In the meadow path over Grange Bridge, (29) looking at the ruins of Monk Bretton Priory and Lunn Wood beyond, he remarked, 'What a lovely subject for a sketch. Let us make our own landscape, and be our own artists.' (He then formed a picture frame shape with his hands). 'That further bank of the stream, with its shady trees, its variously coloured herbs and flowers, with the group of cattle in the meadow above it, shall be my foreground - that venerably ivy-clad ruin, and the old farm buildings, form the middle ground - and yon bold leafy wood, with those rich pastoral eminences, make as fine a background as could be wished.'

Finally here, there is his 'artist's' view of the play of light and shade, which he attempts to convey in his verse.

....'observe that thistle, with a bee feeding on the topmost flower, how richly they stand out in the light, every object around them in the shade. Now the minute and the vast, the near and the remote, are here blended; and what is the connecting link? that straggling sunbeam escaping from the interstices of those cloud masses brings light from yon glorious orb millions of miles, to gild the humble flower and the feeding bee. That illustrates what I have sometimes told you of the faculty of imagination as distinct from fancy - its uniting, expanding power, and its tendency to the infinite.' (30)

In the verse, Elliott even offers advice to the artists, suggesting he concentrates on the small, wild lane with its changing moods and tones of colour,

(29). Ibid.

(30). Ibid.

Now, Landscape-Maker, that with living trees (31)
 Createst Painting! thou should'st hither come,
 And here learn how the town-sick heart to please.
 Can'st thou not, in thy tiny wild, find room
 For a wild lane, that with capricious ease
 Shading or brightening self-taught branch or flower,
 Will saunter gently to a seated bower?
 Or lead thee through a cloudlet of green gloom,
 Cheer'd by the music of its hidden rills,
 To sudden sunburst? where the hunter's cot
 Looks down on rivers and the distant hills
 Climb to the firmament, yet marry not
 Their purple to the orange-blaze, that fills
 O'er-arching heav'n with pomp,
 And peace, and power!

In the following sonnet from a sequence based on
 the revolutions of 1848, called The Year of Seeds,
 published in his posthumous volume, the colours of the
 plants and trees contrast with each other, yet blend
 in an exquisite richness, agreeing to 'thrive in
 partnership' (7/8), as light and shade form a coloured
 picture,

Art thou a colourist? Mark, how yon red (32)
 Poppy, and that bright patch of yellow bloom,
 Cliff-borne above green depths and purple gloom,
 Like spark and blaze on smiling darkness shed,
 Give and take beauty! Mark, too, overhead, 5
 How the rich verdure of this ancient tree,
 And the deep purple of the bank, agree
 To thrive in partnership! And while the bed
 Of the clear stream, through tints of every hue,
 Lifts its bath'd pebbles, lo! to brighten all, 10
 The little harebell brings its bit of blue,
 And is a gainer! happy to behold
 Red blessing green, and purple gilding gold;
 Of light and shade a marriage festival!

This observation of colour and light is used too
 in Rhymed Rambles and notably in his description in

-
- (31). The Imitated Lane in Collected Works, 1835.
 (32). from The Year of Seeds - 30 - printed in More Verse
 and Prose, 1850.

Walkley of the beginnings of a storm.

Sarah and William Adams! here we stood, (33)
Roof'd by the cloud, which cast his frown between
Wardsend and Loxley's moorlands. From the wood
Of one-starr'd Grenno, like a sea unseen,
The wind swept o'er us, seeming, in his might, 5
To shake the steadfast rocks; while, rushing keen
Beyond the edge of darkness, stormy light,
As from a league-wide trumpet, on the scene
A cataract of glory pour'd; and, bright
In gloom, the hill-tops islanded the night 10
Of billowy shade around us. Vale and hill,
Forest and cloud, were restless as a fight;
They seem'd as they would never more be still;
While, anchor'd over all, the high-poised kite
Saw the foam'd rivers dash their blue with white.

Elliott's vocabulary here conveys the image, 'cataract of glory'(11), describing succinctly the flow of light. The hill tops are 'bright in gloom', and 'islanded'(10), which is the poet's way of perceiving the low cloud of the storm, 'billowy shade', (11), which seems to isolate the summits, while the hovering kite (13), presides majestically.

Elliott's observations on the landscape see it as a stimulating force towards an aesthetic sense which was to be rekindled when he retired from the clamour of Sheffield in 1841. Prior to leaving he had voiced his affection for the rivers he knew so well in one of his more lyrical poems, Farewell to Rivelin:

Beautiful River! goldenly shining, (34)
Where with the cistus woodbines are twining;
(Birklands around thee, mountains above thee,)
Rivilin wildest! do I not love thee?

(33). Walkley - from Rhymed Rambles, op. cit.

(34). Farewell to Rivelin. More Verse and Prose, 1850.

Why do I love thee, Heart-breaking River?
Love thee, and leave thee? Leave thee for ever!
Never to see thee, where the storms greet thee!
Never to hear thee, rushing to meet me!

Never to hail thee, joyfully chiming
Beauty in music, Sister of Wiming!
Playfully mingling laughter and sadness,
Ribbledin's Sister! sad in thy gladness.

Why must I leave thee, mournfully sighing
Man is a shadow? River undying!
Dream-like he passeth, cloud-like he wasteth, 15
E'en as a shadow over thee hasteth.
Oh, when thy poet, weary, reposes,
Coffin'd in slander, far from thy roses,
Tell all thy pilgrims, Heart-breaking River!
Tell them I loved thee - love thee for ever!

Yes, for the spirit blooms ever vernal;
River of Beauty! love is eternal:
While the rock reeleth, storm-struck and riven,
Safe is the fountain flowing from heav'n.

There wilt thou hail me, joyfully chiming 25
Beauty in music, Sister of Wiming!
Homed with the angels, hasten to greet me,
Glad as the heathflower, glowing to meet thee.

The poem is an intensely personal one, its lyricism deriving from the AABB rhyme scheme, not least 'chiming/Wiming' (9/10; 25/26); and the caesura of each line which creates an internal symmetry. The repetition of the pronouns, 'thee' and 'me' throughout, cements the conversational tone and the alliteration in lines 6, 20, 23 and the onomatopoeiac, 'playfully mingling laughter and sadness', echo the sounds and movement of the river itself.

Whilst in retirement, Elliott continued to enjoy the landscape around him, seeming almost to find solace in it,

"People," he said, "laughed at me for buying this (35) little estate, and thought I should soon die of 'ennui', so far removed as I am from friends, companions, and the conveniences of civilisation... I am happy with my family and books; and spend my time in laying out my garden, planting trees, walking, driving, reading, writing. I envy no man, nor have I any right to do so. This is not an unlovely neighbourhood (he added), for a poet in his old age".....(I), found that the poet had made artificial openings in the trees which bounded the croft beyond the garden, through which the best pictures of the landscape were visible.

What had provided Elliott with his first inspiration as a boy, now surrounded him in retirement, after having proved the base of all his verse, and the fount of the powers of observation which had led to his bitter, piercing political verse.

We were now in the midst of a wood, wandering (36) knee deep in blue bells, whilst the birds were singing merrily around us. 'These', he said.... are my companions; from them I derive consolation and hope, for Nature is all harmony and beauty, and man will one day be like her, and the war of castes and the war for bread will be no more.

A regional sense is dominant in most of Elliott's verse, not least in two of his largest poems The Splendid Village and The Village Patriarch, where the landscape is peopled with figures who are often seen in relation to their environment; and in his industrial verse to be considered in the next Chapter, where Elliott's

(35) Phillips (Searle) - Memoirs of Ebenezer Elliott, 1850, op cit. p. 139.

(36) Ibid. p. 143.

perception of the landscape of his youth is necessarily changed by social transition to encompass the growth of the industrial town.

In More Verse and Prose, a volume published after Elliott's death, in 1850, the most ambitious piece of work amongst little of merit is Etheline, a long narrative poem which was envisaged to form the 'first part of Eth-Kon-Tel, a story in three parts, each containing four books, each part, as a story, complete in itself; and the three parts, like the trilogies of Aeschylus and Schiller, forming one narrative'. The story is ⁽³⁷⁾extravagant and clumsily constructed but the setting is of interest here in that Elliott had taken the area to the north of Sheffield, extending from Wharncliffe to Wentworth at the time of the Druids and placed his 'epic' within the vast tracts of forest land there and had transformed the Don Valley into an enormous lake 'girt with its vast primeval woods.'

(37). The following synopsis, taken from E.R. Seary-Ph.D. Thesis on Elliott, Sheff. Univ. 1932, indicates the ambitious plot which Elliott was attempting to portray, interesting in that it came so late in his life and remained unfinished.' Seduced by Konig, a priest-chieftain of a prehistoric period in the Conisborough district, Telma attempts to drown herself and her daughter Telmarine, but the child is rescued by Adwick, an outlaw and an enemy of Konig's. He takes it to Etheline, a maiden with whom he is in love but loves Konig, but she refuses to take it until its eyes remind her of Konig. Adwick leaves her, angered and grieved that his request had been granted only because of the child's resemblance to his enemy. Maddened by his wrongs, Adwick becomes a violent megalomaniac and to further his aims and bring to an end the evil reign of Konig, he steals Telmarine from Etheline and presents her to the priests. (continued)

The west wind, gusting boldly, (38)
From Cadeby's falls sent far
The roar of Don and Dar,
Flooding with watery howl and groan,
Their wild abyss of riven stone.
After a day of rain,
The setting sun shone coldly,
Like one who smiles in pain,
O'er woods that seem'd to floor the sky
With ocean-like profundity;
And on the lake's dark grey and blue
The oaken towers of Konig threw
A red and shatter'd glare.
'Twas then, that in despair,
A woman young and fair
Pac'd the black water'd eastern shore,
And on her woful bosom bore
Her child, asleep.
She could not weep;
The "countless laughter" of the lake,
Like mockery on her senses brake,
Because her heart was broken.
She would have spoken
Her deathful thought,
But in her throat
The strangled utterance died.

Elliott had with this setting extended the locality in which he lived to its limits, in an original way, but though he thought highly of the poem, it is prone to wild passages of a gothic nature which preclude full understanding, yet the perception of the natural world is still evident in passages, here a barren, and desolate place :

Footnote (37) continued.

But Etheline's grief for the loss of Telmarine brings Adwick to his senses, and he returns the child to her. The spirit of Telma appears to Konig, and bids him go to Etheline and take care of their child; and in his presence Etheline dies. Adwick is captured by the priests for removing Telmarine from the temple, and dies. This ends the first part.' The second two parts were never attempted, before Elliott's death in 1849.

(38). Etheline - More Verse and Prose, 1850

They traversed realms of verdant night, (39)
 And many a treeless isle of light,
 Whose peaceful bliss the eyes of love
 Watch'd fondly through the blue above;
 A wilderness of shaded flowers,
 A wilderness of virgin bowers,
 Of beauty calm not passionless,
 And lonely song, a wilderness;
 Far on, on, far and long they went,
 Through paths of green bewilderment,
 Where oft the Ouzle, perch'd on high,
 Beneath his clouds, above his woods,
 Pour'd his full notes in gushing floods,
 Flattering the wood-rill tunefully.

Elliott's nature and local verse would not have made him famous alone but his championing of the variegated landscapes surrounding his native South Yorkshire led to some minor recognition, often of an exaggerated nature,

The wild flowers and the free wild storms (40) of Yorkshire never found a more eager and faithful lover than Ebenezer Elliott, but mere sunlight and pure air delight him. The silence or living sounds of the fields or the moor bring healing and refreshment to an ear harrassed by the din of machinery; the wide peaceful brightness is a benediction to an eye smarting from the blear haze of the myriad-chimneyed city. Animal refreshment rises, by degrees to gratitude, exaltation, worship.

Much of the verse is derivative with echoes of eighteenth century poetry and the tradition of landscape verse, yet in places Elliott's own form of inspiration from familiar nature produces delicate and controlled verse and evidence of a keenness of eye which was to benefit his depiction of men in his later political poetry. In the preface to his Miscellaneous poems, he clearly expresses what inspired him to write,

(39). Etheline - ibid.

(40). Dowden, Edward - 'Ebenezer Elliott' from The English Poets, edited by Thomas Humphrey Ward. 1911.-Vol.4.pp. 495-502.

seeing the benefit he enjoyed as one which should
be shared, if possible through his verse,

'I know not whether my publisher is satisfied - I (41)
trust he is; but for myself I am sufficiently
rewarded, if my poetry has led one poor
despairing victim of misrule from the ale-house
to the fields; If I have been chosen by God to show
his desolated heart, that though his wrongs
have been heavy and his fall deep, and though
the spoiler is yet abroad, still in the green
lanes of England, the primrose is blowing, and, on
the mountain-top, the lonely fir with her many
fingers, pointing to our Father in Heaven."

Elliott spent all his life in the environs of
Sheffield and its position as an industrial town
within an area of natural beauty provided him with
the stance he develops here through an aesthetic
sense and a simple but real response to beauty. 'My
mind', he declared, 'is the mind of the eyes. A
primrose to me is a primrose, and nothing more...I
love it because it is nothing more.' In his early
nature verse we are left with the image of the
enthusiastic, almost over-whelmed observer, and it is
difficult to deny the poetic merit of the results.

World of my boyhood! art thou what thou wast?
Seen through the melancholy mist of years,
Thy woods a pale diminish'd shadow cast
O'er thoughts grown grey, and feelings dimm'd with
tears.
Our spirits, biggen'd by their griefs and fears,
Sadden and dwindle, with their backward view,
All they behold. Chang'd world! thy face appears
Poor as the toy that pleas'd when life was new;
And mournful as th'inscription, trite and true,
That lingers on our little sister's grave.
Roch Abbey! Canklow! Aldwark! if I crave,
Now, a boy's joy, from some lone flower's deep blue,
Will your loved flowers assume a pensive hue?
Or smile as once they smiled, still growing where
they grew?

(41). Preface to Miscellaneous Poems - Poetical Works, 1840.
p.123.

(42). Retrospection - from Rhymed Rambles op.cit.

By later life, he was aware of the human changes wrought by social ones, yet his thoughts continually returned to the scenes of his youth. In their beauty he found the resource and consolation, which was to sustain him through the vicissitudes of his life.

CHAPTER 2

INDUSTRIALISM

In any consideration of Elliott's work, the connection between the verse and contemporary newsworthy events and changes is a vital factor. This documentary aspect was noted by the poet himself when he wrote,

'My poem may be a weed, but it has sprung, unforced out of existing things. It may not suit the circulating libraries for adult babies; but it is the earnest product of experience, a retrospect (1) of the past and an evidence of the present, a sign of the times, a symptom, terrible or otherwise which our state doctors will do well to observe with the profoundest shake of the head; for it affords a prognostic if not a proof'.

It is nowhere more evident than in the way much of his verse reflects the industrial environment of Sheffield in which he lived and worked.

The aim of this chapter will therefore be to consider those of his poems which reflect his attitude to industrialization and its concomitants of social change, the onset of mechanization and the ultimate goal of progress and commercial success. Here it is fair to say that apart from one or two longer poems, notably Steam at Sheffield and Verses on the opening of the Sheffield and Rotherham Railway there is little direct reference to industrial transformation. However, implicit in Elliott's poetry is the consciousness of the often dramatic changes taking place around him,

(1). Preface to Corn Law Rhymes - 2nd edition, 1831.

which is itself indicative of the slow assimilation of mixed responses to these changes, in poetry of the time. It is his attempts to come to terms with this which makes this part of his poetic output interesting, particularly as it comes at a time when eighteenth century attitudes were by necessity being slowly moulded to incorporate new facts and in poetic terms, subject matter. The question to what extent Elliott's attitude was indicative or otherwise of later Victorian responses needs, therefore, to be posed.

The first thirty years of the nineteenth century were the critical period of the industrial revolution. The great inventions of the eighteenth century had developed more or less in isolation without transforming the character of the economy as a whole. Now all these changes came together, replacing the ancient timber economy by the age of coal and iron.

In the first three decades of the nineteenth century the main engineering problems of the steam age were solved. In the next twenty years the new powers were triumphantly applied on an ever broader front. The Great Exhibition of 1851. (2) marks the culmination of the whole movement.

A detailed description of the industrial processes is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the progress and drive towards perfection of invention and the

(2). Klingender, Francis D. - Art and the Industrial Revolution. (Paladin. 1972 - first published, 1948.) Ch.6. p.92.

innovations in technique play the major role in the rapidity of industrial advance at this time. (3)

Between the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and 1851, an essentially rural and paternalistic society had become increasingly industrial, urban and individualistic and the severe social stress which accompanied these changes came to be labelled, 'The Condition of England Question', and to be drawn in a set of polarities, notably Land versus City and Man versus Machine. A sense of conflict increased between city and countryside as a phase of social disturbance in the countryside, intensified by the economic effect of prolonged war, coincided with the unprecedented increase in the number and size of the industrial and commercial cities in northern England and the Midlands. A new spirit of social enquiry had established the official census of population and now the burgeoning of the cities, the proliferation of their problems, and most importantly here, a curiosity about the new industrialism encouraged both the statistical and impressionistic investigation of urban society, through both official studies and reports and later, the social novels of the 1840's.

The realities of the new age were put into perspective by Carlyle,

“Were we required to characterise this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age. It is the Age of Machinery, undivided might, (which)

(3). Some of the work which considers this more fully is listed in section B (iv) of my bibliography

forwards, teaches, and practises the great art of adapting means to ends. Nothing is now done directly, or by hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance. For the simplest operation, some helps and accompaniments, some cunning, abbreviating process is in readiness. Our old modes of exertion are all discredited, and thrown aside. (4) On every hand, the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one. The shuttle drops from the fingers of the weaver, and falls into iron fingers that ply it faster. The sailor furls his sail, and lays down his oar, and bids a strong, unwearied servant, on vaporous wings, bear him through the waters.

He was aware too of the psychological demands made on the members of this society and of the pressures which this implied,

let us observe how the mechanical genius of our time has diffused itself into quite other provinces. Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also. Here, too, nothing follows its spontaneous course, (5) nothing is left to be accomplished by old natural methods. Every thing has its cunningly devised implements, its pre-established apparatus; it is not done by hand, but by machinery.....Instruction, that mysterious communing of Wisdom with Ignorance, is no longer an indefinable tentative process, requiring a study of individual aptitudes, and a perpetual variation of means and methods, to attain the same end; but a secure, universal, straightforward business, to be conducted in the gross, by proper mechanism, with such intellect as comes to hand.

Perhaps this determined the responses of Ebenezer Elliott, whose warehouse in the centre of Sheffield, was in many ways, at the centre of this at once mechanistic and organic world. Sheffield, of course, was one of these growing industrial towns. In 1736 there had been 9,696 people in the Sheffield township, in 1801

(4) Carlyle, Thomas - 'Signs of the Times', first published in Edinburgh Review, 1829, no. 98. Reproduced in Essays - Scottish and Other Miscellanies, Vol.1. (Everyman-Dent. 1967)

(5). Ibid.

there were 31,314 and by 1843 this figure had trebled. ^
There are various factors related to the growth of
the town which are directly relevant to Elliott's verse.
The production of steel and the age of machinery came
to a town whose workers had already been using machinery
for centuries because the rivers of Sheffield, so
frequent a point of reference in the poetry, had been
harnessed to grinding mills, whereby the use of a
dam and wheel and other abundant resources led eventually
to the proliferation and concentration of cutlery and
edge tool manufactures in Sheffield. (7) In the
following extract, Elliott alludes to this industrial
setting, with a panoramic view which decreases in
size as the grandness of the scene gives way to the

(6). Walton, Mary - 'Sheffield, its Story and its
Achievements' - Ch.5. p. 131 - from which a
detailed history of the town's development can be
ascertained.

See also Pollard, S. 'History of Labour in Sheffield' (1959).

(7). Ibid - **Chapter 7.**

"The storage dam was created just off the stream,
with a head-goit leading into it from the river and a
tail-goit leading the water back into the river a little
further down. At the tail of the dam the water, regulated
by sluices, fell over the wheel, depressing each wooden
step as it splashed on to it, and so turned the axle
which was geared to the grinding wheel inside the mill.

Sheffield's little rivers - Don, Sheaf, Porter, Rivelin,
Loxley, Blackburn, Moss Beck, Shire Brook - which had
seemed so useless to early man, all have good falls of
water and are small enough to be easily diverted into the
necessary dams and goits.

Other necessary resources were to hand in abundance.
There were quarries for grindstones in Rivelin, Hathersage
and Wickersley; the fuel which the woods and mines of
Hallamshire had supplied for the forges of the smiths
was ample for the hearths of the cutlers; there was iron
ore in the district and supplies of iron from overseas.

presentation of a succinct image of the worker. This use of figures in a landscape is reminiscent of Thomson's *The Seasons*, although the latter's are decorative, whereas here the purpose is to make a potentially critical point. The precision of the named, local rivers is diffused as their waters merge, into a mass, only to return to 'bring food for labour from the foodless waste. Nature and the industrialization process interfuse.

Five fingers, like the fingers of a hand,
Flung from black mountains, mingle and are one
Where sweetest valleys quit the wild and grand,
And eldest forests, o'er the silvan Don,
Bid their immortal brother journey on, 5
A stately pilgrim, watch'd by all the hills.
Say, shall we wander where, through warrior's graves,
The infant Yewden, mountain-cradled, trills
Her doric notes? Or, where the Locksley raves
of broil and battle, and the rocks and caves 10
Dream yet of ancient days? Or, where the sky
Darkens o'er Rivilin, the clear and cold,
That throws his blue length, like a snake, from high?
Or, where deep azure brightens into gold
O'er Sheaf, that mourns in Eden? Or, where roll'd 15
On tawny sands, through regions passion-wild,
And groves of love, in jealous beauty dark,
Complains the Porter, Nature's thwarted child,
Born in the waste, like headlong Wiming? Hark!
The poised hawk calls thee, Village Patriarch! 20
He calls thee to his mountains! Up, away!
Up, up, to Stanedge! higher still ascend,
Till kindred rivers, from the summit grey,
To distant seas their course in beauty bend,
And, like the lives of human millions, blend 25
Disparted waves in one immensity!

IV.

(2)

Beautiful rivers of the desert! ye
Bring food for labour from the foodless waste.
Pleased stops the wanderer on his way, to see
The frequent weir oppose your heedless haste. 30
Where toils the Mill, by ancient woods embraced;
Hark, how the cold steel screams in hissing fire?

(8). Elliott - *The Village Patriarch* (1829). Book V - III & IV.
N.3. For the longer poems which were published prior to the *Poetical Works* of 1840, the date of publication is given. For the shorter verse, the page references for the 1840 edition are given, hereafter referred to as 'Works 1840'.

But Enoch sees the Grinder's wheel no more,
Couch'd beneath rocks and forests, that admire
Their beauty in the waters, ere they roar 35
Dash'd in white foam the swift circumference o'er.
There draws the Grinder his laborious breath;
There, coughing, at his deadly trade he bends.

There is reference to this early mill working as the mill itself 'toils' (31), emphasising the usefulness of the water source, taking us back to 'five rivers.....flung from black mountains' (1). Onomatopaeia and alliteration bring out the activity in 'cold steel screams in hissing fire' (32), and 'the wheel 'couched beneath rocks' (34) is an organic part of the landscape, linked from mountain down through to valley by the utilitarian course of production. The cinematic closing in effect is prolonged as the Grinder coughs, drawing laborious breath over the attempts to sustain himself.

So, if the most striking and characteristic changes in industry came with the adoption of machinery and steam power on a large scale, from the mid eighteenth century onwards, the roots of this 'revolution' had already been set in Sheffield. The old order, however, was antiquated and improvements in commercial methods and communications, which came with the establishment of foreign trade, and the making of turnpike roads led to developments in the four major industries of silver plating, cutlery production, coal mining and notably in steel manufacture.⁽⁹⁾ While it is true to say that a

(9). Walton. op. cit. - for a more detailed consideration of this, see pps. 111-30.

gradual growth of essentially family businesses was taking place, financed by newer methods, the typical unit of Sheffield remained the little master's smithy, where the master worked with his apprentices, and even in the larger cutlery works, the main processes were not changed much by the new developments referred to above,

Steam power for grinding was introduced in 1786 (10) and by 1794, more works on the rivers were driven by steam power than by water power, but the grinding process itself remained the same.

Sheffield's industry then was based on small workshops, and Elliott's own position as an iron dealer and employer gave him both the experience and the authority with which to perceive the struggles and conditions of the artisan, a perception which was to reach a force in *Corn law Rhymes*.

The other factor which helped to shape Elliott's particular poetic response to his industrial environment was one connected with Sheffield's location. Although the boundaries of the town spread, there remained, as today, a proximity to the countryside, which as we have seen, Was a formative influence on Elliott's verse. This was also to provide him with a perspective with which to balance the attitudes to the industrial grime of the working centre. An awakening awareness as a boy and what can be looked upon as the beginnings of a dual

(10). *Ibid*, p. 113.

(11). cf. this thesis - Chapter 3.

preoccupation with both the beautiful and the ugly in the surrounding environment, which was to continue with his concern in the poetry under consideration here, with the hard realities of the city, can be highlighted with the following extract from his autobiography written in 1841, but ending at his twenty third year,

I cannot remember the time when I was not fond of ruralities. Was I born, then, with a taste for the beautiful? When quite a child, I might be seven or eight years old, I remember filling a waster-pan with water, placing it in the centre of a little grove of mugwort and wormwood that grew in a stone slag-heap in the foundry yard, and, delighting to see the reflection in the sun, the clouds and the planets themselves, as from the surface of a natural fountain. (12)

Here then is further evidence of Elliott the nature lover, cherishing a flower in the midst of desolation. Yet he goes on to relate how he also,

had a taste for the horrible - a passion, a rage, for seeing the faces of the hanged or the drowned. Why, I know not, for they made my life a burden, following me wherever I went, sleeping with me (13) and haunting me in dreams. Was this hideous taste a result of constitutional infirmity? Had it not any connection with my taste for writing of horrors and crimes? I was cured of it by a memorable spectacle. A poor, friendless man, who, having no home, slept in colliery hovels and similar places, having been sent, one dark night from the Glasshouse for a pitcher of ale, fell in the canal and was drowned.

In six weeks, his body rose to the surface and I, of course, ran to see it. The spectacle which, by that time, it presented was daily and nightly wherever I was, for months, my constant companion. Had this morbid porpensity any relation to my solitary tendencies?"

(12). Elliott - 'Autobiographical Memoir', printed with some omissions from Ms., The Athenaeum. 12. Jan. 1850, p.p. 46-9

(13). Ibid

This shows him in a much different light, here he is the morbid seeker after tragedy and horror and therefore, potentially well equipped to look at the darkest corners of city life.

It is certainly possible to interpret this as suggestive of an unusual sensitivity, a theory which is enhanced by looking briefly at Elliott in business, at his own position within the industrial scene as both a participant and an observer and also as a beneficiary of the commerce and progress he was to describe in his verse. From his sixteenth to his twenty third year he had worked in his father's foundry at Masborough, Rotherham.

as laboriously as any servant he had, and without wages except for an occasional shilling or two for pocket money; weighing every morning all the unfinished castings as they were made, and afterwards in their finished state, besides (14) opening and closing the shop in Rotherham when my brother happened to be ill or absent . I had been familiar from my infancy with the processes of the manufactory and possibly a keen though silent observer of them.

Elliott then, came to observe the world around him, giving his perceptions of industry in terms of the environment an authority, evidence of a sensitivity in an incongruous setting.

His marriage in 1804 brought him a little capital which he put into the family business. Later, as a partner, he was to grapple with a foundry in decline before buying out his elder brother Giles and his father.

(14). **Ibid.**

But when, following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the demand for iron fell sharply, the crash soon came and in January 1818 the following notice appeared in The Sheffield Iris,

The Creditors who have proved their Debts under a Commission of Bankrupt, awarded and issued forth against Ebenezer Elliott the younger of Masbrough, in the parish of Rotherham and the County of York, Ironfounder, Dealer and Chapman, are requested to meet the surviving Assignees of the said Bankrupt's Estate and Effects, at the Crown Inn in Rotherham on Monday the twenty-third of February next, at six o'clock in the evening, to assent to, or dissent from, the Assignees of the said Bankrupt's Estate and the effects submitting to arbitration certain disputes between the said Assignees and the Mortgages of the said Steam Engine, Machinery, Cranes and Fixtures standing in and being in and upon the said leasehold premises of the said Bankrupt, at Masborough aforesaid, and on other special affairs. (15)

Wheatley and Badger,
Solicitors to the Assignees,
Rotherham January 30th 1818.

So, at the age of thirty seven, with nine dependent children, he found himself bankrupt, taking refuge with his sisters-in-law, before taking up a loan from them to move to Sheffield to begin again as a dealer in iron, in 1821, starting with a capital sum of £150; from which he managed to accumulate a fortune. His experiences in business were to be a determining factor in his poetry and contribute to the unusual combination of artistic sensitivity with the harsh realities of

(15). Sheffield Iris - January 31st 1818 - Sheffield City Libraries - Local Studies Section

industry, shown with effect in the following,

'Sitting in his little iron-dealer's office, (16) surrounded incongruously by busts of Shakespeare, Ajax, Achilles and Napoléon, writing ideas for poems in his day book, he provides an image of the worker in the transition into the industrial age'.

In Sheffield he grew and flourished and it was reported (17) that he could make as much as £20 a day without leaving his counting house or even seeing the goods from which he made his profit. However, his position in the industrial hierarchy remained as a manufacturer, rather than a dealer, as time passed and business succeeded,

Elliott is not mentioned in the Sheffield Directories as being in business until 1825, when he was described as an 'Iron and Steel (18) Merchant.' The 1833 Directory describes him as 'iron merchant and steel manufacturer', and the 1837 Directory, more precisely, calls him 'Steel Converter and Refiner and iron and metal dealer.'

Despite his astuteness in business Elliott was, of course, subject to the uncertain nature of the trade cycle and with the commercial crisis of 1837, (19) he wrote the following letter to his publisher, Tait

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- (16). James, Louis - 'Fiction for the Working Man' - Penguin Books, 1974. - appendix, p.209.
(17). Chambers - 'Papers for the People' No.8. Ebenezer Elliott - (1850)
(18). University of Sheffield. Institute of Education - Teaching Aid No 7 on Elliott
(19). c.f. this thesis - Chapter 3

from the house to which he had retired in 1841,

'In 1837, when the commercial revulsion began, I ought to have retired from all business, as I then intended, being aware that without free trade no tradesman could be safe. But my unwillingness to lead an idle life (which, being interpreted, means my unwillingness to resign the profits of business) tempted me to wait for the crash - a crash unlike all other crashes in my experience... I lost fully one-third of all my savings, and after enabling my six boys to quit the nest, (20) got out of the fracas with about £6000, which I will try to keep. Had I built my house on my land at Foxley, three miles from Sheffield, as I proposed to do in 1836, I should now have been liable to be dragged into public meetings, subscriptions &c. and deluged with the visits of casual strangers, as I was at Upperthorpe. Here, out of the way of great temptations, and visited only by persons who respect me (alas, by how few of them!), I can perhaps live within my reduced income.

The main bulk of Elliott's verse was written while he lived and worked in Sheffield and was in many ways itself the product of the new industrial setting, with harshness, dirt and clamour intermingled with the comparative peace of the countryside, pervading his work. A contemporary article in the Revue des deux Mondes saw this type of verse as in many ways unique, setting the likes of Elliott against the more often discussed poetry of environment, the lake poets, and in doing so emphasises the influences of the realities of town life on the poetry,

C'est la poésie de Sheffield et de Manchester opposée a celle des lacs. C'est surtout en Angleterre qu'il y a une poésie des pauvres. (21) La France aime trop l'idéal en littérature pour que le réel lui plaise dans sa nudité.

(20). Elliott - letter to William Tait (1841)

(21). Etienne, Louis - Revue des Deux Mondes - September 1856.

Elliott's perception, however, was bound to appear to be a slightly ambiguous one in that as an integral part of the new industrial process he benefited from its advances, yet, as a nature lover, an advocate of the beauties of the free country around him, he laments such advance of industrial over rural. How then, was this ambiguity to be reflected in the poetry itself?

Perhaps a relevant starting point would be to consider what can be called the poetic context of Elliott's 'industrial' verse. Before the onset of industrialization a huge body of satirical and elegaic verse opposed town and country. Much of William Cowper's reflective verse, for example, was concerned with contemporary abuses; social, political, moral and religious. The Task presents in its first book a carefully balanced picture of the country versus city theme and in,

'God made the country, and man made the town,' (22) he proposes what was to become the salient point of argument in later English verse.

Augustan reflective poetry in presenting an idealized picture of rural peace, attempted to establish a relationship between past and present experiences, turning to classical literature for its authority. Thus in William Collins, 'Ode to Evening',

(22). Cowper - The Task (1785). Book 1. l. 749.

If aught of Oaten Stop, or Pastoral Song,
 May hope, chaste Eve, to sooth thy modest Ear,
 Like thy own solemn Springs (23)
 Thy Springs and dying
 O Nymph reserv'd, while now the bright hair'd Sun.
Now air is hush'd save where the weak ey'd Bat
 With short shrill Shriek flits by on leathern Wing'.

the invocation of a mood of contemplation is achieved.

The pastoral tradition echoed for example, in Pope's

The mossy fountains, and the green retreats!
 Where'er you walk, cool gales shall fan the glade
 Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a shade. (24)
 Where'er you tread, the blushing flow'rs shall rise,
 And all things flourish wher'er you turn your eyes',

was to be succeeded by 'poems of loss, change and
 regret'. (25)

James Thomson in The Seasons and The Castle of
 Indolence, combines his belief in progress and his
 fascination with the ideal of the Golden Age with an
 interest in the utility of beauty and the grand
 manifestations on nature linked to eighteenth century's
 enthusiasm for landscape painting,

- (23). Collins Ode to Evening (1746). 1. 1-10
 (24). Pope - Summer - The Second Pastoral (1709). 1.71-6.
 (25). Williams, Raymond - The Country and the City -
 (Paladin, 1975).

O Vale of bliss! O softly-swelling hills!
 On which the Power of Cultivation lies
 And joys to see the wonder of his toil! (26)
 Heavens! what a goodly prospect spreads around,
 Of hills, and dales, and woods, and lawns, and spires,
 And glittering towns and gilded streams, till all
 The stretching landscape into smoke decays!

The eighteenth century too was confident in the indestructibility of the landscape and this optimism bears witness to the hope expressed in a poem such as John Dyer's, The Fleece, in which he described the growing industrialization of the cotton industry in 1757.

And growing edifices, heaps of stone,
 Beneath the chisel, beauteous shapes assume (27)
 Of frieze and column. Some with even line
 New streets are marking in the neighbouring fields
 And sacred domes of worship. Industry,
 Which dignifies the artists, lifts the swain....
 So appear
 Th'increasing walls of busy Manchester
 Sheffield and Birmingham, whose redd'ning fields
 Rise and enlarge their suburbs.....

The working processes and the results of a great industry were thus chosen as the subject for a didactic poem, evidence of the penetration of a new theme into the classical conventions of the Augustan period.

There is here no fear of the future, none of the later nineteenth century writers condemnation of the industrial labourer's unceasing toil, of the unremitting fire and movement of the machine wheel, but a belief that there was nothing but good to be gained from the machinery which was just beginning to be introduced....

(26). Thomson, James - The Seasons - 'Summer' (1727), lines 1435-1441.

(27). Dyer, John. - The Fleece (1757) III

But chief by numbers of industrious hands
A nation's wealth is counted: numbers raise
Warm emulation where that virtue dwells (28)
There will be traffick's sent; there will she build
Her rich emporium. Hence happy swains
With hospitality inflame your breast.

And less than forty years later, Erasmus Darwin
was busily extolling the virtues of steam power,

Soon shall thy arm, UNCONQUERED STEAM! afar
Drag the slow barge, or drive the rapid car;
Or on wide-warring wings expanded bear (29)
The flying chariot through the fields of air
.....And armies shrink beneath the shadowy cloud.

That of Elliott's verse which specifically refers
to the active force of industry will be considered later,
yet here to indicate the nature of his own perception
which moves on from the eighteenth century stance, is an
extract from his Steam in the Desert of 1847 which
fully acknowledges the power and potential of steam but
sees too the need for political solution,

Steam if nations grow not old
That see broad ocean's 'back of gold'.
Or hear him in the wind -
Why dost not thou thy banner shake
O'er sealess, streamless lands, and make
One nation of mankind?

The shifts in the structure of industrial society
had brought with them a shift in the value system of
that society,⁽³⁰⁾ which determined the response of
someone like Elliott who owed his livelihood to the
growing predominance of the industrial process itself.
Yet his observation of the changes around him, couched

(28). Ibid.

(29). Darwin, Erasmus - The Botanic Garden (1791).p.30.

(30). c.f. Williams. op. cit.

in terms of nostalgia and regret, was enhanced by his sensitivity and heightened by his involvement. This ability to recognize the potential for progress and success amidst apparent filth and destruction is perhaps the most profound difference between industrial and pre-industrial verse and Elliott's perceptions are based on this recognition.

The rest of this chapter will be devoted to a consideration of that of Elliott's verse which implicitly relates to the transformations of industrialism. His view here of the impact of slow encroachment of industry over the countryside affords an interesting example of contemporary attitudes to such change,

Changed scenes, once rural - changed, and not
defaced!
Far other woes were yours in time of old,
When Locksley o'er the hills of Hallam chased
The wide-horn'd stag, or with his bowmen bold
Waged war on kinglings. Vassal robbers prowl'd, 5
And, tiger-like, skulk'd robber lords for prey,
Where now groan wheelworn streets, and labour bends
O'er thousand anvils. Bled the feudal fray, (31)
Or raved the foray, where the cloud ascends
For ever; and from earth's remotest ends 10
Her merchants meet, where hamlets shriek'd in
flames.

Scenes, rural once! ye still retain sweet names,
That tell of blossoms and the wandering bee:
In black Pea-Croft no lark its lone nest frames;
Balm-Green, the thrush hath ceased to visit thee! 15
When shall Bower-Spring her annual corncrake see,
Or start the woodcock, if the storm be near?

Here then, there is a sidestepping of the pastoral idealization seen in late eighteenth century verse. He draws upon the feudal past in order to condemn or lament,

(31). Elliott - The Village Patriarch (1829). Book I-XIV.

and it is seen as a transitory phase in the course of history. The verbs 'chased' (3), 'waged war' (5), 'skulk'd' (6), 'prowl'd' (5), are similar in their emotiveness to those concerned with the present as the 'wheelworn streets' groan and 'labour bends' (7). This interspersal of an ancient past is a device to which Elliott returns in Verses on the Opening of the Sheffield and Rotherham Railway, where primitive man seeking shelter is directly compared to the wage slave of the present, both unable to control their own destiny.

Fire-kindling Man! how weak wast thou
Ere thou hadst conquer'd fire!
How like a worm, on Canklow's brow,
Thou shrank'st from winter's ire!
Or heard'st the torrent-gathering night
Awake the wolf, with thee to fight,
Where these broad shades aspire!

How dismal was thy airy hall (32)
Thy throne for hearthless kings!
But glorious was thy funeral pall;
And there are direr things
Than thy rod-rule of forest law,
Thy last home in the raven's maw,
Thy hearse of living things.

Yes he whom scorn and hunger ban,
Whom ease and law belie,
Who vainly asks his fellow man
For "leave to toil" and die,
Is sadder, weaker, than wast thou,
When naked here, on Winco's brow,
Thou didst the wolf defy.

The past here then, is seen differently, not as the 'Golden Age' of pastoral convention, but with environment and fate as the determining factors of character and situation.

(32). Elliott - Verses on the Sheffield and Rotherham Railway
in 'Works 1840.'

Elliott's observations on the relationship with the rural landscape endorse the 'Town usurping Country' motif of the eighteenth century tradition hinted at previously and are presented from a retrospective viewpoint. The loss of tradition is paramount as is the absorbing of man's related identity into what was to eventually become the anonymity of the city's streets. (33)

These streets though as in the extract from The Village Patriarch above (see footnote 31), retain their rural connections and in 'Pea Croft, Balm Green and Bower Spring', the essence of a peaceful, uncorrupted past is alluded to.

In this extract from The Splendid Village, however, there are changes taking place within the landscape, as the architectural splendours of the aristocracy are satirized as being out of place, evidence of excess and misuse of wealth. The money could perhaps have been employed in the production of a mill, an echo of the utilitarian ethos. The reference to industry points to its progressive factors in complete contrast to the regressive attitude of the landed classes, something Elliott was to endorse in his Corn Law Rhymes. (34)

Oh happy if they knew their bliss, are they
Who, poor themselves, unbounded wealth survey,
Who nor in ships, nor cabs, nor chariots go,
To view the miracles of art below;
But, near their homes, behold august abodes, 5
That like the temples seem of all the gods!
Nor err they, if they sometimes kneel in pray'r

(33).c.f. Williams. op. cit - opening to Chapter 16.

'Knowable Communities.'

(34).c.f. this thesis. Chapter 3.

At shrines like those, for God-like powers are
there;
Powers that on railroads base no treasures waste,
Nor build huge mills, that blush like brick at taste, 10
Where labour fifteen hours, for twice a groat,
The half-angelic heirs of speech and thought:
But pour profusion from a golden hand, (35)
To deck with Grecian forms a Gothic land.
Hence, yeoman, hence! - thy grandsire's land resign; 15
Yield, peasant, to my Lord and power divine!
Thy grange is gone, your cluster'd hovels fall;
Proud domes expand, the park extends its wall;
Then kennels rise, the massive Tuscan grows;
And dogs sublime, like couchant kings, repose! 20
Lo! 'still-all-Greek-and-glorious' Art is here!
Behold the pagod of a British peer!

The use of the language to describe the architecture,
'expand', 'extends', 'massive', 'sublime', 'repose',
'glorious', and 'Behold (18-22)', emphasises size and
splendour, whereas 'kneel in pray'r (6)', 'twice a
groat', (11), and 'cluster'd hovels' (17), are indicative
of degradation. Finally, 'blush like brick' (10), is
a perceptive phrase as the building substance though
plain and certainly not 'Grecian' (14), is not aware
of taste, but the red colour is that of a blush, the
ambiguity of meaning in such a simple phrase being
an interesting and well drawn one.

Similarly, the effect of human changes wrought
by social ones is observed with absolute conviction in
the following extract,

Where is the Common, once with blessings rich...(36)
The poor man's Common? like the poor man's fritch
and well-fed ham, which erst his means allow'd,
'Tis gone to bloat the idle and the proud!

(35). Elliott - The Splendid Village (1828). VIII

(36). Ibid. VI.

To raise high rents! and lower low profits! O,
Tomorrow of the furies! thou art slow;
But where, thou tax-plough'd waste, is now the hind
Who lean'd on his own strength, his heart and mind?
Where is the matron, with her busy brow?
Their sheep - where are they? and their famous cow? 10
Their strutting game-cock, with his many queens?
Their glowing hollyoaks, and winter greens?
The chubby lad, that cheer'd them with his look,
And shared his breakfast with the home-bred rook?
The blooming girls, that scour'd the snow-white pail, 15
Then waked with joy the echoes of the vale,
And, laden homewards, near the sparkling rill,
Cropp'd the first rose that blush'd beneath the hill?
All vanish'd - with their rights, their hopes, their lands;
The shoulder-shaking grasp of hearts and hands; 20
The good old joke, applauded still as new;
The wondrous printed tale, which must be true;
And the stout ale, that show'd the matron's skill,
For, not to be improved, it mended still!
Now, lo! the young look base, as greybeard guile! 25
The very children seem afraid to smile,
But not afraid to scowl, with early hate,
At would-be-greatness, or the greedy great;
For they who fling the poor man's worth away,
Root out security, and plant dismay. 30
Law of the lawless! hast thou conquer'd Heav'n?
Then shall the worm that dies not be forgiven.

The poem like Goldsmith's The Deserted Village of 1770, is concerned with the changes wrought by depopulation of the countryside, but in Elliott's view there are overtones of political rhetoric and attack and the addition of the new perspective of the encroachment of industry. In the extract, the 'plenty' of village life is presented in vivid detail and the adjectives indicate brightness and happiness, for example, 'strutting, glowing, blooming, joy, joke, and wondrous.' After his list of questions as to the lost traditions and customs, Elliott turns from fantasy to reality with 'the young look base' (25) and 'children, afraid to smile' (26) which refers

back to 'the chubby lad that cheer'd them, (13). The rural verbs of 'root' and 'plant' (30), are now allied to security and dismay.

Elliott sets up the dichotomy of the country being good and clean and the town being corrupt and filthy, which is perhaps an extension of the 'God made the country, man made the Town' motif. Within this, however, there remains a difficulty to maintain the poetic perception of man's identity in the social environment, as the idea of uncontrolled numbers now removes the intimacy and personality sustained in rural life.

Here the equivalent town scene is one of dirt, corruption and wrong, presented as an Hogarthian panorama of a motley collection of low life.

Then, no strange paths perplex'd thee - no new
streets,
Where draymen bawl, while rogues kick up a row;
And fishwives grin, while fopling fopling meets;
And milk-lad his rebellious donkey beats;
While dwarfish cripple shuffles to the wall; 5
And hopeless tradesman sneaks to alehouse mean;
And imps of beggary curse their dad, and squall
For mammy's gin; and matron, poor and clean, (37)
With tearful eye, begs crust for lodger lean;
And famish'd weaver, with his children three, 10
Sings hymns for bread; and legless soldier, borne
In dog-drawn car, imploreth charity;
And thief with steak from butcher runs forlorn;
And debtor bows, while banker smiles in scorn;
And landed pauper, in his coach and four, 15
Bound to far countries from a realm betray'd,
Scowls on the crowd, who curse the scoundrel's
power,
While coachee grins, and lofty lady's maid
Turns up her nose at bread-tax-paying trade,
Though master bilketh dun, and is in haste.' 20

(37). Elliott - The Village Patriarch (1829). Book I, XIII.

The verbs here, 'bawl, kick, shuffle, sneak, curse, begs, scowls,' are indicative of confusion, lack of understanding and criminality. The coldness, and lack of community is observed, objectively and, omnisciently.

Connected with this portrayal is the social documentary element, which has been referred to, as Elliott's view of crowded streets replacing country lanes, is a representation of fact, yet here authority is achieved by the use of an observer, an old man bemoaning like Elliott, such social transformation.

'But much he dreads the town's distracting maze,
Where all, to him, is full of change and pain.
New streets invade the country; and he strays, (38)
Lost in strange paths, still seeking, and in vain,
For ancient landmarks, or the lonely lane 5
Where oft he play'd at Crusoe, when a boy.
Fire vomits darkness, where his lime-trees grew;
Harsh grates the saw, where coo'd the wood-dove coy;
Tomb crowds on tomb, where violets droop'd in dew'.

The old man is now lonely in the industrial city where formerly he enjoyed friendship playing as a boy. The pain brought about by the confusing maze of the streets is strengthened by the use of the verb 'vomit' (7), to describe the fire, now as a purveyor of evil. 'Harsh grates the saw' (8), indicates toil and action and is directly balanced with the soft coo of the dove, and the desecration of the violets is completed with the concomitant of the town, the cemetery, being built on their soil, organically replacing the 'dew' of life with the 'tomb' of death.

(38). Ibid. Book I. XII.

Social criticism is allied to the same sentiment
as the harshness of the industrial vocabulary is replaced
with the gentle simplicity of

The poor man's walk they take away, (39)
The solace of his only day,
Where now, unseen, the flowers are blowing,
And, all unheard, the stream is flowing!

In solitude unbroken,
 Where rill and river glide,
The lover's elm, itself a grove,
Laments the absent voice of love;

Finally of note in this consideration of verse
observing the relationship with the rural landscape is
A Glimpse of the Future, in which once more, using the
figure of an old man, Elliott can present his criticism
of the social transformations around him by allowing
the persona to present evidence of the past. By using
negatives the poet emphasises the changes needed.

And old man, to the field of graves
Borne, in his parish-shroud, methought,
Found, in the land of landless slaves, (40)
The bed of rest, which long he sought.

But, after many years had flown, 5
That old man rose out of his grave,
And wonder'd at his native town,
And found no honest man a slave.

Where once that town of trouble stood,
And he the tyrant's frown had felt, 10
Men in sweet homes, by stream and wood,
Amid their own green acres dwelt.

Nor hovel now, nor temple was,
Where hovels once and temples stood;
All, all had perish'd! for, alas! 15
Redemption had been steep'd in blood!

(39). Elliott - Footpaths - in 'Works 1840'. p. 151.

(40). Elliott - A Glimpse of the Future - in 'Works 1840' p.147.

The 'town of trouble' (9), and the groaning 'engin'd city' (17), are set against the 'sweet homes, by stream and wood' (27), a phrase which Elliott repeats. The aristocracy now work the machines, tyrants bound to 'labour's chain' (22), a succinct phrase for the productive process. The idealized world allies toil with good sense but the return in one more to a rural setting, the 'garden' for mankind.

This conception of change, embodied in the life of one person, naively reveals Elliott's interests here, in the processes of social upheaval. Similarly, the references to future inhabitants of a reborn England, spreading industry and knowledge (lines 27 and 35), reflect the covert imperialism of his writing.

The intention now is to turn away from the 'countryside to look at Elliott's portrayal of the worker in this industrial setting. Elliott, inherently a townsman moved and prospered in its environs. His stance towards the worker though is obviously ambivalent. This and indeed his whole response to industrialism are indicative of the contradictions within his position. He was an industrial capitalist, echoing the idealism and critical mood of the early Victorian entrepreneur, with

a naive belief in political reform by technical improvement and the need for peace required for 'Commerce' which was typically Victorian (41) (exhibiting) a moral idealism whereas others showed a pure and pragmatic self interest.

Elliott's response, however, is not one of a marked class interest and moves us away from the often too reductionist stance of historians of this period. His poetry showed his concern for the working class and he can perhaps best be placed in the category of 'liberal philanthropist' with a

commitment to the Industrial Revolution as a progressive force overbalanced by fear of its destruction of social order. (42)

It is these apparant contradictions then, which make Elliott so interesting for the social historian and it is how this response is shown poetically that is my concern and interest here.

How then is this portrayal manifested? There is certainly in much of Elliott's verse the habitual sense of the landscape being on the side of the artisan, providing the chance to escape into a world where for once, all are equal and free to contemplate Elliott's poetry for the most part expresses simply, a sympathy for the working man, but here there is something more

(41). Stringer and Crute Ebenezer Elliott, Poet of the Field, of the Furnace, of the Poor, Firebird Publications, Anarchist Bookshop and People's Centre, Leeds, 1971.

(42). Richards, Paul 'State Formation and Class Struggle 1832-48' in Ed. Corrigan, Philip Capitalism, State Formation and Marxist Theory, Quartet, 1980 pps 60-61.

O BLESSED1 when some holiday (43)
 Brings townsmen to the moor,
 And, in the sunbeams, brighten up
 The sad looks of the poor.
 The bee puts on his richest gold, 5
 As if that worker knew -
 How hardly (and for little) they
 Their sunless task pursue.
 But from their souls the sense of wrong
 On dove-like pinion flies; 10
 And, throned o'er all, Forgiveness sees
 His image in their eyes.
 Soon tired, the street-born lad lies down
 On marjoram and thyme,
 And through his grated fingers sees 15
 The falcon's flight sublime;
 Then his pale eyes, so bluey dull,
 Grow darkly blue with light,
 And his lips redden like the bloom
 O'er miles of mountains bright. 20
 The little lovely maiden-hair
 Turns up its happy face,
 And saith unto the poor man's heart,
 "Thou'rt welcome to this place.

The aria-like opening is both an expression of joy from the poet, for this is 'ruralizing' in reality; and leads to the language of the poem being hymnal and biblical, invoking Goad as an authority for the natural harmony. The bee and the townsman are linked by the word 'worked', (6) yet the former's toil takes place in freedom without exploitation and that of the poor man is sunless, hard and 'for little', (7/8) 'Street born' (13), brings to mind the connotations of the bed of sweet herbs. Elliott's use of colour is a confusing one here, although presumably it is its very use alone which is important as the lad exposed to rare sunlight becomes part of the natural world,

(43). Elliott - Holiday - Works 1840 p. 155.

indicated by the simile used to describe his lips: (19/20)

Away from social frameworks, the poor man's full welcome comes with his absorption into the surroundings where the graceful flight of the falcon remains the dominant image.

Here in two separate stanzas from The Excursion, the poor are evoked in the three hyphenated expressions of the first line: as the mother's plight is heightened by the exclamatory opening,

BONE-WEARY, many-childed, trouble-tried!
Wife of my bosom, wedded to my soul!
Mother of nine that live, and two that died!
This day, drink health from Nature's mountain (44)
bowl;
Nay, why lament the doom which mocks control? 5
The buried are not lost, but gone before.
Then, dry thy tears, and see the river roll
O'er rocks, that crown'd yon time-dark heights of
yore,
Now, tyrant-like, dethroned, to crush the weak no more.

'Tis passing sweet to wander, free as air, 10
Blythe truants in the bright and breeze-bless'd day,
Far from the town - where stoop the sons of care
O'er plans of mischief, till their souls turn grey,
And dry as dust, and dead-alive are they -
Of all self-buried things the most unblest'd: 15
O Morn! to them no blissful tribute pay!
O Night's long-courted slumbers! bring no rest
To men who laud man's foes, and deem the basest
best!

The metaphor of drinking health is extended to the river itself, whose links with the 'time-dark heights of yore,⁽⁸⁾ make it part of a continual process, so 'the buried are not lost.'⁽⁶⁾ In the second stanza quoted here, the joy of freedom is allied to the air,

(44). Elliott - The Excursion - Works 1840, p. 133.

and is given strength by the alliteration of the second line. The poor now are 'blythe truants',⁽¹¹⁾ out of place but happy in their mischief. The use of, 'stoop' (12) is a subtle and clever triple usage, referring to the health of the toiling poor, their degradation and also interestingly, has overtones of plotting and conspiracy, perhaps reflecting Elliott's attitudes to combination. By doing this he turns the expected blessing into a curse. 'Grey' and 'dry' (13/14), are contrasted with the sweetness and brightness of the rocks and rivers. The call to the elements of the day sees Elliott linking Nature with politics as they are asked to work together, to disapprove of subjection, but to laud freedom.

In the next example, the appeal to God is a direct one as the verse takes the form of a hymn, pleading that 'Labour' which is capitalized and shown to possess this day, should be released into the freedom of the countryside, where the 'falcon's flight sublime', and the 'wheeling' of the plover (21), is indicative of the tranquility.

AGAIN, oh, Lord, we humbly pray (45)
 That Thou wilt guide our steps aright:
 Bless here, this day, tired Labour's day!
 Oh, fill our souls with love and light!
 For failing food, six days in seven, 5
 We till the black town's dust and gloom:
 But here we drink the breath of heav'n,
 And here to pray the poor have room.
 The stately temple, built with hands,
 Throws wide its doors to pomp and pride; 10

(45). Elliott - Artisan's Outdoor Hymn - More Verse and Prose (1850). Vol. 2. p.4.

But in the porch their beadle stands,
 And thrusts the child of toil aside.
 Therefore we seek the daisied plain,
 Or climb thy hills, to touch thy feet; 15
 Here, far from splendour's city-fane,
 Thy weary sons and daughters meet.
 Is it a crime to tell Thee here,
 That here the sorely-tried are met?
 To seek thy face, and find Thee near?
 And on thy rock our feet to set? 20
 Where, wheeling wide, the plover flies;
 Where sings the woodlark on the tree;
 Beneath the music of thy skies,
 Is it a crime to worship Thee?
 "We waited long, and sought Thee, Lord, 25
 Content to toil, but not to pine;
 And with the weapons of Thy Word
 Alone, assail'd our foes and thine,
 Thy truth and Thee, we bade them fear;
 They spurn thy truth, and mock our moan! 30
 "Thy counsels, Lord, they will not hear,
 And Thou hast left them to their own.

The use of 'Again' shows the recurrence of the plea and emphasis on 'here' we drink the breath of heav'n sees Elliott endorsing his belief in God's earth being free for all to benefit from. The use of 'Thee' throughout creates a warmth and a feeling of security, but it has been a last resort. The help ostensibly offered by 'the stately temple' (9), was a false one so the poor turn to God. 'Love and light' contrasts with the 'dust' and gloom of the town and the mixture of economics and social position is complete when the workers 'till' (6) the town - a verb more usually associated with work on the land. The open air is here seen as Nature's temple, and the healthy benefits of the country are coupled with the spiritual benefit of worship.

This then is one side of Elliott's view of the worker in an industrialized setting. The realities; images of want, depravation and despair are another which it is my intention to consider now.

The following extract, the setting of which I have already alluded to (see note (8)), is a succinct portrayal, observed with a lack of sentimentality, going beneath mere ideas, to universal feeling,

There draws the Grinder his laborious breath (46)
There, coughing, at his deadly trade he bends,
Born to die young, he fears nor man nor death;
Scorning the future, what he earns he spends;
Debauch and Riot are his bosom friends. 5
He plays the Tory, sultan-like and well:
Woe to the traitor that dares disobey
The Dey of Straps! as rattan'd tools shall tell.
Full many a lordly freak, by night, by day,
Illustrates gloriously his lawless sway. 10
Behold his failings! hath he virtues, too?
He is no pauper, blackguards though he be.
Full well he knows what minds combined can do,
Full well maintains his birthright - He is free!
And, frown for frown, outstares monopoly! 15
Yet Abraham and Elliot, both in vain,
Bid science on his cheek prolong the bloom;
He will not live! he seems in haste to gain
The undisturb'd asylum of the tomb,
And, old at two-and-thirty, meets his doom! 20
Man of a hundred years, how unlike thee!

The ominous inevitability of 'coughing' 'deadly trade', 'born to die young' (2/3) and 'he seems in haste to gain/The undisturb'd asylum' (18/19) is given credence by the following description of this poem in a contemporary work, presenting both the factual basis for it, and a hint of the social concern which Elliott so often shows,

(46). Elliott - The Village Patriarch (1829). Book V -

A grinder sits on a block of wood, which he calls his grinding-horse, and his grindstone is before him, turned on an axle by steam or water. To this he applies the article to be ground, and a spray of fire rises at every touch. But the fire is not the worst. The grindstone itself wears away in foam-like surges that fill the lungs, and in a certain number of years, calculated by statistics to a nicety, kill the principle of life. A dry-grinder does not reach thirty-five, but a wet-grinder may defy death for nearly ten years more. Of the former is (47) the grinder of table-knives - of the latter the grinder of table-forks. See what a trifle involves ten years of a man's life! We do not think, while sitting at table, that the knives and forks before us are guilty of more human blood than swords and spears! Why should we? The men themselves - and they number between two and three thousand in Sheffield - like their fate rather than otherwise. This is a fact proved by the Report of Government Commissioners, and alluded to in the poem; for the Abraham and Elliot named there were the inventors of a preservative which the grinders will not use, although it is nothing more than a flue introduced into the wheel to carry off the dust. The men insist on their trade retaining its fatal noxiousness, because, if this were removed, there would be a greater competition of hands, their high wages would come down, and their deep drinking be cut short. Did Ebenezer include this in his Bread-Tax? Did he not feel that there are deeper depravities, more sickening horrors, in the very midst of us than can be amended by any political or fiscal reforms? Yes; the poet felt what escaped the rhymers; and he sought for the class of mechanics that moral emancipation without which no other can be of any avail.

The Grinder's attitude then is to maintain his independence, despite the dangers, 'scorning the future, what he earns, he spends'. (4). Yet, interspersed with concern is mention of the machine riots which were prevalent as the workers came to terms with their predicament. Here, the worker is rough in character,

(47). Chambers, William - Ebenezer Elliott - 'Papers for the People', No. 8. (1850). p.28.

'Debauch and Riot are his bosom friends' (5) and Elliott presents him in terms of the power conscious 'Tory' (6) making an indirect slant on the sultan like landowner, and showing equal disdain for the perpetrators of the riots. The machine, whose power is given voice in 'Dey of Straps' (8), has its servants who now revolt. 'Rattan'd' (8), presumably a dialect form of rattened, meaning the persecution or harassment given to those who refused to submit to trade union requirements, by removing tools or spoiling materials; is here used to describe the tools themselves, witnesses to and results of the desecration. The worker though is 'no pauper', he is a wage earner, though this alone cannot control his destiny as 'old at two and thirty' (20), he meets his doom.

Elliott's attempts to find a mode of expression fitting for its purpose went through several stages in his poetry. In One of the Homes, subtitled a 'Health of Towns ballad', he tries the ballad, the importance of which is its oral nature with its dramatic pauses and emphases, but too often his subject matter is presented in an intangible, detached way, with the simple form appearing far too comic in, for example, the following extract.

The small boy, in his home of sighs, (48)
As if he hated man,
Died, with raised hand, and open eyes,
Frowning at little Ann.
Then, died his bird: she wept, she sigh'd:
'Twas worn to skin and bone;
But whether it of famine died,
Or fever, is not known.

(48). Elliott - One of the Homes - A Health of Towns Ballad'
- More Verse and Prose. Vol. 1. (1850). p. 145.

She wept, but not for John - and yet
She loved her brother well;
She wept - wept for his little pet!

and

The dead hand propp'd the coffin-lid,
Above the dreadful frown;
It would keep up! it would, and did;
The joiner screwed it down.
And so, they slept in company;
The blighted feather'd flower!
And poor bud of humanity -
Both blighted in one hour.

His degree of emphasis is difficult to ascertain and for such a mode to succeed, an awareness of cause which produced the Corn Law Rhymes would be needed. Here morbid sensibility about children, so much a part of early nineteenth century balladry is mixed with a debased Romantic sentimentality.

The verse lapses into nursery rhyme as the rats and their sewer seem cheerful. Perhaps the frequency and inevitability of death made Elliott complacent but here the image of the child alone, a constant one in his verse has little substance, although the tone itself still retains the dignity which Elliott was often to refer to in his verse,

Farewell, thou old street-shunning lane, (49)
Where John whole hours would stay,
When welcomed flowers came back again,
To welcome rainbow'd May!
Flowers which by name he once could call!
For he, with childish pride,

(49). Ibid.

Had kept, at home, a funeral
 Of flowers, that weekly died.
 The rats peep'd out behind the door,
 And loth they seem'd to go;
 The rats jumped down beneath the floor,
 Into the sewer below.
 Men raised, in haste, the coffins three,
 In fearful haste were they:
 Ann, famish'd, follow'd gloomily,
 And heard the parson pray.
 Grey-hair'd he was, a grey-hair'd youth,
 Kind, humble, just, and wise;
 He look'd on woe-worm toil and truth
 With pity's tearful eyes;
 For he, a poor man's friendless son,
 Once suffer'd lond distress,

Here, in a short extract from The Village Patriarch,
 the youth who has grown up in the expanding town is
 seen as pensive.

Here oft, with fading cheek and thoughtful brow,
 Wanders the youth - town-bred, but desert-born. (50)
 Too early taught life's deepening woes to know,
 He wakes in sorrow with the weeping morn,
 And gives much labour for a little corn. 5
 In smoke and dust, from hopeless day to day,
 He sweats, to bloat the harpies of the soil,
 Who jail no victim, while his pangs can pay.
 Untaxing rent, and trebly taxing toil,
 They make the labour of his hands their spoil, 10
 and grind him fiercely; but he still can get
 A crust of wheaten bread, despite their frowns;
 They have not sent him like a pauper yet
 For Workhouse wages, as they send their clowns;
 Such tactics do not answer yet in towns. 15

The 'fading cheek' (1) leads back to the 'blooming
 lips' of the street-born lad of 'Holiday', whose symbiosis
 with landscape was complete. The youth's life here
 is one of 'deepening woes' (3), his 'trebly taxing toil'
 (9), and sweat, has no purpose apart from benefitting the
 factory owners, the wealthy, here described as the

(50). Elliott - The Village Patriarch (1829). Book III-XIII

'harpies of the soil' (7). The use of 'grind' (11), alludes to the industrial process itself and to the physical effect of his work. The italicized 'wheaten' (12), is indicative of his status, however degraded as a wage-earner, enabled although with pain, to sustain himself.

Elliott's approach to the working classes was perhaps dictated by his more comfortable position in life, yet his belief in the necessity of work looms large.

Idler, why lie down to die? (51)
Better rub than rust.
Hark! the lark sings in the sky -
"Die when die thou must!
Day is waking, leaves are shaking,
Better rub than rust."
In the grave there's sleep enough -
"Better rub than rust:
Death, perhaps, is hunger-proof,
Die when die thou must;
Men are mowing, breezes blowing,
"Better rub than rust."
He who will not work shall want;
Nought for nought is just -
Won't do, must do, when he can't;
"Better rub than rust.
Bees are flying, sloth is dying,
Better rub than rust.

That part of Elliott's verse which deals most directly with industrialism is his concern with the forces which helped to shape industrial society, the active forces of steam power; the machine and the railway; 'industry in action.' There is too an ironic stance in this verse as the evils and inhumanity of mechanism are paralleled with an awareness of the prosperity it was bringing and

(51). Elliott - Rub or Rust - Works 1840, p. 156.

acclaim and praise for its instigators, who are here described in virtuous terms as simple heroes, and are themselves part of the working tradition.

No; there he moves, the thoughtful engineer, (52)
The soul of all this motion; rule in hand,
And coarsely apron'd - simple, plain, sincere -
An honest man; self-taught to understand
The useful wonders which he built and plann'd.
Self-taught to read and write - a poor man's son,
Though poor no more - how would he sit alone,
When the hard labour of the day was done,
Bent o'er his table, silent as a stone,
To make the wisdom of the wise his own!
How oft of Brindley's deeds th'apprenticed boy
Would speak delighted, long ere freedom came!
And talk of Watt! while, shedding tears of joy,
His widow'd mother heard, and hoped the name
Of her poor boy, like theirs, would rise to fame.
Was not her love prophetic? Is he famed?
Yea; for deep foresight, and improving skill,
And patience, which might make the proud ashamed.

The following extracts also from Steam at Sheffield are fully illustrative of these attitudes to the Industrial Revolution. There is in this, a need to find a language to explain, define and celebrate, an appropriate vocabulary for a new subject. Elliott found poetry in these new marvels, using again the figure of a blind old man as the subjective respondent, led by the poet. As he complains of smoke, grime and the noise of Sheffield he is reproached,

Well, gaze thou on the hills, and hedge-side flowers!
But blind old Andrew will with me repair
To yonder massive pile, where useful powers, (53)
Toiling unconsciously, aloud declare
That man, too, and his works, are grand and fair. 5
Son of the far-famed self-taught engineer,
Whose deeds were marvels in the bygone days!

(52). Elliott - Steam at Sheffield VII - Works 1840.p.92.
(53). Ibid. I. p.91.

Ill it becomes thee, with ungrateful sneer,
The trade-fed town and townsmen to dispraise.
Why rail at Traffic's wheels, and crowded ways? 10

The grand works of man, personified in 'Traffic' (10),
are immediately acknowledged for their power, the
noise and clamour, a declaration of their intent. The
difference is that the workings of the machine is
unconscious toil, whereas Man's is the product of a
sophisticated mind.

Man is part of 'Nature's plan', which encompasses
a great deal of beauty and colour into which the poet
injects a claim for the virtues of the machine, the
drive of his argument coming with the 'ponderous blow'
of 'the hissing steel' (26 below). Steam is an active,
useful and noble beauty now,

If thou lov'st Nature symphathize with man;
For he and his are parts of Nature's plan.
But can'st thou love her if she love not thee?
She will be wholly loved, or not at all.
Thou lov'st her streams, her flowers; thou lov'st
to see 5
The gorgeous halcyon strike the bulrush tall (54)
Thou lov'st to feel the veil of evening fall,
Like gentlest slumber, on a happy bride;
For these are Nature's! Art not thou hers too?
A portion of her pageantry and pride;
In all thy passions, all thou seek'st to do, 10
And all thou dost? The earth-worm is allied
To God, and will not have her claims denied,
Though thou disown her fellow-worm, and scorn
The lowly beauty of his toil and care.
"Sweet is the whisper of the breezy morn 15
To waking streams." And hath the useful share
No splendour? Doth the tilter's cottage wear
No smiles for thee? "How beauteous are the dyes
That grove and hedgerow from their plumage shake!"
And cannot the loud hammer, which supplies 20
Food for the blacksmith's rosy children, make
Sweet music to thy heart? "Behold the snake

(54). Ibid.

Couch'd on its bed of beams." The scaly worm
Is lovely, coil'd above the river's flow;
But there is nobler beauty in the form 25
That welds the hissing steel, with ponderous blow;
Yea, there is majesty on that calm brow,
And in those eyes the light of thoughts divine!

Industry certainly had a profound effect on the visual arts and for the relation of this to the aesthetic concepts of the Sublime and the Picturesque we are indebted to Klingender's Art and the Industrial Revolution (55) which discusses this as one of its many aspects. The interest here is that with Burke's theory of the sublime, the perception of the artist was presented with a yet more elevated stance, to which even beauty was inferior, the sublime being productive of the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling,

Whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects....is a source of the (56) sublime.....In nature, dark confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions than those which are more clear and determinate.

Klingender defines this,

Vacuity, darkness, solitude and silence evoke the sublime, as do glaring brightness, the sudden (57) alternation of light and dark, the noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder or artillery and bitter tastes.

Elliott's perception of power in movement was invoked with a Miltonic drive,

(55). Klingender, F.D. Art and the Industrial Revolution (Paladin 1968. First publ. 1948)

(56). Burke, E. A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757). quoted in Klingender op.cit.

p.72.

(57). Klingender op.cit. Chapter 5. p.73

Come, blind old Andrew Turner! link in mine
 Thy time-tried arm, and cross the town with me
 For there are wonders mightier far than thine;
 Watt! and his million-feeding enginery!
 Steam-miracles of demi-deity! 5
 Thou can'st not see, unnumber'd chimneys o'er,
 From chimneys tall the smoky cloud aspire;
 But thou can'st hear the unwearied crash and roar
 Of iron powers, that, urged by restless fire,
 Toil ceaseless, day and night, yet never tire, 10
 Or say to greedy man, "Thou dost amiss."

Oh, there is glorious harmony in this
 Tempestuous music of the giant, Steam,
 Commingling growl, and roar, and stamp, and hiss,
 With flame and darkness! Like a Cyclop's dream, 15
 It stuns our wondering souls, that start and scream
 With joy and terror; while, like gold on snow
 Is morning's beam on Andrew's hoary hair!
 Like gold on pearl is morning on his brow!
 His hat is in his hand, his head is bare; 20
 And, rolling wide his sightless eyes, he stands
 Before this metal god, that yet shall chase
 The tyrant idols of remotest lands, (58)
 Preach science to the desert, and efface
 The barren curse from every pathless place 25
 Where virtues have not yet atoned for crimes.
 He loves the thunder of machinery!
 It is beneficent thunder, though, at times,
 Like heaven's red bolt, it lightens fatally.
 Poor blind old man! what would he give to see 30
 This bloodless Waterloo! this hell of wheels;
 This dreadful speed, that seems to sleep and snore,
 And dream of earthquake! In his brain he feels
 The mighty arm of mist, that shakes the shore
 Along the throng'd canal, in ceaseless roar 35
 Urging the heavy forge, the clanking mill,
 The rapid tilt, and screaming, sparkling stone.

The intensity of this short extract from a longer poem is maintained by the heightened vocabulary emphasising size, power, heat and noise; 'steam miracles of demi deity' (5), 'metal god' (22), 'hell of wheels' (31), do this, while the almost uncontrollable machines, servants of the personified 'Steam' are inhuman in that they are 'unwearied', 'restless', 'ceaseless', and 'never tire.'

(58). Elliott - Steam at Sheffield - II & III - Works 1840.
 p. 91.

The crescendo of sound with the onomatopaeic 'growl and roar, stamp and hiss' is now harmonious music. The juxtaposition of flame and darkness, joy and terror, echo the dramatic power invoked by Milton's

A dungeon horrible, on all sides round (59)
As one great furnace flam'd; yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Serv'd only to discover sights of woe.

The description by Elliott certainly calls to mind too, De Louthenberg's famous Coalbrookdale by Night. (60) where the industrial artefacts of the dark foreground are contrasted menacingly with the orange heat of the furnace and the excitement as in the poem, of the chaos, noise and fury of the fire is evoked.

Similarly, the apocalyptic work of John Martin (61) is a relevant reference to Elliott's perception, particularly as earlier in this poem he writes,

"Fair is the bow that spans the shower," thou
say'st,
"But all unlovely, as an eyeless skull, (62)
Is man's black workshop in the streeted waste."
And can the city's smoke be worse than dull,
If Martin found it more than beautiful?
Did he, did Martin steal immortal hues
From London's cloud, or Carron's gloomy glare -
Light-darken'd shadows, such as Milton's muse
Cast o'er th'Eternal - and shalt thou despair
To find, where man is found, the grand and fair?

(59). Milton - Paradisæ Lost. Book 1. l.44.

(60). Philip James de Louthenberg (1740-1812), painter of storm, battle and shipwreck in a Romantic manner and with an appreciation of the mighty forces at work at the turn of the century, as in, for example, The Deluge and the Angel destroying the Assyrian hosts.

(61). John Martin (1789-1854) painted apocalyptic visions of celestial wrath and violence, often with dramatic, supernatural effects. c.f. The fall of Babylon, Belshazzar's feast, The Last Judgement, The Great Day of his Wrath. see Klingender op. cit. pps. 104-9.

(62) Elliott - Steam at Sheffield I. Works 1840. p.91.

As the workers who toiled in the infernal conditions became brutalized by harsh labour and harmony gave way to social discord, so Hell became an appropriate image for industry, and a glance at Martin's illustrations to Paradise Lost (1827), endorse this.

Although Martin's visions of Hell, his illustrations of the Old Testament, and his tortured, storm-wracked landscapes reflect the elements of doubt and error in the complex mood of romanticism before 1830, they display at the same time a kind of exultation in the ever-increasing power of science. So completely did Martin express the mood of his (63) time that he was widely regarded as the greatest English artist after Turner. Moreover, he was much more than a passive interpreter of subconscious feelings and impressions. The grandiose architectural fantasies, which form such a striking feature of many of his pictures, influenced the style of many of the greatest engineering works of his day.

Elliott saw industry as a force for progress, and even universal peace,

.....this metal god, that yet shall chase (64)
The tyrant idols of remotest lands
Preach science to the desert, and efface
The barren curse from every pathless place.

A Victorian critic saw Elliott's perceptions thus,

.....science, the advancement of knowledge, (65)
is hailed by Elliott as the glorious means of
restoring Man to the regions of beauty and harmony.
Man's conquest over Nature, is to restore him to
the loving arms of Nature; and, therefore, he
hails each mighty victory of mankind.

(63). Klingender. op. cit. p.106. For illustrations of Martin's Work, see Johnstone - John Martin (Academy Editions (1974)).

(64). Elliott - Steam in the Desert - More Verse and Prose (1850). Vol.1

(65). Paxton Hood, The Peerage of Poverty; or Learners and Workers in Fields, Farms, and Factories. (London:S.W. Partridge & Co. 1865) - Chapter 5. 'The Man of Iron'.

Yet there remains the destruction of the landscape,
a fear of what the future may bring and the need for
adoption of old beliefs,

The spirit of the Moors wrapp'd fold on fold
Of thund'rous gloom, and flash'd th'indignant storm
From his dilating eyes, when first uproll'd
The volumed smoke, that, like a prophet, told (66)
Of horrors yet to come. His angry scowl
Cast night at noon o'er Rivelin and Don,
And scared o'er Loxley's springs the screaming fowl
For rill and river listen'd, every one,
When the old Tory put his darkness on.
Full soon his deep and hollow voice forth brake,
Cursing the tilting, tipling, strange machine

There was certainly in Elliott's work an admiration
for the captains of industry, a phrase coined by
Carlyle in 'Past and Present' (1830), and in the
achievements of the industrial revolution. Towards the
end of his political career in Sheffield he wrote to
a friend.

My hope is not in sayers but in doers, not in (67)
bards or prophets but in engineers. The greatest
man alive is George Stephenson.

The heroes were praised in the poetry as well,
and he acclaimed the likes of Watt, Stephenson, Brindley
and Brunel as public benefactors, as here in,

The far-praised, self-taught, matchless engineer! (68)

and

Engine of Watt! unrivall'd is thy sway. (69)
Compared with thine, what is the tyrant's power?
His might destroys, while thine creates and saves.
Thy triumphs live and grow, like fruit and flower;
But his are writ in blood, and read on graves!

(66). Elliott - Steam at Sheffield - V. - Works 1940 p.92.

(67). Elliott - Letter to Francis Fisher 28th Jan. 1841.
quoted in Brown, Simon:- Ebenezer Elliott the Corn Law
Rhymer - M.A. dissertation. Univ. of Leicester. 1971.

(68). Elliott - Steam at Sheffield IV. Works. 1840.p.92.

(69). Ibid. VI.

and finally here, in

Burns toil'd, but Crompton, (better still,)
Toil'd, and created might: (70)
Dead things, made vital by his skill,
Are blessing day and night;

In Verses on the Opening of the Sheffield and Rotherham Railway progress is couched in terms of a victory for man and technology over primitivism (c.f. p. 65. note (32)), and in a grandiose portrayal of an epoch making occasion, he sees the universal impetus of the railway.

Forests! - thou river'd landscape wide! - (71)
Beneath storm-threatening skies,
I stand on war-mark'd Winco's side,
And see, with gladdened eyes,
Another triumph for mankind - 5
Another victory of mind
O'er man's worst enemies.
They come! the shrieking steam ascends
Slow moves the banner'd train;
They rush! the towering vapour bends - 10
The kindled wave again
Screams over thousands, thronging all
To witness now the funeral
Of law-created pain.
Behold it - Osgathorpe, behold! 15
Look down, and cry "All hail!"
Skies! brighten into blue and gold,
O'er all the living vale!
Wan, lingering foxglove! you, ye trees!
Thou wood of Tinsley! tell the breeze 20
That hell's dark cheek turns pale;
For Mind shall conquer time and space;
Bid East and West shake hands!
Bring, over Ocean, face to face,
Earth's ocean-sever'd strands; 25
And, on his path of iron, bear
Words that shall wither, in despair,
The tyrants of all lands.
Eternal River! - roaring still,
As roar'd thy foamy wave 30
When first each wild-rose-skirted rill
Heard moorland echoes rave; -
Thou seest, amid thy meadows green,
The goodliest sight that earth hath seen

(70). Elliott - Skill and Labour - More Verse and Prose
(1850). Vol. 2. p.53.

(71). Elliott - Verses on the Opening of the Sheffield and Rotherham Railway. op. cit.

Elliott here successfully uses his knowledge of technological advance as an ironfounder and encompasses it in his imagination seeing implications far beyond the obvious practical uses. In using the vocabulary of medieval pageantry in 'banner'd, 'towering,' (8-10), Elliott successfully places the moving engine in the wider landscape. Industrial advance is seen in terms of a precise named locality, in this extract 'Osgathorpe and Tinsley,' and elsewhere in the poem, Canklow and Templestowe, which is a rather limiting device. Elliott as a poet of locality, needs a frame in which to set his verse yet the names here have a bathetic effect, especially here as they are followed by the heightened language of 'conquer time and space' (22), 'Earth's ocean severed strands' (25) and 'tyrants' (28).

Elliott attempts to present a world-view within this poem but there is a continued change of focus from technology to landscape, past to progress, and his ideas too often lack lucidity. Yet he can be perceptive, as here.

In vain thou mak'st the air a slave
 That works and will not tire;
 And burn'st the flame-destroying wave, (72)
 And rid'st on harness'd fire;
 In vain - if millions toil half-fed, 5
 And Crompton's children, begging bread,
 Wealth-hated, curse their sire.
 Fire-kindling man! thy life-stream runs,
 Even yet, through sighs and groans:
 Too long thy Watts and Stephensons, 10
 With brains have fatten'd drones;

(72). Ibid.

O Genius! all too long, too oft,
At thee the souls of clay have scoff'd,
And sold thy little ones!

One important use of the railway, of which Smiles wrote,

The iron rail proved a magicians' road.
The locomotive gave a new celerity to time. It
virtually reduced England to a sixth of its size.
It brought the country nearer to the town, and (73)
the town to the country.....It energized punctuality,
discipline, and attention; and proved a moral
teacher by the influence of example.

had to be improvement in social conditions. Such
improvements were in vain if the factory children were
not fed properly. It followed that production would
then suffer. The two expressions for steam, 'flame-
destroying wave' (3), and 'harness'd fire' (4), are
concrete and succinct and therefore they succeed.
Elliott is right also with his acknowledgement of
prehistoric man's conquest of fire, equated here with
the overdue benefits of steam power which the worker,
rather than the drone should now receive. In this way
the poet foresees moral as well as social improvements.

In the third extract from this poem below, the poet
describes the successful effect of speed with yet more
poetic terms for steam,

But, lo! the train! - On! onward! - still (74)
Loud shrieks the kindled wave;
And back fly hamlet, tree, and hill,
White steam, and banners brave;
And thoughts on vapoury wings are hurl'd, 5
To shake old thrones and change a world,
And dig Abaddon's grave.

(73). Smiles, S. - The Life of George Stephenson
preface to 1903 edition.

(74). Elliott - Verses on the Opening of the
Sheffield and Rotherham Railway. op.cit.

Mountains, that were when graves were not!
 Time-humbled Templestowe,*
 Thou tell'st of eagled Rome and Scott, 10
 What dateless years shall know!
 Lo! Mind prepares the final fall;
 The many-nation'd funeral
 Of law-created woe!

Eternal River! - roaring now, 15
 As erst, in earlier years,
 Ere grief began, with youthful brow,
 To live an age of tears;
 Thou hear'st, beneath this brightening sky,
 A voice of Power that will not die 20
 While man hath hopes and fears.

He, (conquering fire, and time, and space,)
 Bids East and West shake hands;
 Brings, over ocean, face to face,
 Earth's ocean-sever'd strands; 25
 And, on his iron road, will bear
 Words that shall wither, in despair,
 The tyrants of all lands.

'Kindled wave' (2) and 'vapoury wings' (5) show Elliott's imagination at work and before the final climax, which is almost a repeat of the fourth stanza, except that now the 'path of iron' has expanded to an 'iron road', (26); there is once more a wide sweep of time and space. The historical perspective thereby sets up Man's ultimate conquest as 'Mind prepares the final fall' (12), of once more a universal victory of progress over suffering.

For Elliott any progress was impossible without Free Trade, which explains his emphasis on the Corn Laws in his Rhymes. (75) His use of poetry for endorsing political economics will be considered elsewhere, but

(75). c.f. this thesis - Chapter 3.

there are several instances where the ethic of free trade is seen in terms of the cloud, the river and the mountain and there is a recurrence of the vocabulary used in his perceptions of industrialism, which I would like to briefly indicate here.

FREE Trade, like religion, hath doctrines of love, (76)
And the promise of plenty and health;
It proclaims, while the angels look down from above,
The marriage of Labour and Wealth.

Free Trade, like religion, hath doctrines of peace, 5
Universal as God's vital air;
And, throned o'er doom'd evil, he hails its increase,
While his enemies only despair.

The ark of our triumph, far, far as seas roll,
Shall ride o'er the wealth-freighted waves; 10
The chain'd of the drones be the chainless in soul,
And tyrants made men by their slaves.

The hall of our fathers, with heav'n for its dome,
And the steps of its portals the sea -
Of labour and comfort will then be the home, 15
And the temple where worship the Free.

The proclamation of the joining of a personified 'Labour' with 'Wealth' is a repetition of the victory of Steam. Free Trade, like God's vital air should be enjoyed by all. The description of the waves as 'wealth freighted' (10), indicates the steamship's progress and once more 'drones' and 'tyrants' (11/12) are employed.

Interchange, trade and harmony are the keywords here, pointing to the necessity of competition, itself

(76). Elliott - Song-Free Trade like Religion - Works 1840.
p. 157.

an offshoot of industrial advance and success.

Look on the clouds, the streams, the earth, the sky:
Lo, all is interchange and harmony!..... (77)
Cloud trades with rivers, and exchange is power!
But should the clouds, the streams, the winds disdain
Harmonious intercourse, nor dew nor rain
Would forest-crown the mountains;

The unquestionable importance of the role of
'Trade' in the industrial economy is hinted at. The
uprooting of wild flowers is, however, part of the
social transformation, the roots metaphorically giving
rise to 'hard steel', itself to be used by the
extension of the metaphor of source, to release the poor
man from his enslaved, subjected position. A physical
transition has been brought about by the 'wings' of
steam to which Trade is allied.

'That Trade hath wings, to fly from climes unblest'd! (78)
Trade, the transformer, that turns dross to bread,
And reaps rich harvests on the barren main;
Trade, that uproots wild flowers, and from their bed
Digs forth hard steel, to hew the bondman's chain:
Tamer of Tyrants, else opposed in vain!

The following stanzas are taken from Lines written
for the Sheffield Mechanic's First Exhibition.

Then, Trader, Lord, or Yeoman, (79)
If thou a patriot art -
If thou would'st weep to see the light
Of England's name depart,
Her streets blood-flooded, and her plains 5
In boundless conflagration -
Instruct her poor benighted sons,
And save a sinking nation!

(77). Elliott - The Ranter (1830). V. - Works 1840 p.103.

(78). Elliott - The Village Patriarch (1829).

(79). Elliott - Lines written for the Sheffield Mechanic's
First Exhibition - Works 1840, p. 167.

Shall we not lift the lowly,
Whom law and custom ban? 10
O help us to exalt and praise
God, in the mind of man!
Art thou a Man? Then, haste to aid,
Perchance, a sireless brother!
And in his parent, worn with want, 13
"O son! behold thy mother!"

Friends of the chain'd in spirit!
Set free our soul-bound slaves!
And a redeemed and thankful world
Shall smile upon your graves; 20
Age after age shall see your deeds
In useful beauty growing -
Still gathering strength to save and bless
Like streams to ocean flowing.

Through a call to patriotism, Elliott points to the need for the dissemination of the knowledge acquired through experience by the artisan in order to prevent a recurrence. In the second stanza, Christian brotherhood is invoked, but the casual definition of the poor 'whom law and custom ban', (10), only serves to indicate contemporary indiscrepancy in philanthropic thought. Finally, the poet writes as if a new 'redeemed and thankful' (19) world has experienced some progress and the joining of 'useful' with 'beauty' implicitly combines nature and industry.

The use of steam for transport, one of its major benefits is mooted here as a potential escape from 'toil-worn' England. Without the appreciation of a man for his productive worth 'useful men are prized' (5 below) the establishment, Elliott's constant enemy will never come to terms with advance.

O for a ship - a ship! - the wing of steam! (80)
To bear us from the land where toil, despised,
Is robb'd and scourged, and life's best prospects seem
Sad as the couch of patience agonized!
Is there no land where useful men are prized 5
By those they feed?

As a commentary on the age in which he lived and worked, Elliott's verse is a vital force. On the one hand the usurpation of country by town is considered inevitable and his intrinsic involvement with both, fails to cloud his imaginative vision. His was an ambiguous position, yet his lauding of steam and bemoaning social change are not conflicting. In his work and particularly in his politics, progress was the key, and he saw the formation of a new landscape as part of that trend. Despite being brought up in an industrial context there is no tacit acceptance of the changes taking place around, and although later his 'lifeblood' was dependent on commercial success his view could still contain a social criticism of a violent form of transition. Yet there is nowhere a critique of the destructive forces of industry which, for example, Wordsworth brings, with,

An Inventive Age (81)
Has wrought, if not with speed of magic, yet
To most strange issues. I have lived to mark
A new and unforeseen creation rise
From out the labours of a peaceful Land
Yielding her potent enginery to frame
And to produce, with appetite as keen
As that of war, which rests not night or day,
Industrious to destroy!.....

(80). Elliott, The Ranter (1830). V. - Works, 1840, p.103.

(81). Wordsworth - The Excursion

In this new landscape Elliott saw the necessity for 'escape' into the beauties of the countryside retained, despite the growth of the town. In Sheffield this was realized, with the proximity of one to the other providing just this need. The vocabulary of industrialism contained that of power and the sublime, and to conclude this chapter I would like to consider how far Elliott, in selecting these poetic modes came to terms with the expansion and advancement around him.

The language used to describe this new found industrial harmony is transferred to some of his descriptions of the natural surroundings of the industrial core of the town, representing a major development in Elliott's poetic art. Here in an extract taken from one of his Rhymed Rambles , Elliott addresses Kinderscout, the highest mountain in the Peak,

WHEN last I look'd on thee, thy brow was black (82)
With trouble, and beneath it flames flashed out;
While on thine awful face the heav'ns flung back
The red glare of thy lightnings, Kinderscout!
And all thy brethren answered with a shout 5
Their monarch's voice, that spake from sea to sea,
O'er all their cataracts. But now the trout
Sleeps in thy voiceless runlets. Now the bee
Alone is restless here:

The reference to a storm brings to mind the workings of industry with 'flames flashed out' (2), and 'red, glare' (4). The 'awful face' (3), and 'black brow' are ominous and menacing in the way the fire set against Coalbrookdale's darkness was. The 'shout' of the other

(82). Elliott - Noon on Great Kinder - Rhymed Rambles - Works 1840. p. 178.

hills' thunder is opposed to the tranquility of trout and bee in the now 'voiceless' rivulets. The contrast of light with dark and soft with loud is complete.

In the following example from Win Hill or the 'Curse of God', the might and majesty of the hill, whose height is emphasised in the third line; is set up as an observer on those beneath. The personification of 'Air, Light, Science, Reason and Mind' elevates the praise of the landscape yet still 'Mind', used as I have shown to indicate invention and genius elsewhere in his verse, 'shall rule all other might'. The landscape then now is seen in terms of this.

King of the Peak! Win-Hill! thou, throned and (83)
crown'd,
That reign'st o'er many a stream and many a vale!
Star-loved, and meteor-sought, and tempest-found!
Proud centre of a mountain-circle, hail!
The might of man may triumph or may fail;
But, Eldest Brother of the Air and Light,
Firm shalt thou stand when demigods turn pale!
For thou, ere Science dawn'd on Reasons's night,
Wast, and wilt be when Mind shall rule all other might.

In Sabbath Morning the young Mechanic on the day he can be free from toil, is invited to worship God in the welcoming countryside.

Rise, young Mechanic! Idle darkness leaves (84)
The dingy town, and cloudless morning glows:
O rise and worship Him who spins and weaves
Into the petals of the hedge-side rose
Day's golden beams and all-embracing air! 5
Rise! for the morn of Sabbath riseth fair!
The clouds expect thee - Rise! the stonechat hops

(83). Elliott - 'Win Hill, or the Curse of God - Works, 1840, p. 129.

(84). Elliott - Sabbath Morning - Works 1840, p.160.

Among the mosses of thy granite chair:
 Go tell the plover, on the mountain tops,
 That we have cherish'd nests and hidden wings. 10
 Wings? Ay, like those on which the seraph flings
 His sun-bright speed from star to star abroad;
 And we have Music, like the whisperings
 Of streams in Heav'n - our labour is an ode
 Of sweet sad praise to Him who loves the right. 15
 And cannot He who spins the beauteous light,
 And weaves the air into the wild flowers hues,
 Give to thy soul the mountain torrent's might,
 Or fill thy veins with sunbeams, and diffuse
 Over thy thoughts the greenwood's melody? 20
 Yea, this and more He can and will for thee,
 If thou wilt read, engraven on the skies
 And restless waves, that "sloth is misery;
 And that our worth from our necessities
 Flows, as the rivers from his clouds descend! 25

The idle darkness of the 'dingy' town (2) is
 contrasted with the glow of the morning, 'Day's golden
 beams and all-embracing air (5). Yet within this the
 virtues of work are expounded with the exclamatory 'Rise'
 (4/5) and 'engraven on the skies/And restless waves,
 that 'sloth is misery'" (22/3). The homes of the
 labourers are like the cherished nests of the plover (10),
 and are themselves seen as an organic part of the
 landscape, in which all is beneficial. The rivers'
 flow provides, the sunbeams vivify and in return the
 artisan's labour is vital, the Music of sustenance, 'an
 ode of sweet praise to Him who loves the right' (15).

This longer extract from Win Hill opens with the
 rich imagery of 'topmost jewel' and 'rose cupped
 bilberries', a precise image on which to base the
 panoramic view of the homes seeming to surreptitiously

'creep' into and become absorbed in the cloud.

High on the topmost jewel of thy crown, (85)
Win-Hill! I sit bareheaded, ankle-deep
In tufts of rose-cupp'd bilberries; and look down
On towns that smoke below, and homes that
creep

Into the silvery clouds, which far-off keep 5
Their sultry state! and many a mountain stream,
And many a mountain vale, "and ridgy steep;"
The Peak, and all his mountains, where they gleam
Or frown, remote or near, more distant than they
seem!

There flows the Ashop, yonder bounds the Wye, 10
And Derwent here towards princely Chatsworth
trends;

But, while the Nough steals purple from the sky,
Lo! northward far, what giant's shadow bends?
A voice of torrents, hark! its wailing sends;
Who drives yon tortured cloud through stone-still
air? 15

A rush! a roar! a wing! a whirlwind rends
The stooping larch! The moorlands cry "Prepare!
It comes! ye gore-gorged foes of want and toil,
beware!"

It comes! Behold! - Black Blakelow hoists on high
His signals to the blast from Gledhill's brow. 20
Them, slowly glooming on the lessening sky,
The bread-tax'd exile sees, (in speechless woe,
Wandering the melancholy main below,
Where round the shores of Man the dark surge
heaves,)
And while his children's tears in silence flow, 25
Thinks of sweet scenes to which his soul still cleaves,
That home on Etherow's side, which he for everleaves.

Now expectation listens, mute and pale,
While, ridged with sudden foam, the Derwent
brawls;
Arrow-like comes the rain, like fire the hail; 30
And, hark! Mam-Tor on shuddering Stanage calls!
See, what a frown o'er castled Winnat falls!
Down drops the death-black sky! and Kinderscout,
Conscious of glory, laughs at intervals;
Then lifts his helmet, throws his thunders out, 35
Bathes all the hills in flame, and hails their stormy
shout.

Hark! how my Titan guards laugh kings to scorn!
See, what a fiery circle girds my state!
Hail mountains! River-Gatherers! Eldest born
Of Time and Nature, dreadful, dark, and great! 40
Whose tempests, wing'd from brows that threaten
fate,
Cast shadows, blacken'd with intensest light,
Like the despair of angels fallen, that wait
On God's long-sleeping wrath, till roof'd with night,
The seas shall burn like oil, and Death be waked with
fright.

The use of 'sultry' (6) succinctly indicates the atmosphere and mood preceding the imminent storm.

'Giant's shadow (13)', 'torrents', 'wailing' (14)', 'tortured' (15), 'rush' and 'roar' (16) is the same language by which the train and the steam engine were described. There is now a 'mechanistic' consciousness apparent in the poet's imaginative response. 'It comes' 'Behold' (19), are exclamations by which the train of Verses was greeted and the 'blast', (20), 'dark surge', (24), and 'lessening sky', (21) echo the pounding movements of the machine.

In 'the shores of Man' (24), the idea of some vast ocean distancing 'the bread tax'd exile' from the moorlands is introduced. The references to localities here enhance the power of the elements which are in total control of the landscape. The same mixture of praise and fright in which the power of the 'glorious harmony of the tempestuous giant' was observed comes with 'now expectation listens, mute and pale' (28). There is then recourse to a mechanistic violent lexis, with 'brawls', 'arrow like', 'hail like fire,' (29-30), until the crescendo arrives with 'down drops the death-black sky.' (33). The sublimity of this vision is similar in stance to the 'unwearied

crash and roar', and reaches its height in the description of the thunder and lightning of Kinderscout, victorious in battle, 'Conscious of glory, laughs at intervals; Then lifts his helmet, throws his thunders out/, Bathes all the hills in flame, and hails their stormy shout'. (33-36). The image of the giant or monster echoes the following from Steam at Sheffield,

How like a monster, with a league-long mane, (86)
Or Titan's rocket, in its high career,
Towers the dense smoke! The falcon, wheeling
near,
Turns, and the angry crow seeks purer skies.

Finally, the use of shade produces the sublime tone of much of the visual art to which I briefly referred, 'Of Time and Nature, dreadful, dark and great'./.....Cast shadows, blacken'd with intensest light' (42). Here the menacing tone which prevails indicates that time when 'The seas shall burn like oil and Death be waked with fright.' (45).

The awe and wonder with which the advent of the magnificence of steam was greeted is narrowed here to the similarly breathtaking effect of the natural storm.

Elliott had yet to witness the full evils which industrialization was to bring to the town, of power eventually overriding all other human habits and purposes. In the course of his writing which has been considered

(86). Elliott - Steam at Sheffield III - Works 1840 p.92.

in this chapter, his central concern was a human one, and for this reason the poetry directly concerned with industry in action with its welcoming and admiring tone, remains an honest and subjective response. This final extract leads into my next chapter, the addition of an espousal of free trade was to become his chief concern, producing the vehement, trenchant tone of the Corn Law Rhymes. For Elliott the advent of steam power was the source from which improvement in the quality of life would inevitably follow.

Our compass which married the East to the West, (87)
Our press, which makes many minds one,
Our steam-sinew'd giant that toils without rest,
Proclaim that our perils are gone.

(87). Elliott - Song - Let Idlers Despair - Works 1840,
p. 157.

THE CORN LAW RHYMER

It was with the publication of the Corn Law Rhymes in 1830 that recognition of Elliott was to reach its peak and also to find a new direction. He now became known as the Corn Law Rhymer, a title he was to retain until the present day. Up to the beginning of 1831 Elliott's work was to all intents and purposes unknown. A fortunate occurrence ⁽¹⁾ resulted in it being brought to the notice of the public through an article in the New Monthly Magazine which took the form of a letter addressed to the poet laureate Southey, 'Respecting a remarkable poem by a Mechanic.'

The first edition of the Corn Law Rhymes contained only The Ranter which is referred to later, but in the two succeeding editions in 1831 further poems were added, and in the collected works of 1833 still more. These additional poems made up the group which I wish to consider in this chapter. The Preface to these poems first appeared in the third edition under the heading of 'Declaration of the Sheffield Mechanics Anti-Bread-Tax Society up to 1833.'

(1). John Bowring visiting Thomas Asline Ward, editor of the Sheffield Independent, went south with a copy, met Wordsworth in Nottingham, and indicated to him, the 'wonderful poet of Sheffield, not Montgomery but a new name.' In London, he enlisted the support of Bulwer Lytton, who dispatched a letter to the New Monthly Magazine (1831, no. 2), inviting Southey's attention, although Elliott had been known to the latter for over twenty years.

The Declaration, though signed by the Secretary of the Society, one John Carr, bears all the signs of being by Elliott himself. The substance of this declaration is indicated in the first sentence:

Convinced that the Mechanics are the only body of men in this country sufficiently independent to oppose, with any chance of success, the host of corruptionists who are feeding on our labour, and, at the same time, limiting the market for our productions; trusting also that we shall speedily be joined by every wise and good mechanic in the empire, and supported by the yet undebased portion of the middle class of our countrymen, if any such there be, we, the Sheffield Mechanics' Anti-Bread-Tax Society, declare that, in a fully peopled country, it is an act of national suicide to restrict the exchange of manufactured goods for corn; because, where there is a law which restricts the necessaries and comforts of life, profits and wages, (being nowhere worth more than the necessaries and comforts which they will purchase,) are demonstrably measured by the restriction. (2)

The Preface opens with a grateful acknowledgement of thanks to those critics who had praised the early editions of the Corn-law Rhymes, and attempts a defence of the use of poetry for political purposes.

Elliott opened his Preface to the 2nd edition of the Corn Law Rhymes of 1831 with

Two generous critics.....have praised so highly (3) this little unpuffed, unadvertised book, that I am almost compelled to doubt whether I still live in England.

and succeeded in drawing attention to the salient points of debate which the Rhymes provoke. The reviews of his work provided Elliott, who had been writing for over thirty years with the opportunity to present himself

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- (2). Elliott. Preface to 3rd ed. of Corn Law Rhymes - 1831.
(3). Elliott - Preface to 2nd edition of Corn Law Rhymes - 1831.

under his own name ⁽⁴⁾ as a dogmatic and bitter opponent of a social and political evil. It is the extent to which in the Corn Law Rhymes, Elliott adapted the medium of verse to the political purpose he sought to serve, using rhetorical devices seemingly more appropriate to the political platform than poetry, that is my consideration in this Chapter.

The Corn Law Rhymes are so closely related to the Anti-Corn-Law agitation of the 1830's, however, that, before proceeding to the poetry it is necessary to draw in the outline of the political climate as it related to the price of bread. The Corn Laws, or Bread Tax as Elliott referred to it, had been passed in 1815. The Napoleonic Wars had produced the Continental system, which gave the English farmer a virtual monopoly of the home market, and the consequence of this artificial scarcity and of a series of bad harvests, was a rapid rise in prices, accompanied by fluctuations in the trade cycle. ⁽⁵⁾ The solution to the problem, propounded

(4). For example, he had resorted to a pseudonym in 1810 with the Soldier and other poems by Brittanicus.

(5). The price of corn, which in 1789 had stood at 45/9 the quarter, had risen ten years later to over 100 shillings. This trend was reversed by the abundant harvest of 1813, which produced a sharp decline in prices: from 117s.10d. in June 1813, to 69s.7d. in May 1814. The enormous harvest, followed by peace and considerable importation, spread dismay in the ranks of the landed interest. Farmers in recent years had made enormous profits and, presuming on the indefinite continuance of high prices, had sunk a vast amount of capital in improvements and had renewed their leases, in many instances at rents proportionate to prices. Both farmers and landowners had raised their standard of living during the war and were loath to submit to any lowering.

by an unreformed Parliament, representative mainly of the landed interest, was the Corn Law of 1815. Its purpose was to stabilise the price of wheat at 80/- a quarter; no imports of grain were permitted while the price remained below that level. The Act was to force up the price of grain by protective tariffs on imports, serving the interests of the landowners.

Opposition was to come especially from the new industrial classes, leading to the formation of the Anti-Corn-Law League in 1838. The change was not only one of principle but of spirit as well. Behind the old system lay a definite philosophy of social justice in which the interest of both producer and consumer were considered. The intention was to keep the price at a level which would be fair to both. Thus, up to a certain price, the producer was given practically a monopoly of the home market and was given assistance in exporting his surplus. Under the new system the fluctuation in price, up to the point at which foreign grain was admitted duty free, varied directly with the size of the crop at home.

This Act, which satisfied neither the Protectionists nor their opponents and failed to stabilise the price of wheat, produced little agitation beyond petitions to Parliament and a small crop of pamphlets. Agitation for Parliamentary Reform ⁽⁶⁾ overshadowed the Corn Laws and the controversy was not revived until 1838, when the

(6). This culminated in the Reform Act of 1832, which enfranchised large industrial towns previously unrepresented, abolished numerous 'rotten boroughs', and extended the vote to middle class men.

formation of the Anti-Corn Law League coincided with Chartist Agitation. The Industrial Revolution, which had exacerbated the problem, provided a way of solving it by bringing into being a new political class, men such as Sir Robert Peel and in a small way Elliott himself, whose interest was in factories rather than land. They resented the political power which the landed interest held, and wanted cheaper bread, some for humanitarian reasons and all to reduce their wage bill. John Bright called their opposition 'a movement of the commercial and industrious classes against the lords and great proprietors of the soil'; it was infused with 'a moral and even a religious spirit'.

The years 1822 to 1828 are important in the history of the anti-Corn-law movement in that they marked the union of the industrial and commercial classes against the landowners. The reduction of duties on both manufactured articles and raw materials, which Huskisson made in the years following 1823, enabled the manufacturing and commercial classes to attack protection on grain without provoking, as it did in 1815, a reference to the high protection which they themselves enjoyed. Freed from this handicap of earlier years, writers in newspapers and periodicals, pamphleteers and representatives in Parliament were less hampered in the use of certain arguments and in the flood of personal abuse which they directed against the landowners. Practically every argument against protection to agriculture and nearly every epithet hurled against the landed interest by Cobden and the Anti-Corn Law League from 1839 to 1846 was anticipated at this time. The League and its henchmen increased the output rather than the number of arguments, and the volume rather than the intensity of the vituperation. (7)

So, before Elliott began his major controversial

(7). Barnes, D.G. - History of the Corn Laws 1660-1846 (1930), Ch.9 p185. This and McCord, N. The Anti-Corn Law League (1958), deal extensively with the points raised here and were my major sources of reference.

writings, the principles of the attack on the Corn-laws had already been established. The Corn Law Rhymes, then, were used as a medium for the expression of economic, social and political opinions. The mode chosen for the Corn Law Rhymes and the sentiments expressed within them led to the supposition that they had been written by one of the mechanics, although Elliott was quick to refute this. Indeed Elliott, far from being the

quite unmoneyed, russet coated speaker, nothing (8)
or little other than a Sheffield worker in brass
and iron.....doing personal battle with Necessity,

was an employer and reasonably successful business man, essentially a member of the commercial class anxious about his own interests. He therefore addressed himself to both middle and working classes, in the hope that the workers could be raised from their miserable position and profit from a cheaper loaf of bread and improved trade, and that the middle classes would use their new electoral and social powers to bring about necessary reform. Elliott himself seems to have wondered at the sudden popularity which attended the publication of the Corn Law Rhymes. However, he found that he was writing on a subject which concerned the whole of England. His first readers were invited to respond more to their topicality than to their poetic merit.

Elliott's main political objectives were presented in the Corn Law Rhymes as an attack on all those who exploit the workers, whom he saw as parasites of the

(8). Carlyle - 'Corn Law Rhymes' in Edinburgh Review, No. 110
p. 339/40 (1832)

state, the 'Palaced Paupers' as he calls them and it is this exploitation, allied to a pathetic portrayal of the distressed poor which forms the essential message of his verse. This passionate, un-yielding opposition to the Corn Laws is what makes a man who prided himself on his lack of literary finesse so interesting a poet. Contemporary reaction was quick to realise this,

their professed object is to descant upon the evils arising from the Corn-laws; and they effect this, with a poetical power and grandeur of which, we own, we should not have thought so hungry a subject capable:- strength and manly eloquence is their leading characteristic - sweetness they seldom aim at - pathos they frequently court, and to a great extent.....(9).

For Elliott, involvement with contemporary politics was inescapable and his particular abhorrence of the Corn Laws had its origin in personal experience of poverty and unemployment. He had seen throughout his life the effect of the vagaries of the trade cycle upon industry in Sheffield, where as an employer of labour he had a clear view of the suffering they caused to masters and men.

Sheffield itself was a town based on small workshops, where mechanics and their employers were habitually in close contact with one another. Elliott was extremely well placed to speak with authority about the effect of the Corn Laws on the artisan. To this piece of legislation, however, Elliott tended to attribute all

(9). The Literary Beacon; a guide to Books, the Drama and the Fine Arts:- No. 3 - Saturday July 2nd 1831 - 'Review of Corn Law Rhymes'

the miseries of the labouring poor and his own perplexities in business. There were other economic reasons which Elliott did not seem to account for;

a general fall in demand at home and abroad (10) following the war effort; the restoration of a large labour force and the resulting unemployment and low wage problem, allied to the continual undulating vagaries of the trade cycle.

The subjective stance of the poet and the necessity for a poetic technique which related to a prescribed audience was formed from his response to this experience. Agitation against the Corn Laws in Sheffield went back to 1814 when a petition was signed against them by over fifteen thousand people. The Corn Law Question became a regular part of the local radical platform, to which Elliott became a regular and active contributor. He remained an ardent reformer and his involvement in radical politics culminated when around 1830 he formed the 'Sheffield Mechanics Anti Bread Tax Society', which was aimed at linking together the oppressed in all parts of the country to attack the common 'landed' enemy. This society was responsible for the publication of the first and second editions of the Corn Law Rhymes in 1831 which was to ensure Elliott's reputation. The thought that the Reform Bill of 1832 would inevitably bring about the repeal of the Corn Laws meant that the operations of the Society were suspended to assist with the recently formed Sheffield Political Union. It was

(10). Brown, Simon, M.A. dissertation - University of Leicester, 1971.

Elliott's own fiery personality which kept Anti-Corn Law agitation a distinct movement after the first reform bill. This personality was described in Spencer T. Hall's numerous recollections in Biographical Sketches of Remarkable People,

(Elliott).....speaking of the final result of all restrictions of food, he lifted up his clenched hands and his eyes toward heaven, and cried aloud in a terrific alto-tenor voice, 'God would they handcuff Thee'. (11).

January Searle too, in his 'Memoirs' recalls being taken aside by Elliott's wife when visiting the house to which he had retired at Hargate Hill and being asked to avoid the subject of the Corn Laws in order to prevent an explosion of anger. In the 1830's, Elliott was always in the public eye with a constant flow of verse, either for national publications or to be sung or chanted at some local function, a mass meeting in Paradise Square, for example.

This trenchant tone of rhetoric in public speaking is to be found in the Corn Law Rhymes themselves and notably in their frontispiece which comprises a declaration, ardently and honestly expressed in the following way,

Our oppressors....say they cannot live without (12) alms. If the assertion be true, why do they not go to the workhouse for their pay as other paupers do? If it be not true, why are they not sent to the tread-mill for obtaining money under false pretences?

In dealing with the Corn Law Rhymes, it is often

(11). Hall, Spencer, T. - Biographical Sketches of Remarkable People. 1873. Chapter 4.

(12). Declaration of the Sheffield Anti-Bread Tax Society - printed as a frontispiece for 3rd edition - Corn Law Rhymes. 1831.

more appropriate to speak of an audience rather than a readership. The socio-political milieu in which he worked required of the poet a language adapted to the understanding of the artisan.

If working class poetry, the exponents of which according to Shelley,

'Are cradled into poetry by wrong, (13)
They learn in suffering what they teach in song

gained its impetus from the political agitation of the period, then Elliott, though not himself a member of that class, in writing ostensibly for and about its members found a form of self expression.

This verse then can be said to form part of a low culture, responding to contemporary political debate in the form of social protest, a

truthful medium inspired by autodidactism often (14). through poetry and seen as one movement towards self-improvement.

The publication of verse in the virulent format of the Corn Law Rhymes leads to debate on the use of poetry for political ends. Elliott himself believed in the 'union of poetry with politics' and was not to be deterred by friends and critics who told him this was impossible. In defending himself against them, he writes, 'All genuine poets are fervid politicians', citing Homer, Milton, Dante, Cowper and Burns in answer to those who say that such a union is hurtful to the

(13). Shelley - Julian and Maddalo (1818). lines 543-5.

(14). Phillips, John A.S. - Working Class Poets - A Revolution in English Literature. transc. Bayerischer Rundfunk, 11th May, 1973.

— politics and fateful to the poetry and asserting,

'Any subject whatever in which man takes interest however humble and common-place it may be, is (15) capable of inspiring high and true poetry.'

So Elliott moves easily from a theory of poetry into advancing his political ideals, whereas his biographer and son in law, John Watkins, a Chartist and later a poet, draws the distinction between Elliott the humanitarian poet and Elliott the Corn Law Rhymer.

The muses have always been represented as (16) belonging to the softer sex, and we should be sorry to see them out of character.

To Watkins politics should be confined to prose, for the former and poetry were at two extremes.

We grant that true politics, which are patriotism and philanthropy combined, are fit, perhaps the (17) fittest subjects for poetry; but that lower species known by the name of party politics, which is little better than personal strife cannot be etherealised into poetry.

For Elliott the 'impassioned truth' of poetry was heartfelt writing, a sincerity to feeling which necessarily led to a passionate response, yet Watkins in noting the output of poetry which endeared him to the poor and transmitted his name to posterity, goes on,

Poetry deals with great principles, its engines are the heart, and mind and soul - politics resorts to little expedients and sets the baser passions of (18) our nature at work.

(15). Elliott - Preface to More Verse and Prose (1850).

(16). Watkins, John - Life, Poetry and Letters of Ebenezer Elliott (1850) - Chapter 4.

(17). Ibid.

(18). Ibid.

Yet despite this debate and the originality it lends to Elliott's verse here, and taking into account the maxim expressed in,

Poetry should be capable of outbursts of (19) indignation against wrong, as well as shedding tears over sorrow and distress.

Elliott's rhymes are marred by a tendency to denounce, slander and insult the landed interest, seeing misery as the direct result of their oppressive action.

Contemporary response to the Corn Law Rhymes was governed by a prevalent attitude of the reading public of the time and can be associated with the,

critical pre-requisite of the 1830's and 40's - (20) that poetry was a serious and earnest matter, the substance of which should be fact and reality, physical or spiritual, and its end had to be practical, preferably moral.

If this were so, the Corn Law Rhymes would certainly satisfy these criteria and for Elliott such a response meant fervour, trust, freedom and sincerity of feeling.

Given the political context in which the rhymes were produced and Elliott's response to the social evils of his day the question arises as to how well his language in the Corn Law Rhymes expresses his radical views. Clearly some reviewers were prepared to accept Elliott as the spokesman for the radicalized section of the population in the early nineteenth century, and here the praise, though biased, in that it is directed against

(19). Fox, W.J. - Letters addressed chiefly to the Working Classes. 4 vols. 1845.

(20). Brown, Simon - 'Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn Law Rhymer' M.A. dissertation - Univ. of Leicester, 1971. op.cit.

Tennyson, is drawing attention to the language in which the verse was framed,

(21)

..... We do not scruple to assert, that it contains more bold, vigorous, sculptured, and correct versification, greater grasp of mind, and apposite while daring fancy, than could be distilled from all the volumes of all the prodigies that ever were brought out. The Westminster Review has eulogized Tennyson as the future poet of the day: The Sheffield Mechanic is more decidedly original in his manner; and he writes his own language fifty times better than most of our picked authors, with more power free from pretence, and with more harmony devoid of unmeaning narratives.

It remains to be considered whether this apparent high praise was justified and whether this originality and 'beauty and skill visible in the phraseology' (22) can be seen in the rhymes themselves.

On the other hand, Elliott received adverse criticism when the burning question of the Corn Laws had ceased to be a live political issue. His technique is put into a harsh perspective, being accused of,

(leading) to personal animosities and vulgar abuse. (23) Elliott did not sing but scream; he did not lament but blaspheme, his verses were curses showered right and left with indiscriminate frenzy. No matter; they stirred the heart of the multitude, and roused the curiosity of the refined.

The object then of Elliott's Corn Law Rhymes was primarily to rally support against what he saw as the oppressive restrictions brought about by the Corn Laws and the consequent impoverishment and suffering which

(21). The Athenaeum. No. 189.- 11 June 1831, p. 369.

(22). Bulwer Lytton - 'Respecting a Remarkable Poem by a Mechanic'. New Monthly Magazine. XXXI (1831).pp.289-95.

(23). Chambers, William - 'Papers for the People'. No. 8.- 'Ebenezer Elliott' (1850).

had repercussions not only for the poorest classes but also for those within the growing industrial classes of England. This object thus determined his audience, which was to be a wide and popularly based one and also helped to determine the type of verse he would write, much of it to be set to popular tunes and to be sung at rallies against the Corn Laws.

In order to consider the poet's technique in the Corn Law Rhymes, it is most useful to look in some detail at one of the poems, The Black Hole of Calcutta (24) before supplementing this by reference to several others under specific aspects.

In the following consideration of the poem the poetic devices Elliott used may profitably be looked at separately to clarify the extent of the poet's stylistic plan.

Perhaps the most striking aspect apparent from a reading of the poem is the rhetorical bludgeoning effect of the verse. The poet's device is to set his ideas and principles in the form of questions which are quickly and immediately followed by further unanswerable demands,

What for Saxon, Frank and Hun,
What hath England's bread-tax done? (1-5)
Ask the ruin it hath made
Ask of bread-tax ruin'd trade;
Ask the struggle and the groan.

The personification of struggle and groan is used

(24) In the Black Hole of Calcutta, where the title itself is representative of the ultimate horror, Elliott presents his Corn Law doctrines in the form of a bitter, persistent attack on all who benefit from their instigation, and this is presented in a highly rhetorical form. The entire poem is reproduced in Appendix A.

as representative of a universal cry of the oppressed,
its lack of specificity providing greater impetus for
his next line.

Throughout the poem Elliott uses repetition and
listing which, as a means of underlining, serves to
emphasize and enforce the mood of indignation which
becomes, as do the majority of his poetic devices here,
useful for various tonal effects. The subject matter
here demands both force and permanence which is
provided for in the poet's relentless shout.

Fill'd thy skin with untax'd wine
Fill'd thy purse with cash of mine
Fill'd thy breast with hellish schemes (74.7)
Fill'd thy head with fatal dreams.

The question and answer format of this poem follows
closely that of Colonel Thompson's Catechism on the Corn
(25)
Laws , published in 1827. This pamphlet, which achieved
great popularity, reaching an eighteenth edition by
1834, and follows a series of questions from the point of
view of the land owners, and answers often offensive
from manufacturer and labourer alike. Their social
and political position is viciously attacked and this
coupled with similar writings from other pamphlets
and newspapers of the radical press kept the landed
classes in an uncomfortable position during the eighteen-
thirties .

(25). Thompson (1783-18) was a radical propagandist
and later editor of the Westminster Review; publishing
several pamphlets including 'The True Theory of Rent' (1826)
and 'The Catechism on the Corn Laws' (1827); which placed him
in the thick of political controversy, and secured for him a
reputation as a writer able to influence public opinion, c.f.
Jonsson, L.G. - General T. Perronet Thompson - London:
Allen & Unwin, (1957).

Thompson's question section opened as follows,

What is meant by Corn Laws? Answer: Laws which enact that the labourer shall not exchange his (26) produce for food, except at certain shops, namely, the shops of the land-owners.

and Question three asks, What are the effects of these laws? Answer: The same in kind, as would arise from limiting the food consumed in the United Empire, to what could be produced in the Isle of Wight.

The sentiments are certainly those of Elliott.

There are differences however, as it is reported (27), that the printers laughed at the humour of Thompson's debate when setting up some of the questions and answers. The following are illustrative of this.

What is the difference between preventing men from buying food, and taking it from them after they have bought it? Answer: That in one case (28) they starve without working, and in the other with.

and

That the operatives are a lazy race and seldom go to work before Wednesday. Answer: The landlords never go to work at all.

Thompson's injection of humour into a serious debate is achieved in a similar way to Elliott's in this poem, but it is far more difficult to laugh at the poet.

Elliott's admiration for Thompson was apparent for he called him,

(26) Thompson - The Catechism on the Corn Laws 5th edn (1829). p. 13. Questions 1 & 3.

(27). Johnson., L.G. op. cit.

(28). Thompson - Catechism op. cit. - Question 8 p.18 and Paragraph 42. p. 20.

the Prince of politicians - every letter of the (29)
Catechism ought to be printed in gold, and read
once a day on Sundays from every pulpit in the
land.

Elliott endorses the theories behind Thompson's work
in his preface, and allied them to the effect of the
trade cycle on wages,

If trade were universally free, neither gluts nor (30)
scarcities could to any great extent, or for any
great length of time exist.

Here he puts forward the indisputable and basic
reasoning behind his poetry's tone of aggression and hatred,
moving swiftly in the text of this preface from a
discussion of the 'usefulness' of poetry to a justification
of his language style.

Elliott certainly took a precedent from Thompson's
economic writings, but by versification, his style
transformed and gave greater impetus to their combined
cause. The following parallel can be drawn to show the
relative success of the poetic mode. In the Catechism,
the Question,

That their children are miserable and short-lived,
rendered rickety by the unwholesomeness of their (31)
employment, and the excessiveness of the quantity
of work.

is answered with,

it is only too true. And therefore they pray to
have leave to buy what they can that they can eat
more and pay less.

(29). Elliott - footnote to 'Colonel Thompson in Palace
Yard'. - More Verse and Prose (1850). vol. 1. pp.18-19.

(30). Elliott - preface to Corn Law Rhymes - 2nd edition
(1831).

(31). Thompson. op. cit. p. 21. - Paragraph 43 and Question

In The Black Hole of Calcutta, the children are thus depicted by the poet,

·Bread tax'd weaver, all can see,
What that tax hath done for thee
And thy children, vilely led (52-7)
Singing hymns for shameful bread
Till the stones of every street
Know their little naked feet.

This, though unsophisticated, is effective; with the simple childlike rhythms and syllables of the last line providing the echo of a childish street song or chant. 'Vilely led' (a direct use of Shakespeare from King Lear) and 'shameful bread' become an extended metaphor for the evils of beggary and hypocrisy. The maxims of anti-Corn Law agitation are perhaps merely versified here, but given the aims of the Corn Law Rhymes and Elliott's stoic acceptance of their limitations, the verse succeeds.

Throughout this poem the bullying, forceful technique is enhanced by the rhythm as the basic trochaic tetrameter moves the verse along as a chant and the simple AABB couplet rhyme scheme complements the pounding beat of the rhetoric. The interaction of people and objects become mental pictures within the simplistic poetic form Elliott chooses. (32)

The use of short lines throughout the poem, with an internal symmetrical balance causes the line to appear to speed ceaselessly by as the accusatory tone increases.

(32). This form is interesting in that it is identical to that of 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star' which was first published in 1806.

Fiddling parson, Sunday card
Pimp, and dedicating bard.
On the broad and bare highway,
Toiling there for groat a day (122-29)
We will talk to thee and thine
Till thy wretches envy mine
Till thy paunch of baseness howl
Till thou seem to have a soul.

Occasionally however the efforts at balancing the line with internal rhyme becomes mere repetition. The awkwardness of for example

'Like a strife for life, for life.' (7)

is only too apparent.

If Elliott's voice here is that of an omnipresent and uncompromising orator, he is always fully aware of the potential for the manipulative persuasion of his audience. The tone of pestering is paced throughout the verse, increasing in intensity as Elliott's invective and ire replace the inquisitorial method,

'Sneak thou would'st for groat a year
Sell thy sould, and sell it dear!
Self robb'd servile! sold not bought, (30-35)
For the shadow of a groat!
Unbrib'd Judas! what thy gain
By sad Europe's millions slain.

So, the accusation of selfishness is here given widening implications through a progression of ideas from that of one man selling his soul to an apocalyptic picture of the whole continent.

The use of the colloquial in the poem should also be noted. There are several examples.

Money fights for half percents. (65)
Hunger-stung thy skill'd right hand. (93)
Kick'd thy breech and tweak'd thy nose. (95)
and
Make thee poor as mine and me: (137-9)
Drive thee from thy marble halls
To some hovel's squalid walls.

Here again, tonal effect can be achieved as Elliott is able to speak in a language accessible to his audience.

This allied to Elliott's question and attack encompasses society at a multiplicity of levels, whether worker or merchant, owner or producer, oppressed or oppressor. Their respective plights are exemplified in a series of succinct contemporary references. Thus the

'Clothier, proud of Peterloo, (13-14)
Ironmaster, loyal too.'

are representatives of the new industrialised trades, forever loyal and often proud of what the establishment has provided. The

'Bread-tax eating absentee.' (70)

survives without need for the care of his tenants, the problems resulting echoing 'Cobbett's, Rural Rides' of 1830. (33)
The high rents have in Elliott's eyes made this landlord hateful,

'Cramm'd thee from our children's plates
Made thee all that nature hates.' (72-73)

(33). William Cobbett (1762-1865) affords an interesting comparison with Elliott here in Corn Law Rhymes. As a political journalist he campaigned for social and economic reform in his weekly Political Register from 1802-35. In 1830, the same year as Corn Law Rhymes, he published Rural Rides, the result of a fact finding tour of rural England.

Cobbett's work took the form of a denunciation of the way changes in rural society were leading to an increase in the inequalities of wealth and reducing the living standard of the labourer. If the point of attack differed from Elliott's then the language and methods used to present his document of the time as a spontaneous, though didactic dialogue bear close similarities to the poet's.

In discussing the rick burning during the agricultural riots of the first two decades of the century, known as the Swing riots, he writes, echoing Elliott's conception of the respective classes in the economic debate,

....The motive of it is, however, evident enough to men who reflect that every tax-eater and tithe-eater, no matter of what sort or size he or she is, is afraid to believe, and wishes the nation not to believe, that the fires are the work of the labourers..... (34)
..... To believe this is to believe that there must be such a change of system as will take from the tax and tithe-eaters a large portion of what they receive, and give it back to the labourers, and believe this the tax and tithe eaters never will, until the political Noah shall enter into the ark!....

His language is both dogmatic and pragmatic as he expects, like Elliott, that his readers will accept his prejudices and assertions.

Cobbett's method is to move from a particular example to a general pattern. He uses the personal pronoun in an attempt, similar to Elliott's to include himself as

(34). Cobbett - Political Register 27 November, 1830.

one of the subjected. Both writers have no doubt of their ability as touchstones so there is no necessity for parading objectivity. Assertion suffices for the evidence of the argument,

T Why do not farmers feed and lodge their work - people, as they did formerly? Because they cannot keep them upon so little as they give (35) them in wages. This is the real cause of the change. There needs no more to prove that the lot of the working classes has become worse than it formerly was. This fact alone is quite sufficient to settle the point. All the world knows, that a number of people, boarded in the same house, and at the same table, can, with as good food, be boarded much cheaper than those persons divided into twos, threes or fours can be boarded. This is a well-known truth; therefore, if the farmer now shuts his pantry against his labourers, and pays them wholly in money, is it not clear, that he does it because he thereby gives them a living cheaper to him: that is to say, a worse living than formerly? And, be astonished if you can at the pauperism and the crimes that now disgrace this once happy and moral England.

The successful application of a literary mode to suit its purpose which Elliott achieves in many of his Corn Law Rhymes, is a feature of Rural Rides. It is not elegant, studied prose to be reflected on, but appears as privileged companionship, and as in The Black Hole of Calcutta is sermon-like, with the oratorical tone, reflective of the voice on the hustings. Cobbett too, uses rhetorical questions which are immediately answered; he too, lectures then admonishes. His prose is meant to reflect the rhythms of speech itself, and as with the poet, listing and repetition leads to a visualization based on hard fact. The voice admits no

T (35). Cobbett - Rural Rides - Reigate 1825 (Dent Dutton 1957 - p.266).

possible disagreement and authority prevails.

In the poem in question, contemporary reference is successfully allied to insult,

With thy bile and with thy gear
Wheels and shuttles gainless here (40-44)
With the remnant of thy all
Whither, reptile, wilt thou crawl?

Here, the unparalleled growth of industrial advance and the misguided hopes of the advocates of the bread tax have led merely to despair.

This combination of colloquialism and topicality sees Elliott speaking to his audience both as demagogue to crowd as in,

Man of Consols, hark to me
What shall bread-tax do for thee? (98-101)
Rob thee for the dead-alive,
Porn thy thousands ten for five .

and similarly in

Mother of the wise and good! (147-50)
Temple of our smiles and tears
Hoary with the frost of years!
Holy church, eternal, true!

but importantly also as man to man,

Ask our hearths, our gainless marts, (48/49)
Ask our last and owing debts.

We will talk to thee and thine (126/7)
Till thywretches envy mine.

This dual voice allows him to move from pathos through insult to bitterness, adopting the appropriate stance, moving his audience to what is to all intents and purpose the optimum position for response.

The language chosen for debate allows him to produce memorable cadences by using commonplace and easily comprehended words, as in

Ask yon piles, all bread tax built (66)

•Wheat priced roots, instead of wheat (81)

Hunger stung thy skilled right hand (93)

Till thy paunch of business howl (128)

Connected with this is Elliott's use of a compound epithet, which is used both adjectivally and verbally, consistently in most of his political verse, 7Self-robb'd , tax-fed , ^read-tax'd , ^read-tax-eating* #tax-bought* , 'Palaced Paupers* and 'Palaced Beggar.*

The effectiveness of the use of these various modes of language could lie in their accessibility to the defined audience of the rhymes. They were perhaps, comprehensible to, ^educated aristocrat and uneducated worker alike \ (36)

The epithets juxtapose the expected and become a common occurrence and the 'trademark' for Elliott's work, their very repetition increasing the effect.

Within the rhetorical form of the poem, the poet is able to achieve effects both of tone and volume in addressing his audience. His constant use of exclamatory remark thus becomes the unsparing shout of violence and disgust, increasing the impetus at a prescribed moment in the verse.

(36). Phillips, John A.S. - Bayerischer Rundfunk op.cit.p.3.

His anger is never harsher however, than when his method overflows into insult and slanderous attack. His accusation is without repose and it is its interspersions with threat and recrimination that some of his contemporary observers objected to.

The demon of anarchy has never inspired anything more ferocious than the whole of the Corn Law Rhymes.....Repulsive and even hateful as his (37) invectives are, it is not difficult to perceive where the root of his error lies.

Perhaps Elliott's justification for invective lay in his own experiences,

When suicidal anti-profit laws speak to my heart from my children's trenchers - when statutes.... threaten to send me to the treadmill, for the crime of inflicted want! - when in a word, my (38) feelings are hammered cold-short till they are apt to fly off in a sarcasm, and can no longer bend to courtesy. Is it strange that my language is fervent as a welding heat, when my thoughts are like passions, that rush burning from my mind, like white-hot bolts of steel.

Elliott's bitterest attack is reserved for the landed aristocracy where all that they do and all connected with them come under the lash of his tongue,

Grapery, horse-race coach and four
Pampered fox hounds, starving men
Whores and bastards, nine or ten (113-7)
Twenty flunkies fat and grey
Whip and jail for holiday.

He goes further, in that their influence is seen as a disease, polluting those people and institutions under their jurisdiction.

(37). Southey, Robert. - 'Critique written for the Quarterly Review, but rejected after a proof had been corrected.' - printed in Elliott - More Verse and Prose Vol. 2. (1850). pps. 81-126.

(38). Elliott - preface to 2nd edition of Corn Law Rhymes. (1831).

Paid informer, poacher pale
Sneaker's license, poison'd ale
Seat in senate, seat on bench
Pension'd lad, or wife, or wench (118-23)
Fiddling parson, Sunday card,
Pimp and dedicating bard.

What ultimately disgusts the poet is the way pleasure is seen to be gained from the misfortunes of others. As the insults get progressively stronger and more powerful so the momentum of the couplets increases as the crescendo of the speaker is achieved, in his pledge of retribution for the oppressed with the degradation of the 'enemy'

Till thy wretches envy mine
Till thy paunch of baseness howl (127-29)
Till thou seem to have a soul.

A further distinctive feature of this verse is the way in which hard economic and social facts are often defined in the poem by allusion to a series of definite concrete objects, which in turn become highly individualised.

Streeted chimneys, (27)
is thus a representation of the growth of industrialism, and its concomitants of city growth and factories.

Children 'singing hymns for shameful bread' has already been mentioned and by the same extended metaphor,

Ask yon piles all bread-tax built (66-7)
Guiltless yet the cause of guilt.

where building in the town is financed by the profits from restrictive economic measure. While this should be a mark of progress it serves only to lead to further

exploitation and gain, as commercial enterprise naively assumes itself to be right.

Starving workmen, warehouse full
Saxon web, from Polish wool'. (20/21)

epitomizes the hypocrisy of factories lying dormant, unable to provide for those in need, while foreign competition through import is allowed to continue.

Linked to this is the poet's device of using the internal symmetry to develop the recurrence of idea and tone to produce what can perhaps be called rhythmic echo. By this method 'For the shadow of a goat' (33) harks back to the expression 'For the shadow of a bone' (6). The same process is also applied within a couplet,

And when bread-tax'd ten are two
Learn what bread-tax'd rents can do'. (28-29)

Similarly, symmetrical balance is achieved by listing in pairs. The following is an example, where the lexical contrast succeeds in providing the short line with an undulating rhythm.

Houses empty, rents unpaid .
Rising streets and falling rents.' (63-4)
With 'Swallowing fortunes, spreading woes!' (68),

the pair of verbs are connected by virtue of size; increase and decrease, whereas the second noun has resulted from the results of the first. In a third case, 'Gorgeous arch and figured stone.' (158), the pairing brings together two succinct phrases for expressing ecclesiastical tradition.

The condensing of meaning into such a short line reflects a further usage by Elliott, where his apparent

brusqueness leads to the concentration of ideas, notably in

'Of potatoes basely sold
At the price of wheat in gold
And of Britons sty'd to eat (78-81)
Wheat-priced roots, instead of wheat.'

Here the social problem created by the removal of the availability of the staple diet for a sensible price reduces the poor to pigs, scrabbling for a tasteless substitute. The poetic diction in the hands of Elliott is put to good effect as he links his meaning to an observed social reality. Similarly, 'gainless marts' (48) condenses the frustration and despair of a futile commercial enterprise, into a concise two word phrase.

Notable is the way the poet uses his omniscient privilege to prophesy nothing but doom and despair,

Pawn thy thousands five for one (1.102)

and

'There to sicken, there to sigh
Steep thy soul in tears and die -
Like a flower from summer's glow (144-7)
Withering on the polar snow.'

Finally of note within the rhetorical structure of the poem is the way it is written in stanzaic paragraphs, so that each aspect or idea is sectionalized. By this method, as there is spiralling upwards through society's rank, so each respective group can be separately analysed. Neither the peerage, the church, nor the monarchy are spared from Elliott's piercing questioning. As he addresses the church, his prophesy encompasses the erosion of faith and the removal of all Christian values.

It will strip thee bare as she
Whom a despot stripp'd for thee; (152-5)
Of thy surplice make thy pall,
Low'r thy pride, and take thy all.

In the final stanza of the poem, the repetition of the double negative and the word 'patriot' is possibly to preserve the rhythm, yet it does serve to emphasise the way in which the impetus is widened to include loss to England and all she stands for, to raise the threat to one on a patriotic level.

Throne, established by the good - (166-7)
Not unstained with patriot blood.....
What shall bread-tax do for thee,
venerable Monarchy? -
Dreams of evil, spare my sight!
Let that horror rest in night. (17-13)

So, The Black Hole of Calcutta contains not only an attack on the unrelinquished control of the powerful, but a radical critique of all of society. The construction of the poem, embodying the techniques described above, is certainly original. Notable is that a glance at the language brings to light a series of unusual lexis characteristic of Elliott's adoption of colloquialisms, 'reptile'(44); 'sty'd'(81); 'breeches'(110) 'whores, bastards, flunkies'(116-7) & 'pimp'(124).

Although his writing here appears too often as a speech set to verse, the presentation of the man's sincerity and feeling, applied through his careful, and, controlled technique of writing, is both interesting and effective.

The characteristics of Elliott's Corn Law Rhymes are made clearer if one identifies them by looking more closely at several other rhymes.

First, simplicity is a feature of the majority of them. They are mainly short songs, prayers or epigrams written in a variety of styles conducive to reading and singing aloud, often expressing a sympathy for the working man. Repetition is used to enforce the mood of indignation and when the rhymes were sung to familiar tunes, an added emotional effect could be achieved. The simple form itself serves to encapsulate the required effect as here in Drone v. Worker.

How God speeds the tax-bribed plough
Fen and moor declare, man;
Where once fed the poor man's cow
Acres drives his share, man; (39)
But he did not steal the fen
Did not steal the moor, man;
If he feeds on starving men,
Still he loves the poor, man.

Here 'Acres' becomes a generic and symbolic name for the landed classes and their shameful enclosure system. The poem is repetitive, continuing for some fifty-six lines with every alternate line ending with 'man'. It serves though as a good example of how Elliott, by persevering with alternate seven and six syllable lines and with the falling feet of the trochee, succeeds with a simple form.

Wordsworth's attempt in the Lyrical Ballads to use the language of common men arose from meditation on the

(39). Elliott - Drone. v. Worker - lines 1 to 8 - (Works 1840, p.111.)

significance of simplicity in poetry. The inherent simplicity of Elliott's usage satisfied his respect for ordinary fact, presented straightforwardly, with clarity of imagination arising from his singleness of conviction. This is shown most notably where the apparent banality of Common Metre with four line stanzas with alternating four and three stresses and alternating rhyme are used. Thus here in 'The Four Dears'

Dear Sugar, Dear Tea and Dear Corn,
conspired with Dear Representation. (40)
To laugh worth and honour to scorn
And beggar the whole British nation.

the poet personifies four commodities subject to high duties, by using the ambiguous 'dear' to mean both expensive and beloved and sets these in a nursery rhyme framework. The laugh at the ostensible bulwark of society, 'worth and honour' sets up the second stanza,

Let us bribe the dear sharks, said dear Tea
Bribe, bribe, said dear Representation; (41)
Then buy with their own the dear humbugg'd and be
The bulwarks of Tory dictation.

The repetition of bribe aids the dramatic effect of the speech of 'dear representation' and within the very simple ABAB nursery rhyme framework, Elliott has satirised the economic policy of the establishment.

Trivial, but effective may be a way to describe many of the more simply formed of the Corn Law Rhymes. Within the condensed style of 'Squire Leech', Elliott

(40). Elliott - The Four Dears lines 1-4 (Works 1840 - p. 106).

(41). Ibid lines 5-8.

makes his critical point by the juxtaposition of man living parasitically on both the impoverished and on the horse itself, and is illustrative of his making social comment through humour and ridicule.

Give of old the horse leech cried;
Squire Robert cries 'give give.
How the leeches are belied!
They suck, yet cannot live
Little souls grow less and less (42)
And ever downward grow;
Live and let live, they profess,
And feed on Will and Joe!

In the previous stanza the use of 'feeders' is a very effective non cliché phrase and Elliott incorporates a dialect form with the language of officialdom.

Robert rides, and Robert drives -
His feeders bare-foot go; (43)
Will is damning; bread-tax thrives;
And tread-mill's damning Joe.

In Reform Elliott uses a different rhyme form with equal impact. In the AAAB scheme the last line of each quatrain has similarity of grammar and rhythm. - 'Poverty, iniquity, infamy, dignity, mockery' are all abstractions and all have musical similarity as the multi-syllabled word forms the B. rhyme.

Too long endured a power and will
That would be nought, or first in ill
Had wasted wealth, and palsied skill (44)
And fed on toil worn poverty.

They called their poor a rope of sand
And lo! No rich mans voice or hand
Was raised, throughout the suffering land
Against their long iniquity.

-
- (42). Elliott Squire Leech lines 17-29 (Works 1840 p.112).
(43). Ibid. lines 13 to 16.
(44). Elliott Reform lines 1 to 8. (Works 1840 p.115).

Closely linked with the simple format of many of the rhymes is what can be labelled musicality or song. Of some thirty or so rhymes, six have the title Song and many of these have a definite tune indicated to which they were to be sung. The rest are in stanzaic forms which could conceivably fit song tunes, where for example, the falling feet of the anapaestic or trochaic tetrameter add musicality and the use of short, uncomplicated rhyming verse shows Elliott dictating the speed of his chant. This is illustrated in Arthur Bread Tax-Winner.

All our rivals, sire and son,
Foreign cutler, foreign spinner (45)

Bravo! Arthur bread tax winner!
Shallow, half brain'd Famineton!

The tunes are for the most part of Scottish, patriotic or hymnal origin, 'The Land of the Leal', 'Robin Adair', 'Rule Brittania' and 'Scots wha hae.'

The effectiveness of Corn Law Rhymes then, owes a great deal to the fact that they were set to well known, accessible and easily comprehended airs. Hugues Journes has done much interesting work on the provenance of the tunes used,

Car l'impact de ces vers fut d'autant plus important qu'ils étaient faits pour être chanter ou tout du moins, déclamés, psalmodies. (46).

Elliott was to attempt to take the 'verse in song'

(45). Elliott Arthur Bread Tax-Winner lines 10/11 and 15/16 (Works 1840 p.116).

(46). Journes, Hugues La Littérature des Mouvement Chartistes - doctoral thesis L'Université de Lyon (1973).

idea a stage further when the 1835 edition of a collection of his poetry contained 'Corn Law Hymns'. They had appeared individually at intervals in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine during 1833 and 1834, to which he began to contribute poems and a number of prose articles after the favourable reception of the Corn Law Rhymes. He had hoped that these hymns would be sung in the churches, but the tone was still too violent, although compared with the Rhymes they are restrained.

If the sentiments of the Rhymes were similar to the 'Corn Law Hymns' then their purpose was somewhat different. By setting some of his verses to prescribed tunes Elliott was dictating response to them. The pitiable poverty of 'Child is thy father dead', one of the more frequently quote of the rhymes, results from the rhythmic form the poet chooses, which could be described as dactylic dimeter, but equally from the use of the tune, 'Robin Adair' which is slow, tender and mournful and was one of the most often used tunes for parody and often associated with humorous pathos. Here the cadences are memorable ones,

Doctor said air was best
Food we have none
Father, with panting breast (47)
Groan'd to be gone
Now he is with the blest
Mother says death is best
We have no place of rest
Yes, ye have one .

The effect of these rhymes can be gauged from the following,

(47). Elliott - Child is thy Father Dead - lines 17-24
(Works 1840 p. 106).

"I read the poems once over one after another, first to myself and then to my wife and children. (48) As the subject were chiefly suffering poverty, of which we had been and still were large partakers, they suited us amazingly....An honest hearted old collier, worn out with a life of hard work, and who was then a pauper wept again and again as I read the passages to him".

But Elliott here and in his other poetry also uses his verse as a call for the poor to defend themselves, urging them to react to their deprivation. Self help was a vital issue to their dignity and need for survival, as here in Oh Lord How Long,

Up widow up and swing the fly
Or push the grating file
and

Child what hast thou with sleep to do? (49)
Awake and dry thine eyes
Thy tiny hands must labour too
Our bread is tax'd arise!

In Song - Others march in freedom's van, the poet shows another use of song by adopting a lively tune of movement by which to express the necessity for reaction and freedom. The AAAB rhyme scheme means that the first word in each A rhyme line is given resonance, thus:

Wilt thou still feed palaced knaves?
Shall thy sons be traitors' slaves? (50)
Shall they sleep in workhouse graves?
Shall they toil for parish pay .

The poem is a call both to Britain and manhood together, as the exclamatory attack is direct - 'thou' 'thy' and addressed to the perpetrators of the despair.

What are worms if human thou (51)

(48). Quoted by Eaglestone A.A. Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn Law Rhymers in Commemorative Brochure - Sheffield City Libraries (1949) p.8.

(49). Elliott - Oh Lord How Long - lines 9 - 10 and 17 - 20 (Works 1840 p.111).

(50). Elliott - Song - Others march in freedom's van. lines 17 - 20 (Works 1840 p.112).

(51). Ibid - line 4.

The song exemplifies the common feature of the rhymes; a reference to contemporary political problems, providing the verse with a topicality which gave it accessibility to the prescribed audience.

Often the language of hymnology⁽⁵²⁾ is apparent, its use reflecting the attempt at familiarity and need for acceptability by Elliott's readers, providing a perfect medium for the expression of ideals.

(52). In an article published in the Journal of Popular Culture, Vol. IX. No. 3. 1975, Susan S. Tamke, writes, "Because they were an expression of ideals, hymns reflect changes in social thinking over a period of time. Changing attitudes often appeared first in the hymns which were published privately, but by the end of the century these changes were evident even in the denominational hymnals. We need only to look at the hymns on the subject of social welfare for an example. At the beginning of the century most hymns which mention the poor view them as God's chosen people. God is frequently pictured as especially concerned about the poor:

Friend of the friendless and the faint,
Where shall I lodge my deep complaint?
Where but with Thee, whose open door
Invites the helpless and the poor?

Even the hymns of charity, however, are few. The social quiescence of the early Victorian churches is best summed up in Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander's popular hymn, "All Things Bright and Beautiful."

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly,
And ordered their estate.

By the third and fourth decades of the century, however, paralleling the growth of social and industrial unrest in England, hymns began to appear in newspapers and privately published hymnbooks vigorously demanding social justice. Perhaps the most well known of these is Ebenezer Elliott's, "When Wilt Thou Save the People?" which was first published in a Sheffield newspaper in 1832. Elliott's vigorous demands for reform were far from complacent:

Shall crime bring crime forever,
Strength aiding still the strong?
Is it thy will, O Father,
That man shall toil for wrong?
"No", say thy mountains; "No", thy skies;
Man's clouded sun shall brightly rise,
And songs ascend instead of sighs:
God save the people!

The demand for both social justice and welfare and the psychological impact of the call to God, as an authority are allied, and became prevalent in the verse, as here in Battle Song .

In vain your pomp, ye evil powers,
Insults the land;
Wrongs, vengeance and the cause are ours (53)
And God's right hand!
Madman! they trample into snakes
The wormy clod!
Like fire beneath their feet awakes
The sword of God.

Elliott's sentiments are in the envisaged fight between Right and Wrong and the ensuing battle as the hostile armies stand defiant. He succeeds in contrasting the pageantry of the powerful

Wide o'er their march the pomp is flung (54)
Of gold and gem,

with the 'fiercely dark' unbannered, oppressed,

Nor tassell'd silk, nor epaulet,
Nor plume, nor torse -
No splendour gilds, are sternly met, (55)
Our foot and horse,
But dark and still, we inly glow,
Condensed in ire!

The more serious, overall tone of the rhymes is, however, one of vehemence, which as seen throughout The Black Hole of Calcutta, becomes almost a distaste through Elliott's absolutely persistent and dogmatic attack. In his eyes the landed aristocracy are paupers kept by the poor and their seemingly oblivious degradation, as bread is taxed to support them in their luxury. Again from Others march in freedom's van

(53). Elliott. Battle Song, lines 25-32.

(54). Ibid. lines 7/8.

(55). Ibid. lines 17-22.

Dost thou cringe, that fiends may scowl?
Were thou born without a soul?
Spaniel's feed, are whipped and howl;
Spaniel! thou art starved and whipped!

(56)

'Wilt thou still feed palaced knaves?
Shall thy sons be traitors slaves?
Shall they sleep in workhouse-graves?
Shall they host for parish-pay?'

If the rhymes reflect very vividly the passing moods of the poet, they are frequently marred by bitterness. The strength and depth of his feelings means that he can see nothing but evil in those who supported the Corn Laws and for the landlords and their political supporters, he has only contempt and hatred,

Whoever does not oppose the Corn Law, is a patron of want, national immorality, bankruptcy, child murder, incendiary fires, midnight assassination (57) and anarchy. Therefore every supposed moral or religious man - every schoolmaster, every teacher of religion especially - should oppose the Corn Law; or he cannot possibly be either moral or religious, and the devil would be more fit to be a teacher than he.

Elliott's denunciatory language in these poems become vitriolic and frenzied.

The 'plundered combine and the fat are no match for the angry'. (58)
and Elliott 'growls and tears with savage fury'. (59)

At the end of the Corn Law Rhymes are several poems written on the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832. The contemporary over-emphasis of what this act would provide is apparent,

Mind mind alone (60).
Is light and hope and life and power!
Earths deepest night, from this blessed hour.

However one verse of some 21 lines with a complex

(56). Elliott - Others march in freedom's van op.cit.lines. 13-20.

(57). Elliott - preface to 2nd edition Corn Law Rhymes (1831).

(58). Watkins op. cit. Ch. 4 pps. 93-94.

(59). Ibid.

(60). Elliott

rhyme scheme, 'The Emigrants farewell is interesting.

Its tone is a serious one, the frustration and despair of the poet and former patriot have led him to the following conclusions,

England farewell! We quit thee - never more
To drink thy dewy light, or hear the thrush (61)
Sing to thy fountained vales.'

The effects of the 'bread tax'd' members of his nation is to be heard,

.....In our prayers
If we forget our wrongers, may we be (62)
Vile as their virtues, hopeless as their heirs
And sires of sons whom scorn shall nickname theirs.

This early retrospect from Elliott may well seem out of place within the bulk of the Corn Law Rhymes, devoid as it is of invective, crudity of expression or contrived rhythm. It nevertheless points to the way his powers of observation, of nature and of the human condition are shown within the rhymes.

The prevailing moods of the Corn Law Rhymes are pathos, anger, bitterness, recrimination and threat and if the poet's views and opinions were ardent, dogmatic and bitter, so frequently was his poetry. Basic truths are expounded in the basic, uncomplicated rhythm of, for example, 'The Taxed Cake'

Give give they cry - and take!
For wilful men are they (63)
Who tax'd our cake, and took our cake
To throw our cake away.'

(61). Elliott - The Emigrant's farewell lines 1 to 3
(Works 1840 p.118).

(62). Ibid. lines 10 to 13.

(63). Elliott - The Taxed Cake , lines 1 to 4 (Works 1840,p.106)

Here the voice of the first person plural has Elliott including himself as one of the distressed, giving greater authority to the degradation he portrays,

They mix our bread with bran,
They call potatoes bread,
And get who may, or keep who can, (64).
The starved they say are fed.

The sentiment is a blatant though nonetheless moving one, as his alternative radical voice offers a plea for improvement,

Lend, lend thy wing, oh steam,
And bear me to some clime
Where splendid beggars dare not dream (65)
That law's best fruit is crime.

The importance of the oral nature of Corn Law Rhymes has already been considered, the elements of song and hymn helping to contribute to the popularity and accessibility of the rhymes. The Ranter which alone comprised the first edition of Corn Law Rhymes in 1830 shares similarities of language and sentiment with these shorter rhymes, yet it differs from them in several ways, in that it is a short narrative poem in which the central feature is a sermon against the effects of the Corn Laws.

In so far as I have been concerned with an analysis of the adaptation of the short, concise song like rhymes for an overtly political purpose in this chapter, then discussion of The Ranter does not belong here, but it is certainly an interesting variant. In the poem a field preacher in the Wesleyan tradition, Miles Gordon preaches

(64). Ibid. lines 9-12.

(65). Ibid. lines 17 to 20.

a sermon on Shirecliffe, then a local hillside, and this sermon replete, naturally enough for Elliott, with Corn law doctrines, forms the basis of the poem. The result is though a far shorter and perhaps more obviously political mouthpiece than The Village Patriarch which preceded it (1829), and which is discussed at length in Chapter 5. The Ranter is a didactic piece, with elements of education and persuasion which are reminiscent of the moralizing tracts of the first decades of the century.⁽⁶⁶⁾ The opening scenes, before the actual sermon is delivered, are interesting. Miles Gordon the preacher, wakes and prays for the widow and her children with whom he lodges, and she arises to prepare him a meal. The lines are simple yet precise as the quasi-maternal feelings of the woman as she cares for him, passes through a virtual hero worship of him as a saint, towards the missionary fervour of the final lines with their methodist teaching of worship, acceptance and the infinite worth of the soul.

This morn, betimes, she hastes to leave her bed
 For he must preach beneath th'autumnal tree:
 She lights her fire, and soon the board is spread
 With Sabbath coffee, toast, and cups for three.
 Pale he descends; again she starts to see
 His hollow cheek, and feels they soon must part
 But they shall meet again - that hope is sure;
 And, Oh! she venerates his mind and heart, (67)
 For he is pure, if mortal e'er was pure!
 His words, his silence, teach her to endure;
 And then, he helps to feed her orphan'd five.
 O God! thy judgments cruel seem to be!
 While bad men beggen long, and cursing thrive,
 The good, like wintry sun-beams, fade and flee,
 That we may follow them, and come to Thee.

(66). Examples are Leigh Richmond - The Dairyman's Daughter
 and Hannah More - The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain

(67). Elliott - The Ranter (1830). II (Works 1840 p.102).

In the context of Elliott's verse as a whole, The Ranter is interesting for its language, its local setting, but primarily for its direct use of a sermon, ostensibly a religious mode, for overtly political and critical ends. The following extract shows this only too well, where the language is biblical in form, yet defiant in tone, allying the anger of the shorter rhymes with recourse to divine authority for his claims. Within the form the simple, musical rhythm of the rhymes is absent, and it is virtually a political tract in rhyme, which is at once rhetorical and abrasive, as is exemplified here.

Hater evangelized of liberty!
How worthy Him who died on Calvary,
The Great Reformer, Christ! Who does not loathe
His loathsome loathing of all liberal taint!
Which of you hath not toiled to feed and clothe
His lackeys? O for Hogarth's hand, to paint
His mental lineaments of beast and saint,
His Corn-Law scowl, and landed length of ears!
Dost thou, thus early, mighty Lord, repair
To yonder fane? 'Tis well. Go, and in tears
Kneel, holy wretch, although the Sabbath air, (68)
Is weary of thy long unpunish'd prayer.
Thou, who with hellish zeal, wast drunk and blind
When tyrants, cloven-hoof'd in heart and brain,
Made murder pastime, and the tardy wind
Bore fresh glad tidings o'er the groaning main
Of hecatombs on Moloch's altar slain!
Kneel, Saint of Carnage! - kneel, but not to Baal;
Kneel, but alone, with none to laud thy zeal;
For the hour cometh when the reed shall fail
On which the wicked lean. But wherefore kneel?
Can the worn stone repent, and weep, and feel?
Still harder granite forms the bosom-core
Of him who laugh'd when freedom's thousands fell.
Hark, 'tis the voice, that erst of battle's roar
Was wont too oft from yonder tower to tell,
Pealing, at thy command, o'er crash and yell,
And fiend-like faces, reddening in the light
Of streets, that crimson'd midnight with their glare,
When England hired the hell-hounds of the fight,
Because men broke, in their sublime despair,
The bonds which nature could no longer bear!

(68) Ibid. V. (Works 1840) p. 103

Hark, 'tis the iron voice! and still to thee
It speaks of death. Perchance, some child of clay,
Some wo-worn thrall of long iniquity,
Some drudge, whose mate can yet afford to pay
For decent pray'rs, treading the gloomy way
Which all must tread, is gone to her long rest,
And last account - a dread one thine will be!
Of means atrocious, used for ends unbless'd!
And joy - for what? For guilty victory;
States bought and sold by fraud to tyranny;
Slaves arm'd to kill; the free by slaves enslaved;
Red havoc's carnival from shore to shore;
Sons slaughter'd, widows childless, realms depraved;
And Britain's treasures pour'd in seas of gore,
Till lords ask alms, and fiercely growl for more!

The Ranter then, is predominantly based on the oral form of the sermon, and suggests, as elsewhere in Elliott's work, the proximity of a radical attack through verse to an assumed religious authority for it, and perhaps facilitated popular acceptance of such verse. It is also possible to draw an analogy between the construction of Corn Law Rhymes with their rhetorical and popular elements and actual attendance at a political gathering; where conceivably a longer speech or sermon could be followed by the singing of hymns or songs in an attempt to engender emotion. Here The Ranter written and published first, precedes the shorter rhymes and Elliott's purpose for writing Corn Law Rhymes is therefore reiterated by their actual written form and composition.

In conclusion then the rhymes while certainly varying in standard, provide one lasting memory - that of the poet's voice, cajoling and blatantly persuading his audience. One certainly cannot argue with Carlyle on Elliott the man,

The great excellence of our Rhymer...we take to consist even in this...that he is genuine. Here is an earnest truth-speaking man; no theoriser, sentimentaliser, but a practical man of work and endeavour, a man of sufferance and endurance. The thing that he speaks is not a heresy but a thing which he himself has known, and by experience became assured of. (69)

Yet the general tone of the Corn Law Rhymes seems to have left an aftertaste. Watkins in 1850 was writing,

But luckily for literature and for the fame of the poet, the Corn Law Rhymer has written much poetry that has nothing to do with politics. (70)

Spencer T. Hall writing in the Art Journal of 1865 said,

The one great blemish of Elliott's poetry in the estimation of general readers is the frequent introduction of that subject which with him, was more than a sentiment - an overbearing and overmastering passion. (71)

Even his son in editing a Poetical Works in 1876 (72) omitted those rhymes which were the most obviously political and the most strongly offensive.

Of course, by definition, any poetry attacking a social evil which was for the most part remedied 15 years after their publication was bound to hold a position of transience.

We think we may safely predict that forcible as it is, it will share the fate of almost all production written to serve the purposes of the moment, and be forgotten with a cessation of interest. (73)

(69). Carlyle - 'Corn Law Rhymes' op. cit.

(70). Watkins op. cit. Ch. 4.

(71). Hall, Spencer. T. - 'Memories of the authors of the age' - Art Journal. Vol. 4. 1865, pp.245-8.

(72). Elliott - Poetical Works ed. Edwin Elliott (1876). Interestingly The Black Hole of Calcutta is one of those omitted.

(73). Eliza Cook's Journal III (1850). p. 312. quoted in Brown, Simon. M. A. dissertation op. cit.

In any assessment of the Corn Law Rhymes it is important to realize that they form a very small component of Elliott's total poetic output and that he himself was under no illusions as to their artistic merit, for he wrote,

I have published poems without political allusions and the worst of them might justly claim a hundred times the merit of the Corn Law Rhymes. (74)

But, the Corn Law Rhymes and the fame however short lived which they brought to Elliott pervaded his work and reputation afterwards. By being proud in later life of having a letter seal with the letters C.L.R. embossed, Elliott was obviously far from ashamed of his status.

I claim to have been a pioneer of the greatest, the most beneficial, the only crimeless Revolution which man has yet seen...I also claim to be the Poet of that Revolution - the Bard of Free-trade... and ultimately the Bard of Universal Peace. (75)

His price lay predominantly in his achievement as a defender of the oppressed and he saw the Corn Law Rhymes as being an expression of the virtues of the Anti-Bread-Tax Society, seeing his songs, epigrams and satires as preparing the way for political doctrines.

To an extent a consideration of the poetry of Corn Law Rhymes is difficult, given that to their

(74) Elliott - preface to 3rd edition Corn Law Rhymes 1831

(75) Elliott - preface to More Verse and Prose (1850)

creator, his art took a definite lower place behind both commerce and politics. His statement,

I have won my name as the 'Rhymer of the Revolution' and am prouder of that distinction than I should be if I were made poet laureate of England. (76)

sets up the question; had Elliott sacrificed poetry for politics given the lack of artistic merit of the Corn Law Rhymes? If the answer must remain vaguely as, possibly, the fact is, that Elliott believed that the two were inextricably linked, and there remains a uniqueness and originality in the spirit and fervour which the rhymes conveyed.

Perhaps, however the true merits of Elliott the poet, should be considered elsewhere in this study.

We are left therefore with Carlyle, for indication of why the rhymes were successful in the 1830's

His Rhymes have more sincerity and genuine natural fire than anything that has come my way in late years. He is what so few are, a Man, and no Clothes-horse. (77)

(76) Ibid
(77) Carlyle 'Corn Law Rhymes' op.cit.

CHAPTER 4

EARLY NARRATIVE

Elliott's longer poems, which I propose to discuss in this and the subsequent chapter, show his development as a narrative poet and perhaps most fully demonstrate his greatest strengths and weaknesses in conception and execution. The thematic approach which I have so far followed has to be set aside and Elliott's verse will here be considered and evaluated in the light of changing critical assumptions, including the poet's own estimate of his achievement.

One continuing difficulty with Elliott's verse of the early 19th century is the often uneasy alliance in both form and content, between features which belong decidedly to the eighteenth century and others which show an awareness of the changes in poetic subject and manner resulting from the impact of early romantic poetry. The reception of his work by his contemporaries, to which reference will be made, reflects something of this uncertainty and provide a context in which these narrative poems may profitably be approached.

The narrative verse under consideration was all published before 1825, and therefore before the comparative success of Corn Law Rhymes and Elliott's

political verse. They reveal Elliott striving to find a poetic manner in his formative years as a poet, without, as yet, regard from an established readership for his work.

One of his earlier publications was Night published in 1818. It is in four books, The Lovers which tells of the fate of Macdonald and Glanfillan and the object of their rivalry, Eliza in a setting of love, murder and suicide; Wharncliffe, given a local setting but with murder and pestilence and the powers of evil forming the basis of the plot; The Canadiad, which describes the capture of Quebec by Wolfe and the defeat and death of Montcalm; and Napoleon with lurid description of the consequences of failure in battle. Elliott expressed his purpose in the poem in a short preface

After the public taste has been long excited by strong stimulants, I venture (but with fear and trembling) to publish a Work without unity of interest, and in blank verse. It is a des- (1) criptive poem, in the narrative form; an attempt to depict the scenery of night as connected with great or interesting events.

The unifying theme of these tales is taken from the background rather than the foreground in that they are four entirely diverse stories, pictorially linked by a gothic darkness which provides the title of the volume.

(1) Elliott - preface to Night, A descriptive poem, in four books (London 1818)

In many ways these verses show the worst aspects of Elliott's early writing, full of obvious imperfections, the accumulation of too many thoughts in one sentence, too frequent personification and many linguistic weaknesses and it is fair to say that contemporary reviews were pertinent in their criticism.

A small volume, entitled Night, a descriptive poem, has recently issued from the press. We (2) cannot say much in its praise the style is harsh and affected and the ideas are in the wildest strain of ultra German horror or bombast.

However, one particularly fair critic remarked on the appearance of some talented writing, if only it could be controlled; such economy of thought and style which is in many ways the major need of Elliott's early verse, and when attained, highlighted a marked success in his poetry.

On the whole we think highly of this work. Its faults appear to arise from the luxuriance of a genius which requires the rein rather than the spur. They are not attempted to be concealed or adorned under the covering of rhyme, which (3) to many readers renders even nonsense acceptable. Whatever is good in the poem is intrinsically so, and does not derive its beauty from adventitious ornament. Disdaining the embellishment of dress, it stands forward in naked, but in modest beauty.

In 1820 another volume followed, containing Peter Faultless, an attack on The Monthly Review for its harsh treatment of Night and also four

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- (2) Monthly Review - January 1819 Vol. XLVI p. 532
(3) Literary Gazette - February 6th 1819

poems collectively called Tales of Night , whose production is best explained by the poet himself.

When I published the first part of Night, it was my intention to complete the poem in three successive parts of four books each; but I was afterwards advised, by a person learned in the trade, to write in rhyme, and choose another title. With the utmost reluctance I complied. Two of the tales in this volume (4) formed no part of my original design; they were written, perhaps, in despite of nature and my stars, but certainly in compliance with the advice of my learned friend.

The stories within them are told with vigour but with unfortunate crudity in places, relieved only by the odd passage which stands out. Their relevance to my consideration of Elliott's narrative verse here lies predominantly in their choice of subject. The Exile , the first of these Tales is set at the time of the Civil War and takes place in America, themes to which Elliott was to return, elsewhere in his narrative verse. In many ways they provide the key to Elliott's originality here, as will be shown later in this chapter.

The following synopsis of The Exile provides also a general indication of the subject matter and style of these narratives and the propensity for melodrama and pathos, all to be considered through a closer discussion of the verse itself.

(4) Elliott - preface to Peter Faultless to his Brother Simon, Tales of Night, in rhyme, and other poems (Edinburgh 1820)

The Exile, the first of the Tales, tells of a royalist exile who fled from England after the battle of Worcester, and settled on the banks of the Potomac. He returned to his farm one night to find a white woman being beaten among a batch of newly-arrived negro slaves. He interposed, and later recognised the woman as his sweetheart whom he had left in England. She (5) did not recognise him, but told him her sad story. Her lover had gone across the sea and deserted her, and she had had a child. Her parents had turned her from their home, and eventually she had been driven to pawn material, which she was employed to sew, to obtain food for her baby. For her crime she had been sentenced to transportation, and on the voyage her child had died. Alfred, stricken with remorse, reveals himself to her, but worn out by her sufferings Emma dies.

Of the three remaining tales in the 1820 volume Bothwell has once again a definite historical setting, as it is based on the history of Bothwell and Mary, Queen of Scots where the hero, in prison, retrospectively describes his life to Rhinvalt, another prisoner. It purports to be a dramatic poem, with the two characters alternately narrating, but Elliott struggles painfully with the dialogue form and the lapse into bathos was to become another recurring trait of his verse at this time. Finally Matrimonial Magic and Second Nuptuals as their titles imply, have marriage, both adulterous and happy as their subjects. The latter is centred around a wedding feast where the guests alternately sing songs and both poems are often bizarre in their presentation, as the precise local setting which they are given, seems unsuitable to its subject, and is

(5) Seary E. R. Ebenezer Elliott, A study, including an edition of his works - Ph.D thesis - University of Sheffield. (1932)

marred by a clumsy construction. Indeed one review launched a vitriolic attack on the author, particularly focussing on the coarse subject of the stories.

We are sorry to have to notice this publication; but having in our Number 107 (6th February, 1819), admitted a review of the preceding work by the same writer, which would recommend any of his subsequent publications, we feel bound to enter our caveat against that consequence. Mr. Elliott, the reputed author, has far forgot himself in his new volume; and ten times the ability which he displays in his attack upon the Reviewers in the Monthly Review, and in parts of his graver poems, would fail to procure him pardon for the filth and obscenity which he has thrown into what he calls comic stories ... It is really surprising that any man of common sense, or moral feeling, could be guilty of an offence against decency so exceedingly gross, (and withall so destitute of wit or humour to colour its depravity), as is committed, for instance, in the poem, Matrimonial Magic. It is fit for the Brothel only, and must exclude the book from every place where virtue is valued and pollution feared. We have done our duty to ourselves and the public in thus expressing our sentiments; and will not encumber our page with those quotations from some of the other poems, which we should have adopted had they not been intermingled with such nasty trash and low abomination as to fill us with disgust, and render all parley disreputable. (6)

In 1823, Elliott published a volume entitled Love, in the collected editions of his works in 1834 and 1840 is divided into separate poems. The original title Love is given to Part I Books I and II; Part I Book III becomes The Letter, Part II is called They Met Again and Part III, Withered Wild Flowers. This division will be adhered to throughout as it facilitates discussion of what is at times an incoherent whole poem. In his life of Elliott, Watkins wrote of the volume,

(6) Literary Gazette - July 8th 1820.

Now that we can look back on all his poetry we have no hesitation in saying, that the genius of the author reached its meridian in this volume, and that these poems will be those for which he will be most remembered by posterity. (7)

When writing on the Corn Law Rhymes, Watkins had shown an aversion to the use of rhetoric and politics in poetry. In this verse his likes are contained, and the virtues of poetry correctly displayed. (8)

Love is a poem sweet as love itself - rich with ideas that are jewels and glow with delight - round and smooth as the apple which Paris gave to Venus. All that love has done, can do, or will do in its various forms of youthful, conjugal, maternal, and heroic, is expressed in this poem, though it remained unnoticed and unknown, and "wasted its sweetness on the desert air," while many a gaudy plant was cherished in the conservatory of public favour. It is a poem not only good in its poetry, but in its purpose. (9)

If there is unity in this volume it is that in the first poem Love, he provides illustration of the form which love takes; familial, youthful, matrimonial and maternal, and then in the tales which follow he uses the plot of his narrative to explore more deeply the essence of love. In The Letter, the story is that of a young woman, struck blind at the marriage altar, and whose husband's love wanes until he deserts her. Just before she dies, alone and in poverty in a workhouse a letter arrives in which her husband relates his

(7) Watkins, John - Life, Poetry and letters of Ebenezer Elliott with an abstract of his politics (London 1850) chapter 2 p. 64

(8) c.f. this thesis chapter 3 p. 116

(9) Watkins op. cit. Chapter 3 p. 65

experiences in a cold impersonal tone and eventually returns home too late to relieve her misery. The theme then is a simple and pathetic one, but the dramatic elements all too often show the negative qualities of pathos and it is possible to see these tales as melodramatic. The elements of pathos and melodrama can be shown through a closer consideration of the verse itself, but before turning to this, the narrative line of the other tales to be considered, should be indicated.

The gist of They Met Again is an encounter of two men, a husband who has lost his wife's love, and the man who was her lover. The action is set once again at the time of the Civil War and the melodramatic impetus is provided by the betrayer rescuing a shipwrecked traveller, whilst in hiding, who turns out to be the wronged husband, who then proceeds to relate his sufferings to a remorseful, repentant listener. Seary ⁽¹⁰⁾ points to the missed opportunities of what could be an essentially Aeschylean drama as once again Elliott's attempt at dialogue fails through a lack of response between the two men as one speaks and the other listens. Nevertheless the choice of subject and setting provide the main interest.

(10) Seary op.cit p. 51

Finally Withered Wild Flowers serves to reinforce Elliott's consistent moral that sin leads to misery. A contemporary response to this poem serves both as a synopsis and to emphasize the belief held of the didactic, edifying and preferably moral tone often found in the verse of the day.

All are tales of sorrow and remorse. Narrative and descriptive powers they evince in a high degree, but are chiefly characteristic for pathos. "Withered Wild Flowers" is a tale of New England. We are introduced to Kirk, Winslow, and Henley; also to Elliot, the Indian Apostle. Senena, the guilty and unfortunate love of Henley, and Mary, her sister, the wife of Winslow, are the female characters of the drama. After a dialogue, remarkable for the courtier tone of the cavalier Kirk, contrasted with the fierce republicanism of Winslow, the conscience-stricken Senena quits the room, and we follow in secret to a dark deed of guilt, the murder, by drowning, of her infant child; it hath no other name. Afterwards, impelled by that strong curiosity which prompts the murderer to look (11) upon his deed, she goes and draws the dead body of the infant to land. Remorse plunges her with it into the wave. The guilty lover discovers his victims, and sequesters himself from all society. He also dies, and his funeral gives occasion to Elliot, the missionary, to preach a funeral sermon over his grave, from the text, "The curse of God is in the house of sin." Most tender and solemn is the feeling awakened by this. Bad indeed must that heart be whose better feelings would not be touched by it - hard indeed, if the hand of sorrow that can soften a stone did not cause those tears of penitence to flow, whose drops, more than "great Neptune's ocean," have power to wash away guilt.

The tales alluded to so far then, are tales of death, misery, lost love, darkness and horror, referred to with characteristic exaggeration here.

(11) Watkins op. cit pps. 70 to 71

The Poet had looked upon Nature in so many and such various moods, that all her phenomena and forms were transfigured by the power of his feelings and passions, and had become to him the symbols and the representatives of human thought and life. Nature and man's life were fused indeed into one great whole, and in the midst of sunshine, and waters, and singing birds, he heard the wild wail of famine, and the shrieks and moans of bleeding and broken hearts. Nay, he took a strange and unwearied pleasure in drawing pictures of woe and misery, and making them speak in a language that melts all hearts. (12)

It is in his adherence to these subjects and the forms in which he presents them in his verse that Elliott's shortcomings in these tales can be most easily identified.

Elliott's own comments on the purpose of poetry, provide perhaps an indication of what he was attempting in this verse.

.... for what is poetry - what can it be - but the heart speaking to itself. The principle of earnest self communion - on which all composition purporting to be poetry must stand, or wanting it, fall (13)

When a poet, ceasing to commune with himself, addresses others, he may be eloquent, but he is no longer poetical, unless he forget his audience, and in that case he is addressing himself and not others.

The subjectivity of the feelings expressed are often allied to a didactic element of instruction and

(12) Phillips, G.S. (January Searle, pseudonym) Memoirs of Ebenezer Elliott, the corn law rhymer; with criticisms upon his writings (London, 1852) page 17.

(13) Elliott - A Lecture on the Principle that Poetry is Self Communion - written for the Hull Mechanics' Institute - first published in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine 1837, reproduced in More Verse and Prose 1850 vol. 2 p. 126.

example in this verse, which supports Elliott's method
as here in Love.

Oh, bless'd, who drinks the bliss that Hymen
yields,
And plucks life's roses in his quiet fields!
Though in his absence hours seem lengthen'd
years,
His presence hallows separation's tears.
Oh! clasp'd in dreams, for his delay'd return (5)
Fond arms are stretch'd, and speechless wishes
burn!
Love o'er his fever'd soul sheds tears more
sweet
Than angel's smiles, when parted angels meet:
To him no fabled paradise is given;
His very sorrows charm, and breathe of heav'n. (10)
And soon the fairest form that walks below
Shall bless the name of parent in her woe;
Soon o'er her babe shall breathe a mother's
pray'r,
And kiss its father's living picture there.
While the young stranger on life's dangerous (15)
way
Turns with a smile his blue eye to the day.
But where shall poesy fit colours choose
To paint the matron norming sprinkling dews
O'er half-blown flowers, that pay their early (14)
breath
In tribute to the Lord of life and death, (20)
Who bids the lucid blush of nature glow
Till angels see another Heaven below,
Dimples the deep with every breeze that
blows,
And gives its sweet existence to the rose?
Maternal Love, best type of heavenly bliss! (25)
Thou show'st the joys of brighter worlds in
this,
When sons and daughters rush to thy embrace,
And Love is painted on each rosy face!
E'en in the vale of poverty and gloom,
Thy joys, like heath flowers on the moorland,
bloom, (30)
And o'er thy child of ignorance thy sigh
Is wordless pray'r, and not unheard on high.
But crown'd with knowledge, best Instructress
thou!
Tuition smiles seraphic on thy brow.
What though Contempt, with simpering sneer
aside,
Deems all thy teaching labour misapplied?

(14) Elliott Love Book 1 lines 125 to 167 - (Works
1840 p. 29)

What though around thee move the slaves
of gain
Who oft inflict, but seldom pity pain;
Still pointing, as they shake the sapient
head,
At talent's rags, and learning's sons half-
fed? (40)
Thy children's worth, maturing day by day,
Thy children's glory, shall thy cares repay.

The poet moves from an invocation of the Muse of Love, through a call to Maternal Love (25) to more specific reference to children suffering (38 - 40) and in expressing this in biblical vocabulary, for example in lines 32 - 36, he evokes the virtue of love and worship. The phrases 'slaves of gain' (37), 'talent's rags and learning's sons half-fed' (40) are an early reference to the wrongs of degradation which was to become the major subject of his political verse.

Elliott's prose works are often marked with reference to his theories on verse writing, also offering justifications and endorsements of the concerns of his poetry. The following, from one of his lectures, can be seen in the light of the extract just quoted from Love.

Perhaps there is nothing in the world so poetical as the love of a mother for her child; it is altogether unreserved. Honesty is always poetical, because it is in earnest - it means what it says - it does what it has to do with its whole heart - in word and deed, it is sincere. (15)

(15) Elliott - lecture, op. cit. More Verse and Prose
Vol. 2 p. 131

And whoever inspects human nature closely, will find that the least trust-worthy is the least poetical of his acquaintance; because to him the love of the true, the beautiful, the good, if it visit him at all, is a bird of passage - it is seldom homed, never bosomed with him. Poetry, then, is sincerity in earnest - impassioned truth - the heart, not the head; speaking to itself.

The final remark above continues the thinking behind that referred to earlier and is consistent with his championing of a crude inspirational theory for his verse. The reliance on very outdated models for both the construction and composition of his narrative verse, and inability to readapt either, is where Elliott's problems with this early verse lie and must be the starting point for any consideration of it.

The majority of the tales under discussion in this section are written in the couplet form and Elliott's adherence to a strictly eighteenth century format is an interesting one as his choice of subject is too often unsuited to the form. Perhaps the outstanding quality of the Augustan age in poetry had been the aims of precision where every word was chosen for its exactitude. Elliott's often seem to be chosen for the effects of rhyme or metre. Similarly he does not appear to make poetic discipline command an often disorderly subject and there is none of the balancing of line against line and contrasting within single lines which had been so important to Augustan verse.

In his reference to poetic theory Elliott often

criticizes Pope, calling the heroic couplet 'the stinging of abstract terms in heroic rhyme'. The criticism though is more likely to be directed at subject rather than metrics in that Elliott at this time a very minor, virtually unknown poet persevered with this form until he could successfully adapt it to his purpose. The lectures from which the extracts were taken were written after he had achieved some fame and are in many ways indicative of Elliott's self confidence as an instructor which often bordered on an arrogant self justification. On the couplet form, he wrote;

Any well-read lad of good sense may, in six months, learn to write as good epigrammatic couplet as any in Pope. Let me not be misunderstood: I do not say that it is not difficult to write good epigrammatic couplets, but that it is still more difficult to forge penknife blades, or, perhaps, to cut sparables. (16)
I know I am heretical in this opinion; but why should we quarrel about rhymes and rhymsters? They certainly are not of the most important things in this world, whether poetry be so or not. What is verse itself, but an artifice? I write in rhyme, because my thoughts are not good enough for prose.

Now then, he decries the importance of poetry, yet more relevant here is that he struggled with the form in his early narrative verse. Perhaps his inspirational theory either prevented him from or justified him in not mastering the craft of poetry? A closer look at the verse will point to the problems of form which Elliott found here.

(16) Elliott - A Lecture on the Poets who succeeded Milton, and preceded Cowper and Burns - written for the Sheffield Mechanics' Institution, published in More Verse and Prose Vol. 2 p. 170.

In this extract from The Letter Elliott tells of Anna's woe as she realises the loss of Charles' love.

More seldom day by day, Charles sooth'd her
 woe;
He came, she dared not own, in haste to go;
But she would sigh, and, with suspended
 breath,
Hear tones that were to her a dirge of death;
Then, while they struck her heart and soul
 with blight, (5)
Try to believe she had not heard aright.
Few were his questions, harsh were his
 replies,
And deeply in his heart he cursed her sighs,
And called his guilt misfortune. She became
A thing unmark'd - though seen, o'erlook'd:
 her name (10)
Ceased to be heard - she vanish'd. Who
 inquired
If she were dead or living? Undesired
Came such inquiries; and one answer brief
Met them, half-utter'd. Hopeless, in her
 grief,
She sate in some dark corner, lone; and
 there, (15)
With restless lips, she mutter'd ceaseless
 pray'r,
Or sigh'd, unheard, "What will become of me?"
But menial wrath, with vile indignity, (17)
And vulgar curses on her helpless head,
Soon drove her to her unpartaken bed, (20)
Through the long night of nights and days to
 weep,
Or start from slumb'rous dreams, but not to
 sleep.
Yet was her trust in God unshaken still,
And she endured, with meek-submitted will,
Her heavy sorrows; nor of that worst pain, (25)
Love unrequited, did she once complain.
Poor, sightless, trampled worm! for him she
 pray'd
Who bade her droop, with none to soothe or
 aid;
Her broken heart, already, quite forgave
Him whose stern coldness had prepared her
 grave; (30)
And Charles, by dying Anna unreprieved,
When most unworthy, seem'd the most beloved!
He, heartless wretch, and weak as base, made
 haste
Her bridal portion and his wealth to waste;

(17) Elliott - The Letter lines 141 to 176 (Works 1840 P. 41)

And suddenly, when all was gone, assumed (35)
Th' equestrian sword, and helmet sable-
plumed.

The poet's attempt to portray heartfelt feeling often suffers from his attempt to adhere to metre and one often feels that his vocabulary could have been better chosen. 'Undesired' (12), 'half-uttered' (14) 'menial' and 'indignity' (18), 'slumbrous' (22) and 'meek-submitted' (24) do not have the power they might have had if Elliott had written in longer stanzas wherein an idea was contained, instead of the continual often stuttering flow of his open couplets, which often lapse into monotony.

Elliott's choice of the narrative mode of presentation is often not as sound as it might be in that the strength of narration is often its continuity, its power of moving with the action as it evolves. Often Elliott's inability to hold focus means that continuity fails to become an integral part of his verse. Here, from They Met Again, Elliott uses biblical language in the mouth of his repenting character in an attempt to elevate the plot, yet it is the form which fails to carry the philosophy.

But, when the dogs bark'd at me as I pass'd,
And worldlings, if they met me, travell'd
fast,
Ann tore at once the bandage from my mind;
I gazed on truth, and wish'd my heart were
blind!
"I was undone! by Ann and all forgot;
Cold - naked - hungry - and she sorrow'd
not;
Distracted - and she soothed not my despair;
Sick, and in prison - and she came not there.

Night was around me, and I wept alone,
Despised, neglected, left unheard to groan.
But when I rose out of the earth, and light
And Nature's face rush'd lovely on my sight,
How did the bosom-serpent greet her mate? -
With looks of rancour and with words of hate;
And wretch she call'd the wretch herself had
made.

She cursed me to my weeping eyes - she bade
My children curse me! and I wish'd again
To hear the clanking of my dungeon chain.
But Julia was the sweetest child of all:
She kiss'd, she bless'd me, she alone did
call

Her mother's husband 'Father!' While the
rest

Jane and Matilda, (though my own,) express'd
No joy their sire's long-absent face to see,
Julia - the youngest - Julia welcomed me!
Dear Julia! - on my broken heart she smiled;
Dear Julia! - wherefore was not she my
child?

(18)

"But never will I drink again from cup
Made by the skill of mortal. I scoop'd up
The water in the shallows of the sand,
And drank it from the hollow of my hand.
Nay, do not think that I myself deceive,
But trust that I, in horror, must believe.
They gave me poison in my drink; and he
Smiled as I drank it; and - O misery!
I burn'd and lived; I burn'd - and yet I
live.

God, in thy mercy infinite, forgive -
Forgive them if thou canst! and I will try -
Will wrestle hard to pardon both and die.

His efforts to extend his clauses to their gram-
matical limits by using a series of similar adjectives
or his repetition of the same verb or noun in con-
secutive lines or his change from description to the
recall of names, or more blatantly perhaps his
attempted caesura, all contribute to the stuttering,
stopping effect of the verse and its subsequent lack
of continuity.

(18) Elliott - They Met Again Book III (Works 1840 p. 41)

Indeed although a reference to and comparison of Elliott with Crabbe is perhaps best left until my consideration of The Village Patriarch in the next chapter a comparative note here on their metrical skill serves to illustrate Elliott's use of the couplet. Crabbe's epigrammatic tales of man in society are depicted through a tightly controlled couplet rhythm, which reads simply and fluently. His couplets have more movement (19) as he successfully intersperses contemplation with a change to simple dialogue or an actual movement through landscape which itself relieves the frequent monotony of couplet verse. This fluent and rather dull phlegmatic control of the form is however very different from Elliott's verse here, for example from The Exile where he harnesses his couplet for dramatic effect.

Ah, clasp'd he death? or did she lifeless
 seem?
 Slackening his grasp, he stoop'd but heard
 no sigh!
 Then paleness blush'd; and life's returning
 beam
 Relum'd the faded azure of her eye.
 Faintly she strove to clasp him to her side. (5)
 "Was it, indeed, my angel's voice?" she
 cried;
 "And wilt thou take the convict to thy breast?
 And shall the vile, the outcast, the oppress'd,
 The poor and trodden worm, again be bless'd?
 Ah, no, no - heav'n ordaineth otherwise! (10)
 My love ! - we meet too late! - thy Emma
 dies."
 Then, with clasp'd hands, and fervent hearts
 dismay'd,
 That she might live for him, both mutely
 pray'd.

(19) For example, in Crabbe - The Lover's Journey
 lines 300 to 340.

But, o'er their silence burst the heavy
 blast;
 And down the giants of the forest dash'd; (15)
 And, pale as day, the night with lightning
 flash'd;
 And, through awed heav'n, a peal, that
 might have been (20)
 The funeral dirge of suns and systems,
 crash'd:
 More dread, more near, the bright blue blaze
 was seen,
 Peal following peal, with direr pause between. (20)
 On the wild light she turn'd her wilder eye,
 And grasp'd his hands, in dying agony,
 Fast, and still faster, as the flash rush'd
 by.
 "Spare me!" she cried. "Oh, thou destroying
 rod!
 Hark! 'tis the voice of unforgiving God! - (25)
 A mother murder'd, and a sire in woe!
 Alfred, the deed was mine! for thee, for thee,
 I broke her heart, and turn'd his looks to
 snow!
 Hark! 'tis the roaring of the mighty sea.

What Elliott does here is to try to bend the often
 rigid demands of the couplet to his will. The weak-
 nesses here, repetition, the use of too similar verbs
 in succession and the attempt at pathos are more
 successfully disguised within the rhythmic movement
 of the verse and its interspersal with dialogue and
 action. Indeed here and elsewhere he occasionally
 relinquishes his grip on the couplet rhyme via a set
 of assonance rhymes (7-9) 'breast, oppress'd
 bless'd'. In lines 16-19 he uses an AABA rhyme scheme
 in between two pairs of couplets and in the final four
 lines of the extract, he successfully slows down the
 rhythm as his subject demands. Dramatic effect has
 thus been deliberately, or at least arguably so,
 achieved with metrical and rhythmical skill.

(20) Elliott - The Exile XV and XVI (Works 1840 p. 23)

Elliott then, had criticized the couplet but his use of language in this early narrative verse consistently shows him failing to reject the diction of the period whose metrics and mechanical procedures he attempted to discard. (21) He is often prone to purple passages which although poetic enough if out of context become elaborate and seemingly detached descriptive lapses. Here an extract from The Exile shows the use of outmoded diction.

Ah, surely in that hour I should have died,
But that my boy clung fondly to my side,
And, not in vain, to soothe his mother
tried!
Then came a thought which nature could not
bear:
'What! take him from me?' shriek'd my
heart's despair. (5)
But little Alfred left the land with me;
And, while the tall ship rush'd into the
sea,
He sate, and smiled upon his mother's knee,
Pleased with the sails, the motion, and
the deep.
The billows seem'd to rock my cares to
sleep. (10)
Oh, there was comfort in the dreadful
thought
That far from happiest England I should go,
Where none who knew me could behold my woe,
To taunt the shame that want and sin had
brought;
And that the poor companions of my way (15)
were wretches too, but I less vile than
they!
I loved to sit upon the airy deck,
While swell'd the moonlight heav'ns, without
a speck,
O'er ocean without wrinkle; and I loved. (22)
While star-light only glimmer'd through the
clouds, (20)
And, arrow-like, and billow-borne, we
moved,

(21) The same failing is equally apparent in Wordsworth's early verse.

(22) Elliott - The Exile X (Works 1840 P. 22)

To hear the fresh gale whistle in the shrouds,
 And see the maned waves each other chase,
 Like flaming coursers in the endless race.
 Then, with delighted terror, from the prow, (25)
 High on the mountain billow's summit curl'd,
 Down look'd I on the wat'ry vales below,
 That, like a tenantless and hopeless world,
 Barren and black, and deepening chilly,
 frown'd.
 And, on that far land, whither I was bound, (30)
 Enthusiast Hope beheld, nor whip, nor chains;
 But hill and shadowy vale seem'd fairy
 ground,
 And groves elysian deck'd the teeming plains;
 And airy fingers form'd, with many a flower
 Of dulcet breath, a visionary bower; (35)
 And there my fancy wander'd with my child,
 And saw him strive, with lifted hand, to
 reach
 The grape's dark luxury, or the glowing peach;

In the passage the narrative moves from sea travel,
 through its implications, towards a description of the
 seascape itself which is summarily referred to with
 waves 'arrow-like and billow-borne' . 21) 'maned'
 23) 'flaming coursers' 24) 'wat'ry vales' 27)
 etc. The poet's inability to discard the obvious
 traits of Augustan poetic diction and syntax stultifies
 the narrative movement and the richness of the vocabu-
 lary of poetry of the past, for example 'deepening
 chilly' 29) 'groves elysian' ... 33) and 'dulcet
 breath'. . 35) saturate the sense of the narrative in
 the poet's attempt to portray journeying to insecure
 hostile and unknown lands, a frequent element in
 Romantic poetry. His inability to maintain the focus
 of his reader both literally and emotionally is perhaps
 bound up with his own inability to reconcile form with

content as he mixes unsuitable modes and subject matter.

This lack of continuity in reading and understanding some of Elliott's verse is exemplified in the following extract from Withered Wild Flowers.

When last I sought his hermit-home, no smoke
Rose o'er the hemlock huge, or greener oak.
My heart misgave me as my steps drew near,
And chill I enter'd with foreboding fear. (5)
No voice replied to mine; the dog had fled!
The house was tenantless, the fire was dead.
Night came in storms; and I, perforce, must
stay,
And wait in loneliness the coming day.
O'erwearied, soon I slept; but thunders deep
Roused me, appall'd, from unrefreshing sleep, (10)
And the still horror of portentous dreams.
Night seem'd eternal; and the morning beams,
As if averse to chase so foul a night,
Prolong'd their slumber in the hall of light.
But when the grey-eyed morning sweetly
spread (15)
Her dappled mantle o'er the mountain's head,
I issued from my prison-house of dread.
The sun had not yet risen. The forest
threw
Gigantic darkness on the mingled hue
Of gold and crimson in the brightening sky; (20)
The sea was fiery purple to the eye;
And o'er the waves, still warring with the
gale,
The moon was shining calm, and cold, and
pale.
Frown'd sea and strand, but heaven divinely
smiled; (25)
And, cheer'd, I sought the hermit in the wild.
I reach'd his wonted station on the shore;
I found him there; and to the billow's roar
He seem'd to listen from his bed of sand,
His face to heaven, his head upon his hand. (23)
I paused - and felt at heart a deadly chill: (30)
Did ever breathing bosom lie so still?
Wan as the ocean's foam, with unclosed eye,
As if to take his farewell of the sky,
Serene he lay in everlasting rest,
The faithful terrier pining on his breast. (35)

(23) Elliott - Withered Wild Flowers Book III - Works
1840 P. 48

Scarce hath the lily faded on her shroud,
Since earth's cold curtain, like a friendly
cloud,
Closed o'er our sinful sister! and the tear
Of dread and woe is damp upon her bier.
She did but go before him: he is here!

The first person narrative lacks conviction because again the poet sacrifices the syntax associated with speech for retaining the couplet metre; 'and chill I entered' (3) 'and I, perforce must stay' (7), 'thunders deep' (9) etc. and also with his subsequent description of the morning he fails to lift his lexis above that of the received commonplace. The meeting with the hermit is couched in simple terms in bathetic contrast to the more abstract passages preceding and following it, a common fault in Elliott's poetry. Another of Elliott's problems is that his verse is often weak structurally. He changes the focus of his verse within a short passage attempting to relate too many ideas to what usually is a main theme. Witness here, in an extract from Love as focus and impetus is changed.

Slow seems the gloomy Angel, slow, to bring
His opiate cold to hopeless suffering;
And, when in death's long sleep their eyes
shall close
Not with their fathers shall their dust
repose,
By hoary playmates of their boyhood laid (5)
Where never corpse-thief plied his horrid
trade:
Not in the village church-yard, lone and
green,
Around their graves, shall weeping friends be
seen;

But surly haste shall delve their shallow bed,
 And hireling hands shall lay them with the
 dead, (10)
 Where chapmen bargain on the letter'd stone,
 Or stumble, careless, o'er the frequent bone.
 How long, O Love! shall loveless Avarice sow
 Despair and sloth, and ask why curses grow?
 Or dost thou give thy choicest gifts in vain, (15) (24)
 And mock with seeming good the hear of pain?
 God! where thy image dwells must sorrow
 dwell?
 Must Famine make thy earth her hopeless hell?
 Did thy uplifted axe, Napoleon, find,
 In manless deserts, barren as the wind, (20)
 Food? or, when black depopulation shed
 Hunger o'er Moscow, were Gaul's armies fed?
 Why do the clouds cast fatness on the hills?
 Why pours the mountain his unfailing rills?
 Why teems with flowers the vale - with life
 the sky? (25)
 Why weds with loveliness utility?
 Why woos the foodful plain, in blessing
 bless'd,
 The tons of labour to her virgin breast?

Elliott in attempting to relate his abstract
 introduction to Love to actual life moves from death
 through village wrongs, to a brief political criticism
 of his favourite enemy the landlord, to reference to
 the results of the wars with France, all set in a
 series of rhetorical questions with the odd succinct
 original phrase, 'black depopulation' (21), 'manless
 deserts' (20), 'clouds cast fatness' . (23) 'foodful
 plain' (27). His method suffers at the expense of
 building thought upon thought, image upon image in
 order to present his metaphor of the fertility of land
 with the degradation of its purpose to provide.

(24) Elliott - Love Book II (Works 1840 P. 32)

Contemporary criticism drew attention to this need for continuity as one of the components of successful verse,

Poetry is imaginative passion. The quickest and subtlest test of the possession of its essence is in expression; the variety of things to be expressed shows the amount of its resources; and the continuity of the song completes the evidence of its strength and greatness. He who has thought, feeling, expression, imagination, action, character, and continuity, all in the largest amount and highest degree, is the greatest poet. (25)

and indeed the lack of the ability to write flowing and intrinsically coherent verse is one of Elliott's more obvious weaknesses as a poet.

Elliott's problems with form only serve to emphasize his struggles with the content of his verse. In the verse under consideration here, his narrative models are once again outdated ones. His method of narrative verse was being proposed thirty years after the real debate though. The first struggles towards a new poetic theory were attempted through Gothicism, which proved to be a false start, though Elliott now proceeded to reproduce it in the plots and trappings of his tales.

Perhaps the most glaring reason for the lack of success of the tales in the 1823 volume is their lack of originality in both subject matter and presentation.

(25) Leigh Hunt - What is Poetry 1844 p. 256

The overstocking of the market is alluded to here by Southey.

A recommendation to the booksellers to look at a manuscript is of no use whatever. In the way of business they glance at everything which is offered them; and no persons know better what is likely to answer their purpose. Poetry is the worst article in the market; - out of fifty volumes which may be published in the course of a year, not five pay the expense of publication: and this is a piece of knowledge which authors in general purchase dearly, for in most cases these volumes are printed at their risk. (26)

Watkins, one of Elliott's biographers pointed to the irregularity in the poetry, yet added that competition from the established poets worsened his situation. Interesting in this context is the reference to Southey on the changing fashions of such verse, even if Elliott's had little to lift it above the ordinary.

Southey wrote to him, saying, "There is power in the least of these tales; but the higher you pitch your tone the better you succeed. Thirty years ago they would have made your reputation; thirty years hence the world will wonder that they did not do so." It is now more than thirty years since Southey made this observation; but the world does not wonder that the poems adverted to did not make Ebenezer Elliott's reputation, whatever they might have done thirty years previously. Let us recollect who were in the field at that period. Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge, Byron, Scott, Crabbe, Campbell; the men have passed away, but what poem of Elliott's would stand in competition with one of theirs? Our poet's poetry was irregular - unequal - indicating by fitful passages of great (27)

(26). Southey, R. Letter to Elliott - October 13th 1808 in Life and Correspondence of the late Robert Southey Ed. C.C. Southey - London 1850. Vol.IV

(27). Watkins op.cit. Chapter 3.

power and beauty the struggles of the god within, rather than the liberated expression of his genius. His forces were as yet undisciplined; he had not obtained the complete mastery over them. He lacked the dignity of ease.

It was however Elliott's adherence to outdated modes which limited him. He was self educated and it is worth recalling his declared influences in that they may have bearing on his choice of subject.

I never could read a feeble book through; and it follows that I read masterpieces only - the best thoughts of the highest minds; after Milton, Shakespeare, then Ossian, then Junius, with my father's Jacobinism, as a commentary. Paine's Common Sense (28) Sense, Swift's Tale of a Tub, Joan of Arc, Schiller's Robbers, Bftrger's Lenora, Gibbon's Decline and Fall, and long afterwards Tasso, Dante, De StaSl, Schlegel, Hazlitt, and the Westminster Review.

The list comprises a mixture of overtly political works, works of doom and gothic despair and others of established poetic authority and all to varying degrees influenced his early work and set the seeds from which his later work grew. The roots of these tales are derived then, from the taste for the gothic romance, the interest in the supernatural and the opportunities for representing feelings excited by fear, horror, madness and even ecstasy. More specifically, the final decade of the eighteenth century saw an unprecedented output in poems about ghosts, demons, graveyards, night and long deemed dead but returning lovers, which were gathered together by Matthew Lewis in 1821 through two

(28) Elliott - Autobiographical memoir , written June 1841 - here from holograph in Sheffield Local Studies Library.

volumes entitled Tales of Wonder .

The horrific scenes in Elliott's verse had their roots here and in his reading of German literature. He had read De Stael, Schiller and Bürger whose Lenore had been translated into seven English versions by five poets in one year, 1796. These 'Sturm und Drang' works⁽²⁹⁾ emphasised in often excessive and sensational narrative the energetic, Promethean quality of the individual in terms of 'Kraft' i.e. power, vigour, force, and energy expressed in extravagant ideas of verbal explosion as a reaction against the rational ideas of the enlightenment.

In much of Elliott's verse too, it is possible to trace what can best be described as romantic elements. Describing the plan of 'Lyrical Ballads' in his 'Biographia Literaria', Coleridge distinguishes two 'cardinal points of poetry'; truth to nature and the use of the imagination. Romantic narrative verse while choosing subjects from ordinary life deals often with supernatural or romantic characters. In his 'Night of 1818 the latter appear in Elliott's verse in the form of demons and a persistent attitude to the

(29) Sturm und Drang - this phrase is translated Storm and Stress and idiomatically means untamed youth. It has been adopted from the title of a play by F.W. Klinger, by literary historians to denote the period in German literature from 1767 to the mid eighties and particularly the works of Herder, Schiller, Bürger and early Göethe.

morbid, melancholy and cruel continues up to and beyond the poems so far considered in this chapter. Similarly the cultivation of emotion and sensation, so much a part of his narrative are alluded to in Romantic criticism.

The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such, as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves.

(30)

These romantic elements were continued in the later verse to include the tendency toward free thought and individualism and the apparent revolt against political authority and social convention.

The location too of a definite historical past suited the public appetite of the time and Elliott's major influence here must be Scott whose gripping narrative poems are set in a chivalric past, embellished with antiquity, topographical notes and supernatural events. If there is originality in Elliott's early narrative work it lies in his ability to pursue the

(30) Coleridge - Biographia Literaria Ch. XIV (1817)

the Gothic motifs of dead babies, sex, death and demon lovers, but to change the chivalric, medieval settings for his own purposes.

However his work is prone to an affectation which often results in the discordance alluded to by a Victorian critic here.

In his writings there is the appearance of occasional affectation, and this more especially visible in the dedications of his poems: these are invariably couched in language exceedingly resembling bathos: this will always be the penalty for cultivating force without the requisite intensity of feeling. Forcible expression should never be sought for; it should come unbeckoned; and surely, in Elliott's case, it usually came thus promptly and decisively. And there is yet another cause - Elliott knew little of social refinement. There are in his poems passages most execrable in point of taste: the pathos of his poems sprang from the depth of feeling, from the profound perception of beauty: and his lyrics are the very psalms and hymns of worship, and are a tribute paid to beauty: but he had no disposition to train his note to suit even ordinary refined ears; and in the parlour and on the platform we could never be sure of the man. Pure himself, exceedingly pure, he had no idea of the impurity of certain forms of speech.

(31)

This extract is doubly interesting in that it comes from a book entitled The Peerage of Poverty, in which among other things the virtues of the self educated 'poor' writers are expounded. Yet here a critical view of Elliott considers his 'lack of social refinement and taste'. True, in his political verse

(31) Paxton Hood - The Peerage of Poverty (1859) chapter 6 pps. 110 - 11.

one would expect this, but here where Elliott's aim is somewhat different the pathos of much of his verse offends the ear. The power of stirring tender or melancholy emotion should excite pity or even sadness, yet Elliott fails to realise its dramatic potential.

Here from Withered Wild Flowers is a passage which illustrates this most successfully. A brief synopsis of the plot has already been given, but the context of this particular passage is that the lovers Senena and Henley meet by the shore where she has drowned her child. Henley, ignorant of what has happened, speaks to her of marriage and their future happiness together. She curses him, relenting after he has left. He faints and a ghost appears to him, offering a child to be kissed. Senena recovers her child's body in the scene below, then drowns herself with it clasped in her arms. Henley then sees the bodies, brings them to the shore and in a hysterical craze collapses beside them. But the attempt at a grandiose style in which to set this scene is marred by the wild extravagance of the following lines,

The troubled curtains of portentous night
Flung from their brightening folds a sudden
light;
The waters seem'd to chide her as she stood!
A voice of mourning issued from the flood.
She started - on the surface rose to sight (5)
A flower, a floating lily, bluely white:
She gazed upon it, (and her hot tears came,)
Call'd it her child - it had no other name -
Kiss'd its blue sodden cheek, its bosom fair,
Its small round fingers, and its dusky hair; (10)

Then to her heart she clasp'd its lips of
 snow,
 And sobb'd, thrice happy in severest woe.
 She wonder'd at its loveliness in death;
 Scarcely believed she that it had not breath.
 Once more she bent, once more a kiss to
 take, (15)
 And half expected that it yet would wake.
 And then the fire return'd into her brain:
 And memory wept, and conscience groan'd
 again;
 Wild, mutter'd accents from her bosom broke,
 And words came to her tongue, and misery
 spoke: (20)
 "My murder'd baby! O that I had borne
 The taunt of prudery, the scourge of scorn,
 She shriek'd - she stoop'd - she snatch'd
 it to the strand;
 God! 'twas no lily - 'twas a little hand!
 Forth from the brine she drew her murder'd
 child, (25)
 The black rocks echoing wide her accents
 wild;
 Close, and more close, her ice-cold babe
 she press'd,
 And cold was comfort to her burning breast. (32)
 The penance due to sin! Would I had taught
 Thy little lip to know this breast, and
 bought (30)
 Thy thankful smile with love; and o'er thee
 hung
 To bless the name of mother from thy tongue!
 Was this a mother's deed? Thy stifled cry
 Still echoes in my soul, and will not die.
 Bitter remembrance is my portion set, (35)
 Never on earth to smile or to forget;
 And I must bear perdition in my breast,
 And wear my hopeless anguish as a vest.
 Why did I do this deed? Let Henley tell:
 He, most unworthy, still is loved too well; (40)
 But he shall weep when I am lowly laid,
 And wish, too late, I had not been betray'd.
 Canst thou forgive me, baby? thou my child,
 Canst thou forgive this wretch with blood
 defiled.

This poem is very conventional Gothic in thought
 and expression, owing a lot to both Lewis and Scott.
 It is a weakly horrific rather than a pathetic picture,

(32) Elliott - Withered Wild Flowers Book II (Works 1840
 pps. 45-6)

the use of children in this way being an often used melodramatic trait. This is not helped by Elliott's own particularly cold touches like 'blue and white' (6) 'blue sodden cheek' (9) 'ice-cold babe' (21) and 'vest' (38). The contrived images of the flower, the stilted vocabulary used to describe her crazed reactions and once again the seemingly contrived search for words to retain the rhyme of the couplet push the melodrama over the edge of conviction. Here the dramatic elements seem hollow and falsely worked up.

In this passage from *They Met Again*, the wronged husband pours out his heart to his wife's lover.

And when she raised her eye, resign'd and
 meek,
 Warm on my wither'd hand, and woe-worn cheek,
 I felt her last - last tear. She spoke no
 more:
 The sinful sufferer's many pangs were o'er,
 And mine scarce felt. I heard the shovell'd
 clay (5)
 Fall heavy on her bier. I turn'd away
 With bursting heart. Lo! as my head I bow'd
 I saw th'adulterer in the homeward crowd!
 But, like a frozen sea, on which the wind
 Can raise no billow, slept my awe-quell'd
 mind; (10)
 All angry feeling from my bosom fled,
 The passions all were chain'd - my heart was
 dead. (33)
 "I may not lie where Ann in cold earth lies;
 But might I see again with these sad eyes
 The clay that is her pillow, they would close (15)
 Happy to shut for ever on the woes
 Of such a world as this. I weep for her:
 I am not stone: she was a sufferer,
 And, though a sinner, yet a Magdalene:
 She died repentant, and was loveliest then. (20)
 Oh, she was false to me! but I am true;
 And, when she died, we then were wed anew.

(33) Elliott - *They Met Again* Book III (Works 1840 p.47)

The worms, the worms our bridal bed prepare;
Long waits the bride - in vain! I come not
there.

Sever'd in life, still, still let death divide; (25)
Why should I slumber by the lost one's side?
Yet, when the trump of foom shall rend the sky,
And wake all sleepers, she shall meet an eye
That could not meet hers frowning. Oh, her
breast,

Though dearest still, is spotted and unbless'd: (30)
No pillow meet for me, although I long for
rest!

"Let me not doubt God's justice! Oh, what
fate

Pursues my race, as with a demon's hate?
Evil must come of evil! that I know;
But how have we incurr'd this shame, this woe, (35)

Despite the exclamatory tone, the repetition of certain phrases and the clumsiness of for example 'awe-quell'd' (10), Elliott's discrepancies are to a certain extent compensated by his linking of the vocabulary of death and sleep, 'clay, stone, slumber, doom, severed' with that of marriage and waking, 'anew, meet, calm, raised her eye, bridal bed'. The dialogue however is once again contrived yet it serves Elliott's purpose here, the injection of a moral into a narrative mode, its impetus by the reality of who the speaker and listener actually are.

Here again from They Met Again, the speaker reflects on his life,

I wore my youth in dreams on Pleasur's
breast;
My sleep was sinful, and I woke unbless'd:
Most wretched, and deserving so to be,
I darkly suffer, but not sullenly.
I have rejoiced and sorrow'd; I have proved (5)
Th' extremes of fate, 'have loved, and been
beloved.'
What fallen angel, not without a tear,
And piteous wafture of that hand most dear,

And frantic locks, and looks where love yet
 lives,
 Smiles on my soul, and pities and forgives, (10)
 Even while she mourns the hour when first she
 fell
 To guilt and shame? I know thee, wrong'd
 one, well!
 Cursed be the tongue that utters ill of thee!
 I found thee fond as fair: and I will be
 Still faithful to thy memory, and disdain (15)
 The lying penitence of fear and pain.
 Ye woodbine bowers, where oft, with throbbing
 heart,
 We met in ecstasy, in tears to part!
 Oh, woods of Darnal! ye no more shall see
 The matron tall who loved your shades for me; (20)
 Love-listening Rother, thou wilt hear no more
 Her guilty whisper on thy silent shore!
 As when she trembled, hung her head, and
 wept, (34)
 Sweet as the flower on which the moonbeam
 slept,
 Wan as the snow-white rose in Catcliffe's
 vale, (25)
 But not, like it, in stainless meekness pale.
 Scenes of my youth! 'tis sadly sweet to look
 Back on your paths, and read, as in a book,
 Where painting's magic brings the path to
 view,
 A witching story, mournful and too true.

Here the environs of Elliott's native Sheffield are referred to and the use of locality to define setting within a narrative is once again an influence of Scott. His attempt to balance the lines results in the unfortunate 'I darkly suffer, but not sullenly' (1.4) and 'And frantic locks, and looks where love yet lives' (1.9) and the poet continues his stream of regret which in the context of the verse, is now overlong, monotonous and repetitive before moving abruptly and awkwardly to local reference, 'Darnal', 'Rother' and 'Catcliffe', uniting pathos with bathos as the memories of his lost wife are

(34) Ibid Book II (Works 1840 p.39)

associated with youth, the past, England and 'the snow white rose in Catcliffe's vale'. (1.25)

Occasionally Elliott's descriptive passages are lifted above the commonplace by his ability as in the 'industrial verse' to select vocabulary original and well suited to its subject.

Emma, how sweet the calm that follows storms!
How sweet to sleep in tears, and wake in
heav'n!"
Morn soon will smile on Nature's drooping
charms,
And smooth the tresses which the night hath
riven;
But no sun shall arise that wretch to cheer; (5)
Alas! his grief despairs, and hath no tear!
From heav'n's deep blue, the stars steal, one
by one
Pale fades the moon - still paler - she is
gone.
As yet, no marshall'd clouds in splendour
roll'd,
See, on Potomac's breast their mirror'd gold; (10)
Yet, eastward, lo! th'horizon, forest-fringed,
Blushes - and dusky heights are ruby-tinged!
Lo! like a warrior in impatient ire,
On mail'd steed, fire-scarf'd, and helm'd (35)
with fire,
Forth rides the sun, in burning beauty strong, (15)
Hurling his bright shafts, as he darts along!
Oh, not more splendidly emerged the morn
When light, and life, and blissful love were
born,
And day and beauty, ere his woes began, (20)
Smiled first elysium on the soul of man,

In this passage from The Exile Emma's emotions are linked to the pale beauty of the moon 'marshall'd clouds' (9), 'mirrored gold' (10), the 'forest-fringed' (11) horizon and the 'ruby-tinged' (12) heights are fresh images and the power of the sun is seen in terms

(35) Elliott - The Exile XVIII (Works 1840 P. 24)

of strength and glory and movement. This looks forward to the images of industrialism and the elements in his later verse.

Elliott's narrative method in these tales is usually to provide an abstract introduction or setting in which he places his characters allowing the tale itself to be told by way of a first person narrative. Usually there is repeated emphasis upon selected naturalistic details and the diction and structure of the narration follows a commonplace chronology. The poet's injection into the natural world of human passions, emotions and responses and the way in which one is always couched in terms of the other and his laying upon these scenes, objects and forces the narrative tension of his verse is perhaps the most profoundly Romantic aspect of these poems, owing direct influence to both Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Here and in so many Romantic imaginative poetic tales travel is important. The journey is in the philosophy of the Romantic poets an image of the mind's or soul's passage through self exploration. Elliott's journeyer is more literal though, passing through a social environment which affects and shapes his experiences.

Foot-sore, and weary, and in soul distress'd,
I was returning from the travell'd west:
The night was gloom unbroken; and I lost
My way amid the many paths that cross'd
The dangerous forest. Long and far I went (5)
Still more and more astray, and vainly sent
My voice for help through echoing gloom
abroad.

At last a red light from a lone abode
 Flash'd through the kindling verdure. Vast
 and high
 The building darken'd on the starless sky. (10)
 Deserted and all-tenantless it seem'd;
 And yet the brightness of a pine-fire
 gleamed'd
 Wide from the centre of the ample floor.
 Apart I stood, and through the open door
 Survey'd awhile in fear that vault-like
 room:
 Its vast retiring depth was lost in gloom. (15)
 I spoke - I shouted: from disturb'd repose,
 Behind the fire, a startled wretch arose,
 Casting his lengthen'd shadow far aloof, (36)
 That, like a spell-raised giant, propp'd the
 roof;
 And, lighted from below, his features wan (20)
 Seem'd such as fear would not ascribe to man.
 Like a stray'd captive by his gaoler found,
 His terror utter'd a despairing sound.

Here, the consistency of the images is of the warmth
 of a room, providing solace for the traveller. The
 narrative moves with all the rapidity of the progress
 from where 'long and far I went' (5) and 'Vast and high/
 The building darken'd' (9/10) convey distances
 otherwise needing elaboration, when not part of a nar-
 rative in which significance becomes more important than
 realism.

The passages of narrative dialogue are interspersed
 with passages of natural description. Here the cave in
 which the shipwrecked Moreland is lying is described
 omnisciently as the poet's eye sees the scene, painting
 his background before moving to the man himself.

And o'er the rustic carpet, wrought in flowers,
 The osprey's wing a snow of blossom showers.
 It is a scene so lonely and so fair -
 The winds, enamour'd, love to loiter there,

(36) Elliott - Withered Wild Flowers Book III (Works 1840
 P. 47)

Stoop to salute the sea-pink, as they pass, (5)
 And coldly kiss the ever-waving grass.
 The roof within, Cathedral-like, ascends
 Sublimely arch'd and vaulted high, and bends
 O'er pillars vast its sparry curtains grand, (10)
 Whose gems unnumber'd shine on every hand
 Bright as the plumage of a seraph's wing:
 Behold a palace meet for Ocean's King!
 But he who lies in troubled sleep beside
 The central fire, that casts its radiance
 wide,
 Making with darkness and reflected light (15)
 A starry roof, and imitated night,
 Most awful in its grandeur - What is he?
 What slumbering wretch, escaped the stormy
 sea,
 Who, when his comrades sank to rise no more,
 Sent his wild laugh th' affrighted billows
 o'er? (20)
 What mortal slave of sorrow, love, or hate,
 Cast on the strand alive to execrate
 The storm that was not fatal, and the wave
 That did not make the howling foam his grave?
 'Tis Moreland, passion's victim from his
 birth, (25)
 Who, like the murderer Cain, hath roam'd
 the earth.
 He, self-deceived, deems man a dungeon'd
 slave,
 While Fate, the goaler, hears the captive
 rave; (37)
 Smiling to see him roll his eyes in vain,
 And grind his teeth, and shake th' insulting
 chain; (30)
 And writhe in fury, like a self-stung snake,
 And stamp upon his tombstone but to wake
 The echoes of his prison-house of woe.
 Victim of passion! hast thou found it so?
 Evil must come of evil; and, too late, (35)
 Thou call'st the fruit of crime and folly,
 "Fate."
 Sleep, but not rest! Lo! o'er his features
 spread
 An earthly darkness grows; and pallid dread
 Smites every lock and every limb amain.
 His bristling hair is damp with fear and
 pain; (40)
 And while without the deepening thunders
 roll,
 He seems to hear the tempest in his soul.
 O God! 'tis dreadful! Nature's self doth
 quake
 As though her final hour were come; and
 shake

(37) Elliott - They Met Again Book II (Works 1840 p. 38)

E'en like the felon, whom th' offended laws (45)
Have doom'd to die. And now the soundless
pause
Locks the suspended soul in icy fear.

The size of the cave is set in contrast with the
'slumbering wretch' (18) imprisoned within it with
Elliott moving from an actual description to the person-
ification of the gaoler Fate who presides over the
writhing, seething captive. The dreadful visage of the
man is seen in terms of storm within the soul as the
'earthly darkness' (37) and the 'deepening thunders
roll' (41) as he seems to hear the 'tempest in his soul'
(43). This, although contrived in its form is effective
in that Elliott successfully attains a focus as he moves
from the grand description of the cave to the man within
it to the horrific image of the man's mental dilemma.

Perhaps Elliott's writing in these early narratives
was more suited to the poetic demands of the day. One
of his biographers says of the poem called The Letter

'This is a beautiful, simple, touching, and
domestic tragedy; a common tale of common
occurrence. It is managed throughout with
great skill; and contains passages of real
and marvellous beauty. Both these poems are
examples of the power of genius to exalt
human passion and human misery, and invest
them with enduring interest. His picture of
the maiden Anna, prior to her marriage and
desertion, is one of the sweetest in poetry; (38)
and he ransacks all the charms of nature
wherewith to clothe her virgin beauty. Indeed,
whenever he speaks of woman, his words melt
into music; and violets and all sweet flowers
spring up and blossom around him, as if by
enchantment.'

(38) Phillips (Searle) - Memoirs op.cit. p. 34

The exultation of human passion referred to, no doubt satisfied contemporary critical taste which differs from ours, yet we can agree that Elliott's tale is told with all the bright freshness of pastoral with a joyful depiction of country flowers in which to set the happiness of the girl. However like all his early narrative it suffers the faults of strained, unnatural language straight from his Gothic sources. There is throughout a looseness and indelicate tone to Elliott's writing, as here again from The Letter.

There, light of heart, nor lonely, nor unseen,
She walk'd and sung, and talk'd and laugh'd
 between,
Paying, in raptures from her guileless breast,
The soul-felt tribute which pleased Heav'n
 likes best;
Or paused, on broomy banks to sit or kneel, (5)
While hedge-side bluebells died beneath her
heel.

Her brow, where gentlest beauty held high
 state,
Was vein-inlaid with azure, delicate
As tenderest leaf of shaded columbine
That bends beneath the love-sick eglantine; (10)
And, oh, she was the meekest maid of all
That ever stoop'd o'er alpine waterfall,
Or look'd up to the hills from valleys sweet,
Like Nature's primrose, dropp'd at Bretland's
feet.

She loved, with virgin-love, a stately swain: (15)
Unhappy passion! though Charles loved again.
Fresh was his cheek, as evening's flowers,
 that furl'd

Their banners in the sun; his locks outcurl'd (39)
The finger'd hyacinth, outshone the down
On youngest morning's cheek, when, newly
blown, (20)

The maiden violet meekly views the south,
While the rich wallflower, in its early
growth,
Prepares deep amber, for th' expecting eye
That sees in fading flowers eternity.

(39) Elliott - The Letter lines 36 to 70 (Works 1840
P. 34)

She wedded, high in hope and passion strong; (25)
 Unhappy marriage! for Charles loved not
 long;
 And, at the altar, dark she stood in light;
 Heav'n's swift fire there bereft her eyes
 of sight.
 E'en as she turn'd preparing to withdraw,
 Burst flash and crash, in overwhelming awe; (30)
 And pail she stood, with sightless eyes
 upraised;
 And pale the bridegroom wax'd, as mute he
 gazed;
 And from the holy temple, sadly led,
 A mourning bride she moved, with languish'd
 head.

The poet might have avoided certain phrases, 'his locks
 outcurl'd/The finger'd hyacinth' (18/19), 'unhappy
 passion' (16), 'high in hope and passion strong'

(25) and indeed in this extract taken from a later
 edition one sees that 'awful beauty held high state'
 has been amended to 'gentlest beauty' (7). The
 account of Anna's marriage and affliction shows Elliott
 failure at achieving full dramatic effectiveness. An
 example of his unrefined rather coarse presentation
 is when he makes the marriage service the occasion
 of her becoming blind and implies throughout that the
 marriage will be unhappy. In doing so he has moved
 away from a literary to a folk convention.

The failure of his drama is similarly shown here
 from *They Met Again* where one speaker is allowed to
 speak continuously with no reaction from the man who
 is his adversary.

When I became a traitor, fear'd, abhorr'd,
 And fiercely fought, and fought against the
 throne,

By gloomy, envious malice urged alone.
No love of freedom fired my stormy breast;
I deem'd the patriot half a fool at best.
I scorn'd his shallow hope, his honest zeal,
I mock'd the virtues which I could not feel.
No sacred ardour sanctified the deed,
And nerved my arm to make a tyrant bleed;
But a base lust
"Whence was that sound? It came not from
below;
There none but wanderers of the waves can
go:
Hush! - many voices hath the stormy sea.
I tremble - do I tremble causelessly?
Death, I have heard thy shout, and seen thy
frown,
When stooping Slaughter mow'd his thousands
down;
And I have couch'd beside the sever'd limb,
When Horror call'd on night
And thou wast dreadful then. But for this
hour (40)
Hast thou reserved thy soul-subduing power:
Thee never, Death, did I invoke, but still
I bow'd to mightiest circumstances my will:
And, in the darkest hour and stormiest shade,
Look'd ever calmly for the dawn delay'd.
Yet would that thou hadst laid me with the
slain,
Where England's bravest fell on Marston's
plain;
Little they fear'd thee, King of Terrors,
then,
Now not at all: for in the war of men
They fought, and, shouting, died. But thus
to meet
Thy certain aim, and count thy coming feet,
While the half bloodless heart forgets to
beat -
To meet thee thus, O Death! is terrible!
Hush! - the hoarse cry is drown'd in ocean's
yell.
Hark! - voices, murmurs, and the steps of
men!
What! will they storm the lion in his den?
Hither my evil Angel led my feet,
And here deserted me. But, from retreat
Cut off, I still can rush upon the foe;
And bold shall be the arm that lays me low,

(40) Elliott - They Met Again Book II (Works 1840
p. 39)

Whilst there is nothing intrinsically undramatic or ineffective about a dramatic monologue format, with or without a silent interlocutor, more skill is needed by Elliott here. His purpose would have been better served had he used two way dialogue with one character trying to justify his actions. Instead we are left with what is at times a discourse on love and at others a lament. Elliott uses two contradictory methods, one psychological and the other outward and what is needed is an external conflict. In this particular extract he details in elaborate and often exclamatory terms why he is a rebel and one feels that in his later verse Elliott would not have missed the political opportunities here.

From the point of view of its purpose alone, these verses can be placed at a midpoint between the eighteenth century and its liking for descriptive and often satirical verse which was oriented toward moral didacticism and the frequent occurrence in early nineteenth century narrative verse of newly perceived moral dilemmas which raised questions rather than provided answers. The Romantic Period saw a growth in poetic stories, often with adventurous narrative reflecting social problems and attitudes. Within this it was possible to minimize the naturalistic function of the poem in order to employ it to express a philosophical position. Elliott in choosing his

own historical, distanced settings divorced his verse from naturalistic settings and it was not until he moved to the poetry to be considered in the next chapter that he successfully achieved a descriptive realism which simplified his characterizations and made his images clear and precise, thus giving his portrayal of the complex relation between individual and society a greater depth.

However, such stories could not successfully convey highly individualized characters and the abrupt shifts from one situation to another, so often a feature of Elliott's verse, preclude any exploration of complex motives as both cruelty and the supernatural are taken for granted.

The verses from the 1823 volume are certainly interesting in the context of Elliott's development as a poet. They brought him little recognition probably for the reasons considered, some of which are succinctly alluded to here in a contemporary review.

...His delineation of intense passion ...
often deserves high praise, though it appears
to us that at times, not satisfied with the
suggestion of his own natural talents, he (41)
works himself up to a false excitement, and
by too great anxiety to produce effect, falls
into extravagance ...

(41) New Monthly Magazine Vol III 1830 quoted in
Seary Ph.D. thesis op.cit.

Before concluding it is useful to summarize the weaknesses of the earlier volumes. Up to this point the extracts, though long themselves, have been taken from much longer narrative pieces and in order to more fully indicate the points of debate the final eighty lines of The Letter are reproduced here.

For the last time, like one risen from the
tomb,
She raised her feeble form: a transient bloom
Flush'd her fall'n cheek: with intermitting
breath
She bent toward the messengers of death,
As shipwreck'd seamen listen t'wards the
land.
She held, stretch'd forth, her agitated hand,
Expecting, not believing, propp'd in bed
One one lean arm, but less in hope than
dread;
With feeble shriek, she fell and tried to
rise:
And strain'd the letter to her sightless
eyes, (10)
And kiss'd it o'er and o'er. But when she
heard
The written words, she lay like death, nor
stirr'd,
Grey tress, or wasted limb. "He told of
flocks
With fleeces fine, and goatherds of the rocks,
And Spain's fandango, and the soft guitar,
That sounds o'er treeless wastes to love's
bright star,
Calling the hind when day's warm task is done,
To meet the dark-eyed daughters of the sun.
He told of bayonets blood-incarnadined,
Of distant battles booming on the wind, (20)
Of foodless marches, and the all-day fight,
And horrid rest among the dead at night.
Last named he servile servants of base ends,
But call'd by him his dear and absent
friends;"
For they had pamper'd oft his mind diseased,
Fed on his riot, and with poison pleased.
And was this all? was there no postscript? -
No:
Named he not that dark flower inscribed with
woe?
Stern manhood, break thy sword, and blush for
shame
He did not even write his Anna's name! (30)

With harrow'd heart that could be still
 and bleed,
 She listen'd when the reader ceased to read.
 In silent strength grief tore her soul's
 deep chords:
 Oh, what had wrongs like hers to do with
 words?
 And all who saw her wept at what they saw.
 Serenely pale, while all around her wept,
 She slept - she sleeps; but light shall
 yet arise,
 Th' eternal day-spring, on her sightless eyes;
 And Mercy yet may purify with pain
 That wretch beloved, and bid them meet
 again! (40)

He, when the trump of war had blown its last,
 Sigh'd and look'd back, repentant, on the
 past.
 In pale inaction, languid, he declined,
 And with the body sympathized the mind.
 Long-slumbering feeling waked, and waked to
 woe,
 Stung by remorse, the never-flattering foe, (42)
 That triumph'd o'er his maim'd and toil-worn
 frame,
 As o'er the storm-struck ash the conquering
 flame.
 He thought of home, resolved to sin no more. (50)
 So the poor Hebrew, long content to roam,
 The homeless wanderer, seeks at last a home;
 Quits the tall bark, and treads the hallow'd
 strand,
 His aged consort leaning on his hand,
 Sedately glad, though tears bedim his eye,
 To lay his bones where Abraham's ashes lie.
 He climb'd the homeward ship, and blamed the
 wind,
 And blamed the waves, that seem'd to lag
 behind
 The bounding stern; till England, like a
 cloud,
 Dawn'd on the sight, where Heaven to ocean
 bow'd. (60)
 He leap'd to land; and, wing'd o'er Snowgate's
 fern,
 Beheld again the valley of the Dearn,
 Cragg'd Hartley's broom, and Breton's shades
 below,
 And Clayton's cottage-smoke ascending slow.
 Down, down he hasten'd, pleas'd almost to
 pain,
 And felt as if become a boy again.
 Then fled the dream. Beside her cottage-door,
 Remember'd well for pranks play'd there of
 yore,

(42) Elliott - The Letter lines 207 to 287 (Works 1840
 pps. 35-6)

He met a woman, lame and bent, whose breast
 Had pillow'd Anna's infant cares to rest - (70)
 One who had taught him many a childish game.
 But when he paused, and ask'd that aged dame,
 In tones that told the sudden dread he felt,
 Not if his Anna lived, but where she dwelt,
 Back shrank the crone, as from a thing
 abhorr'd;
 Then slowly forth she drew, without a word,
 The brooch which, erst, his ill-starr'd Anna
 wore;
 And, with a look that pierced him to the
 core,
 Placed in his hand (and turn'd abrupt away)
 A lock of faded hair, too early grey! (80)

The unsuccessful characterizations are continued here as it is even more difficult now to believe in the feeble impoverished dying Anna or the heartless distressed Charles whose repentance comes too late. These characters are used then, merely as representations of the emotions which they convey. In many ways this extract is typical of Elliott's verse at the time with its insufficient focus on one theme at a time; its imbalanced pathos; the use of questions; its clauses of inordinate meaning and the affection of certain phrases, 'foodless marches' (21), harrow'd heart (31), 'never flattering' (46) and 'sedately glad though tears bedim his eye' (55).

In his use of 'blood-incarnadined' (19) Elliott draws directly from Shakespeare in an attempt to write the relating of the tale by the returned lover on an elevated level. The imagery of 'Spain's fandango' (13) and 'booming battles' (20) support this exotic contrast to the sufferings of the dying girl who has waited in vain.

Similarly there is the placing of emotive description before naturalism particularly in that of Charles' remorse: the reliance of the syntax, particularly through compound adjectives, and the diction of received poetry, and finally the way the symbol of travel finds its conclusion once more in setting of locality. The climax of the tale fails to realize its dramatic potential, lapsing instead into a weak image of the wronged wife.

In concluding it is possible to draw on this body of verse for any analysis of the later narrative. This aspect of Elliott's verse was certainly derivative in its idioms, structure, diction, format and subject, but it is possible to determine elements which look forward to his more successful verse and are themselves indicative of his development. What was needed was a tightening of his subject into one which he was more capable of handling. Here a retrospective view alludes to this, and is also interesting for its emphasis on the provincial, non establishment nature of his verse, pointing to the utilitarian impetus so important to Elliott's political productions.

His subjects, too, though they seem to have strongly possessed himself, lacked popular interest; and poetry in these utilitarian days will hardly recommend itself. "Is it good?" is not the question - but "What is it about?" Elliott found out this truth afterwards. In the meanwhile he went on as

(43)

(43) Watkins op.cit. Chapter 4

he had begun, writing on subjects which interested his own very powerful sensibilities, and, of course, excelling in them; but they were rather of a hackneyed nature; and though he treated them with great originality, they lacked the charm which soonest arrests the public ear - the charm of novelty.

Elliott took no means to make himself popular beyond legitimate merit. He resorted to no tricks. He belonged to no clique or coterie. He was a provincial poet, and stood aloof from the literary world, and independent of it. He knew that a clique reputation, though it may buoy up a writer into sudden notice, is not a public reputation, and that true fame, to be lasting, must be of slow growth.

The lack of polish evident in his work could conceivably have resulted from his lack of classical literary grounding yet to repeat the conclusions of the chapter on the Corn Law Rhymes, the coarse, bitter nature of much of his verse with their sincerity and passion are what gives his work their original edge. Elliott certainly did not consider himself unlettered though, here outlining the way he used poetry to educate himself from humble beginnings to succeed in realizing the potential of a new meaning and purpose in verse as a fount of social revolution.

There are only two lines in my writings which could enable the reader to guess at my condition in life. As a literary man, I claim to be self-taught; not because none of my teachers ever read to me, or required me to read a page of English Grammar; but because I have of my own will read some of the best books in our language, original and translated, and the best only - laboriously forming my mind on the highest models. If unlettered

(44)

(44) Elliott - Autobiographical Memoir op.cit.

women and even children write good poetry, I, who have studied and practised the art during more than forty years, ought to understand it, or I must be a dunce indeed.

In one of his lectures he pointed to the edifying elements in self education, using his authoritarian position in an attempt to influence those from a similar background to his own.

The dullest mechanic, by merely reading what is excellent in our language - the masterpieces alone - might, in a few months, become allied to the highest minds, a co-partner in excellence; and, if thought is eternal; a shareholder with immortality. Think of this, Young Men! for you cannot win the race of knowledge (which is virtue) by lagging behind the age in which you live; and if you cannot answer Time - the great questioner here - how will you answer God, when he asks you, not if you won the race, but why, you stood still? (45)

The formative influences of his earlier narratives were allied in the later ones to an attempt to describe the condition of human existence in terms of what he had himself perceived, endorsing Wordsworth's theory in

What then does the poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and reacting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions. (46)

(45) Elliott - A Lecture on Cowper and Burns, the two Earliest Great Poets of the Modern School - written for the Sheffield Mechanics' Institution - printed in More Verse and Prose Vol 2 p. 193.

(46) Wordsworth - Lyrical Ballads - preface (1801)

The success of this perception of alienation was manifested in Elliott's verse through his awareness of the causality of such a state and the resultant transition of passion into an absolute. Indeed even contemporary regret for the coarseness and attack inherent in Elliott's political verse recognizes 'passionate inspiration'.

Political poetry, however, is the fortè of Elliott. By political poetry his name became famous. Politics still form his passport of recommendation to a great number of readers. But he did not study politics in the serener airs of humanity - he studied the science only by the light of Sheffield fires. It is sad, we must hold it to be so, when minds, more than ordinarily gifted and fitted to utter the all-sublime words of prophecy, in poetry or painting, to sketch the visions of the future, and pour out their words in passionate inspiration, to give motives to the Children of Humanity to travel in the pathway of Truth and Righteousness; it is sad when, of all men, such men soil their pages by the language of personal abuse.

(47)

It was this new found mode which was to move Elliott into a further use for his narrative verse, in the ostensibly political and social writing of The Village Patriarch and The Ranter. This new purpose then was in 'impassioned truth' realized through the explicit utility of the medium of poetry.

The poets of our times, then, have indeed a prospect of glorious usefulness before them, whether they write in prose or verse. Oh, that I might live to be the author of some great prose epic, which, though immortal itself, might survive long enough to be in its consequences a river of fertility,

(48)

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- (47) Paxton Hood - op.cit. - Chapter 6 'The Men of Iron'
(48) Elliott - Lecture on the Poets who succeeded Milton and preceded Cowper and Burns - printed in More Verse and Prose Vol 2 p. 188.

influencing beneficially unborn generations of men! Who would not be one of the Legion of Immortals, though frail as the flower of the field, yet eternal in their usefulness?

These attempts to re-examine and re-define found voice in the debate on the principles of poetic theory and here direct reference is made to Elliott's own theories.

Thus far our progress towards a clear view of the essentials of poetry has brought us very close to the last two attempts at a definition of poetry which we happen to have seen in print, both of them by poets and men of genius. The one is by Ebenezer Elliott, the author of Corn Law Rhymes, and other poems of still greater merit. 'Poetry,' says he, 'is impassioned truth.' The other is by a writer in Blackwood's Magazine, and comes, we think, still nearer the mark. He defines poetry, 'man's thoughts tinged by his feelings.' There is in either definition a near approximation to what we are in search of. Every impression, which can enter into his consciousness, may become poetry when shown through any impassioned medium, when invested with the colouring of joy, or grief, or pity, or affection, or admiration, or reverence, or awe, or even hatred or terror: and, unless so coloured, nothing, be it as interesting as it may, is poetry.

(49)

An indication of what was to follow can be found in the tales under discussion here as despite the faults of strained, unnatural Gothic language and the contrived received syntax of the verse Elliott chooses not the Romantic Gothic past of chivalry, superstition and medievalism that gives it its inspiration and excuse for the irrational, but times of civil war and settings not of German forests but American ones. His temporal

(49) J. S. Mill - What is Poetry? (1830)

location of the tales in the seventeenth century or in the days of the early Colonists or at the time of rural and urban transition suit his purpose admirably. Its influence was revealed in his autobiographical memoir, where he writes of his father, who,

used to preach every fourth Sunday to persons who came from distances of twelve and fourteen miles to hear his tremendous doctrines of ultra-Calvinism (he called himself Bercan), and hell hung round with span-long children! On other days, pointing to the aquatint pictures on the walls, he delighted to declaim on the virtues of slandered Cromwell, and of Washington the rebel; or, shaking his sides with laughter, explained the glories of "The glorious victory of His Majesty's forces over the Rebels at Bunker's Hill!" Here the reader has a key which will unlock all my future politics. (50)

His didactic, moral or political intent is therefore given resonance as it is set in periods when the rights of the individual's liberty were of paramount importance.

His interest in this sort of story is not as a vehicle for exploring the dark areas of the consciousness; despite his assertion of inspirational poeticism, but for something far more literal, an exploration of the darker areas of the social organization. This purpose, he shares in a way with Wordsworth, and Coleridge tried to combine it with horror and supernaturalism, but they did not have his view. He may not be a subtle craftsman but is positive in that he is informed, his engagement with the modern world is unique in many ways.

(50) Elliott - Autobiographical Memoir op.cit.

The distinction is important between fiction and truth, mere story and feeling derived from reality.

Many of the greatest poems are in the form of fictitious narratives, and in almost all good serious fictions there is true poetry. But there is a radical distinction between the interest felt in a story as such, and the interest excited by poetry; for the one is derived from incident, the other from the representation of feeling. In one, the source of the emotion excited is the exhibition of a state or states of human sensibility; in the other of a series of states of mere outward circumstances. (51)

These doctrines were applied more successfully in The Village Patriarch, as Elliott located his search for his own perception of human sensibility in a view of man in his environment based on the more concrete values of humanitarianism and concern.

(51) J. S. Mill op.cit.

LATER NARRATIVE - 'THE VILLAGE PATRIARCH'

This chapter will consider Elliott's more successful use of the narrative mode by extending the themes developed in his earlier narratives, and considered in the previous chapter. To achieve this, discussion will be based on the poet's longest work The Village Patriarch published in 1829, but which received fuller recognition following the success of Corn Law Rhymes of 1830. To respond to the poem fully we need to be aware of something of the social background which gives rise to it, and the literary context in which it was written, and also to see it in relation to Elliott's poetic development. In attempting to do the latter a close reading of the text itself will be undertaken as well as reference to contemporary poetry and criticism and to reaction to the poem itself, all of which help to establish more fully the context in which Elliott was writing.

The poem takes the form of a series of incidental stories, whose essence is an attack on the Corn Laws, but which are centred round the figure of the patriarch himself, blind old Enoch Wray, through whom Elliott's description of the conditions of the poor and the exposure of distress through the recall of a happier past is conveyed. The composition of the poem sets immediate problems for an analysis of Elliott's narrative art. Its ten books, each themselves divided into stanzaic paragraphs, comprise

some hundred and twenty pages of the 1876 volume of his work and the poem is not bound together by any thread of incident, deriving any unity it may have from the constant appearance of Enoch Wray, the Patriarch. This was noted by Elliott's biographer.

The longest but not the best of Ebenezer Elliott's poems, is "The Village Patriarch." It can scarcely be called a poem - it is a string of poetic passages, each a little poem in itself, but which have little connexion with each other, except what Enoch Wray, the Village Patriarch, gives them by being made the peg on which this bundle of desultory descriptions hang. (1)

Although the poem was Elliott's first overtly political production the predominant interest here is not in those sections which border on political tract but more specifically in how the poet's doctrine of impassioned truth and the utility of verse was located through the use of a naturalistic narrative; in a portrayal of misery through indignation. His method of achieving this is perhaps best indicated by his use of the type of chapter summary more usually associated with the eighteenth century novel, before each of the sections of the poem. Here in the contents of Books III and V of the poem, the desultory nature of what often appear as vignettes or an album of dis-associated photographs can be seen.

(1) Watkins, John - The Life, Poetry and Letters of Ebenezer Elliott - (1850) Chapter V p. 107

Book III - Comparative Independence of Skilled Labour - Fine Sabbath Morning - Sunday Stroll of the Townsmen - Coach race - Misery and Misfortunes of the Poor - Congregation leaving the Village Church - Old Youth working in the Town - Poacher of the Manufacturing Districts - Concluding Reflections.

(2)

Book V - An Excursion with Enoch Wray to the Mountains - Beautiful Winter Morning - Rivers of Hallamshire - Short Lived Grinder contrasted with the Patriarch - The Moors - Mountain Bee - Enfeebled Snake - Lost Lad - The Desert, a fit Abode for Spirits - Christ's Love of Solitude - Reflections, suggested by the Desolation of the Scene.

As can be envisaged from the above, the problem of continuity, so evident in his early narratives, lies not within the stanzas themselves, because here they form self contained units of thought. However by the lack of a consistent thread of plot, the poet creates difficulties for himself of both coherency and effectiveness, as his common fault of attempting to mix rhetoric with description often precludes a fluent narrative. Elliott's verse suffers from its varying quality and proneness to purple passages which are easier to evaluate out of their context. This is nowhere better shown than here in The Village Patriarch, although the particular reason for concentrating on extracts in this chapter is not in order to highlight this fault, but because such a procedure renders the poem more accessible and comprehensible. In a poem as long as the one in question, the need to sustain the reader's attention is paramount and consideration of this is based on Elliott's failure to do

(2) The Village Patriarch (1829) - Books III and V - contents. Works 1840 pps. 60 and 63.

NB - The title of the poem will be abbreviated to V.P. from now on. All page references are to the 1840 edition of Elliott's Poetical Works.

so by the composition of the verse, but his attempts to succeed elsewhere. The theme of the poem is a serious one and the reader is, as will be seen, totally convinced of Elliott's sincerity and authority, as the realistic tone of his narrative, however intermittent sees him drawing from experience, to underline the detrimental effect of the Corn Laws.

The format of The Village Patriarch is a mixture of eighteenth century and romantic literary genres. The actual method of storytelling, whereby description remains on a basic level, as often does any unity of time and action, is reminiscent of the fast moving, inclusive narrative of the early novels. Here with the addition of syntax suited to verse movement where adjectives often follow nouns, the tale assumes almost a Chaucerian vigour and gaiety.

Far to the left where streams disparted flow,
Rude as his home of granite, dark and cold,
In ancient days, beneath the mountain's brow,
Dwelt, with his son, a widower poor and old.
Two steeds he had, whose manes and forelocks
bold

Comb ne'er had touch'd; and daily to the town
They dragg'd the rock, from moorland quarries
torn.

Years roll'd away. The son, to manhood grown,
Married his equal; and a boy was born,
Dear to the grandsire's heart. But pride, and
scorn

(3)

And avarice, fang'd the mother's small grey
eyes,

That dully shone, like studs of tarnish'd lead.
She poison'd soon her husband's mind with lies;
Soon nought remain'd to cheer the old man's
shed,

Save the sweet boy, that nightly shared his bed.
And worse days were at hand. The son defied
The father - seized his goods, his steeds, his
cart:

(3) Book V XI p. 67

Although failing to sustain it in places, Elliott's idea of basing events and thoughts around one central character who is far more fully developed than any other is based on the picaresque tradition of the eighteenth century novels of say Smollett or Fielding as indeed are the chapter introductions. However, such a method is rooted very clearly in the classical epic tradition, even if here on a homely rather than a grand scale.

The common features, a central figure of heroic calibre; perilous journeys; various misadventures; elements of the supernatural; repetition of fairly long passages of narrative or dialogue; long speeches and vivid and direct descriptions of the kind common in folk ballads are all to be found in some form. The elevated tone is not present, as here the hero like Virgil's is passive and the introspective stance of for example, Wordsworth's attempt at a Romantic epic in The Prelude is tried with varied success.

In his dedication of the Village Patriarch,⁽⁴⁾ Elliott refers to the poem as 'the incarnation of a century' and the potential of this was noted by contemporary criticism.

(4) To Henry Brougham, Esq. the Friend of the Poor, and the Champion of Education, as a humble Tribute of Respect and Gratitude for his efforts in the great cause of Humanity, this tale of Enoch Wray (the incarnation of a century) is dedicated by the Author.

The rhapsody of old Enoch Wray is in its nature and unconscious tendency, epic; a whole world lies shadowed in it, what we might call an inarticulate, half-audible epic. The main figure is a blind, aged man, himself a ruin, and encircled by the ruin of a whole era. Sad and great does that image of an Universal Desolation hover visible as a poetic background. Good Old Enoch! He could do so much, was so wise, so valiant!

(5)

Elliott's 'epic' is located here, as he uses his own figure of universal impetus for documentary, political and social purposes.

If these 'epic' traits are diffused within the narrative, then Elliott's attempted adherence to the progress form, which enumerates in defined stages the course of punishments attendant on a particular vice, is more blatant. Here though, Elliott takes the somewhat mechanical form and moves from any particular vice to incorporate a general attack on degradation, which is then imposed upon the individual's biography. Enoch's life details are applied to the narrative only in terms of how they relate to the overall theme or plan. Although never failing to realize the didactic potential of the progress form, Elliott's plan differs in that here, there is no social deterioration as Enoch Wray's position remains on one miserable level relieved only by his dignity in spite of it. In the following two examples, Elliott uses the character of Enoch to embody moral forces and principles. His actions are not separable from their system. By portraying the conflict of moral and political absolutes,

(5) Carlyle, Thomas - Edinburgh Review No 110(London 1831)- 'Corn Law Rhymes' reprinted in Carlyle - Selected Essays (Dent Dutton)

a dynamic process overcomes a static situation and the resultant actions are what gives his characterization depth.

Man, poor and blind, who liv'st in worse than
pain!
Where'er thou art, thou helpless, wingless
owl!
The worm, our eyeless sister, might disdain
Thee, subject to thy fellow's proud control.
But what a worm is he, the blind in soul,
Who makes, and hates, and tortures penury!
Ah! who shall teach him mercy's law sublime?
He who can sever wo and poverty,
Or pride and power, or poverty and crime;
He who can uninstruct the teacher, Time. (6)
Oh, yet erect, while all around are bow'd,
Let Enoch Wray's majestic pride remain,
A lone reproach, to sting the meanly proud,
And show their victims - not, perhaps, in vain -
What Britons have been, and may be again.
O Age and Blindness, why should you be pair'd?
O sisters three, worst fates, Want, Blindness,
Age!
Hope look'd from heav'n, beheld you, and des-
paired?
But now she rends her hair, in grief and rage.

Here Enoch Wray becomes a representation or even a representative of the false pride of Man and is lifted to this elevated status by being set amongst the personifications of 'Want, Blindness and Age' which appear like some modern version of the Greek gods, but here more specifically as the fates of a mighty Briton, giving Elliott's plea against the destruction of the past some depth, in that he has successfully created a human dimension in which to base it.

Similarly here, where a biblical introduction sets Enoch within a churchyard.

(6) V.P. Book II - V p. 59

Hark! - like a spirit preaching from the sky,
 "Repent ye, for the kingdom is at hand!"
 An iron voice - as if Eternity,
 Dethroning Time, sent forth his high command -
 Speaks to the awed heart of the silent land. (5)
 From yonder tower, time-darken'd, thunder-
 scarr'd,
 Still the deep toll is floating on the air;
 It calls our father to the lone churchyard;
 Ah, many, many of his friends are there!
 And Age, at five-score years, hath few to
 spare! (10)
 Thou antique Fane! that, in thy solemn suit
 Of carven flowers, and stone-embroidery
 grand,
 (Old, yet unshaken; eloquent, though mute,) (7)
 Tower'st like the sculptured guardian of the
 land
 Thy reverend looks what bosom can withstand, (15)
 And feel nor throb like love, nor chill like
 fear,
 Nor glow like adoration? The leaves fall
 Around thee - men fall with them; both are
 here
 While thou alike view'st bridal-robe and pall,
 Sovereign of marriage and of funeral! (20)
 Witness of Ages, and memorial hoar
 Of generations, to eternity

The iron voice of 'Eternity' (3) is greater than Time
 itself and our hero 'time darken'd, thunder-scarr'd
 (6) like the church tower, now becomes an embodiment of
 'Age', in communion with his lost friends. The falling
 of men like mere leaves is too seen as no defence
 against the passage of time. It is necessary for
 Elliott to create the embodiment of passing time in
 his presentation of Enoch Wray here, because otherwise
 the scene which follows would be even more melo-
 dramatically weak than it actually is.

V

Erect, like youth, stands this sepulchral stone:
 But what is youth? a flower; and life? a
 dream.
 Read! - for youth, life, the flower, the dream,
 are gone:

(7) V.P. Book X - III p. 78

Read! - "Death is life! I am not what I seem:
Think of poor Henry still! but rightly deem."

VI

The next is dateless; but, aged eighteen
years,
Died she, whom hardest hearts have ceased to
blame:
The kind still read her epitaph with tears: -
"Here rests a stranger - she had once a name:
Weep for the gentle dust that died of shame."

VII

They did not lay his bones where four roads
meet.
Although his crime was grief, which some called
pride,
Wrong not the wrong'd, who slumbers at thy
feet!
"Was Jones a coward? Honest, yet belied,
He was too brave to live disgraced, and died."

(8)

VIII

In yonder grave heaven's grateful debtor lies,
Struck blind in youth - old Shiloh Hollischart.
"The beam of beauty left his cheerful eyes,
To glow more deeply, brightly, in his heart."
Read, mortal! be instructed, and depart.

IX

Tears for the slander'd! tears - but shed too
late.
Come! if thou come to weep, traducer fell,
Whose slighted love hath done the work of hate!
But thou, perchance, hast yet more lies to
tell
Of her who loved but thee, and loved too well?

Enoch's pathetic scene in the churchyard is focussed upon by the poet as his method of retrospect is again to allow his hero in telling the tale, to become himself a representative of the past which the gravestones represent. Each five line verse includes one recollection or anecdote, the inscriptions themselves indicative of the manner in which the village members died. This simple narrative form is perhaps more successful in illustrating Elliott's purpose than the longer, often more ambiguous philosophical sections.

(8) V.P. Book X - V to IX p. 79

For Elliott's tale of an age to have the desired effect his descriptions had to be realistic and to have a naturalistic grounding. Elliott's originality here though, lies in the fact that his is based on and allied to local reference giving his own view of an idyllic past some subjective authority, and also particularizing Enoch's position within the panoramic canvas.

Then every mountain had a voice of flame;
Blue Kinderscout to starting Snailsden spoke,
And fiery speech from troubled Stanedge broke.
Tell, Enoch, yet again, of that huge tree,
Old as the hills; that tree to whose broad
shade
Your herds were driv'n, when age and infancy, (9)
The thoughtful matron, and the weeping maid,
Fled through the gloom where lonest Rivilin
stray'd.
Speak of the cellar and the friendly well
In which thy mother, trembling, hid her plate;
The ancient cup, whose maker none can tell;
The massive tankard used on days of state .

The poet also has an ability to place Enoch's wanderings historically within their setting and then to move from the general to the particular.

Forge! - built by him, against the ash-crown'd
rock,
And now with ivy grown, a tussock'd mound -
Where oft himself, beneath the hammer's shock
Drew forth the welded steel, bright, blue, and
sound!
Vale of the stream-loved abbey, woodland-bound! (5)
Thou forest of the Druids! O thou stone,
That once wast worshipp'd! - pillar of the past
On which he lean'd amid the waste alone!
Scorner of change! thou listenest to the blast
Unmoved as death; but Enoch travels fast. (10)
Thatch'd alehouse, still yclept the Sickles
cross'd!
Where died his club of poverty and age -
Worst blow of all! where oft the blacksmith
toss'd (10)
His truth-deciding coin; and, red with rage,

(9) V.P. Book II - IX p. 60
(10) V.P. Book IX - VII p.76

The never-silenced barber wont engage (15)
 In argument with Enoch! Fountain dim,
 In which his boyhood quench'd the sultry beam!
 School, where crown'd monarchs might have
 learn'd of him
 Who sway'd it, how to reigh! Cloud-cradled
 stream,
 That in his soul art eloquent as a dream! (20)
 Path-pencill'd hill, now clad in broomy light!
 Where oft in youth he waked the violets cold. .

Here the recall of the alehouse, in turn, recalls three local village characters. The archaic usage of 'yclept' (11) and the compound epithets 'cloud cradled' (19), and 'path-pencilled' (21), are of note here and indeed become trademarks of Elliott's descriptive writing. So in moving from the forge through the valley and its ancient abbey, the alehouse and the school, Elliott returns again to the stream and hill in relation to which, they are located.

Finally here in reference to the setting of his protagonist's wanderings, Elliott can alternate his landscapes between foreground and background, as here where majestic proportions are achieved in his laudatory evocation of the moors, his direct address personifying their grandeur,

The moors - all hail! Ye changeless, ye sublime,
 That seldom hear a voice, save that of Heav'n!
 Scorners of chance, and fate, and death, and
 time,
 But not of Him, whose viewless hand hath riv'n
 The chasm, through which the mountain stream
 is driv'n!
 How like a prostrate giant - not in sleep, (11)
 But listening to his beating heart - ye lie!
 With winds and clouds dread harmony ye keep;
 Ye seem alone beneath the boundless sky;
 Ye speak, are mute - and there is no reply!

(11) V.P. Book V - VI p. 66

In drawing on eighteenth century sources for the particular narrative nature of his verse, Elliott's Village Patriarch, through its union between lyric and social criticism and its attempted link between meditation and description draws on Romantic verse, appearing almost as a diluted Childe Harold. In using this adjective the implication is that, in taking as his theme the individual alienated from his civilization, trying to find peace and security within himself, Byron's work is more fully developed, his ironic, disenchanted mood enriched with exotic scenes and sensational events. Elliott could well have been influenced by the poem, finished in 1818, and Byron's influence on the 'poets of the poor' has already been noted. (12) Byron's hero is described in powerful terms (13) and his despair filled wanderings are similar to Elliott's, though differing in the former's richer similes and images. The vital difference is that in Childe Harold the protagonist is set apart from his society whereas Enoch Wray is purported to be typical, an epitome of the age. An interest in the subjective, emotional aspects of human life and a concern with the problems of individual personality as part of an organic whole is something which can be associated with both poets here, even if Elliott's perception is too often clouded in political dogma. Perhaps the aims of the 'worker' and the aristocrat though, were not as dissimilar as they may first appear.

(12) Collins, Philip - 'Byron, Cooper and the Poets of the Poor' - Univ. Nottingham (1976).

(13) cf. Byron - Childe Harold (1818) XV and XVI

Elliott's writing may well be structurally feeble, his inorganic presentation of characters resulting not only in this poem, but elsewhere in a society of separate individuals and not bound together as a social organism. However with his attempt at a portrayal of the complex relation between an individual and society he succeeds in evoking the social problems and attitudes of his age. Importantly, his approach to the individual is from the opposite point of view from that of, for example Byron, in that in Elliott's verse the individual is helplessly shaped by environment only able to preserve personal dignity passively.

He uses various methods to illustrate the relation of this observed individual to his society, and his powerful, abstract description is often allied to the anger and vehemence of the Corn Law Rhymes. In this extract his call to rebel against misery is powerfully written.

Assail the bondsmen, struggling to be free;
And strike for tyrants, destined, soon or late,
To thank our crimes, by which they reign, and
 be
Black vengeance to our hearths, and righteous
 fate.
But go! - no second spring can renovate (5)
Thy blighted soul. A moment, big with woe,
O'er thee hath roll'd another hundred years.
Go, to the cottage of thy childhood, go!
Where green, as in thy youth, the vale appears,
And Mary's love awaits her sire, in tears. (10)
Go to thy cottage - not with humbled look
And stealthy pace, a thing of guilt and fear!
But thou, alas, dependence canst not brook! (14)
E'en pity now is insult to thine ear;
Fall'n is thy crest, thy heart is cold and
 drear. (15)
Yet go thou to thy home, though daily there
Some little comfort is retrench'd

(14) V.P. Book IX - XI p. 78

The repetition of the imperative 'go' is a call to arms linking present with past as 'black vengeance' (4) relates to 'Mary's love' (10) and 'some little comfort' (17).

Here in the following we are given at once Enoch's and Elliott's voice, the personifications presenting a list of characters debating and cajoling, 'Want, Mercy, Hate, Constancy, Faction and Fraud'. Abstracts thus can become positive forces.

Hail, Desolation! Solitude! and, throned
On changeless rocks, Eternity! Look down,
And say, What see ye? - Want, that vainly
groan'd,
While Mercy gave him stones for food! The
frown
Of guilt, on minds and hearts, in ruins strown!
Hate, torturing Constancy, that loved too well!
Majestic things, in gnats that live an hour! (15)
Soul-bartering Faction, fain to buy or sell,
And 'spoused to Fraud, with kingdoms for a
dower!
Stand ye upon the earth? Heav'n hath no cloud
To be a carpet for your dismal feet.

One significant factor which shapes the format of the poem is the way that in places, Enoch's wanderings are not random but are directly shaped and guided by the participation of the poet within the narrative. His intrusion to make a direct verbal appeal to the protagonist has the effect of involving the reader quite specifically. We are often led, as if on a guided tour,⁽¹⁶⁾ the scenic surroundings given importance through the direction of our observations.

(15) V.P. Book V - XIV p. 68

(16) This guiding is perhaps provoked by Elliott's knowledge of Dante, in whose work, the descent into purgatory is too, seen in terms of the dramatic surroundings in which it is set.

Still dost thou weep, old man? The day is
 bright,
 And spring is near: come, take a youngster's
 arm;
 Come, let us wander where the flocks delight
 At noon to sun them, when the sun is warm;
 And visit them, beyond thy uncle's farm,
 The one-arch'd bridge - thy glory, and thy
 pride.
 Thy Parthenon, the triumph of thy skill; (17)
 Which still bestrides, and long it shall
 bestride,
 The discontented stream, from hill to hill,
 Laughing to scorn the moorland torrent still.

Indeed, the very purpose of the journey is didactic.

In order for the reader to learn from the experiences
 of the patriarch it is natural that any movement
 through a foreground should be tinged with some
 attempted clarification or explanation for the reader.

But he is storm-bound. To the marsh below,
 While squattering ducks descend, and, with
 pale beams,
 The hooded, ineffectual sun, through snow
 That fell all night, and still is falling,
 gleams,
 Like reason, struggling half awake, in dreams, (5)
 He hears the redbreast peck the frosted pane,
 Asking admittance to the warm fireside; (18)
 And - while o'er muffled ruts each cart and
 wain
 Moves without sound - he opes the casement
 wide
 To hail once more the guest he ne'er denied; (10)
 Then spreads his hands, to feel if yet the
 plumes
 Of heav'n are wavering in the noiseless air;
 Determined - when the burden'd sky resumes
 Its lucid azure, clear, and cold, and fair -
 Through paths of hidden peril to repair, (15)

Here the description of the sun is qualified by
 a series of clauses which in turn place Enoch's flinging
 open of worshipping arms to the 'plumes of heav'n'
 (11/12) in its context. The sky though burden'd (13)

(17) V.P. Book IV - VIII p.65

(18) V.P. Book VI - I p. 68

is also lucid clear and fair, the sun though 'hooded' and 'ineffectual' (3) gleams; the juxtaposition of human and natural qualities is completed.

The type of format and the method by which character is employed in The Village Patriarch can be seen to have its poetic models. In his preface to the poem as it first appeared Elliott admits the influence of both Wordsworth and Crabbe recalling that they had both written 'pauper poetry' before him. The difference he draws between the two writers in this context is an interesting one.

Wordsworth only meets his subject halfway, and with his hinder end towards it Crabbe, on the contrary takes his hideous mistress in his arms, and she rewards his confidence in her by telling him all her dreadful secrets. (19)

These statements can be seen to have a direct bearing on the construction and characterization in The Village Patriarch. Often the deliberate aim of Wordsworth's verse is to choose to observe men in their natural state, uncorrupted by the artificialities of civilization, "the condition in which the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity."⁽²⁰⁾ His poetry often focuses on particular characters, individuals; the old huntsman, the leech gatherer or the old Cumberland beggar. Relation to environment is, as with Elliott his preoccupation. In Resolution and Independence

(19) preface to Village Patriarch (1829)

(20) Wordsworth and Coleridge - Lyrical Ballads - preface (1801)

the persona of the poet meets on a moor an old leech-gatherer who is not only himself a natural object, so closely is he assimilated to his surroundings, but at the same time mediates between the natural world and the poet himself in such a way as to bring home to him the qualities of mind and character which are the fruit of the influence of natural objects.

The verses which describe the man,⁽²¹⁾ use the image of all three primeval elements, rock, sea and sun and even in reality the old man seems half way to being an inanimate object, with the simile within a simile of 'Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf of rock or sand repositeth.' (63) deliberately blurring the boundaries. The significance of the old man gradually penetrates the poet's mind as although old, poor and decrepit, he has both strength of mind and dignity. The poet's emphasis is not only on the imaginative truth of poetry but its general humanity, yet his observation remains detached in that he fails to realize why the man finds it difficult to communicate. Elliott, by choosing a known natural setting in which to base his characterization, takes his own emphasis on humanity a stage further, appearing to be personally concerned for the patriarch. Wordsworth, despite being personally involved in the poem, which is set into an account of his own state of mind seems not to comprehend and certainly does not fully know

(21) Wordsworth - Resolution and Independence
lines 50 - 75

the man yet Elliott's view is participatory and very subjectively placed. His characterization is based on an intimate experience, an association with the everyday, modern world.

In the following extract, the landscape is seen as friendly, offering a greeting to the old man.

Thou almost god-like in thy dignity!
Hark, how the glad rill welcomes thee with
pride!
We have been friends and neighbours five-score
years -
Father! the stream still loiters at thy side,
And still unchanged by envious time appears; (5)
Like human life, it flows, a stream of tears -
But not to pass, like human life, away.
What, though thy locks of venerable grey
Claim not with yon wild cliffs coeval date,
Yet, blind old man, shake hands with them, for
they (10)
Are dark like thee; and, by an equal fate,
They too, enduring long, shall perish late.
Thou see'st not Winco, in his dusky cap,
Lean'd on his elbow, as becomes his years,
With all the past beneath him, like a map, (15)
O'er which he bends and ruminates in tears;
But how like thee that woe-marked hill appears! (22)
Ye are not changeless, though ye long endure,
And Eld herself sees but what still hath been,
In him and thee. Nor art thou yet mature (20)
And ripe for death, but strong in age and
green,
And alter'd less than this pathetic scene.
The cottage, where thy sire and his were born,
Seems, as of old, a hillock in the vale:
But many a chink admits the breezy morn; (25)
Neglect long since divorced the jasmine pale
That clasp'd thy casement; and the sorrowing
gale
Sighs o'er the plot where erst thy choice
flowers bloom'd.
Ah! when the cottage garden runs to waste,
Full oft the rank weed tells of hopes entomb'd, (30)
And points at man, once proud, now scorn'd,
debased!
The dogs bark at him; and he moves, disgraced,
O'er wither'd joys which spring shall ne'er renew.

(22) V.P. Book II - II p.59

The loitering stream is used in a conventional way as a metaphor for life, but the distinctiveness of Elliott's perception comes with the 'venerable grey locks' (8) being paralleled with the enduring quality of the 'wild cliffs' (9). But, with the personification of the local hill of 'Winco' (13), Elliott juxtaposes the longevity and solid existence of the 'woe-marked hill' (17) with the blind old man himself by the use of the third person singular. Then by directly comparing the two he pursues Wordsworthian thinking by giving his subsequent portrayal of the 'pathetic scene' (22) of the cottage gone to waste, an authority. The desolate, forlorn scene is well drawn, the use of adjectives 'pale, sorrowing, entomb'd, scorn'd, debased and wither'd' being used as indicative of what has transpired.

Elliott admitted an indebtedness to the poetry of Crabbe and most commentators on the former have noted this, seeing Crabbe as the progenitor of Elliott's writing on political and social subjects.

L'influence de Crabbe sur Elliott est flagrante et Elliott ne s'en cache point. Dans sa préface à l'édition de 1833 du *Village Patriarch*, Elliott se dit "an unfortunate imitator of Crabbe." (23)
Mais c'est Crabbe, qui vivait encore au début des années trente (il avait ne d'écrire depuis une douzaine d'années), qui s'était attaché pour la première fois à une peinture de l'Angleterre indigente.

In The Village, (1783) Crabbe had written of village

(23) Journes, Hugues - La Litterature des Mouvements Chartiste - Univ. de Lyons - doctoral thesis - (1975)

life in all its squalor and vice, showing the drabness, cruelty, wretchedness and harshness of life, so suited to descriptive realism. (24) Crabbe's inner view avoids analysing motives and impulses, and is dependent on a variety of precisely observed details which build up a set of impressions as his couplets often take on the rhythm of a relentless series of cruelties.

Yet Elliott in possibly using The Village as a model and recognizing the picture as true to his experience, concentrated his poetic energy, through allying it to his politics on the causality, the very origin of these evils. One of his biographers highlighted the closer proximity and therefore greater sympathy to his cause, evident in Elliott's verse.

Elliott is a better painter of nature, because more sympathetic. Crabbe was an anatomist who laid bare the bones, and muscles, and nerves of the body politic; but feeling flies before him. He was an artist that used the stick end of his brush - a matter-of-fact poet, more head than heart. Being a clergyman, he was restrained from Elliott's freedom. He writes like a gaoler, or the keeper of an asylum, or a Poor-law guardian. His lines are cast, like cast-iron. (25) There is nothing utopian in him; he is hard and literal without mellowness of tint or tone. Crabbe enlightens the mind, but Elliott warms the heart. Crabbe possessed more knowledge of the world, and reasoned better, but felt less; Elliott is more eloquent, more oratorical. Crabbe was the physician, the lawyer - Elliott the friend.

Crabbe, striving for literal surface realism remained on that surface, whereas Elliott in probing deeper often sacrifices realistic detail by his too intense highlighting of causes because he can, quite naturally, never separate them from indignation.

(24) Crabbe, George - The Village (1783) lines 225 - 250

(25) Watkins, John - op.cit. Chapter V p.114.

After The Village Crabbe did not publish another major work for twenty four years. The Borough (1830) concentrates on stories of separate individuals. One of them, Peter Grimes, provides an interesting point of comparison with The Village Patriarch. It is a life history, what happened to a single man, but is far more concerned with the attitudes and activities of the community in which it occurs than is Elliott's writing. If the latter looks forward to the social novels of the eighteen forties, then Crabbe is rooted in Jane Austen's novels of community. Much of the tale is narration, Grimes observed by others, a tragic tale based on the townsfolk's changing reactions to him, first indifference, then his self justification, then, their outlawing of him and their final pity. Crabbe moves from the outside to the inner view in consecutive passages, first the citizen's cheerful indifference, then the boy's feelings, then Grimes's own.⁽²⁶⁾ This depth of characterization and the perceptions which arise from it are to be found nowhere in Elliott's verse. In the poem under consideration, Enoch Wray is never observed by other characters, only by the omniscient poet, and the character remains a medium through which ideas, emotions and the poet's voice of protest are expressed.

The Village Patriarch is primarily a tale of Man in his environment and Elliott succeeds in maintaining varying perspectives through which to perceive this

(26) c.f. Crabbe, The Borough (1830) 'Peter Grimes' lines 70 - 95.

relationship. One of the main preconceptions in which a poem such as this is rooted is in the importance of a naturalistic perception. The events and actions which Enoch Wray experiences and undergoes need to be based on actuality or reality in order to endorse his and Elliott's overt message. In his autobiographical memoir, the poet wrote,

There is not in my writings one good idea that has not been suggested to me by some real occurrence, or by some object actually before my eyes, or by some remembered object or occurrence, or by the thoughts of other men, heard or read. If I possess any power at all allied to genius, it is that of making other men's thoughts suggest thoughts to me which, whether original or not, are to me new. (27)

There are various ways for Elliott to achieve this verisimilitude and these are best considered in relation to his characterization. Here, is a scene, reminiscent of the street scene described in the chapter on industrialism.

The bell strikes twelve. The ancient house of prayer
Pours forth its congregated youth and age;
The rich, the poor, the gay, the sad, are there;
And some go thence, who, in their hearts, presage
That one week more will end their pilgrimage.
First, in all haste, comes busy Bolus, croose
As bantam cock, and neat as horse fresh poll'd.
Then boys, all glad, as bottled wasps let loose,
Clapping their hands because their toes are cold.
Then the new Squire (more dreaded than the old) (28)
Raised from the milk-cart by his uncle's will -
A Norfolk farmer he, who loved his joke,
At tax-worn tradesmen aim'd, with practised skill;
For, scorning trade, he throve, while traders broke,

(27) Elliott - Autobiographical Memoir (1841) op.cit.
(28) V.P. Book III - VI p.62

And did not care a straw for Mister Coke.
Next, lo! the monarch of the village school,
Slow Jedediah comes, not yet the last.
Well can he bear the blame for stubborn fool;
Meekly he bows to yeoman, stumping past,
While Bolus, yet in sight, seems travelling
fast.
Thou, Jedediah, learned wight, know'st well
Why rush the younglings from the porch with glee.

It contains all the elements of a narrative of community, its inspiration and movement obviously owing a great deal to Crabbe. However, the asides and the snipes at Corn Law doctrines are most certainly Elliott's own. The ancient names of the participants and their terms of reference in country life place the extract in the rural past, supplementing pastoral vitality and naivety with omniscient, intrusive comment.

Similarly here, verisimilitude is reached by the insertion of the vignette of a coach race. It comes as a light hearted digression from the consistently miserable tone of the narrative, yet Elliott still finds room for a little social criticism as he exposes the cruelty to the horses which participate. Here then, he writes with precision about actual, lively events.

They come, they come! behold, hark! - thundering
down,
Two headlong coaches urge the dreadful race;
Wo to outsiders, should they be o'erthrown!
Be ready, Doctor, if they break a trace!
Twelve miles an hour - well done; a glorious
pace!
Poor horses, how they pant, and smoke, and
strain!
What then? our jails are full, and England
thrives.

(29)

Now, Bomb! now, Bomb! Defiance lends again;
Hurrah! Bill Breakneck or the Devil drives!
Whip! - populous England need not care for
lives.

O blessed Sabbath! to the coach-horse thou
Bringest no pause from daily toil. For him
There is no day of rest. The laws allow
His ever-batter'd hoof, and anguish'd limb,
Till, death-struck, flash his brain with dizzy
swim,
Lo, while his nostrils flame, and, torture-
scor'd,
Quivers his flank beneath the ruthless goad,
Stretch'd, on his neck each vein swells, like
a cord!
Hark! what a groan! The mute pedestrian,
aw'd,
Stops - while the steed sinks on the reeling
road,
Murder'd by hands that know not how to spare!

Often a perspective is achieved by the locating of a particular natural scene which is then set by extending it to a wider panoramic view. His descriptive technique may then be to place Enoch Wray within this landscape and to see him existing in a symbiotic relationship with the natural surroundings in much the same way as the artisan escaping from the town seen in his industrial verse. Occasionally Elliott observes the central character in a picaresque way in terms of his actions and movements or alternatively allowing him to actually relate events in the first person.

To consider these perceptions more fully, the verse itself should be considered. Here in the opening three stanzas of the poem Elliott is scene painting, evoking an ominous winter scene.

Through fiery haze broad glares the angry sun;
The travell'd road returns an iron sound;
Rings in the frosty air the murderous gun;
The fieldfare dies; and heavy to the ground,

Shot in weak flight, the partridge falls -
 his wound (5)
 Purpling with scatter'd drops the crusted
 snow.
 Loud thumps the forge; bright burns the
 cottage fire,
 From which the tilter's lad is loth to go;
 Well pleased the tramper sees the smoke
 aspire;
 High flies the swan; each wild strange bird (10)
 is shyer,
 And, terror-taught, suspects hill, vale, and
 plain.
 Our poor blind father grasps his staff again -
 O Heav'n! protect him on his way alone!
 Of things familiar to him, what remain? (30)
 The very road is changed; his friends, the
 stone (15)
 On which he went to sit and rest, is gone;
 And ill the aged blind can spare a friend!
 III
 How lone is he, who, blind and near his end,
 Seeks old acquaintance in a stone or tree!
 All feeling and no sight! O let him spend (20)
 The gloaming hour in chat with memory!
 Nor start from dreams to curse reality,
 And friends more hard and cold than trees
 and stones!

Immediately 'glares, fiery and angry' (1) suggest
 all is not well. The ice on the road hardens the sur-
 face and the metaphor is extended to the gun which in
 the hands of the oppressor becomes a murder weapon
 destroying and disjuncting the products of nature.
 The contrast between the sun and frost is developed
 into one of colour now as the purple blood (6) is
 seen against the hard, white snow, and the brightness
 of the cottage fire with its homely, retaining quality.

What is perhaps Elliott's best piece of atmos-
 phere setting is concluded with the use of the words
 wild, strange, shy and terror (10/11) to indicate the
 disruption in the natural environment as the birds can

no longer feel safe in what normally would be as welcoming as the cottage fire is to the tilter's lad and the tramper. Having established this atmosphere, Elliott then places and introduces us to 'our poor blind father' (12), the use of the first person plural linking the reader to the protagonist.

The recurring theme of social transition is mentioned but here there is an added familiarity as stone and tree are friends to the man (15). He is old, decrepit, lonely and blind yet here, unlike the earlier narratives the pathos succeeds in that the man has not been taken out of context and made one dimensional with nothing behind a mere representation of character. Indeed, the opposite has happened, in that couched in terms of his natural surroundings and the unbalancing of normality of the first stanza, the reader can empathize to the extent that through our belief in the character's plight we provide a response for Elliott's rhetorical questions. Memory and dreams surpass reality which is harder and more cruel, with the double meaning here of 'gloaming hour' (21) as both twilight and the man's decline, bringing the successful opening stanzaic thought of the poem to an end.

The ABABB pentameter rhyme scheme used here is continued throughout the poem, the stanzas within each book, although of differing lengths being rhythmically connected by the repetition of the final rhyme of one stanza and the opening one of the next, here 'plain/again' (11/12) and 'friend/end' (17/18). The syntax

supports this scheme with lines often beginning with verbs or adverbs, 'rings, shot, purpling, loud, high, seeks'.

Elliott's method of closing in cinematically on a particular scene is used in this poem, notably in the portrayal of the Grinder drawing 'his laborious breath' already alluded to⁽³¹⁾ where not only the figure of the Patriarch is seen to be a constituent part of the landscape itself. There though of course, he has taken his perception a stage further in that he changes tone completely within the stanza from a topographical description of the rivers of Sheffield to highlight the vagaries of political combination.

Elliott's descriptive techniques, particularly connected with his use of a central character are of interest here in that his observation of Enoch Wray is in terms both of the natural surroundings and the past. Also throughout, Elliott's descriptions of Enoch, the fact that he is blind becomes increasingly important, in that by the withdrawal of one sense, his visionary and psychological perceptions are enhanced. Vision, dream and mental pictures gradually become the most common ways in which the reader learns the patriarch's and by extension the poet's thoughts. It is therefore to be expected that Elliott spends some of his space in such a long poem in analysing and assessing the nature of blindness. The figure of such

(31) c.f. this thesis - chapter 2 p.53

a blind, old man is used elsewhere in Elliott's verse, most often as a medium for his views on social change or politics, the poet obviously feeling that this gives his retrospective and often emotional responses an authority in that these realistically drawn characters are seen to have experienced and taken part in exactly what the poet is attacking. By an extension of this method he can simultaneously incorporate pathos into his characterizations.

In the following extract he moves from a realistic account of the patriarch reading through what purports to be a justification for his subsequent blindness, towards a spiritual level, throughout, the repetition of vocabulary connected with vision and the use of metaphor and comparison, relates Enoch's plight.

V

But thou no more shalt printed vision read,
Enoch! that dire perusal was thy last;
For, from thine eyeballs, with a spirit's
 speed,
Gone, and for ever, light and beauty pass'd.
Not that a horror and a woe too vast (5)
Had quench'd thy brilliant orbs: nor was
 thy doom

Like his - the bard who sang of Eden's bowers,
The bard of lofty thought, all fire and gloom,
All might and purity - whose awful powers,
Too darkly strong for organs frail as ours, (10)
Press'd on his visual nerve a pall-like
 night:

But God, who chastens whom he loves, ordain'd, (32)
Although thy frame was vigorous, thy step
 light,
Thy spirit like th' autumnal gale unrein'd -
That thine should be affliction, well sustain'd, (15)
To show the proud what humble worth can bear.

VI

Then hither, Pride, with tearless eyes repair!

(32) V.P. Book IV - V and VI pps. 64 and 65

Come, and learn wisdom from un murmuring
 woe,
 That, 'reft of early hope, yet scorns despair. (20)
 Still in his bosom light and beauty glow,
 Though darkness took him captive long ago.
 Nor is the man of five-score years alone:
 A heav'nly form, in pity, hovers near;
 He listens to a voice of tenderest tone, (25)
 Whose accents sweet the happy cannot hear;
 And, lo, he dashes from his cheek a tear,
 Caught by an angel shape, with tresses pale.
 He sees her, in his soul. How fix'd he
 stands!
 But, oh, can angels weep? Can grief prevail
 O'er spirits pure? She waves her thin, white (30)
 hands;
 And while her form recedes, her eye expands,
 Gazing on joys which he who seeks shall find.
 There is an eye that watches o'er the blind:
 He hath a friend - "not lost, but gone before" -
 Who left her image in his heart behind. (35)
 But when his hands, in darkness, trembled
 o'er
 Her lifeless features, and he heard no more
 The voice whose last tone bless'd him, frenzy
 came!
 Blindness on blindness! midnight thick and
 deep,
 Too heavy to be felt! - then pangs, like flame, (40)
 That sear'd the brain - sorrow that could not
 weep;
 Fever, that would have barter'd worlds for
 sleep!
 He had no tears, but those that inly pour,
 And scald the heart; no slumbers, but the
 doze
 That stuns the mourner who can hope no more; (45)
 But he had shudderings, stupor, nameless
 woes,
 Horror, which only he that suffers knows.

Even though the lexis results in exaggerated
 phrases, such as 'quenched thy brilliant orbs' (6)
 and 'on his visual nerve' (11) the tone is one of
 virtue rewarded. Rather like the didactic methodist
 tracts of the early nineteenth century, Elliott uses
 the justification of Enoch's blindness as being to

teach the proud, to point to the solace to be found in believing in God's work and the emphasis is on the infinite worth of the poor man's soul. This is simply but effectively personified in the visionary figure with 'tresses pale' (27) and 'thin white hands' (30), the angel-like friend of the afflicted. The reference to Milton (7-11) gives a specific example of 'greatness' by which the poet can judge his predicament; thus elevating Enoch's blindness by comparison. In this extract we see Elliott moving away from a real, spoken perception in order to convey the thoughts of his central character (35 to 50) even if the faults of repetition deter its complete success.

The following extract from another section of the poem has Enoch meeting a character from the village, a poet, and his tranquil blindness is evoked.

Lo! on a visit, mournfully he wends,
 To feel the dial, his acquaintance old;
 But, by the way, in pensive musing bends
 O'er ancient landmark, now half sunk in
 mould:

Shake hands, sad friends, for times are
 changed and cold! (5)

But, lo! he enters at the garden gate!
 Awhile in chat the rival poets stand:
 He feels the bench, where oft in youth he
 sate;

The shed, which, long ago, he built and
 plann'd; (10)

And now the dial is beneath his hand.
 Ah, the slow shadow, measuring the swift
 hours,

While his touch wanders o'er the figured
 plane, (33)

Baffles his patient finger's cunning powers!
 But man, the shadow, mocks grey Time in
 vain!

Dusky, we pass away; he laughs amain; (15)

(33) V.P. Book IX - VI p.76

His sportive trade it is to mow us down;
 He plays at death, and is industrious too!
 Thou dark and sorrowing mortal, yet unmown,
 Weep - but thy sun-clock, as of old is true!
 Oh, better weep than do as others do, (20)
 Whose eyes discredit all save what they see!
 But thou deny'st not beauty, colour, light;
 Full well thou know'st, that, all unseen by
 thee,
 The Vernal Spirit, in the valleys bright, (25)
 Is scattering diamonds over blossoms white.
 She, though she deign to walk, hath wings
 of gold
 And plumes all beauteous; while in leafing
 bower,
 The chrysalis, that ne'er did wing behold,
 Though born to glide in air o'er fruit and
 flower,
 Disproves the plum, the beauty, and the (30)
 power,
 And deems it quite impossible to fly.

His keen sense of touch and his memory are what sustain him against the rural decay, 'now half sunk in mould' (4). The tone is a calm yet mournful one and 'acquaintance old' (2) 'oft in youth' (8) and 'long ago' (9) all reveal the importance of the past in his musings. As he fingers the dial he is unable to see the 'slow shadow' (11) which becomes a double symbol for the passage of time and later, Man. Enoch, while able to use his 'cunning power' (13) to establish what time of day it is, is unable to notice the encroaching darkness. The shadow is not only slow, but insignificant against the power of 'Grey Time' (14), both destructive and industrious. By juxtaposition it is now almost the voice of the Patriarch which complains bitterly of Time's 'sportive trade' (16). Elliott uses the verb 'mow' (16) in a violent sense here, yet its sense of cultivation is not lost as he returns once more to the virtues of the old man's

senses, whose perception of beauty is enhanced in the poet's eyes as he, unable to see the detrimental passage of time can appreciate the brightness once known to him.

Elliott who even within this short extract has moved through idyllic, bright perceptions to dark, violent ones, by invoking now the 'Vernal Spirit' (24) moves to pastoral with 'valleys bright (20) 'blossoms white' (25) 'wings of gold' (26) and 'leafing bower' (27). Enoch has been used as the medium through which to perceive the past, and this perception is not complete until Elliott has contrasted the bright 'diamonds' (25) located within the rich vocabulary of fertility; with the chrysalis (28) indicative of nature's growth, yet here stultifying. So the poet's observation of his central character is taken to analytical proportions through a direct link with both natural and unnatural transition, provided by his juxtaposition of blindness, life, the past and growth.

Elliott attempts then, to incorporate his observation of man in environment within his narrative and in order to achieve this uses various methods. There are many passages where the poet identifies his character with the scenery of his locality, his pictures, characters, incidents and feelings are local and passages where he describes in some detail the flowers and trees around him.

The "Village Patriarch" would furnish many sweet passages illustrative of Elliott's love of flowers, and his intense and deeply-awed admiration of all the scenes of Nature;

and the knowledge procured in these glorious rambles we find photographed in Enoch Wray, the Village Patriarch. In the course of his stollings through all these various scenes, you find the old man is blind, but he has his attendants, and the old scenery is recalled of wonted rambles in the days of his youth; and in the course of the perusal it needs not that the scenery should have been visited. How graphic, as short and simple annals of the poor, are these; they are the scenery of a deserted village - not of Goldsmith's, but of our own day. Deserted from other causes than those which of old conspired to destroy the village life, and introduced the labour market of a new era.

(34)

Admittedly these passages tend to contribute to the rather desultory narrative thread, yet they are important to Elliott's technique. The floral descriptions assume a symbolic significance in their relation to man. In this extract, the mention of the flower to Enoch recalls people known to him and the rustic traditions in which they are rooted.

There is a flower - the housewife knows it
well -
A flower, which long hath graced the warm
hedge side
Of Enoch's dying neighbour, Andrew Gell;
Whose spleeny sire he pummell'd for his
pride,
Ere beauteous Mary Gold became a bride. (5)
It is the flower which (pious rustics say)
The virgin-mother on her bosom wore.
It hoards no dew-drop, like the cups of May,
But, rich as sunset, when the rain is o'er,
Spreads flamy petal from a burning core; (10)
Which, if morn weep, their sorrowing beams
upfold,
To wake and brighten, when bright noon is near.

(35)

(34) Paxton Hood - The Peerage of Poverty (1859)
op.cit. p.127

(35) V.P. Book IX - V p.76

And Enoch bends him o'er the marigold;
 He loves the plant, because its name is
 dear.
 But on the pale green stalks no flowers
 appear, (15)
 Albeit the future disc is growing fast.
 He feels each little bud with pleasing
 pain,
 And signs in sweet communion with the past;
 But never to his lip, or burning brain,
 The flower's cold softness shall he press
 again, (20)
 Murmuring his long-lost Mary's virgin name.

The colour and brightness of the flower spreading
 'flamy petal from a burning core' (10) is extended
 to a metaphor for sunlight in the next line which then
 reverts to reality with actual mention of both Enoch
 and the marigold itself, before taking on symbolic
 properties as his touch reveals the past. The use of
 the epithets 'pleasing, sweet, burning and cold' to
 describe 'pain, communion, brain' and softness'
 (16-20) bring to mind the ambiguity of what the flower
 represents to Enoch in that it recalls melancholy,
 lost thoughts, which bring both sadness and happiness.
 Of course, unlike the rocks like Enoch 'enduring long',
 the 'future disc' (16) of the growing plant is rep-
 resentative of the opening living flower and the pro-
 gress or defiance of nature.

In his criticism of The Village Patriarch, of
 importance to any student of Elliott's work, Carlyle
 wrote on the problems of characterization and its
 position within the narrative,

Old Enoch is from the first speechless, heard of
 rather than heard or seen; at best mere motion-
 less, like a stone pillar of his own carving.

Indeed, to find fit utterance for such meaning as lies struggling here, is a problem, to which the highest poetic minds may be content to accomplish only approximate conclusions. (36) Meanwhile the "Village Patriarch," though of an elegiac strain, is not wholly lachrymose, not without touches of rugged gaiety; it is like life itself with tear and toil, with laughter and rude play, such as metallurgic Yorkshire sees it.

In the following, unlike in the earlier narratives Elliott succeeds in harnessing the dramatic potential of the narrative and this is often most successfully achieved when the tale includes other characters. Here Enoch's recollections have brought to mind a tale of 'a widower, poor and old' who may well be Enoch himself, although we are never specifically told. His son marries but his wife is proud, scornful and avaricious, and she succeeds in poisoning the mind of her husband. Their son, attached to his grandfather is heartbroken when his father turns the old man out, and the boy refuses to leave the old man's side.

"The floor," he said, "is dry:
Let the poor boy sleep with me this one night."
"Nay," said the mother; and she twitch'd
awry

Her rabid lip; and dreadful was the sight,
When the dwarf'd vixen dash'd, with fiendish
spite, (5)

Her tiny fist into the old man's face;
While he, soft-hearted giant, sobb'd and wept.
But the child triumph'd! Rooted to the place, (37)

Clasping the aged knees, his hold he kept,
And once more in his grandsire's bosom slept. (10)

And nightly still, and every night the boy
Slept with his grandsire, on the rush-strewn
floor,

Till the old man forgot his wrongs, and joy
Revisited the cottage of the moor.

The description of the mother 'rabid' 'dwarf'd
vixen' and 'fiendish' (4/5) and her violence towards

(36) Carlyle - Edinburgh Review op.cit

(37) V.P. Book V - XI p.67

her father in law is vicious indeed and is contrasted with the 'soft hearted' warmth of the grandfather. The drama is here enforced by the subject with Elliott perfectly pitching his tone as the flow of the narrative is couched in Gothic vocabulary. This short tale within a tale continues with increasing effect.

But a sad night was darkening round his door:
The snow had melted silently away,
And, at the gloaming, ceased the all-day
rain;
But the child came not. Wherefore did he
stay?
The old man rose, nor long look'd forth in
vain; (5)
The stream was bellowing from the hills amain,
And screams were mingled with its sullen roar:
"The boy is in the burn," said he, dismay'd,
And rush'd forth, wild with anguish. From the
shore
He plunged; then, staggering, with both hands
display'd, (10)
Caught, screaming, at the boy, who shriek'd
for aid,
And sank and raised his hands, and rose, and
scream'd!
He leap'd; he struck o'er eddying foam; he
cast
His wilder'd glance o'er waves that yelp'd and
gleam'd;
And wrestled with the stream, that grasp'd
him fast, (15)
Like a bird struggling with a serpent vast. (38)
Still, as he miss'd his aim, more faintly
tried
The boy to scream; still down the torrent
went
The lessening cries; and soon, far off, they
died;
While o'er the waves, that still their boom
forth sent, (20)
Descended, coffin-black, the firmament.
Morn came: the boy return'd not: noon was
nigh;
And then the mother sought the hut in haste.
There sat the wretched man, with glaring eye;
And in his arms the lifeless child, embraced, (25)
Lay like a darkening snow-wreath on the waste.
"God curse thee, dog! what hast thou done?"
she cried,
And fiercely on his horrid eye-balls gazed:

Nor hand, nor voice, nor dreadful eyes replied;
 Still on the corpse he stared with head
 unraised: (30)
 But in his fix'd eyes light unnatural blazed,
 For Mind had left them, to return no more.
 Man of the wither'd heart-strings! is it well?
 Long in the grave hath slept the maniac hoar;
 But of the "lost lad" still the mountains
 tell, (35)
 When shriek the spirits of the hooded fell,
 And, many-voiced, comes down the foaming
 snow.

The narrative now reaches its dramatic peak and once again Elliott sets his action as if in a drama with his 'melting snow' and 'darkening night' given their full ominous impact with 'But the child came not' (4). The succession of verbs which follow speed up the line as the horror of the drowning boy is revealed. The use of some of these verbs is interesting in that as the boy's movements are controlled by those of the waves, so the division of the line into phrases, 'He plunged' (10), 'He leap'd' (13), 'he struck o'er eddying foam' (13) echoes this. 'Wither'd' (14) is an unusual usage, here losing its more usual suffix to fit with the rhythm and the pairing of 'yelp'd' and 'gleam'd' (14) in the same line, serves to show the power and almost bestial force of the waves which is then further endorsed by the simile two lines later. Then as the battle is won, the vocabulary assumes a negative tone with 'miss'd', 'faintly tried', 'lessening', 'far off', 'descended' and 'return'd not' (17-21). Finally the image of the old man embracing the dead child is a powerful one, particularly through the use of 'darkening snow wreath' (26). The use in four consecutive

lines of 'horrid eye balls', 'dreadful eyes', 'he stared' and 'fixed eyes' (26-31) endorses the poet's preoccupation with sight and its properties, although here they parallel the old man's vacant mind.

Elliott's writing in this type of verse is a successful development of the Gothic strain. It is tight yet unrestricted, his persistent use of similar vocabulary to endorse the emotions and feelings he is portraying succeeds in creating images, yet moving the narrative along at the chosen speed and impact.

So, in this poem Enoch Wray is described in varying ways in terms of the environment in which he lives, which in turn gives Elliott's characterization some depth. Often his attempt to achieve dramatic effect could have been improved by a more strict adherence to one central plot in place of several often unconnected separate stories. One of his biographers noted this eloquently, when writing of this poem.

Elliott's genius was too impulsive to submit to a regular plan; but this very tendency to the indulgence of wild self-will required all the more that he should have possessed the bridle-rein and guiding hand of art. His spur needed the curb. Unity of time, place, and action, there is none in his epic.

(39)

For example, the story of Hannah Wray, Enoch's daughter in law could quite easily be lifted out of the body of the poem and treated quite separately. It belongs to the whole in that it portrays misery, distress, and rural life and customs. Its plot, which

(39) Watkins op.cit. Chapter V p.108

could quite easily be derived from one of the tavern stories Elliott heard as a youth, can best be indicated by a glance at the contents.

BOOK VIII

CONTENTS

Ezra White unroofs the Cottage of Hannah Wray, the Widow of an imputed Poacher - He detects her and her Daughter in the Act of re-roofing their Cottage - He assaults the Mother, and is killed by the Daughter - Imprisonment, Trial, and Death of Hannah Wray. (40)

This improbable tale is again couched in vocabulary and syntax suited to the narrative movement. The introductory section which sets both scene and purpose has an interesting lexis which juxtaposes nature, freedom and restriction, looking forward to Elliott's Corn Law poetry, but here with a reluctant acceptance rather than vehemence.

Kind souls! ye jail the peasant, while ye
plough
The wild that loved to laugh around his home.
Where the broad common fed his father's cow,
And where himself, a fearless boy, could
roam
Unquestion'd, lo! the infant rivers foam (5)
No longer, through a paradise of fern!
Look how, like burden'd slaves, they steal (41)
through fields
That sullenly obey your mandate stern!
And how the tortured waste, reluctant yields
Corn bought with souls, while soulless avarice
builds (10)
His palace, rafter'd with iniquity!

The palace 'rafter'd with iniquity' (11) becomes
a symbol for the way even the free flowing rivers have

(40) V.P. Book VIII 'contents' p.73

(41) Ibid. I p.73

been industrially harnessed. Once again we return to drama invoked by violence which shows Elliott in his narrative stride. His other characterizations are not given as much depth as Enoch Wray but are placed by the consistent description he applies to them.

Morn rose, all splendid, o'er the frosty
plain,
And Lucy Hargrove married Ezra White.
But Ezra strove to cheer his bride in vain;
Long stay'd the day, and linger'd long the
night;
For Hannah's curse was on them like a
blight. (5)
The homeless widow seem'd to haunt their
bed -
The idiot child to thunder at the door.
"They fire the stacks," he growl'd; "I hear
their tread."
"O give them back their cottage on the moor;
How canst thou prosper if thou rob the
poor?" (10)
Cold lay the moonbeam on the glittering rock,
When Ezra gruffly left his troubled bride;
His early steps alarm'd the wondering cock;
And the fox saw him on the dim hill side,
Plodding through molten snow, with cautious
stride (15)
And horrid instinct, hither. But, behold!
Here laboured Hannah Wray, and silly Jane,
Fearless of blinding sleet, and blue with cold,
Busily roofing their sad cot again.
Flash'd Ezra's eyes, and rage fired every
vein, (20)
As when men wound a tiger. On he sprung,
And grasp'd the struggling widow by the
throat,
Till white her eyes upturn'd, and forth her
tongue
Protruded through retracting lips that
caught (42)
Sad hues from coming death, while anguish
wrought (25)
Terrific changes on her pensive cheek.
But Jane took up a stone, and smote his brow.
He fell, but held his prey; with strangled
shriek,
He tried to heave his bulk, relaxing slow
His murderous gripe, and backward sank;
then low (30)

(42) Ibid. III p.74

Dropp'd his large chin, and grim he gaped
 in death!
 But long lay Hannah senseless - happy she,
 If, senseless, she had yielded up her breath,
 But her eyes closed, then open'd - what to
 see?
 She gazed on Ezra's corpse in agony; (35)
 Then on her daughter; and then gush'd her
 tears.
 The horrid future on her spirit gleam'd;
 She trembled with unutterable fears;
 And, while the wan dawn o'er the mountains
 beam'd,
 She clasp'd her daughter to her breast and (40)
 scream'd -
 "No, I can die! they shall not hang my child!"
 Then came the hue and cry; the parting wild
 Of sunder'd bosoms, ne'er again to meet;
 The dungeon'd weeks; and hope, that never
 smiled.

For example, Ezra White, who has unroofed the
 cottage is characterized with the following terms of
 reference, 'parting sneer' 'gruffly (12), 'flashed
 Ezra's eyes' (20), 'murderous gripe' (30). This lack
 of depth in minor characterizations produces one
 dimensional forms aptly suited to the simple method
 of relating the tale itself, which reaches its impetus
 with Elliott's piling up of onomatopaeic and well
 chosen words, 'flashed, grasped, protruded, strangled
 shriek, gaped, gleam'd, beam'd, trembled', interspersed
 with a simplicity which heightens the delivery of the
 tale. The tale continues until the movement slows
 down when an attempt to use syntax fitting with the
 narrative, fails. The staggering effect of the fol-
 lowing lines only succeeds in checking the reader's
 flow.

She saw herself a corpse; saw Jane draw nigh
 Shrieking, to gaze upon that corpse, aghast;
 And, shrieking, waked, with temples throbbing
 fast!

Then came the trial brief; the evidence
So clear, so false, so fatal; the sad eyes,
All gazing on convicted innocence,
But not in pity! her convulsive sighs,
Her sudden tears; the dread solemnities
Of sentence on the wrong'd and guiltless! -
Oh,
Was there no pleader, by the laws allowed,
To aid the sufferer in her hour of woe?

(43)

The narrator of these tales is most often Elliott's omniscient self or less frequently Enoch Wray. But by extending the narrator to the minor characters in places the tale can be further developed. For example the use of dialogue later in Book VIII is effective in that Hannah Wray pleads innocence and moral grace to Enoch, the recounting of sin at a time of imminent death only able to be successfully incorporated into the narrative through the first person. Elliott had by now seemingly developed the abilities which were lacking in the earlier narratives, seeing dramatic potential, and using his available poetic resources with much greater effect, the success based very firmly in his varying perspectives of man, in the form of Enoch Wray, in relation to society.

This poem is in many ways the culmination of the themes of suffering, misery and death which prevail in his earlier narratives and in fact in much of his verse as a whole. Here, one of Elliott's biographers, January Searle, whose untutored written style was often prone to exaggeration, relates the tone of the poem to praise of Elliott's own characteristics as man and poet. The elevated style takes us

(43) Ibid

away however briefly, from his position as a political poet or as poet of the poor. The references to Dante and Isaiah are interesting too, and the use of the word 'epic' refers us back to earlier discussion.

Enoch Wray, the blind old Patriarch of the Village, is finely drawn, and his early recollection of better days is made to tell, with painful effect, upon the miseries which surround him in the desolation of his age. It is, in fact, an Epic of misery; and Elliott, like Dante, had been in hell. It is a book without hope, and his prophecies of England's future are as terrible as anything in Isaiah. ..

..... He had studied the physiology and anatomy of human misery, and was its poetical demonstrator. Every painful throb, and every agony of the heart, was familiar to his ear, and he reproduced them in melodies which drop down into the soul like the tears of Music.

..... It is strange how such tenderness, pity, and deep womanly love, should be united to so much rugged manliness, sternness, fierceness, and valour, as met together in his noble and hospitable nature. It was this mixture of opposing elements, however, which gave strength, beauty, and consistency, to his character; and although his curses and his hatred were so violent, that he exhausted all the capabilities of language in his utterance of them - yet there was nothing low or vulgar in all this, and looked at from the true point of vision it was even grand and prophetic.

(44)

This 'human misery' has been seen within the portrayal of suffering in the poem, yet here Elliott adapts this to incorporate a description of the landscape as a barren wasteland in order to epitomize the misery he invokes,

This scene is ancient, Enoch must allow.
Marble is less enduring than the flower

(44) Searle (Phillipps) - Memoirs of Ebenezer Elliott
(1852) pps.38 and 40.

That wither'd ages hence, and withers now,
Where, black as night, th' unalter'd
mountain's tower,
And baffled Time sees things that mock his
power. (5)

I thank ye, billows of a granite sea,
That the bribed plough, defeated, halts
below!

And thanks, majestic Barrenness, to thee, (45)
For one grim region in a land of woe,
Where tax-sown wheat and paupers will not
grow. (10)

Here pause, old Man, the alpine air to
taste:
Drink it from Nature's goblet, while the
morn
Speaks like a fiery trumpet to the waste.

The use of 'marble' and 'granite' determine the new
landscape now, yet the political overtones of 'bribed
plough' (7), 'grim region' (9) and 'tax-sown wheat' (10)
take over. The result that 'paupers will not grow' (10),
incidentally a highly successful juxtaposition of plant
and human, is congratulated, as here the personified
'Barrenness' is 'majestic' and omnipotent. Here the
vocabulary is linked to a productive landscape.

Gems of the wither'd bank and shadeless
grove:
Ye are where he who mourns you soon must
lie;
Beneath the shroud ye slumber, tranquilly;
But not for ever. Yet a sudden hour
Shall thaw the spotless mantle of your
sleep, (5)

And bid it, melted into thunder, pour
From mountain, waste, and fell, with foamy
sweep,
Whelming the flooded plain in ruin deep. (46)

Yes, little silent minstrels of the wild,
Your voiceless song shall touch the heart
again! (10)

And shall no morning dawn on Sorrow's child?
Shall buried mind for ever mute remain
Beneath the sod, from which your beauteous
strain

(45) V.P. Book V - VII p.66

(46) V.P. Book VI - II pps. 68-9

Shall yet arise in music, felt, not heard?
No! Faith, Hope, Love, Fear, Gladness,
Frailty, all, (15)
Forbid that man should perish.

The ruined soil where 'he who mourns you soon must lie' (2) is degraded, the vocabulary, 'wither'd' (1), 'shadeless' (1), 'shroud' (3), 'waste' (7) and 'flooded' (8) reflecting this. This literal description then diffuses into the spiritual as the poet defiantly exclaims that the soul will never perish, the personified living, human emotions are here as guards against the 'whelming flood' (8) of ruin, which literally and metaphorically powers on.

The emphasis on the mind and vision has been consistent throughout the poem and the most powerful evocation of this and of suffering and death come in the horrific images in Enoch Wray's dream. In many ways it is self contained, divorced from the narrative and could easily be treated separately from it, in that it adds a clear, historical perspective to Elliott's politics and is located in the vocabulary of his Corn Law poetry. The dream takes up the whole of Book VII of the poem, and the initial vision is of a man, whom Elliott names as Bradshaw. (47)

Gone! are ye gone? Bright dreams of youth, adieu!
Old, blind, and poor, I dream of dreadful things.
Methought I saw a man, renown'd and true,
Rise from the grave, upborne on sable wings, (48)
Bradshaw his name, abhorr'd by slaves and kings.
His hue was Death's, his majesty his own.

(47) John Bradshaw (1602-59) was a lawyer and a radical. President of the parliamentary commission to try the king, since he was one of the few lawyers willing to serve. Many thought his treatment of the king to be brutal. By 1636 he was an opponent of Cromwell.

(48) V.P. Book VII - I p.70

This context is soon made clear when Elliott's political invective reaches its heights as the leading protagonists of the English Civil War are all introduced,

What is a Briton? One who runs away,
To barter souls for untax'd wine abroad,
And curse his brutes, who sweat at home, and
bray.
Art thou a Briton, Ass, that lov'st the goad,
And bray'st in honour of thy glorious load? -
Say, palaced pauper, drunk with misery's tears,
Did Russell, Fairfax, spring from gods like
thee?
Or, scourge for poverty! is this Algiers?
Dog of the bread-tax-eating Absentee!
Our children feed thy lord - why growl at me?
Where are thy paper wings of yesterday,
Thou bankrupt gambler for the landed knave? -
Audacious poacher, scorn'st thou parish pay?
Kill'st thou God's hares to shun a beggar's
grave? (49)
What! is it better to be thief than slave? -
Wretch, that did'st kill thy sire, to sell him
dead!
Art thou a Briton? Thou hast Strafford's brow.
Poor, corn-bill'd weaver, singing hymns for
bread!
Could Hampden breathe where crawl such worms
as thou?
Spirit of Pym! lo, these are Britons now!
Charles Stuart! are they worthy to be thine?
Thou smil'st in scorn, in triumph, and in pride.
And thou, at Marston taught by right divine,
Thou recreant patran of vain regicide!

Elliott had used this historical period for the settings of his earlier narratives but here he realizes its political force. The influence of his father's republicanism would have made him an advocate of the parliamentary cause and here he seems to be supporting the sentiments but not the murder of the king which resulted. Unfortunately this is not clear because throughout the visionary depiction, the incessant names and images are an example of the worst of Elliott's

(49) Ibid. p.71

writing in that their precise meaning is too often blurred and confused. In addition to this the question of how easily accessible these figures were to Elliott's readers has to be asked. Perhaps the references to the decline of a nation were becoming more familiar in the early nineteenth century. Here the compound epithets so familiar to any reader of Elliott's verse compare this descent to the fate of Rome which possibly awaits the people of Britain,

O Time, is this the island of the just
And the immortal, in her virtues strong?
The land of Shakespeare? Worthy of our dust,
Because she guards the right, and loathes
the wrong -
The land of Ireton's bones, and Milton's
song?
Rise, Bard of our Republic! - wherefore rise,
Like Samuel to the troubled King of old?
Could'st thou flash living fire in Britons'
eyes,
Would pigmy souls be minds of giant mould?
Oh, what could wake these worse than dead and
cold?
But thou, O Rock! that watchest freemen's
graves!
Well may'st thou veil thy lofty brow in shade,
Scorning to look on boroughmongering knaves,
And game-law'd, corn-law'd, war-worn, parish-
paid,
Rag-money'd, crawling wretches, reptile-flay'd! -
What nameless curse comes next? Degraded Rome!
How like a Caesar of thy days of shame.

(50)

What Elliott is attempting here to use Bradshaw, the leader of those who perpetrated regicide, to address Enoch Wray in the dream and by extension, the oppressed. His address culminates in a powerful description of what could result if Britain is not released from the control of the powerful, through, of course, the repeal the Corn Laws.

(50) Ibid.

A fiend, whose breath shall wither hope,
like flame;
Lean Retribution is his horrid name.
Behold his bare and sinew'd haggardness!
Behold his hide-bound arm, his fleshless
thigh!
'Tis he! the fearless and the merciless!
I see his cheek of bone, his lifeless eye,
His frown - which speaks, and there is no
reply!
I hear his mutter'd scorn, his taunting
strain:
'Oppressor! hath thy bondage set us free?
Is all thy long injustice worse than vain?
Art thou, too, fall'n, scourged, trampled,
weak as we?
What! hath our destitution beggar'd thee?
And can'st thou tell why plunder'd states
are poor?'

(51)

The imagery evoked by the succession of adjectives and the skeletal personified form is well drawn. With the series of questions which are unanswered, Elliott reverts again to a device used in his other political verse.

Enoch's vision then takes on the form of an historical pageant with a parade of apparitions of feudal kings, reminiscent of Shakespeare's. They are rhetorically questioned, with Elliott exemplifying the vagaries of English history and its oppressive, dark secrets by showing how parallel it is to the présent.

From stream to headlong stream. But, eager-eyed,
I gazed on stately shadows at my side;
For buried kings, whose will, erewhile, was
law,
Around me, like the ghost of Hamlet, kept
Their state majestic, arm'd! And when I saw
Their cruel faces bathed in tears I wept.
But o'er my heart a deadlier chillness crept;
My white locks, every hair fear-stricken,
stirr'd;

(51) Ibid.

My limbs, all shaken, trembled every bone;
 My pulse stood still! and in my soul I heard
 The torrent, tumbling o'er the cold, grey
 stone,
 Prophecy! - while the shadowy mountains lone,
 That saw the Roman eagle's wearied wing -
 Spake to the silence of the dead of old:
 'King of the Poor! thou wast, indeed, a king.
 But com'st thou sorrowing from the charnel
 cold?
 Henry Plantagenet, the uncontroll'd!
 Why? Did thy gracious servants bid thee reign
 O'er bread-tax'd vermin, and transform thy
 name
 Into a synonyme and type of pain,
 Written o'er famish'd realms in tears and
 flame?
 King of the People! royal is thy fame;
 Thou need'st not blush.' - 'First Edward!
 thou here, too?
 King of the Kingdom, hail! But on thy brow
 Why grows the saddening cloud? Is Peterloo
 A nobler word than Falkirk? or wast thou
 The nominee of kinglings, such as now
 Ordain what shall be best for states and
 thrones?
 Did men like them, when thou wast loved and
 fear'd,
 Glut death with blood, and cover earth with
 bones?'

(52)

The evocation of Enoch's dream contains some of
 Elliott's best imagery, which is too often clouded
 by his piling up of picture upon picture to stress
 political meaning. Where the imagery is more simply
 depicted it remains equally powerful yet far more
 effective.

What saw I next? A temple paved with graves!
 Lo! on the floor a giant corpse lay bare!
 And thousand, thousand, thousand, thousand
 slaves,
 All dead and ghastly, kneel'd for ever there,
 Statues of baseness, worshipping despair! (5)
 From many a battle-field and many a sea,
 Cast forth by outraged earth and loathing tide,
 They made a winter for eternity,
 And seem'd like suppliant demons side by side,
 For in their looks their crimes were petrified. (10)

Bound by a spell, which ne'er, methought,
 would break;
 Amid the dead I stood, the living one!
 And, lo! the tears were froz'n on every cheek!
 Ah, ne'er in solitude felt I so lone, (53)
 As in that crowd, whose tears were turn'd to
 stone! (15)
 The Titan corpse, sublime in stillness lay,
 With marble looks, like power and pride
 asleep;
 O God! its dreadful silence could dismay
 More than the shriek of shipwreck o'er the
 deep!
 And every lifeless form did seem to weep, (20)
 Gazing in tranced horror and remorse,
 On the sad features of the mighty dead,
 While, on the forehead of that giant corpse,
 In letters of eternal fire, I read
 This sentence: "I am he for whom ye bled, (25)
 Undying Death! - feast, Dogs, but lap no
 blood."

Here then is Dante's infernal vision of hell,
 the giant corpse, frozen with its demonic attendants,
 given frightening overtones by the first person
 narration. The slaves are symbolic of those who died
 for a cause, the 'Titan corpse, sublime in its still-
 ness' (16) is the essence of death to which they are
 bound. The images of frozen sublimity and petrified
 remorse linger as Elliott's full apocalyptic vision
 reaches its intensity. The originality of his imagery
 is of consequence too and here a vast, heaving wave
 of human depravity, at once horrific and violent,
 overpowers the hero in his nightmare.

Then, lo! what, distant, seem'd the ocean's
 flood,
 Smote on my heart, with clamour fierce and
 foul.
 Wave shouldering wave, they shook me where I
 stood.
 No winds urged on the billowy, living roll,
 But whirlwind dwelt within it, like a soul,

Heaving the foamy, roaring surges high,
While all beside was voiceless, breathless
fear;

And, lo! the foam was human agony,
Alive with curses, horrible to hear!
The waves were men! - a deluge wide and drear!
And while, all raving, all at once, they came,
Heap'd on each other, to devour the shore,
The flash of eyes made heav'n's red vengeance
tame!
The thunder dared not whisper to the roar;

(54)

Similarly here in the passage which immediately follows
it the vision assumes a confused horror as the animals
of death crowd in, evolving horrifically from the pet-
rified rocks in which they are formed.

When, with their multitudinous hands, they
tore
The rocks, that seem'd to live in bestial forms.
Lo! frozen there, the tiger's terror glared;
Stiffen'd the startled folds of fanged worms;
Wolves grinn'd, like nightmare; glassy
caymen stared;
And the boar's tusk, his powerless tusk,
was bared
In fear - a tyrant's fear! High over head,
The despot eagle ceased his prey to tear;
His mighty pinions not for battle spread,
But stretch'd to fly, and palsied by despair.

(55)

The vision continues and here Elliott's descrip-
tion is not only powerful, but artistic, the intensity
of colour as good as any in the apocalyptic painting
of his contemporaries. The words describing fire and
redness flow endlessly, 'glare, fiery flood, molten,
brazen, desire, inflamed, dinderous, gore, gleam'd'.
The alliterative couplet 'With unremitting and intense
desire/To quench immitigable thirst inflamed' (8/9)
shows Elliott's lexical dexterity and the total image

(54) V.P. Book VII - V p.72

(55) Ibid.

of pain and fire is one of his best and more successful crescendos.

The vision changed; and, lo! methought I
stood
Where sinners swelter in the penal glare
Of everlasting noon! A fiery flood,
As of steel molten, on their nerves all bare,
Rush'd from the brazen sky; and scorching
air (5)
Burn'd upward from red rocks of solid fire.
There I beheld a statesman, evil-famed,
With unremitting and intense desire
To quench immitigable thirst inflamed;
Stretch'd, moaning, on the cinderous marl;
and named, (10) (56)
In scorn and rage, by spectres pitiless,
who bade him, smiting their clench'd hands,
restore
Their homes, their innocence, their happiness;
And, in dire mockery, to his hot lips bore
Rags, steep'd in black, thick, slippery,
burning gore. (15)
But when he dozed, worn out with pain, he
dream'd
Of fire, and talk'd of fire that ever burn'd;
And through his frame, in all his vitals
gleam'd
Fire; and his heart and brain, to cinder
turn'd,
Still crack'd and blazed, while, tossing, low
he mourn'd, (20)
And from his eyes dropp'd tears of sable flame.

Finally the dream ends with total terror as the unnamed, yet representative statesman is savaged by a crowd of skeletal, decaying forms. The vocabulary is unusual with use of simile, onomatopoeia and alliterative diction,

As if incensed, and sounds swell'd on the air
Which told of foes that knew not how to spare.
Soon, spectre skeletons, like wolves in chase,
Came howling on. As outstretch'd greyhounds
fleet, (57)
Some with riv'n ribs, and one with half a
face

(56) V.P. Book VII - VI p.72
(57) V.P. Book VII - VII p.73

They came, all hungry, and their clattering
feet
Stamp'd on the soil of adamant heat.
Then sprang they on him, and his muscles
rent
With cranching teeth; and still their hate
increased
As fast it fed, and joyful sounds forth
sent;
Yet from the rapturous banquet oft they
ceased.

Elliott wastes none of the opportunity which the incorporation of such a passage as the dream into a longer narrative provides. He is able to use the flexible format of such a sequence to develop a free hand in word painting. His success fully encapsulates the experience, insight and pattern of images which occur while dreaming; in an unusual state of mind, unobservant of the commonplace reality around him and transforms this, in places, to a marvellous vision. In doing so, Elliott draws heavily on the romantic visionary lyric of for example, Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* or Byron's *Darkness*, the apparent lack of logical completeness and the use of image and symbol dramatizing fantasy into apocalyptic significance. In harnessing creative emotion to his overt purpose his images are all transmuted from political significance into virtual allegory. Any incoherency is, given the context of a dream in poetry, totally acceptable, thereby exonerating Elliott from any such criticism here.

For Elliott's message to have its full effect his attempts at giving a universal impetus to it need some

success. Carlyle who is a constant source of reference for Elliott criticism has observations on this, recognizing not only the universality, but seeing this in terms of the modern day Epic already referred to, though he admits that Elliott had not fully succeeded.

Where Enoch's hand or mind has been, disorder becomes order. Chaos has receded some little hand-breadth of his ancient realm. Enoch, too, has seen his followers fall around him (by stress of hardship, and the arrows of the gods); has performed funeral games for them, and raised sandstone memorials with his own hands, the living chronicle and epitome of a whole century. When he departs, a whole century will become dead. Historical rudiments of an epic we say; and of the true epic of our time, where the genius but arrived that could sing it. Not "Arms and the man:" "Tools and the man!" that were now our epic. What indeed, are "Tools", from the Hammer and Plummet of Enoch Wray to this pen we now write with, but arms wherewith to do battle against unreason without or within; and smite in pieces, not miserable fellow-men, but the Arch-Enemy that makes us all miserable, - henceforth the only legitimate battle?

(58)

But Enoch's heroic proportions are achieved through survival, his quest is that of retaining dignity through suffering. He is however more than that though, a representative of the events of a century and convenient medium for the poet's world view.

Within this pathos can be effectively placed, it is unlike in The Letter or Love, based on reality, and the latter part of the following claim may have some grounding now.

for pathos there is certainly no poem in our language to match it. It reads as if it were written in tears.

(59)

(58) Carlyle op.cit.
(59) Searle op.cit. p.39

Here it is set amidst anguish and despair, a plea for
humanity and concern.

Shall I, lost Britain! give the pest a name
That, like a cancer, eats into thy core?
'Tis Avarice, hungry as devouring flame;
But, swallowing all, it hungers as before,
While flame, its food exhausted, burns no
more.
O ye hard hearts that grind the poor, and
crush
Their honest pride, and drink their blood
in wine,
And eat their children's bread without a
blush,
Willing to wallow in your pomp, like swine,
Why do ye wear the human form divine?
Can ye make men of brutes, contemn'd,
enslaved?
Can ye grow sweetness on the bitter rue?
Can ye restore the health of minds depraved?

(60)

Enoch, the hero, can surely judge and plead, as he
draws from experience and speaks with authority.

By the time we reach the final one hundred lines
of the poem, Elliott has begun to refer to Enoch as
'our father' an indication of our expected sympathy.
His imminent death is muted and its ignominy is
possibly his ultimate degradation, the family name
having been falsely blighted.

But degradation is to him despair;
The hour is come which Enoch cannot bear!
But he can die. - and in his humble grave,
Sweet shall his long rest be, by Mary's
side;
And o'er his coffin (uninscribed) shall wave
The willow tree, beneath the dark tower's
pride,
Set by his own sad hand when Mary died.
Though basely branded with a poacher's name,
Poor Joseph slumbers in a distant tomb;

(61)

(60) V.P. Book IX - XI p.77

(61) V.P. Book X - XVI p.80

The death of the patriarch is described in human terms yet he remains a symbol in 'lyre of the past(5) in the following extract.

His visage wan assumes a darkening hue;
The blind dog whines a melancholy plaint,
And ghastly roll his eyes of pallid blue;
E'en the hard bailiffs bread the scene to
view.

Lyre of the past! O, art thou, then,
unstrung? (5)

The boy resigns his grandsire's finger cold;
A sweet word lingers on our father's tongue - (62)

"Mary, dear Mary." - But the tale is told:
With her whose virgin name was Mary Gold,
He hears, in heav'n his swooning daughter
shriek. (10)

Elliott certainly found horrific death far easier to describe than the pathetic. Here 'He hears, in heav'n'(10) only serves to deflate and ridicules the sentiment he wishes to express. Throughout, the landscape has been shown to form a symbiotic relationship with Enoch Wray and here it is seen almost to react to his death,

And when the fells, fresh-bathed in azure
air,
Wide as the summer day's all golden wing,
Shall blush to heav'n, that Nature is so
fair,
And man condemn'd to labour, in despair; -
Then, the gay gnat, that sports its little
hour;
The fälcon, wheeling from the ancient wood;
The redbreast, fluttering o'er its fragrant
bower;

The yellow-bellied lizard of the flood; (63)
And dewy morn, and evening - in her hood
Of crimson, fringed with lucid shadows grand -
Shall miss the Patriarch; at his cottage
door
The bee shall seek to settle on his hand.

(62) Ibid.

(63) Ibid.

But from the vacant bench haste to the moor,
 Mourning the last of England's high-soul'd
 poor,
 And bid the mountains weep for Enoch Wray!
 And for themselves! - albeit of things that
 last
 Unalter'd most; for they shall pass away
 Like Enoch, though their iron roots seem
 fast
 Bound to the eternal future, as the past!
 The Patriarch died! and they shall be no more.
 Yes, and the sailless worlds, which navigate
 Th' unutterable deep that hath no shore, (d)
 Will lose their starry splendour, soon or late!

His departure is couched in grandiose terms, rather
 like an exit from a gladiatorial arena, yet achieving
 cadence by the fading, weakening effect of the image.

Before concluding discussion, it is worth
 reproducing one of the few reviews which the poem
 received in its year of publication. It is sympath-
 etic, as may be expected from a journal opposed to
 the Corn Laws, yet it remains fair and particularly
 pertinent in its comments on the poem's construction.

... A poem it scarcely is; but a succession
 of pictures, not very happy in their groupings,
 nor equal in their deservings; but they are
 each painted in the dark colourings of dejection,
 relieved by sharp touches of indignant genius:
 his poetical philosophy is borrowed from
 Wordsworth; his personalities from Crabbe.
 Every now and then there are expatiations, some
 of them highly poetical, into other regions
 than those of his habitual thoughts; but those
 thoughts have bound his spirit in fetters of
 iron, and continually drag him back to the
 domains where all things are associated with
 the memories of insult, despotism, monopoly,
 and wrong. The story can hardly be called a
 story. There is no link of continuity: it is
 a volume of digressions, loose, disjointed; a

(64)

(64) Westminster Review - July 1829 - edited by
 Colonel Thompson, who wrote 'Catechism on the
 Corn Laws' (1825)

journey made of wanderings ... But the book is full of merit and of mind.

In the Village Patriarch Elliott had found a subject which he was capable of handling. He is once again the poet of humanitarianism and concern, seeing himself both as a speaker to the poor and a spokesman for them.

As a missionary to the poor - and not altogether the cottage poor, with their woodbine porch and cultivated gardens, aesthetic even in their poverty - but the immolated mechanics wearing away their lives amongst looms and forges, for whom no beams of God's sun, and none of the freshnesses of creation, are vouchsafed; as such a missionary and God-teacher he has gone forth, leading the way through flowery places, till the pent spirit follows him at will. Does he repine? It is not at mimic woes. His tears are human, - good hearty English tears. And if he be not resolute to denounce wrong, who ministers at the altar, how shall the sin be corrected, or the sinner redeemed? But only as he thus teaches, does the poet become the priest, the episcopos - that men are vicious because they are unwise, and that while we hate the crime, we must ever pity the criminal.

(65)

He is now more fully in control of his material, his subject matter, and provoked by depravation the serious tone of his writing becomes indignation. His choice of topic is vital in that with a limited writer such as Elliott, its flexibility becomes important as he attempts varying modes of achieving virtually the same end. Elliott's writing here was of contemporary importance and relevance, and in this respect looked forward to later nineteenth century values in poetry.

(65) Cambridge University Journal - 1850 - 'Ten Minutes with Ebenezer Elliott'

The question of poetry and the age raised the crucial problem of what poetry should be about. The relationship of the poet to his age was a side-issue in 1830 but by 1842 it had become very important and by the time Arnold wrote his 1853 Preface it was a major topic of debate. In the 1830's the attention claimed by Ebenezer Elliott and the Corn-Law poets perhaps encouraged the notion of a truly popular poetry which would deal with contemporary issues and reinforced the growing feeling that poetry should, in some often undefined way, reflect the age.

(66)

So the attempts to re-examine the nature of poetry continued. Elliott had successfully harnessed a depiction of incident to a portrayal of feeling, endorsing truth to concern.

The poet's true object should rather be to excite sympathy in spite of it, to strike upon those chords which prove the whole world kin; and to do this he must choose either topics which concern men alike - men as men - the hopes and fears we are born with, the sorrows, the affections that come to us with the air we breathe.

(67)

Elliott attempted to write poetry in various forms, narrative verse being one of them, and his verse is composed of various elements based on romantic and social thinking. Generally speaking these are Nature, History, Nostalgia, Politics, the Gothic and Characterization and all are used to varying degrees in The Village Patriarch so in that respect it is definitive of his work, the culmination of his writing ability. His other verse may contain one or

(66) Armstrong, Isobel - Victorian Scrutinies (Athlone Press 1972) p.28

(67) Gilfillan, George - 16 Oct 1845 quoted in Armstrong op.cit.

more of these elements but here one is built upon the next, interwoven .. so that they complement one another. This then is 'total' Elliott, exhibiting both his strengths and weaknesses.

In many ways his development in narrative verse seen over the last two chapters is mirrored in the chronological advances in English verse of the time. To attribute Elliott with the role of reflecting both eighteenth and nineteenth century poetic taste is certainly not a false one. His earlier narratives are based on a formality of subject and form and an adherence to conventional, contrived idioms. Yet his later verse in moving towards realism and an accurate truth in its tale of man in society, looks forward to the fictional forms of nineteenth century realism, and any claim of originality for Elliott's work should be based on this albeit minor role in such a transition.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

The intention of this study has been to evaluate Elliott's writing and in order to do justice to this, it has been necessary to look in detail at all his verse. From this it can be concluded that there exists a considerable number of poems such as the early Gothic and Romantic narratives and several lines of weak inspirational verse which add nothing but bulk to his work, and which only a researcher would read.

In striving here to present the essential Elliott, I judge him on his most characteristic effusions, which show his originality rather than him being derivative of writers who influenced him. Corn Law Rhymes, The Village Patriarch and Steam at Sheffield for example, are at once characteristic, striking and memorable, poems which nobody else could have written and indeed it is in poems such as these, where he had found a subject matter suited to his purpose, that the greatest claim for originality lies.

In this conclusion then, I am after the essence after the duller material has evaporated and the output has been reduced to what I think he should be remembered by. The two major discoveries about Elliott's verse which most justify the effort in studying it are the originality of his industrial themes and the involvement and vehemence exhibited so clearly in his verse.

Elliott can be seen as a pioneer in perceiving the interest of industrial themes as a subject for poetry. It is rarely possible when assessing Elliott to move far away from the context in which his verse was perceived and written. The product is often a documentary on the industrial environment, with Elliott's implicit consciousness as a townsman highlighting the slow assimilation of mechanization and commercial change.

This acute awareness of social and psychological changes is rare in the poetry popular at the time. He often views these changes with excitement and apprehension yet he is aware of them as progressive and finds an appropriate language with which to describe them in a perceptive, memorable manner. Instead of writing in the elegant, pastoral tone of the late eighteenth century, he latches on to the new as the poet's rightful 'prey', and in doing so attempts to wrestle with historical progress.

Occasionally too, short locally based poems achieve far more than good description. Throughout, landscape is the stimulating force, but through Elliott's aesthetic sense leads to a perception of landscape changed now by social transition to encompass the growth of industry.

Elliott as a man was often radical and outspoken and came from the autodidactic tradition, claiming at one time to have most of the Bible and Paradise Lost by heart. Equally important he had a proximity to and experience of what he wrote about in his verse. The combination of working as an iron dealer in Sheffield, with his account

book bordered with literary quotation and experiments in verse, and producing such a large body of poetry, presents him as extraordinary in many ways. His sensitivity was aroused by his surroundings and hardened by reality, allowing him to provide us in his verse with a sincere realistic observation from within.

In his verse he is consistently then, the notetaker and observer rather than the fabulist, a 'Sunday poet' in his own phrase, but not for escapism or therapy. He writes with emotional involvement and not for exercise or for a form of elegant leisure. With Elliott we are not presented with the subdued or pastel tones more often associated with the label 'minor' poet. His verse is consistently raw, craggy, gritty and vehement in tone. There are throughout shades of Carlyle who praised these virtues in his criticism of Corn Law Rhymes. Elliott, the minor poet is never ingratiating, tepid or mellifluous, but course, bitter, scolding and perhaps more importantly angry. The response of the reader is correspondingly vivid. We may be repelled, energised, or even moved to laugh, but it is difficult to ignore the experience.

Elliott exhibits an awareness of the burning issues of the day and in that verse which unites industrial change and political perspective, the reader's lasting impression is one of power; with images of light, action and sound coalescing. This may mean a lack of smoothness and subtlety, but certainly a lack of glibness. His poetry carries the conviction that what we have is a picture as true as he could make it. This is a style which clashed with conven-

tional poetic themes but one which is most suitable for conveying a sense of urgency and it is almost impossible to miss the purpose of Elliott's better efforts. He is not seeking sensation or emotional exploitation but is responding to authentic, heartrending circumstances, seen daily and bitterly resented.

The breadth of popular appeal his verse held can be exemplified by the fact that while at one time his work was quoted from Chartist platforms, his poem, The People's Anthem is often anthologised today and indeed, though slightly amended to remove references to class, found its way into the Anglican hymn book, and appeared set to pop music in the rock musical 'Godspell'. His concern is a consistent one, highlighting the plight of the majority of the population, and once again he has the desired effect by presenting his message in the form of a hymn. Similarly typical is his desire, in a footnote to endorse the importance of his subject and to make sure that the reader fully understands his message.

When wilt thou save the people?
Oh, God of mercy! when?
Not kings and lords, but nations!
Not thrones and crones, but men!

Flowers of thy heart, oh, god, are they!
Let them not pass, like weeds, away!
Their heritage a sunless day!

God, save the people!

Shall crime bring crime for ever,
Strength aiding still the strong?
Is it thy will, oh, father,
That man shall toil for wrong?

"No!" say thy mountains; "No'." thy skies:
"Man's clouded sun shall brightly rise,
And songs be heard, instead of sighs."

God, save the people!

When wilt thou save the people?
Oh, God of Mercy! when?
The people, Lord, the people!
Not thrones and crowns, but men!
God! save the people! thine they are,
Thy children, as thy angels fair:
Save them from bondage, and despair!

God! save the people'.*

* And who are the people? The are all
those persons who, by honestly maintaining
themselves, and, by, perhaps earning a surplus
or by honestly living on the precious earnings
and savings of others - prove their
right to govern the community through
their representatives.....

The sensibility of Elliott then has worn well, with
the concern shown for nameless or representative persons
making a favourable impression on the modern reader.⁷⁴
Writing in poetry spare Elliott the temptations that assailed
contemporary novelists dealing with historical and political
subject matter, where the novelist is bound to make the
leading figures exceptional and interesting and worst of all,
sympathetic, to maintain the romance or mock memoir aspect
of the book.

In Elliott's verse the clarity of outline of persons
represented tends to make them representative, though
there may be no deliberate attempt at allegory on his part.

(1). Elliott - The People's Anthem - Poetical Works 1876
Vol 2 pps 202-3

It is almost impossible for the attentive reader not to extrapolate from the original to some extent by seeing, for example Enoch Wray as standing for the Old Order in Sheffield or the young townsman lying on the heather as an emblem of the right of the worker to change and repose. The novelist would have to account for these people to such an extent that they would be characters and this changes and affects the balance of the reader's sympathy. Elliott's best work is unsentimental.

Ebenezer Elliott was not only the 'Corn Law Rhymer' as he became popularly and lastingly known during the agitation against the Corn Laws. Unfortunately for Elliott as a poet, he became inextricably bound up with the movement from the publication of Corn Law Rhymes in 1830 until 1846 when the Corn Laws were repealed, unfortunately because his writing included some notable pieces on aspects of the early Industrial development, transitions and the effect on people. His realism in his tales of man in society are pieces which have a wider significance both for literary critics and historians.

Elliott himself remained aware of the limitations of his verse and was content to be considered for his political status. Yet when the focus of his work changed from the romantic and pastoral to the reality of working life in Sheffield, he had found his own voice and taking up images and energy from the industrializing process, he began to write with originality, and as an employer showed himself

to be more sympathetic than most to the struggles of the poor. His Corn Law Rhymes certainly contributed to the overwhelming tide of popular opinion and feeling which resulted in the repeal of the tax on bread and he was identified by Samuel Smiles as a man whose example was worthy of following by the self improving artisans. By virtue of its overtly political viewpoint and its decidedly provincial nature, Elliott's verse represents a non-establishment view and is important historically for that reason.

Any reader who approaches Elliott's work needs to be selective and indeed a selection of his poetry is worthy of editing. In many ways he is neither Romantic nor Victorian in tone so there is a problem in knowing entirely how to place him. The period in which Elliott wrote was to be a major one for developments in what can be called the mainstream of English poetry, and the standards set by these advances make it difficult for the flaws in his verse to be tolerated by a twentieth century 'general' reader, expecting the fluidity of style and unworldliness of much early nineteenth century verse. However, the current interest in this period through Chartist Studies and the rise in critical estimation of such as Shelley's political works bode well for a renewed interest in Elliott. It is probable however, that he will always be known for a fraction of his poetic output. The poems by which he is now represented in anthologies could well be replaced over the next decade by more characteristic

and substantial pieces, such as the industrial and later political poems. With Elliott's verse often feeding on industrial and urban folk song I think the increased academic attention currently being paid to song in all its forms will secure the republication of the Corn Law Rhymes.

When looking at Elliott's verse as a whole, perhaps the most interesting aspect of it lies in his transition from a derivative writer to a peculiarly topical Sheffield writer, which is clearly shown up by his provincial background. Perhaps unlike a minor figure in metropolitan literary circles, the influences on him and his contributions are clearly traceable. His industrial poetry draws upon his nature and purely topographical verse and themes and images from these are in turn taken up and developed in the political and narrative verse, presented either via song or more complex poetic forms. It is his incorporation of these themes and his parallel development as a poet that provides a clear interest and sets the criteria by which his verse should now be considered.

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- (ii) Prose Sources.
- (iii) Manuscript Sources.

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- (iv) Social, cultural, historical background.
- (v) Local studies.

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- 1810 The/Soldier:/and/Other Poems./(two rules)/By Britannicus. /(two rules)/Harlow: Printed by B.Flower:/For M.Jones, Newgate-street,/London./(rule)/1810.
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/MDCCCXLIV.

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Row./MDCCCXLIV.

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A reissue of Elliott's poems was planned to be completed in eighteen
weekly parts, at sixpence each. The first part appeared early in 1836
and received reviews in the Literary Gazette (Jan.9th 1836) and in
the Monthly Review (Feb.1836). The following was the title of the
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APPENDIX A

THE BLACK HOLE OF CALCUTTA

What for Saxon, Frank, and Hun,
What hath England's bread-tax done?
Ask the ruin it hath made,
Ask of bread-tax-ruin'd trade;
Ask the struggle and the groan,
For the shadow of a bone,
Like a strife for life, for life,
Hand to hand, and knife to knife.

Hopeless trader, answer me!
What hath bread-tax done for thee? 10
Ask thy lost and owing debts,
Ask our bankrupt-throng'd Gazettes.
Clothier, proud of Peterloo!
Ironmaster, loyal, too!
What hath bread-tax done for you?

Let the Yankee tariff tell,
None to buy, and all to sell;
Useless buildings, castle strong,
Hundred thousands, worth a song;
Starving workmen, warehouse full, 20
Saxon web, from Polish wool,
Grown where grew the wanted wheat,
Which we might not buy and eat.
Merchant, bread-tax'd-trade wont pay,
Profits lessen every day;
Sell thy stock and realize,
Let thy streeted chimneys rise;
And when bread tax'd ten are two,
Learn what bread-tax'd rents can do.
Sneak! that wouldst for groat a year 30
Sell thy soul, and sell it dear!
Self-robb'd servile! sold, not bought,
For the shadow of a groat!
Unbribed Judas! what thy gain,
By sad Europe's millions slain?
By our treasures, pour'd in blood
Over battle-field and flood;
Bread-tax'd profits, endless care,
Competition in despair.
With thy bile and with thy gear, 40
Wheels and shuttles gainless here,
With the remnant of thy all,
Whither, reptile wilt thou crawl?

What hath bread-tax done for me,
Farmer, what for thine and thee?
Ask of those who toil to live,
And the price they cannot give;
Ask our hearths, our gainless marts,
Ask thy children's broken hearts,
Ask their mother, sad and grey, 50
Destined yet to parish pay.

Bread-tax'd weaver, all can see
What that tax hath done for thee,
And thy children, vilely led,
Singing hymns for shameful bread,
Till the stones of every street
Know their little naked feet.

Building lawyer's nominee,
What hath bread-tax done for thee?
Ask thy fainting thoughts that strive 60
But to keep despair alive;
Ask thy list of friends betray'd,
Houses empty, rents unpaid,
Rising streets and falling rents,
Money fights for half per cents;
Ask you piles, all bread-tax-built,
Guiltless, yet the cause of guilt,
Swallowing fortunes, spreading woes,
Losing, to make others lose.

Bread-tax-eating absentee; 70
What hath bread-tax done for thee?
Cramm'd thee, from our children's plates,
Made thee all that nature hates,
Fill'd thy skin with untax'd wine,
Fill'd thy purse with cash of mine,
Fill'd thy breast with hellish schemes,
Fill'd thy head with fatal dreams -
Of potatoes, basely sold
At the price of wheat in gold,
And of Britons sty'd to eat 80
Wheat-priced roots, instead of wheat.

England! what for mine and me,
What hath bread-tax done for thee?
It hath shown what kinglings are,
Stripp'd thy hideous idols bare,
Sold thy greatness, stain'd thy name,
Struck thee from the rolls of fame,
Given thy fields to civil strife,
Changed thy falchion for the knife,
To th'invading knout consign'd 90
Basest back, and meanest mind,
Cursed thy harvests, cursed thy land,
Hunger-stung thy skill'd right hand,
Sent thy riches to thy foes,
Kick'd thy breech, and tweak'd thy nose,
And beneath the western skies,
Sown the worm that never dies.

Man of Consols, hark to me!
What shall bread-tax do for thee?
Rob thee for the dead-alive, 100
Pawn thy thousands ten for five,
And, ere yet its work be done,
Pawn thy thousands five for one.

What shall bread-tax yet for thee,
Palaced pauper? We shall see.
It shall tame thee, and thy hears,
Beggars them, and beggars theirs,
Melt thy plate, for which we paid,
Buy ye breeches ready made,
Sell my lady's tax-bought gown, 110
And the lands thou call'st thy own.
Then of courses five or more,
Graperies, horse-race, coach and four,
Pamper'd fox-hounds, starving men,
Whores and bastards, nine or ten,
Twenty flunkies fat and gay,
Whip and jail for holiday,
Paid informer, poacher pale,
Sneaker's license, poison'd ale, 120
Seat in senate, seat on bench,
Pension'd lad, or wife, or wench;
Fiddling parson, Sunday card,
Pimp, and dedicating bard -
On the broad and bare highway,
Toiling there for groat a day,
We will talk to thee and thine,
Till thy wretches envy mine,
Till thy paunch of baseness howl,
Till thou seem to have a soul.

Peer, too just, too proud to share 130
Millions, wrung from toil and care!
Righteous peer, whose fathers fed
England's poor with untax'd bread!
Ancient peer, whose stainless name
Ages old have given to fame;
What shall bread-tax do for thee?
Make thee poor as mine and me;
Drive thee from thy marble halls
To some hovel's squalid walls;
Drive thee from the land of crimes, 140
Houseless, into foreign climes,
There to sicken, there to sigh,
Steep thy soul in tears and die -
Like a flower from summer's glow,
Withering on the polar snow.

Church bedew'd with martyr'd blood,
Mother of the wise and good;
Temple of our smiles and tears,
Hoary with the frost of years;
Holy church, eternal, true! 150
What for thee will bread-tax do?
It will strip thee bare as she
Whom a despot stripp'd for thee;
Of thy surplice make thy pall,
Lower thy pride, and take thy all -
Save thy truth, establish'd well,
Which - when spire and pinnacle,
Gorgeous arch, and figured stone,
Cease to tell of glories gone -
Still shall speak of thee, and Him 160
Whom adore the seraphim.

Power, which likest Heaven's might seem,
Glorious once in freedom's beam;
Once by tyrants felt and fear'd,
Still as freedom's dust revered -
Throne, established by the good,
Not unstain'd with patriot blood,
Not unwatch'd by patriot fears,
Not unwept by patriot tears!
What shall bread-tax do for thee,
Venerable Monarchy?
Dreams of evil, spare my sight!
Let that horror rest in night.

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