

## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IDEALS IN THE ENGLISH POETS.<sup>1</sup>

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“**P**OETRY,” said Shelley, “is the expression of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds.” “Every man,” said the great French critic Sainte-Beuve, “has a sleeping poet in his breast.” These two sayings may serve to justify, if it need justification, the recourse to the poets at a time of supreme national stress. The poets are even through their poetry akin to us, and the greatest poets are of all the most deeply akin. They waken something in us which habitually sleeps, and this something we recognize, the more surely the greater the poet, as the best in us, something which draws us by a sudden magic out of our common egoisms and our common attachments, and makes us for the time citizens of a realm which is at once real and ideal ; the very world which we inhabit, but seen in the light of larger vision and loftier purpose. No doubt, poetry is a house with many mansions, and some of these are idyllic pleasaunces where you rather learn to forget the real world than to see it more clearly ; where dreaming eyes look out from magic casements upon faery lands, and idle singers pipe at ease of an empty day. But no great poet remains permanently in these idyllic bowers. You find him sooner or later in the great hall, vividly alive to all that goes on there, to high counsel and heroic emprise, to the memorials of the great past which hang on the walls, the symbolic fire that burns on the hearth. Every country which has given birth to a great poet has a voice in which some national aspiration, or some national need, has become articulate.

But no nation has a richer treasure of great poets who reflect, sustain, and reanimate its deeper self, than our own country.

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We may distinguish three types of national ideal. In a complete and mature patriotism they will all be found ; but, in patriotism as it has commonly been, and still for the most part is, one or other falls short. There is first, the " simple " patriotism of the warrior fighting and dying for his native land, and thinking that true glory. The cry of this patriotism is heard in the first beginnings of all national history, and is heard to the end. It was never more alive than it is in Europe to-day. But as a nation grows in strength and complexity, new problems emerge, for which this primitive patriotic passion offers no solution : problems of internal right, the struggle of sovereign and subjects, of privileged orders and the people, of rich and poor ; it becomes evident that a nation secure from without may be shattered from within, and then perhaps for the first time fall an easy prey to an external foe. Thus arise more complex ideals of national well-being, which may lead men equally devoted to their country along different, even opposite paths ; whole-hearted patriots are found on both sides in every civil war, as well as in the normal antagonisms of parties. But these ideals may still ignore everything outside the nation ; they may be national in the narrow sense of those who regard the well-being of other nations only as it contributes to the power, wealth, or glory of their own ; and it is possible, as we see in Germany to-day, for an ideal of national life to be extraordinarily developed in respect of its own internal organization, and yet on a very low plane in regard to the well-being of other nations. There remains then a third phase of national ideal, which regards the nation as fulfilling its function only when it acts as a member of the community of Man. This third phase, even from a strictly " national " point of view, marks an advance. For just as a man who wrongs his fellow-citizens will be apt to wrong his family, if only by loading them with privileges or luxuries beyond their due, so a nation which is unjust to other nations will be also deeply unjust to itself, if only by stimulating beyond measure those sides of its life, those elements of its strength, which serve only for aggression and expanse.

If we look at the history of these three types of national ideal we find that, while they emerge in different phases of national life, the earlier as a rule persist side by side with the later, like the labourers in the vineyard, and, as there, the latest comer is not the least deserving, though as yet he is apt to receive the least reward. Thus the ele-

mentary love of country and readiness to die for it is as strong to-day as in the English country-folks who fought by East Anglian river sides with Danish pirates. The ideals of social justice and order hardly emerge in England before the 14th century ; their clash and clamour is still about us on every side to-day. While the ideal of international right, which is to a fully developed nation what the ideal of humanity is to a high-bred man, first became clear and resonant in the age of the French Revolution, and in spite of the appalling rebuff which it has experienced in the present crisis, that ideal is steadily and quietly rooting itself in the best mind of the civilized world.

What, then, has been the part of the poets in relation to these three types of ideal ?

### I.

Few words are needed here of the elementary but sublime patriotism of the field. War, like Love, touches man where he is greatest and where he is least ; the fire and the clay, the hero and the brute. It is the glory of poetry that in its handling of this familiar matter, it helps to liberate us from the obsession of the brute and the clay, and make us one with the hero and the flame. We all of us, as citizens and newspapers readers, treat it as axiomatic : that success is better than failure, and coming back from the battle infinitely preferable to falling in it. Yet when Browning tells us that "achievement lacks a gracious somewhat" ; or when Wordsworth declares that action is a temporary and limited thing, "the motion of a muscle this way or that," while suffering "opens gracious avenues to infinity" ; or when Rupert Brooke, in his noble sonnet, declares that in the peril of death lies the supreme safety,—we thrill with an involuntary assent which, in spite of the protests of our cool reason, obstinately persists. And whether this be every one's experience or not, the poets themselves involuntarily confirm it by the poetic sterility of sheer triumph. The pæan is a poor creature compared with tragedy. Even Pindar's songs of triumph for the winners of chariot races are themselves a kind of triumph over reluctant material. The noblest battle-poetry in Old English is the story, nearly 1000 years old, of one of the rare occasions on which Englishmen have been overpowered by an invading army on their own soil. All fall save two ; but their leader before the fight has flung his heroic defiance at the Danish pirates : "Tell

your lord, that here stands unblenching, a chieftain with his men, who mean to defend this native ground, this fatherland ". Or compare the crude animal joy of Laurence Minot, as he hitches into rhyme the smashed limbs and burnt cities of the French or the Scots, and the glow of unquenchable faith with which John Barbour a little later tells the story of the homeless wanderings of Robert Bruce. In most great battle-poetry we are made to feel either the heroic stand against great odds, as in Drayton's song of Agincourt, and Tennyson's "The Revenge"; or else the pathetic sublimity of ruin, as in Shakespeare's wonderful lines on Coriolanus :—

Death, that dark sprite, in's nervy arm doth lie,  
Which being advanced declines, and then men die.

His "Henry V." is no doubt a dramatic song of triumph for a great national success. But it is not Henry's success which most endears him to his creator; the greatest moments of the play are those in which he shows us the tragic forecast of doom based upon his father's wrong, and the personal magnetism which welded his army together as one man and, more than his generalship, accounted for the victory. Drayton had painted him truculently careless of his title to the crown :—

His lion's courage stands not to inquire  
Which way old Harry came by it. . . .  
What's that to him? He hath the garland now. . . .

That is not Shakespeare's notion of heroism; his Henry prays to God, before Agincourt, to remember his father's guilt on some other day. And his mastery of men is based not upon terror, terrible though he can be, but upon comradeship and character :—

A largess universal, like the sun,  
His genial eye doth shed on every one,  
Thawing cold fear, that mean and gentle all,  
Behold, as may unworthiness define,  
A little touch of Harry in the night.

In that very drama of "Coriolanus" which sounds the sublimest note of Shakespeare's war poetry, the climax of greatness is reached not in those pictures of the irresistible arm, leaving death and tears in its path, but in his final surrender of his purposed vengeance upon Rome at the impassioned appeal of his mother and wife,—a surrender which, he knows, will cost his life :—

O mother, mother !  
 What have you done ? Behold, the heavens do ope,  
 The gods look down, and this unnatural scene  
 They laugh at. O my mother, mother ! O !  
 You have won a happy victory for Rome ;  
 But for your son, believe it, O believe it,  
 Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,  
 If not most mortal to him. But, let it come.

So, if we turn to a later time, a poet like Campbell made great heroic songs of the " Battle of the Baltic," and the irresistible floating bulwarks of Britannia. But for the greatest war poetry of that world-crisis we have to turn to Wordsworth's sonnets. And what stirs him to poetry is not Trafalgar or Waterloo, of them he has not a word ; but the colossal disasters of Jena and Austerlitz, the overthrow of Venice and of Switzerland, and the ruin of leaders of forlorn hopes, like Schill, and Palafox, and Toussaint Louverture. The wonderful sonnet to this last great ruined chieftain gathers up in its last lines,—some of the sublimest in English poetry,—that instinctive faith, which we can neither justify nor get rid of, that heroism, even when it utterly fails, and the more when it utterly fails, does not perish, but has its part in the spiritual atmosphere in which our lives are passed and by which they are silently moulded, replenished, and inspired :—

Most miserable chieftain ! Yet do thou  
 Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow !  
 Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,  
 Live and take comfort ! Earth and air and skies,  
 There's not a breathing of the common wind  
 That will forget thee. Thou hast great allies ;  
 Thy friends are exultations, agonies,  
 And Love, and Man's unconquerable mind.

## II.

We have glanced at two Shakesperean types of military valour. The gulf which separates Henry and Coriolanus in their action upon the State,—the one affecting it as cement, the other as dynamite,—may help our transition to the second type of national ideal, that rooted in the need for inner cohesion and order. Doubtless this need was first brought home by the urgency of the more primitive need of defence. In Germany to-day, where the militarism of the primitive tribe has survived into an age of advanced industrial and scientific culture, we see child life and the upbringing of children watched over,

on the whole to its great advantage, largely with a view to the provision of fighting material. The older civilization of England has outgrown the motive without approaching the results. And, on the whole, the ideas and ideals which emerge most distinctly in the long struggling evolution of the English polity, have not been consciously adopted or systematically applied, have not been framed, like Plato's, in academic groves, but have been struck out in the thrust and parry conflicts and the give and take settlements of centuries of eager and vivid political life ; and if we look for logical symmetry in their application we soon recognize that the struggles out of which they emerged have left them scarred and chipped, riddled with anomalies and exceptions.

Two such ideals, in particular, have come down to us, as trophies of our long political history, and deeply dyed with its temper—*law* and *liberty*. The fact that we couple them is characteristic of the shape these seeming opposites have assumed in our hands : we clearly regard law not as a force which interferes with our liberty, but as one which prevents other people from interfering with it. Let us now ask what the poets have done to illuminate or drive them home. Law, to begin with, is not a matter obviously fruitful for poetry ; for poetry is commonly a surging up of individual passion and thought, something penetrated and pervaded by personality ; while law prides itself on being blind to distinctions of persons, and on imposing an inflexibly uniform rule upon all alike. Hence poets have frequently been born *antinomian*, they have denounced law as a system of mechanical bonds in the name, now of emancipated impulse and unreined desire, now of the higher law of spiritual freedom. So Shelley and so Blake. But theirs is not the dominant note of English poetry. Our poets have on the whole been, for better or worse, in close touch with the deepest convictions of the nation ; they have interpreted its best instincts ; and none more signally than the greatest of all. But long before Shakespeare and Milton, in that momentous 14th century when England could already arraign her kings, one stern poetic voice is heard arraigning England herself for her loose observance of the laws she had set up. William Langland saw the England of his day in a dream, as Bunyan, 300 years later, saw the England of his, given up to lawlessness.

The great Elizabethans too, except Marlowe—the Shelley of the 16th century—are penetrated with the sanctity of civic and political

law. The "Faerie Queene" of Spenser, the most complete and splendid expression of Elizabethan ideals, is indeed no severe and frowning temple of Minos; it has rather been likened to an upper chamber suffused with the morning sunlight, rich with the fragrance and music of the wakening world. It is informed through and through by the passion for beauty. Yet Spenser is no epicurean. His passion for beauty finds sustenance not chiefly in the beauty that cloyes or even thrills and exalts the sense, but in that which uplifts the spirit and kindles the nerve: in heroic emprise, in self-consecration, and self-control. Beneath that exalted sensibility of his lay the hard grit of an Elizabethan statesman, lay the stern asceticism, even, of a Puritan. And so, to the moral equipment of his ideal man belongs, together with holiness, temperance, and chastity,—justice. Law and order matter to him supremely, and not only as pious aspirations: he is ruthless in enforcing them. His champion of Justice, Sir Artegal, who stands for Lord Grey, the Vicegerent of Ireland, to whose suite Spenser was attached, is attended everywhere by a man of iron mould,

Immoveable, resistless without end,  
Who in his hand an iron flail did hold  
With which he threst out falsehood and did truth unfold.

While Sir Artegal himself, who has been "nursled in all the discipline of justice"<sup>1</sup> from childhood, wields a sword of adamant that cleaves whatever it lights on. A conception of Justice of more than Roman rigour, one thinks. And indeed the Elizabethan treatment of Ireland, which Spenser has in view, showed a contempt for the customs of the subject people, a masterful overriding of *their* justice by *our* justice, which Rome only practised under extreme provocation. The day of our third type of national ideal had not yet dawned. But Spenser was an idealist, and his ruthlessness, like that of another, much maligned, idealist of our age, Friedrich Nietzsche, was rooted in his idealism. He saw a world from which the goddess of Justice had taken flight, grief-stricken at the wickedness of men: nothing remained but that her champion should restore her dominion by the sword. The gentle and humane Spenser represents the legal and law-abiding temper of England on the side, it must be owned,

<sup>1</sup> "F.Q." v. i. 9 f.

on which it stands nearest to despotism. And the modern Englishman finds himself more easily, in this as in other matters, in the neighbouring poetic world—the world at once more supremely poetic, and more profoundly real, of Shakespeare. Shakespeare's politics, it is true, no more than Spenser's, are ours; the Civil wars and the Revolution lie once for all between us; a gulf which the stoutest Tory reactionary cannot cross. Democrats—even so large and free a spirit as Whitman—may turn away from his genially contemptuous pictures of the Roman mob. But Shakespeare, Tudor poet as he was, draws arbitrary power with a yet more incisive hand. If he laughs at the Roman citizens on whose political sentiments Mark Antony plays what tune he pleases, he makes Cæsar himself a provoking compound of magnificent pretensions and senile weakness. And the English Histories are weighted with an almost oppressive sense of the national significance of law. Shakespeare does not show us the goddess of Justice flying with shrieks away from earth; nor a knightly champion vindicating her with an adamant sword. But he shows us the Titan Richard III, trampling, with easy cynical smile, the innocent lives which stand in his path; and the tender flower, Richard II, as beautiful as the other was ungainly, overriding the liberties of England with the insolent nonchalance of boyhood. Bolingbroke is able to dethrone Richard because Richard stands for wanton misrule and he for the might of law, for the established and ordered polity of England. And it is this ordered polity of England and neither Bolingbroke nor Richard, that is the hero of this play. For Bolingbroke, having dethroned Richard in the name of law, himself violates law by sending him to death; and thus incurs for the dynasty he founds the Nemesis which finally overwhelms the House of Lancaster in the Civil Wars. So far is Shakespeare from the worship of the strong man; so far is he from the worship of the State—from the unqualified worship even of his own England. The strong man Bolingbroke had saved the State, but the strong man, in his posterity, goes down; and so far from crime being as Macchiavelli taught, a method of benefiting a State, Shakespeare saw in it only a desperate hazard which might seal its doom.

But if he refuses to worship force, Shakespeare believes unflinchingly in government. Only he sees that all government succeeds best when it has the wills of the governed on its side, and his ideal for a



State is that it should be what in modern language we call an organism, what in his is called a harmony—

Congreeing in a full and natural close  
Like music.

Therefore doth heaven divide  
The state of man in divers functions,  
Setting endeavour in continual motion ;  
To which is fixed, as an aim or butt,  
Obedience : for so work the honey-bees,  
Creatures that by a rule in nature teach  
The act of order to a peopled kingdom.

..“ Hen. V.” i. ii.

The poetry of our greatest poet is then permeated with the ideal of law. But what of the ideal of liberty? Liberty, as an ideal, stirs us, and above all stirs the poet in us more deeply than law. Yet in the poetry of Shakespeare and his generation the note of liberty is hardly heard save in genial mockery at the fantastic tricks played in its name by the Roman plebeians, or Jack Cade, or Caliban. Nay, in all English poetry up till his time we rarely detect it. There were serfs, and dungeons, and pining captives in England before the 17th century; but it was only then that their inarticulate misery broke out in songs to divine liberty. The oppressed and the singers had, till then, belonged, on the whole, to distinct categories. The poets were on the prevailing side; their sweetness came out of its strength; Chaucer, the favourite of kings and friend of queens, never hints at the grinding economic oppression which provoked the agrarian revolution. Queen Elizabeth was an autocrat, but her autocratic power came home chiefly to Catholics and Puritans, whose armoury of retort included many formidable weapons, but not the trumpet blasts of an Areopagitica. It was only under the more provocative and headstrong autocracy of the Stuarts that the wrongs done to public and private liberty in England found immortal voice. Milton had thought deeply upon liberty; and his thought was nourished on the wisdom of Athens and the idealism of the early Church. Liberty with him meant both the right of every man to speak his mind unchallenged—*democratic* freedom—and *spiritual* freedom, or the willing self-surrender to a higher law. The second was for Milton the ground and justification of the first. Liberty is with him always, ultimately, the liberty to obey, the release from a lower control

for the sake of perfect service to a higher. And he assails with equal vigour, though with different weapons, the human laws and despotisms which thwart the higher service and the human weakness which flags in it. That higher service and therefore the ideal of perfect liberty, in its conflict with human weakness, is the theme of his great poems. The Lady in "Comus" vindicates it; Adam and Eve transgress it; Christ regains Paradise for man by submitting to it; Samson, after his tragic failure, reasserts it by his death. In the Prose works he deals rather with the impediments imposed by tyrannical laws. If he thunders against the censorship, it is that the mind of England may freely unfold its God-given powers; if he would extend the right of divorce, it is because marriage is sometimes a clog to the spiritual life. And when he came to discharge, at the cost of his eyesight, the "noble task" of defending English liberty before the bar of European opinion, he made very clear that he meant much more by it than the right of the English people to manage its political affairs as it chose. At the close of the "Second Defence of the English People" he turns upon the fellow-countrymen, as Wordsworth will do in his war sonnets, with an outburst of impassioned eloquence, warning them that to have beaten down their enemies, and establish republican government, will avail them nothing if they neglect the greater victories of peace:—

*Nam et vos, O cives . . .* For your chances, either of winning or keeping liberty, will be not a little affected, fellow-citizens, by what you are yourselves. Unless your liberty is of such a kind as arms can neither procure nor destroy, unless a liberty founded only on piety, justice, temperance, have struck deep and intimate root in your hearts, there will not be wanting those who will rob you insidiously of the liberty you boast to have won in arms. War has exalted many whom peace brings low. If at the close of war you neglect the arts of peace; if war is your peace and freedom, war your sole glory and virtue, you will find, trust me, peace itself the most arduous kind of war, and what you took for your liberty, your servitude. Unless by loyal and active devotion to God and men . . . you have put away the superstitious spring of ignorance of true religion from your hearts, you will find those who will put you like cattle under the yoke. Unless you expel avarice, ambition, luxury from your minds and from your households, you will have the tyrant whom you thought to encounter abroad and in the field upon you at home, within, and yet more stern, rather a host of tyrants will be begotten daily, unendurably, in your very entrails. *These* you must first conquer, this is the warfare of peace, these are victories, arduous indeed and though bloodless more glorious by far than the bloody victories of war; and unless you are

victors here also, that enemy and tyrant late in the field you will either not conquer at all or you will have conquered him in vain.

For if anyone thinks that to devise ingenious means of filling the treasury, to array forces by land and sea, to deal astutely with foreign envoys, and make sagacious leagues and treaties, is of more value for the state than providing clean-handed justice, redressing grievances, relieving distress, securing to each his own, you will discover too late, when these great affairs have suddenly deceived you, that these small ones, as you account them, have proved your ruin. Nay, even your trust in armies and allies will betray you unless it be guarded by the authority of justice; and wealth and honours, which most men pursue, easily change their owners. They repair where virtue and industry and patient labour are most alive, and desert the slackers. Thus nation precipitates the downfall of nation, or else the sounder part of a nation subverts the more corrupt: thus you have overthrown the royalists. If you slip into the same vices, if you begin to imitate them, to pursue the same bubbles, you will be assuredly royalists for your foes, whether your present foes or their successors; who trusting in the same prayers to God, the same patience, integrity, skill, by which you prevailed, will deservedly subjugate your degenerate sloth and folly.

Know—lest you should blame anyone but yourselves—know, that just as to be free is exactly the same thing as to be dutiful, to be wise, to be just and temperate, prudent with one's own, not laying hands on other's possessions, and thence, finally, generous and strong, so to be the opposite of these, is the same as to be a slave.

If after such great deeds you should degenerate, . . . posterity will pass judgment: that the foundations, yea and more than the foundations, were magnificently laid; but that men were wanting who should complete the building; it will grieve that after such beginnings perseverance was lacking; it will see a great harvest of glory, an occasion for the doing of mighty deeds, but the men were wanting for the occasion; but there were not wanting men to counsel and incite, and when the deeds were achieved, to adorn and glorify them with eternal praise.

Thus Milton by way of liberty and Shakespeare by way of law, arrive at a national ideal which, while very imperfectly worked out as yet in the English State, answers to the strongest and deepest political instincts of the English mind;—an ideal in which order and freedom both have their place, less as antagonists than as partners; order, with us, being most relished when it is won not by terrified obedience or stupid routine, but by the intelligent co-operation of free citizens; and freedom when it expresses that willing acceptance of the social and political order which Heine compared to the congenial bondage of a happy marriage. In our later poetry this Shakespearian and Miltonic ideal for England is expressed most decisively by

Wordsworth, with the accent on Freedom, and, with a yet more emphatic accent upon Order, by Tennyson ; for whom Freedom is a kind of *annexe* to "settled government,"

broadening slowly down  
From precedent to precedent.

Expressed most decisively, I say, by Wordsworth and Tennyson. For the English poetry of the 19th century has otherwise broken rather sharply away from this tradition ; and when, as with Swinburne and Meredith, it finally struck a note passionately national again, it was under the spell of other influences, and by way of other paths. The French Revolution altered the psychology, as well as the geography, of Europe ; especially, it left enduring traces in the sensitive brains of poets. It severed the old reverence for government, and thence for law ; it stimulated the temper which sanctifies impulse, and recognizes no oracle but that planted in the individual breast. Yet it also enriched and enlarged the scope of those individual impulses. In a Blake, a Shelley, who fiercely repudiated the old bond of law, it created a new bond of pity, which included all living things.

A robin-redbreast in a cage,  
Doth all heaven and earth enrage,

cried Blake.

For I am as a nerve, along which creep  
The else unfelt oppressions of the earth,

said Shelley. And Keats, in whom both the political anarchism and the new social sympathy were less pronounced, could yet speak, not less nobly, of the poet,

To whom the miseries of the earth  
Are miseries, and will not let them rest.

And Shelley expressed more magnificently than any other English poet the great poetic vision of Humanity :

Man one harmonious soul of every soul,  
Whose nature is its own divine control,

and of the *Universe* kindled and interwoven in every part by Beauty and Love. Of Shelley in another capacity I shall speak presently. It will be well, first, to dwell awhile on the most original, if not the greatest, of the poets of the century, whose contribution to our present subject is perhaps more apposite than any other.

Wordsworth, starting from a passion for freedom as revolutionary and anti-national as theirs, rose, like Milton, and sustained by Milton's inspiration, in the presence of a supreme national crisis, to poetry of freedom which is penetrated both with the passion for country and with the recognition of law, and better than any other in our whole literature answers to our aspirations and our needs to-day. As securely as Milton, Wordsworth knows that wealth and military power cannot of themselves make a people great :—

By the soul  
Only, the nations shall be great and free.

He knows that there is the closest inward connexion between the character of a people and its destiny in the world ; and with all his unshaken confidence in the power of Englishmen to work out their own safety by their own right hands, with all his assurance of their union under the threat of invasion :—

in Britain is one breath ;  
We all are with you now from shore to shore,  
Ye men of Kent ! 'tis victory or death ;

with all this, he recognized the grave failings, which, then as now, sullied our national temper. And so he called in his dejection to Milton,

Milton ! thou shouldst be living at this hour ;

I need not quote the famous words. And the memory of Milton came indeed to his aid, lifting him out of his despondency with the conviction that the English people, with all its flaws, stands, by its soul, for something indestructible in the world's history, in the life of humanity.

It is not to be thought of that the Flood  
Of British freedom, which to the open sea  
Of the world's praise from dark antiquity  
Hath flowed, . . . should perish, and to evil and to good  
Be lost for ever. In our Halls is hung  
Armoury of the invincible knights of old ;  
We must be free or die, who speak the tongue  
That Shakespeare spake, the faith and morals hold  
Which Milton held. In everything we're sprung  
Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold.

Thus Wordsworth sounds, in a way wholly his own, the great national ideals which had possessed the minds, both so vast and so unlike, of Shakespeare and Milton. What they saw from different,

in part conflicting standpoints, he, though not to be compared with either in range of experience or in compass of thought, nevertheless saw at once. The need for disciplined unity against a foreign foe and order in the State, which Shakespeare most keenly felt, the need for spiritual growth, and the removal of whatever, in law or institution, shackles it, which inspired Milton,—these together are the inspiration of Wordsworth's prophetic call to his countrymen in a world crisis more terrible than either Shakespeare or Milton had ever known.

### III.

But this lofty patriotism of Wordsworth and Milton holds in it the seed of something yet loftier. When we recognize, as they did, that by the *soul* only the nations shall be great and free, we have in effect recognized the condition of that highest type of national life of which I spoke. A great German historian, Eduard Zeller, writing long before the war, used these significant words :—

It is questions of power and advantage, it is prejudices and ambitions, which divide the peoples; what unites them is the culture of ideal interests, morality, art, science, education. In this domain they can unfold all their powers without hostile collision; here they have all common aims, while the widest scope is left for their individual genius in conceiving and executing them?

If this is so, if "by the soul" the nations are made implicit members of a world community, while by their greed of wealth and power and by their fear of one another, they are made deadly enemies; it would be strange if poetry, which is the soul's most intense expression, had not done something in these latter days to quicken the sense of international fellowship. In the first generation following the Revolution, the growth of the sense of fellowship with other nations almost always meant a loosening of the bond of communion with one's own. Wordsworth bitterly resented his country's declaration of war with the young French republic, and listened fiercely for the news of English defeats. Schiller accepted citizenship of France; and our great chemist, Priestley, invited to accept a seat in the assembly shortly after the September massacres, 1792, declined only because of his imperfect mastery of French. Half a generation later, Byron and Shelley passionately renounced their citizenship of England, and both seemed, by that renunciation, to become citizens, in a fuller sense than ever before, of the kingdom of poetry.

But the Revolution ran its course, and in 1797 the Republic's magnificent war of defence against the embattled monarchies of Europe became a war of aggression even against other republics, like Switzerland and Venice. The gospel of liberation, so ardently proclaimed eight years before, turned into a gospel of conquest. The despised sentiment of nationality, thus outraged, instantly recovered its force ; the Swiss Republicans fought against their fellow-republicans for their country, just as the French socialists to-day are fighting for theirs against their German confederates. Wordsworth's sonnets on the extinction of the Venetian republic, and on the subjugation of Switzerland, both too famous to quote, are the first great lyrics called forth by the tragedy of another people since Milton's yet greater "Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints". And Milton would hardly have spoken with such passion, if he had even spoken at all, had not the massacred people been fellow-Protestants. But Wordsworth cares nothing about their religion ; the faith of Venice and of most of Switzerland was not his ; he only feels poignantly that they had stood for freedom and were now subdued.

But Wordsworth's services to the cause of international liberty were to be far more signal than this, far more signal than is even now generally known. In 1808 the most critical point in the struggle with Napoleon was the Spanish Peninsula. Austria and Prussia were for the time effaced, Russia was humbled, and the rest of the continent was virtually incorporated with the French empire. But in Spain and Portugal the conqueror was met for the first time, not merely by national armies but by a nation in arms. After a century and a half of steady decadence, the countrymen of Cervantes and the Cid, almost without training or military leadership, showed the superb valour which had thrilled the England of Shakespeare. But the task of resisting Napoleon's veterans was stupendous. It was in this crisis, closely resembling the German invasions of Belgium, that England sent her expeditionary force to Portugal. It was eventually to strike the deadliest blow at Napoleon's power. But its first stage was humiliating. After an indecisive success, the leaders concluded the Convention of Cintra, which virtually purchased their safety by a surrender of the Portuguese cause. Questions were asked in Parliament ; but it was an impractical poet who, in a spirit worthy of Milton, in one of the most splendid pieces of reasoned eloquence in the language, ex-

posed the meanness and greed which had dictated the transaction, and summoned his countrymen to rise to the height of the heroic cause they had undertaken, to deliver the small and weak people fighting for their fatherland. The political and military situation he argues with the detailed mastery of a statesman ; but the informing passion of the whole is his own lofty conviction that, "by the soul only the Nations shall be great and free," and that the soul is nowhere more greatly manifested than in the heroic crises of national existence. Even the sonnets do not rise to higher notes of poetry than the prose sentences in which this brooding poet of tranquillity declares that man will always be found more than equal to whatever fate may befall him ; it is his fate which, save at challenging crises like this, does not satisfy the need of his spirit.

The passions of men (I mean the soul of sensibility in the heart of man) —in all quarrels, in all contests, in all quests, in all employments which are either sought by men or thrust upon them—do immeasurably transcend their objects. The true sorrow of humanity consists in this ;—not that the mind of man fails ; but that the course and demands of action and of life so rarely correspond with the dignity and intensity of human desires. . . . But, with the remembrance of what has been done, and in the face of the interminable evils which are threatened, a Spaniard can never have cause to complain of this, while a follower of the tyrant remains in arms upon the Peninsula.

Spain was liberated from Napoleon ; but his overthrow was, as great military triumphs have commonly been, no victory for freedom. If it unseated the great usurper, it everywhere enthroned political reaction. The ten ensuing years saw a series of national efforts for freedom, followed with passionate sympathy by a new generation of English poets. And a new element enters into their sympathy. Wordsworth's championship of the cause of Spain, Switzerland, and Venice is almost untouched by historic sense : they are patriots deprived of their freedom ; but his ardour is not quickened by concern for their specific genius ; his imagination is not yet kindled by that passion for Venice as Venice which Ruskin first taught the world. The spirit of the French Revolution was fundamentally unhistoric : in breaking with the past it broke also with the temper which lingers over and interprets the past. And Wordsworth, far as he receded from the Revolution, never outgrew its anti-historic bias. Byron and Shelley were more genuine children of the Revolution than Wordsworth had ever been ; and they remained arch-rebels to the end.



But, all the same, they lived half a generation later in that swiftly moving time, and they stand for some things which Wordsworth never reached. To them, as to him, the historic spirit as such was strange. But two historic lands stood out for them in consummate splendour from the black wilderness of the past at large. Greece and Italy had naturally been objects of keen interest among scholars since the Renaissance ; but there was a vast gulf between the cultured homage of a Gray, or even the majestic tribute of a Milton, and the passionate claim to spiritual citizenship which inspires Byron's

O Rome, my country, city of my soul,

and led him to give his life for the deliverance of the Greeks.

But still the historic apprehension remains, in both poets, rather ardent than penetrating. We see the passion of the devotee more clearly than the lineaments of the goddess. A generation later, with the Brownings, and then with Meredith, and even with that latter-day Shelley, Swinburne, Italy is not less deeply loved, but she is far more intimately known and far more vividly portrayed. Meredith's "Sandra Belloni," or "Vittoria" is an eloquent symbol of the spirit of the Italian "Risorgimento" ; but she is also a noble rendering of Italian womanhood, nerved to the height of aspiration and of heroic resolve by the great crisis. And Robert Browning's picture of such a woman is not less perfect in the poem, "The Italian in England," which Mazzini used to read to his fellow-exiles in London. The hunted patriot has crouched six days among the ferns, when a company of peasant women went by near his hiding-place. He throws his glove to strike the last, taking his chance of betrayal. The woman gave no sign, but marked the place and went on. He prepares an ingenious tale to explain his position, plausible enough to deceive a peasant. An hour later she returns :—

But when I saw that woman's face,  
Its calm simplicity of grace,  
Our Italy's own attitude,  
In which she walked thus far, and stood,  
Planting each naked foot so firm,  
To crush the snake and spare the worm,—  
At first sight of her eyes, I said,  
"I am that man upon whose head  
They fix the price, because I hate  
The Austrians over us,"—

in short put his life in her hands. She goes back with a message to his friends at Padua. After three days she returns,

I was no surer of sunrise  
Than of her coming.

Mrs. Browning was a far more effusive Italian patriot than her husband, but she had less concentrated power, and the prolonged diatribes of "Casa Guidi Windows" and "The Poems before Congress," are not much more digestible to-day than most of the poetry inspired by obsolete politics. But one figure of hers has something of the quality of her husband's Italian peasant-woman the court lady of Turin who arrays herself in her most stately dress to visit the soldiers, Italian and French, who have been wounded in defence of Italy at Villafranca; that hospital is for her the court, and those wounded soldiers kings. And her words to the French soldier strike one note, not the least noble, of internationalism :—

Each of the heroes around us has fought for his land and line,  
But thou hast fought for a stranger, in hate of a wrong not thine.  
Happy are all free peoples, too strong to be dispossesst.  
But blessed are those among nations, who dare to be free for the rest.

With Algernon Charles Swinburne the English poetry of international idealism assumes an altogether larger compass and grander flight, notwithstanding that his fundamental conceptions are still the crude and outworn ideas of the Revolution. Outworn as they are, they receive a new afflatus from his magnificent lyric power; but it is lyric power pure and simple, for of critical or speculative power applied to ideas Swinburne had hardly a trace. But as I have said, his international idealism has a vast sweep and range. Earth, mother of the peoples, and sister of the stars in their courses, lives again, an aged, tragic figure, and her children, the nations, her glory and her shame, call to her for help :—

Thou that badest man be born, bid man be free.

And so the voices, successively of Greece and Italy, of Spain and France, Russia and Switzerland, of Germany and England, are lifted up in intercession. One recalls with curious interest to-day the voice which Swinburne ascribed to the Germany of half a century ago; the more so since the colossal history of 19th century Germany has passed almost unnoticed in our poetry, through which the great struggles of

19th century Italy sent so deep and sustained reverberations. And this Germany of Swinburne's is curiously remote, it is the Germany of Tacitus and Grimm's fairy tales, and the motley crowd of principedoms and dukeries :—

I am she beside whose forest-hidden fountains  
 Slept freedom armed,  
 By the magic born to music in my mountains,  
 Heart-chained and charmed.  
 By those days the very dream whereof delivers  
 My soul from wrong ;  
 By the sounds that make of all my ringing rivers  
 None knows what song ;  
 By the many tribes and names of my division  
 One from another ;  
 By the single eye of sun-compelling vision  
 Hear us, O mother !

In sharp contrast with the vague and uncertain touch of that portrait is the terrific sureness and trenchancy of his Italy and his France. Swinburne felt deeply the spell of France ; he gloried in her genius which had shown Europe the way to Revolution ; he gloried in her as the birthplace of his master, Hugo ; but he saw her also prostituted to sensuality, and submitting tamely to the yoke of the Second Empire ; and he turned upon her with the fierce yet agonized rebuke of a lover to a guilty mistress. But when the fiery trial of 1870 came upon her, his anger changed to pity, and he felt that she who had beyond others loved humanity, had, like the Magdalen, atoned for her sins. It is as a Magdalen, thus guilty and thus redeemed, that Freedom, the spirit of God and man, addresses her :—

Am I not he that hath made thee and begotten thee,  
 I, God, the spirit of man ?  
 Wherefore now these eighteen years hast thou forgotten me,  
 From whom thy life began ?  
 Yet I know thee turning back now to behold me,  
 To bow thee and make thee bare,  
 Not for sin's sake but penitence, by my feet to hold me,  
 And wipe them with thy hair.  
 And sweet ointment of thy grief thou hast brought thy master,  
 And set before thy lord,  
 From a box of flawed and broken alabaster,  
 Thy broken spirit, poured.

And love-offerings, tears and perfumes, hast thou given me,  
 To reach my feet, and touch ;  
 Therefore thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee,  
 Because thou hast loved much.

From George Meredith, too, the tragic overthrow of France, no less than the desperate fight for Italian unity, elicited noble poetry, poetry as much more pregnant and weighty in intellectual substance than Swinburne's, as its music is less eloquent and winged. The ode "December, 1870" stands, with the greatest of Wordsworth's War sonnets, at the head of the political poetry of the century. Like Swinburne he feels the mingling of glorious gifts and foulness in the French genius. But for him too the glory is the supreme thing : it was she who led the way in the liberation of mankind :

O she, that made the brave appeal  
 For manhood when our time was dark,  
 And from our fetters drove the spark  
 Which was as lightning to reveal  
 New seasons, with the swifter play  
 Of pulses, and benigner day ;  
 She that divinely shook the dead  
 From living man ; that stretched ahead  
 Her resolute forefinger straight,  
 And marched towards the gloomy gate  
 Of Earth's Untried. . . .

But now this prophet and leader among nations is plunged in ruin,  
 half through her own sins : she who in

The good name of Humanity  
 Called forth the daring vision ! she,  
 She likewise half corrupt of sin,  
 Angel and wanton ! can it be ?  
 Her star has foundered in eclipse,  
 The shriek of madness on her lips :  
 Shreds of her, and no more, we see.  
 There is horrible convulsion, smothered din,  
 As of one who in a grave-cloth struggles to be free.

Yet amid the chaos she is full of song :

Look down where deep in blood and mire,  
 Black thunder plants his feet, and ploughs  
 The soil for ruin ; that is France :  
 Still thrilling like a lyre.

And these words, written forty-five years ago, are yet more moving to-day, in the midst of a struggle less outwardly disastrous but far more deadly for France, and which she did far less to provoke.

How, lastly, does this international poetry of the end of the century, of Swinburne and Meredith, differ from that of Byron and Shelley, near the beginning? Partly, as we have seen, in that it is both vaster in range and more penetrating in degree of insight into the personality of nations. But even more, because it goes along with a passionate love of, and imaginative understanding for, England herself. Byron and Shelley have no note of joy in England; but Meredith and Swinburne are as firmly rooted in her soil as Shakespeare and Wordsworth; where in modern poetry is the wonder of this "enchanted isle" made more alive than in the one poet's pictures of her woodlands and breathing valleys, her Hampshire maids and farmers, or in the other poet's pictures of the North Sea surging against the embattled crags and castles of Northumberland?

And there is meaning in this latter-day union of what we commonly call national and international idealism. It means, as I have said, that the love of country itself has been lifted to a higher plane. So long, let me repeat, as national greatness is conceived in terms of power, or of territory, or even of wealth, the very conception of a community of nations can hardly emerge: other nations are rivals to be beaten, are material to be made use of, are territory to be annexed, or at best, are allies to rally to our help; their individual aims, interests, aspirations, count only as pieces, more or less formidable, in the game of the opposite side or in our own. So far and so long as these conditions prevail, nationalism and internationalism are inconsistent and incompatible: the one can exist only at the expense of the other. But the root fact of the situation,—and the ground of the deepest encouragement is this,—that in proportion as the aims of a nation cease to be fundamentally material, as soon as it seeks a well-being founded upon the spiritual enlightenment, the mental and moral health of its population, the similar aims of other nations become contributory, instead of rival forces, *their* advance an element of its own progress; all these multiform national lives becoming figures in the complex pattern of the life of Humanity; and the love of each man for his country, as Mazzini said, only the most definite expression of his love for all the nations of the world. The problem of converting

that old intense but narrow love which finds complete expression in a fighting patriotism into this not less intense love of country which is "only the most definite expression" of a love which goes beyond country,—this problem is one with that of transforming the brute-will to master man into the spiritual will to uplift him : and therefore all who are working for the spiritual uplifting of their fellow-countrymen are working for humanity, and all who are working for humanity are working for their own land. And if there is something higher than patriotism, as Edith Cavell said with the clear vision of martyrdom, in her last recorded words, so the recognition and fulfilment of that something higher is itself an act of patriotism ; and she herself will be remembered not only as one who loved England, and died for it, but as one who loved England too intensely and too nobly to hate any of her fellow-men.