Jeremiah is my favorite book now. It has taught me more than tongue can tell. But I am much disheartened, and am minded to speak no more words in this name [Parson Lot]. Yet all these bullyings teach one, correct one, warn one, show one that God is not leaving one to go One’s own way. “Christ reigns,” quoth Luther.—Kingsley in a December 1850 letter to F. D. Maurice.  

Charles Kingsley was a sort of mid-century Jeremiah, lashing out at his own Church of England, imploring workers to choose Christ, demanding that the aristocrats and middle classes change their ways, seeing himself as a necessary prophet. The letter to his “Master,” F. D. Maurice, written after failure of the Christian Socialist magazine (to which he contributed as Parson Lot), shows Kingsley at his open, honest, self-doubting best. This man who scorned Newman’s The Soul and who feared the “higher criticism” of men like Strauss could urge his underprivileged countrymen to accept the teachings of Christ while himself admitting that the Old Testament figures meant most to him. Parson Lot, not Paul; Jeremiah, not Luke. And the choice is not random. The New Testament for Kingsley described a millennial world, a world of socialism, and Kingsley joined J. M. Ludlow and Maurice in equating Christianity with socialism. But socialism was for Englishmen, men who could learn to love their work and know their place. The clergyman who was to dismiss Irish peasants as so much dirt and African tribesmen as slightly elevated apes was also the man who thought, almost in spite of himself, of a revenging God and of a chosen race. Kingsley’s famous announcement: “I am a Chartist” was a courageous admission to a group of working men. But Kingsley’s
whole sentence was: "I am a parson and a Chartist—Church of England I mean."²

In 1850 the parson, rector of Eversley, was thirty-one years old. He had published *The Saint's Tragedy*, his anti-Catholic, anti-ascetic play based on Elizabeth of Hungary (and in its original, incomplete version, his wedding present for Fanny, his wife). As "Parson Lot" he had written his polemics in *Politics for the People* and was to write again soon for the *Christian Socialist*. He had published *Yeast*, his polemical novel, in *Fraser's* (1848). And he had turned to reviewing, also for *Fraser's*, publishing a long series of commentaries on various writers and topics of his day. I have mentioned his praise of *In Memoriam* as the greatest Christian poem in centuries and his advice to Matthew Arnold to emulate the self-discipline and robustness of Thomas Arnold. Kingsley also wrote lyric poems, essays on land reform, and social tracts. In 1850 he published "Cheap Clothes and Nasty," which he said he drew for from his experiences in Chelsea, but which clearly owes much, as his notes suggest, to Mayhew's *London Labour and London Poor* articles in the *Morning Chronicle*, articles that shocked more people than Kingsley into outraged polemics.

A related piece of writing in 1850 was *Alton Locke*, perhaps one of the oddest literary documents of nineteenth-century England. Before turning to Kingsley's novel, subtitled *Tailor and Poet*, I want first to glance at Kingsley's other activities as a Christian Socialist and missionary clergyman.

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A new idea has gone abroad into the world. That Socialism, the latest born of the forces now at work in modern society, and Christianity, the eldest born of those forces, are in their nature not hostile, but akin to each other.—J. M. Ludlow, in *The Christian Socialist*, November 1850³

Kingsley's fame has come to rest on what he would have thought an accidental aspect of his career. Not his Cambridge professorship, his work at Eversley, his efforts for social reform, his defense of Christianity, his literary labors—not these, but rather his attacks on John Henry Newman are remembered. The attacks did him little service, if only because his antagonist was the subtler man, and they eclipse what is perhaps the most important feature of Kingsley's life. For although contemporaries praised Kingsley as a potentially great poet or as the novelist of his day, he was manifestly neither. But there is no question, as G. M. Young writes,
that Kingsley's varied activities, his controversial positions, his often inconsistent attitudes, as well as his exchanges with Newman, make him a useful index to the times.

In dealing with a past age [Young writes] we constantly need a central man to refer to, and naturally he will not be one of its greatest men in the eyes of later generations. Kingsley is very nearly the central man of that period of swift change which sets in soon after 1845 and was consummated about twenty years later.

Young sees the age as committed to both "liberation and conservatism." He says that "the triumphant bourgeoisie of 1830 was looking rather small in 1850: the gentry, who, in 1846, seemed to be down and out for ever, were in fact just entering their golden age. There was a great deal of day-dreaming in it all." What Young construes from his picture of mid-century England is a nation in need of Benthamite policies and Tory governors—enlightened authority, in short. He thinks of the combination as England’s secret, sees the secret established at mid-century, and finds Kingsley to be its embodiment and spokesman. And indeed Kingsley’s affection for aristocrats (he was later to tutor the Prince of Wales), if not for Tories, and his affection for workers seem to illustrate the direction of much contemporary thought. So, too, Kingsley’s Broad Church philosophy, his virulent antipoverty sentiments, his "muscular Christianity," which for Young suggest the historical development of a church that had become somewhat more active in its social responsibilities and that had lived through almost a generation of Tractarian challenges. By 1850, Newman had long ago abdicated in favor of Rome, and the High Church movement "had been re-absorbed with the main stream of religious tendency."

This common view of mid-century England is of a nation making a reasonable compromise toward "equipoise" and "equanimity" after suffering through social and religious upheavals; and certainly mid-century Englishmen, looking with delight on improved harvests, and shrugging off the Chartists—who a scant two years earlier had made them fearful of property and life—tended to assess their situation in optimistic terms. What I would question in such an estimate is the sense—not shared by Kingsley—that problems were solved. Problems of religion were perhaps never to be solved, whatever the abated energy of the Oxford Movement. Even the Census of 1851 showed poor church attendance, particularly among the poor. As for problems of social inequality, they have endured with at least as much tenacity as any Benthamite-Tory working alliance. But even if we agree with general assessments about an "age of equipoise," it is still hard to see Kingsley, the young Kingsley, the man at mid-century,
fitting very well as its embodiment. A man of passion, of anger, of powerful loves and powerful prejudices, he serves as an index to the times. But he is hardly typical of the times. Perhaps he is central because he is involved in so much, but he is also an outsider, the self-styled Jeremiah, a voice of angry conscience, who won the praise of a later generation, to be sure, but who, as the author of *Yeast* or “Cheap Clothes and Nasty,” seemed to the establishment he loved more of a hostile force than the comforting herald of compromise.

Looking back on his association with Kingsley, Thomas Hughes (fellow Christian Socialist and later author of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*) spoke of Kingsley’s social-religious mission in this way:

I have often thought that [at mid-century] his very sensitiveness drove him to say things more broadly and incisively, because he was speaking as it were somewhat against the grain, and knew that the line he was taking would be misunderstood, and would displease and alarm those with whom he had most sympathy. For he was by nature and education an aristocrat.  

No doubt Hughes wanted to make Kingsley seem less radical than he had been, but he also isolates an important quality. For Kingsley was, as Hughes suggests, both a reluctant prophet and a prophet with mixed sympathies. His vigorous Anglicanism and his social causes share with his writings an odd pattern of commitment and retreat. Even when he worked at a novel, for example, he wrote a few pages at a time, then withdrew from his study, created a few more pages in his mind, returned to his writing, and so on. He was at once preoccupied with the job to be done and unable to work without interrupting himself. And his method of writing offers a pattern for his life. Whether at Cambridge or Eversley or London, he worked feverishly hard for a certain time, then apparently collapsed, as though his entire energy had gone into the task at hand. When he quoted Byron (in a letter to his mother), saying that he was the sort of person who became middle-aged when young and who died early, because he would burn himself out—he uses the same quotation in *Alton Locke*—he was accurate in his prediction and apparently right about the reason. To understand Kingsley, we need to remember his profound reluctance along with his compulsive desire to serve. His driving energy had as its counterpart an obvious frailty and weakness: physical and mental breakdowns occurred with almost predictable frequency. The effect of his temperament on his writing, which is usually polemical writing, is a chronic overstatement and a total lack of sympathy for his opponent, although he himself, often enough, had expressed views similar to those of
his opponents or had felt what they had felt. We can see how this works in terms of his religious development and of his response to the Newman brothers, neither of whom he admired.

Kingsley’s father was an Anglican clergyman, and Kingsley grew up—in the Fens, in Cornwall, in London—aware of the church and of its role and responsibilities. He did not approve of his father’s clerical methods, and he became increasingly lonely and ill at ease at home. When he went to Cambridge, he found himself an unbeliever. His slow return to faith resulted largely from his relationship with Frances Grenfell, with whom a long and at first unacknowledged courtship matured into a discovery and later an acclamation of belief. When he met her, Fanny had more or less committed herself to becoming a nun. Kingsley felt compelled, while showing her the evils of physical abstinence, also to find his own ironclad belief. In spite of her family’s opposition, of repeated separations, and of their personal differences, they did at last marry. And they seem, with interludes, to have lived well together. The relationship has nevertheless its odd side. Kingsley’s passionate attraction to Fanny coincided with his own flirtation not only with asceticism but also with the church he publicly flayed, the Church of Rome. “There is no middle course. Either deism, or the highest and most monarchial system of Catholicism.”7 Although he chose neither, his statement shows an understanding of the position consistently held by John Henry Newman, the position that led Newman and Manning and their followers into the Church of Rome.

Kingsley’s religious struggles during his courtship also took a form that seems at the furthest remove from his public, and indeed from most of his private, remarks. “I once formed a strange project,” he wrote to Fanny. “I would have travelled to a monastery in France, gone barefoot into the chapel at matins (midnight), and there confessed every sin of my whole life before the monks and offered my naked body to be scourged by them.”8 Even while campaigning for sexuality and sensuousness against Fanny’s waning asceticism, Kingsley could admit his terrible fear of his sexuality, his need for confession and for penance. Often, when separated from his fiancée, he imposed on them both a harsh course of self-denial, urging Fanny’s continued fasting, which came at the expense of her health. All the while he worked on his *Elizabeth of Hungary*, his story, with his own drawings, of a woman perverted by asceticism, whose life he found terrible, though obviously compelling.

No less than Francis or John Henry Newman, Kingsley underwent a religious conversion, in his case a Carlylean shift from naysaying to a very loud yea. But whereas John Henry Newman’s acceptance of Rome followed
years of self-doubting and theological inquiry, Kingsley’s conversion coincided with his winning of Fanny and his choice of a profession. No sooner had he devoted himself “to the religion I have scorned, making the debauchee a preacher of purity and holiness,” than he chose his father’s calling and decided to become a clergyman.⁹ I am not questioning his motives, although clearly his calling fitted nicely with an almost self-willed conversion and with his winning of his wife. I am saying that his sense of himself as a potential theologian and his often foolish attacks on Newman cast doubt on his self-understanding. For on the one hand Kingsley could at certain moments see the essential line of Newman’s arguments and could advocate a kind of asceticism or bodily mortification that would have made Newman seem the English voice of common sense, and on the other hand he could dismiss the whole of Newman’s struggles—along with Newman himself—in a satirical comment: “How silently Newman has glided over to his own place! No doubt more will follow—which will do them little harm—and us much good.”¹⁰ This was a private remark. In his first review for Fraser’s (in 1848), Kingsley wrote with no less a Calvinistic glee:

Among [the German] converts it cannot name a first-rate man. . . . So it is with our own late conversions. Have we lost a single second-rate man even? One, indeed, we have lost, first-rate in talents, at least; but has not he by his later writings given the very strongest proof, that to become a Romish priest is to lose, ipso facto, whatever moral or intellectual life he might previously have had? . . . Above all, in all their authors, converts or indigenous, is there not the same fearful want of straightforward truth, that “Jesuitry,” which the mob may dread as a subtle poison, but which the philosopher considers as the deepest and surest system of moribund weakness?¹¹

Which is the philosopher’s voice here and which the mob’s?

In his campaign for Fanny’s love and his own belief, Kingsley approximated another aspect of Roman Catholicism that mid-century Englishmen theoretically deplored. Clearly he treated Fanny both as a woman to be saved from celibacy and as a symbol of his highest aspirations. If he reminded her that the woman was the weaker vessel, in the manner of Ruskin’s later “Queens’ Gardens” essay, he could argue from at least two opposing points of view. Like John Stuart Mill, he became a feminist in part because of his admiration for the woman he loved, and at mid-century he worked in the movement for women’s higher education, arguing—again as Mill did—that women were at least the equal of men in most pursuits. Whereas Mill turned Harriet Taylor into a paragon of learning and sense, however, Kingsley conceived of Fanny as a type of Beatrice:
I feel that in the tumult and grossness by which I am surrounded my mind is seldom, very seldom, in a tone capable of approaching the subject [religion] as it ought to be approached, and of coming pure and calm into your pure and calm presence. I feel that I am insulting you when I sit down reeking with the fumes of the world's frivolities and vices to talk to you. . . . I have, however, I assure you, struggled to alter lately and this alteration has been remarked with pleasure by some and with sneers by others. "Kingsley," they say, "is not half so reckless as he used to be." You are to me a middle point between earthly and ethereal morality. I begin to love good for your sake. At length I will be able to love it for God's sake.

He began this letter of confession with "My dearest Lady." 12

Whatever Kingsley's acknowledged or unacknowledged leanings toward Catholicism, his assessment of the Roman Church and of Newman as its principal English exponent was always contemptuous. One is tempted to think of his often gratuitous attacks along the lines of his attacks on the "feminine" qualities of men he disliked. Browning he thought effeminate; Arnold, too. Conversely, his favorite term of praise was "manly." Since Kingsley's own acquaintances often spoke of his effeminacy, his preoccupation with "manliness," like his hatred of Catholicism, reflects less on the objects of his scrutiny than upon his own character. Yet he could be honest about his affection for men, if not about his own effeminacy of manner. He told Fanny that, were she a man (he is defending his friendship with Charles Mansfield), "we should have been like David and Jonathan." 13 His praise of the beauty of the male body is much like that of D. H. Lawrence: he calls a keeper on a trout stream "a river god in velvet-teen." 14 The point is that Kingsley's passions and hatreds tumbled over one another, causing him agonies of doubt. When he had arrived at a belief or a social conviction, he seemed instantly to have no understanding, either of his own ambivalence or of opposing points of view. Like Carlyle, he found no room for tolerance.

There is little record of Kingsley's relationship with Francis Newman, although we know that he visited Newman shortly after Newman published Phases of Faith. Apparently, the two shared a great deal, especially the sense that John Henry Newman's road to Rome approximated the road to hell. Both resented in the future cardinal the quiet self-scrutiny, the evident indecision, the acquiescence in choosing a foreign and authoritarian church. Both shared, temperamentally, a ferocious high seriousness, at least to the extent that they were rarely seen to laugh. Yet Kingsley did laugh at Newman's The Soul. After an embarrassing episode in London, when a clergyman who had invited him to offer the sermon actually denounced him for his views, Kingsley was speaking with several Christian
Socialists at the house of F. D. Maurice. Someone mentioned Newman’s *The Soul*, and Kingsley, who stammered, said: “Oh, yes! the s-s-s-soul and her stomach-aches!” If he had read Newman’s book, he should have realized that Newman was trying to sort out precisely the dilemma that he himself had articulated at Cambridge: How does one find belief between the extremes of unbelief or deism and the authoritarian theism of the Church of Rome?

In *The Soul* as in *Phases of Faith*, Newman wants to establish religious sanction for right conduct, although *The Soul* emphasizes the problem of faith rather than its social implications as such. Kingsley’s impatience, which may have reflected his mood more than his considered opinion, has to do with his notion of the uses of religion, of religion’s fight for social reforms. Newman’s appreciation of “romantic scenery,” his conviction that right actions follow strong convictions, his precise assessment of what had been Kingsley’s own predicament—these could easily be overlooked by a reader who saw his mission as changing men and women, bringing the news of Christ and the news of socialism.

By 1850, Kingsley’s association with Maurice and Ludlow had already resulted in the short-lived *Politics for the People*. Joined by Charles Mansfield, Thomas Hughes, and other men committed to social reform, the Christian Socialists wanted to prompt the Anglican Church toward social responsibilities and to show poor people why they needed a socialism tempered by Christianity. The origins of Christian Socialism go back, as Robert Martin says, to “Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose work *On the Constitution of Church and State*, 1830, with its assumption of the social ethic implicit in Christianity, had influenced Maurice’s thinking when he was studying at Oxford. . . . To Maurice, Ludlow, and Kingsley, their own theological position, roughly that of what came to be known as the Broad Church movement, seemed the only one capable of carrying out Coleridge’s ideas.”

Martin thinks of the social philosophy of the Christian Socialists as having derived from the French Socialists and from Robert Owen, whose New Lanark had been a pioneer manufacturing community. The connection with Owen makes good sense, because of the paternalism inherent in the group’s attitudes: they themselves worried about the absence of working class people in the movement. The call for association and for equitable distribution and for what resembles, at times, a labor theory of value could, however, have come from a variety of sources. Socialism at mid-century was, in the words of Marx and Engels, a “specter” across Europe. It was a central issue in England as well. Periodicals like the *Leader* were self-acclaimed organs of socialism no less than the *Christian Socialist* itself.
One can find in the pages of the Leader acknowledgment of the new Communist periodical The Red Republican, notices of Socialist movements on the continent, defenses of articles on socialism in the British Quarterly Review, and praise of such contemporary assessments of the poor as Mayhew's articles in the Morning Chronicle and Joseph Kay's pioneering survey of British and European educational systems. Whether contemporaries took the evidence presented to them and, like Carlyle, began making grim forecasts, or whether, like George Lewes, they assumed the need for reforms, they had available a battery of incisive surveys and a large number of interpretive prophets. One of the cant words of the time indicates a yet further direction in contemporary social thought. Herbert Spencer's Social Statics uses statics to imply the empirical, scientific nature of the social inquiry that Spencer shared with men as diverse as Comte, Engels, and Carlyle. Similarly John Stores Smith, a clergyman like Kingsley, in his Social Aspects (1850) discusses what he considers the driving forces in his society, speaking of "the Decay of Nations" of "the Social and Domestic Tendencies of the Age." He is intent on isolating the energies and the characteristics of his age, though he cares most about its degeneracy and Pharisaism. But while wholly opposed to Spencer on matters of progress, national destiny, and various other features of "the modern Phasis," he shares the tendency to sociological methods.

Socialism and communism (in this first great age of isms) are in one aspect polemical extensions of the insatiable search for statistics and what is probably its corollary, the need for explanatory social theories. If all this coincided with an almost universal clamor in favor of individual rights and liberties, the reason is not hard to find. For the acceptance of great historical forces like evolution or progress carries with it the implication of the individual's frailty. Hence a writer like Lewes can embrace the social meliorism of a variety of Socialist thinkers while praising the excessive individuality of Carlyle and defining poetry (after Carlyle) as the history of a single human soul.

Kingsley's conception of socialism reflects the anger of Carlyle at England's blindness to social ills; it reflects the widespread sense—shared by Marx and Engels—that historical forces were creating a new order and that, in a time of great change, it was necessary to define the conditions of change and to act with conviction. Whereas Marx and Engels posit a vast historical reordering of class and wealth and urge their readers—with the sanction of historical necessity—to claim what the future promises, Kingsley thinks in terms of reformable institutions. He berates his middle-
class contemporaries for their blindness and ridicules their folly. He shows that the diseases of the poor are the diseases of the rich, since the disgraceful buyers of “slop” tailoring are contaminated by the illnesses of the poor tailors themselves. But Kingsley’s arguments center on local issues, on how people live. He details, after Mayhew, the prices paid for clothing, the moneys extracted by the “sweaters,” or middlemen, the wages received by the tailors, the conditions of the tailors’ lives. “And now comes the question—What is to be done with these poor tailors, to the number of between fifteen and twenty thousand? Their condition, as it stands, is simply one of ever-increasing darkness and despair. The system which is ruining them is daily spreading, deepening.”

He also makes specific suggestions to his readers about where to shop or what not to buy.

What can be done?

First—this can be done. That no man who calls himself a Christian—no man who calls himself a man—shall ever disgrace himself by dealing at any show-shop or slop-shop. It is easy enough to know them. The ticketed garments, the imprudent puffs, the trumpery decorations, proclaim them,—every one knows them at first sight. He who pretends not to do so is simply either a fool or a liar. Let no man enter them—they are the temples of Moloch—their thresholds are rank with human blood.

Kingsley’s polemic has general application to working-class conditions in other trades and in other places, yet it flies at a particular target in the hope of redressing a particular ill. This would be true, of course, of writers like Dickens or Mrs. Gaskell or Disraeli. Because all assume the essential permanence of the system itself, they may be limited to attacking what a Marxist would call the symptoms of the disease. Kingsley, oddly enough, is especially limited. He may call himself a Socialist and he may, he does, cry out for public conscience and social reform. His ideal, however, is far even from the implied classless society in Dickens’s novels. He wants workers to remember that they are workers and ought to remain workers, since those above workers have a rightful place as well as their unfulfilled responsibilities.

When Kingsley told those assembled workers that he was “a parson, and a Chartist,” he defined his own relation to the movement for reform. In fact, he did not have a very high opinion of the People’s Charter: “My only quarrel with the Charter,” he said, “is that it does not go far enough in reform. I want to see you free, but I do not see that what you ask for will give you what you want. I think you have fallen into just the same mistake as the rich, of whom you complain—the very mistake which has been our curse and our nightmare. I mean the mistake of fancying that
legislative reform is social reform, or that men's hearts can be changed by an Act of Parliament.” The implications of this point to a revolutionary plan far in advance of the Chartists, and Kingsley does say, “The French cry of ‘organization of labor’ is worth a thousand [charters].”19 What he actually wants for workers is something similar to what the Chartists want and differs only in a few specifics. Kingsley is a Chartist, a man with limited and potentially realizable goals, who uses “the French cry” to give urgency to his message.

We are teaching [the workers] to become Christians by teaching them gradually that true socialism, true liberty, brotherhood, and true equality (not the carnal dead level equality of the Communist, but the spiritual equality of the church idea, which gives every man an equal chance of developing and using God’s gifts . . .) is to be found in loyalty and obedience to Christ.20

Such principles, from the Revolution of 1789 rather than from that of 1848, mean for Kingsley definite social objectives:

We must touch the workman at all his points of interest. First and foremost at association—but also at political rights, as grounded both on the Christian ideal of the Church, and on the historic facts of the Anglo-Saxon race. Then national education, sanitary and dwelling house reform, the free sale of land, and corresponding reform of the land laws, moral improvement of the family relation, public places of recreation (on which point I am very earnest), and I think a set of hints from history, and sayings of great men. . . .21

In the first of these passages, Kingsley calls for a change of heart among the workers made possible, as it turns out, by the ruling classes, who do the teaching and who bring the message of Christ. And Kingsley rarely writes his polemics without putting the main paternal burden for reform on clergymen. In the second passage, he has left the world of Carlyle for that of Disraeli. An implied and necessary change of heart of the governing classes must, he says, “touch the workman at all his points of interest.” True, some of the announced goals are vague at best and some are perhaps whimsical. Where Marx scoffs at the bourgeois marriage contract as a sign of slavery and injustice, Kingsley calls for its reinvigoration. His theory of “political rights,” grounded alike on Christianity and Anglo-Saxon history reflects the widespread contemporary interest in theories of race (at least two books about the subject appeared in 1850 alone)22 and Kingsley’s own pet theory about the “feminine” qualities of the Anglo-Saxons that need fertilizing by the “masculine” Nordic peoples. But whatever his general theories about “this . . . puling, quill-driving, soft-handed age,” he returns consistently to hopes for workingmen’s association and cooperation,
to specific questions of sanitary reform, to the need for "public places of recreation (on which point I am very earnest)," to matters that could and would be handled by "legislative reform."

After a few years of vigorous social work, work which, along with his duties at Eversley and his almost continuous literary work, caused his recurrent breakdowns, Kingsley ended his role as Parson Lot. He became again Canon Charles Kingsley and Professor Kingsley, assuming the history professorship at Cambridge, and it was to the undergraduates at Cambridge that Kingsley directed his final preface to Alton Locke. But then, in spite of the Parson Lot letters to the workers, Kingsley's real message had always been to those he thought remiss in their duties. He agreed with Matthew Arnold about the need to educate the middle class, because he assumed that the hierarchy of classes would endure. In this respect he was more a prophet than Marx.

It is easy to find inconsistencies and inadequacies in Kingsley's arguments and to wonder—when, for example, he lashes out at John Henry Newman—what intellectual center there was to his life. The religious thinker could forget his own past while bemoaning the course of his opponent's life; he could dismiss celibacy while imposing it upon himself and his wife (for the entire first month of their marriage). He could articulate arguments like those of The Soul and dismiss Francis Newman's book as the symptom of stomach ache. As a social thinker, he could argue the inadequacies of the People's Charter and tender a somewhat watered program himself. As Parson Lot, he envisaged himself writing tracts on the model of the Tractarians, whose beliefs and methods he deplored equally. He could argue the responsibility of the local clergyman and seek, with his colleagues, to wage a war for reform in the streets of the Great Wen.

And then, surely before they had won, Kingsley was no longer fighting. He defended Alton Locke in the preface to the Cambridge undergraduates, and he was happy to see it reissued, but he no longer spoke as Jeremiah, capable of this earlier outrage and scorn:

Sweet competition! Heavenly maid!—Nowadays hymned alike by penny-a-liners and philosophers as the ground of all society. . . . Man eating man, eaten by man, in every variety of degree and method! Why does not some enthusiastic political economist write an epic on "The Consecration of Cannibalism"?23

The writer who excoriates Cambridge in Alton Locke says in the 1860s:

I have received at Cambridge a courtesy and kindness from my elders, a cordial welcome from my co-equals and an earnest attention from the undergraduates with whom I have come in contact, which would bind me in honor to say nothing
publicly against my University, even if I had aught to say. But I have naught. I see at Cambridge nothing which does not gain my respect.\textsuperscript{24}

To think of Kingsley, as a lost leader, ready to forget both his own anger and the reasons for the anger, nevertheless, would be misleading. The inconsistencies in his thinking are, in the first place, endemic and temperamental. Not only could he not continue as the self-proclaimed tribune of the people, he really did not want the role in the first place. While he accepted the consequences of his polemics, he always suffered from adversity and took pains to explain to almost anyone why he wrote what he had to write. Conversely, he felt uncomfortable among “restless and eccentric persons,” and even in the company of vegetarians and men with beards. When he admitted to “the love of praise,” he had in mind the love of “all men,” but he also made a distinction between “the esteem of good men, and the blessings of the poor.” He honored “public opinion,” thinking of it as a sort of honest English jury (along the lines of Newman in the \textit{Apologia}), and he confessed to wanting its approval.\textsuperscript{25}

So there are obvious reasons for Kingsley’s short-lived role as the prophet without honor. He needed honor—and precisely within his own country. It is also true that Kingsley’s efforts on behalf of the poor had their effect. Frederic Harrison could look back on Kingsley’s work and say:

Of that small band [of social novelists] Charles Kingsley was the most outspoken, and most eloquent and assuredly the most effective. When we remember how widely this vague initiative has spread and developed, when we read \textit{Alton Locke} and \textit{Yeast} again and note how much practically has been done in the last forty years to redress the abuses against which the books uttered the first burning protest, we may form an estimate of all that the present generation of Englishmen owes to Kingsley.\textsuperscript{26}

After 1848, when Kingsley’s work with Maurice and the Christian Socialists began, conditions did slowly change. In 1848 most political commentators could say with Kingsley, “Look at France, and see.” By the mid-fifties, the energy for reform seemed to have waned; by the early 1860s, the date of Kingsley’s last preface to \textit{Alton Locke}, even a moderate reform bill like that of 1867 seemed a distant prospect, although Kingsley pointed out to his readers that the spirit for reform would certainly return again. Kingsley did not reform England single-handedly, but he was an important voice and he could see—because of trade unionism, cooperative societies, and so forth—that conditions had changed. As a respected professor, Kingsley would have found it hard, after the mid-fifties, to speak again like the author of \textit{Alton Locke}.
He was no longer the same man, his world no longer the same world.

3

Never let it be forgotten that every human being bears in himself that indelible something which belongs equally to the whole species as well as that particular modification of it which individualizes him.—S. T. Coleridge, *The Friend*  

Kingsley had suffered during the writing of his first novel, *Yeast*, both because of the effort necessary to meet monthly deadlines (the novel appeared serially in *Fraser’s* in 1848) and because the message of the book worried Parker, its publisher, and offended readers. Its publication followed the rejection of Kingsley for a Cambridge position, the result of his association with Christian Socialism and its brief-lived magazine, *Politics for the People*. Knowing that his polemics could hurt him, Kingsley went ahead to write a novel attacking landlords, Roman Catholicism, the Irish, and celibacy, while it urged the rights of the rural poor. He obviously thought of *Yeast* in the way that Disraeli thought of his fiction.

Disraeli wrote in the preface to the fifth edition of *Coningsby* (1849): “It was not originally the intention of the writer to adopt the form of fiction as the instrument to scatter his suggestions, but, after reflection, he resolved to avail himself of a method which, in the temper of the times, offered the best chance for influencing opinion.”  

Disraeli’s terms suggest Kingsley’s: the scattering of suggestions, like seeds, implies the same assumption about the societal need for change and growth. Whether Disraeli quite expresses Kingsley’s early ambivalence about the novel, he shared the common view of the novel as a literary form of dubious stature yet of powerful impact. For Disraeli, novels like *Sybil* and *Coningsby* were useful extensions of politics; for Kingsley, *Yeast* and *Alton Locke* were useful extensions of the Sunday sermon. *Yeast* is a novel of 1848, the year that many Englishmen considered with dread, because it showed them the instability of political institutions, and Kingsley wanted his readers to heed and remember.

Some of the technical problems of *Yeast* grow out of its polemical intent and are implicit in the title itself. The novel assesses, as Kingsley puts it, the social and intellectual “ferment” of the age. “These papers have been, from beginning to end, as in name, so in nature, *Yeast*—an honest sample of the questions, which, good or bad, are fermenting in the
minds of the young.” Papers and sample point to the discursive quality of the novel, about which the author himself was well aware.

Yeast describes, in the words of the subtitle, “The Thoughts, Sayings and Doings of Lancelot Smith, Gentleman.” Smith’s education has not prepared him to use his sympathies or to deal with moral questions. For his Carlylean change of heart, Kingsley provides him with a Carlylean figure, Barnakill, “The Prophet,” and with an ideal woman, Argemone. Drawing like Dickens on Past and Present, Kingsley lets Argemone die, as Dickens’s Esther Summerson nearly dies, because she has been serving the poor and the ill; her typhus, like Esther’s smallpox, symbolizes the revenge of the poor on the rich, since Argemone’s father has refused to accept his responsibility for the poor on his estate. As for Lancelot, he engages in political and philosophical conversations with Tregarva, a gamekeeper, then in the manner of David Copperfield, Arthur Pendennis, and so many other fictional heroes, he goes penniless to London. His money has disappeared in a bank crash, and he must accept menial employment. In London he meets Barnakill, begins his moral education, and prepares himself for his change of heart. Unfortunately, Argemone’s death precludes a happy ending.

After reading a part of Yeast in manuscript, J. M. Ludlow wrote to Kingsley: “There is little awkwardness now & then in the putting together, but for the depth, & breadth & wit, & fun, & thought, & feeling, & interest, it holds as much of all this as a first-rate three-volume novel of the day. It is easy for you to become the greatest novelist of the age.” Ludlow urges his friend to try to make the novel “if possible, ten times pleasanter, thoughtfuller, truer than before,” because Kingsley as Christian Socialist must “shew to all the world what a great Xjian work a novel can be, written by a great Xjian man.” This would seem to imply that Ludlow approved of Kingsley’s fiction and felt that it had, or could have, unprecedented importance as applied Christianity. Oddly enough, he concludes by imploring his friend to stop: “Write never tale more till you are sixty.” Whether the suggestion reflected his unacknowledged prejudice against the novel or his secret dislike of Yeast itself, or whether, as Robert Martin suggests, it reflected his sense that Kingsley should concentrate on poetry, Ludlow anticipated Kingsley’s own feeling when he came to finish the novel. He would, he said, stop writing fiction. He had “no more to say.”

Kingsley’s resolution waned as his energy returned. He was soon talking of two more novels, making Yeast part of a trilogy, and imagining perhaps some sort of resurrection for his dead heroine, along with continued
adventures for his hero. When Ludlow and other friends joined Fanny in arguing against the trilogy, Kingsley gave up the idea. His next novel, not to be written for almost two years, was to be, though a thematic continuation of *Yeast*, another kind of story with an altogether different kind of hero. *Alton Locke* is just as tendentious as *Yeast*, but it is more coherent, held together by the reminiscing mind of its narrator, who essentially confesses his story to “aristocratic readers.” In making Alton a poet, Kingsley gives him a retrospective awareness; in making him poor, he gives a legitimate grievance to his complaints.

*Alton Locke* is an attempt to show Kingsley’s social philosophy from the point of view of a working-class boy. As a reader of Thackeray, Kingsley may have remembered Thackeray’s hope for a novelist from the mine or the mill, or he may have known George Lewes’s example of a working-class poet in *Ranthorpe*. In any event, he wanted his novel to herald what the Chartists themselves were calling for, a distinctively working-class literature. Thomas Cooper, “the Cockney Poet” on whom Kingsley probably based Alton Locke, wrote “To the Young Men of the Working Classes”:

> It now becomes a matter of the highest necessity . . . to create a literature of your own. Your own prose, your own poetry . . . would put you all more fully in possession of each other’s thoughts and thus give you a higher respect for each other, and a clearer perception of what you can do when united.32

In spite of the narrative guise, contemporary reviewers immediately recognized *Alton Locke* as the work of someone from the upper classes. The author’s evident preoccupation with attitudes of the privileged, his use of Alton as an object lesson, his love of literary allusions—all these betrayed the hand of someone creating Alton rather than editing his posthumous autobiography. Still, Kingsley’s narrative of an intelligent and finally luckless “artisan” is not only a sympathetic portrait of a plausible character; it reflects also a sharp sense of the character’s world, of the social ills and insuperable obstacles facing a talented working-class boy. *Alton Locke* culminates the works of social protest of the 1840s—*Mary Barton, Sybil, Jane Eyre* (in one of its facets), and Kingsley’s own *Yeast*—while it seems as a form to unite Dickens’s *David Copperfield* with Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*. With a large, Carlylean pun, Kingsley invokes the Philosophy of Clothes, since Alton becomes, in metaphor and in fact, a tailor-re-tailored.

Like “Mark Rutherford,” Edmund Gosse, and so many other nineteenth-century autobiographers, Alton Locke grows up in a dissenting household,
which offers him stern Calvinism, rigorous discipline, and very little affection. His mother, like David Copperfield's, is a widow, who contains within herself the relentless intolerance of the Murdstones. Her acquaintances are largely hypocritical denouncers of "bad doctrine," for whom any disagreement serves as reminder "of the narrow way of discriminating grace." Alton grows up with a sense of inexplicable sin, and just as David bites Murdstone in his first gesture of independence, so Alton writes poetry and reads "pagan" literature, questioning the narrowness of his mother's advisers and finally rejecting his mother's religion. He too is orphaned before his mother dies, although in his case his mother banishes him from her own house. Since he is, as he calls himself, a "Cockney among Cockneys" (1:131), he need not come to London. He is of London. But he joins David and Oliver Twist and other orphans in the fiction of his time and finds himself in brutalizing circumstances. His inferno (a comparison he likes) is work as a tailor. Kingsley allows him descriptions that could have been transcribed from "Cheap Clothes and Nasty," but he also allows him moral outbursts that Dickens carefully keeps out of the narrative of David's early sorrows:

I owe . . . an apology to my readers for introducing all this ribaldry [he has quoted in the manner of "Cheap Clothes" a group of tailors]. God knows, it is as little to my taste as it can be to theirs, but the thing exists; and those who live, if not by, yet still beside such a state of things, ought to know what the men are like to whose labor, ay, life blood, they owe their luxuries. They are "their brothers' keepers," let them deny it as they will. (1:162)

In addition to quoting scripture with a social purpose, Alton refers directly to contemporaries, though the ostensible time of the narrative predates the circumstances he discusses. He alludes, for instance, to "a few master tailors, who have built workshops fit for human beings." "Among them I may, and will, whether they like it or not, make honorable mention of Mr. Willis, of St. James's Street, and Mr. Stultz, of Bond Street" (1:163).

Just as Kingsley, without writing romans à clef as such, drew on people he knew for the portraits he made, so he also thought of his novelistic world more literarily than did Dickens. Dickens may be equally topical. He has his factories, law courts, model prisons. David Copperfield goes to London, travels to Yarmouth, visits the Alps. The young boy's trek to Dover, like Alton Locke's escape to Cambridge, follows a recognizable road out of London and deals with places that his readers might themselves know. But Dickens uses his background as though it has become a part of David's life, whereas Kingsley reminds his reader that the "real"
world exists, that it has its problems, that it needs reform. The effect is, like that of a morally charged picaresque novel, or of a philosophical and ambulatory novel of the eighteenth century, a continual mixing of the author’s direct commentary (or the narrator’s, since they do not always coincide) with the workings of Alton’s memory. The resulting ironies are not the dramatic ironies of Dickens who allows his younger self only partly to understand what the older narrator fully understands in retrospect.

One possible reason for the lack of continuing irony and for its corollary the sometimes static quality of the various scenes is Kingsley’s method of writing fiction. He composed his important scenes first, often writing a passage from late in the novel along with an early passage. He said at one time that he had “done [Alton’s] conversion at the end, and today his becoming a poet towards the beginning,” The effect was likely to be a series of set pieces, introduced or commented about in passages lacking the energy or even care of the primary scenes.

If we remember that Kingsley thought of the novel as an instrument of social justice, we might note additionally that he thought of his own novels as “true.” He wrote to Ludlow in explanation of *Yeast* that his “tale of the country” accurately depicted the problems of rural England: “I shall be very hard on the landlords—because they deserve it; but I will promise to invent nothing.” The comment indicates a further aesthetic handicap with which Kingsley worked when he applied himself to fiction. For while he lets Alton Locke appeal to high-born or privileged readers to acknowledge the truth of his narrative, Alton dismisses fiction as such, scoffing repeatedly at “mere novels.” To some extent traditional to fiction, the ploy also reflects Kingsley’s ambivalence about rhetorical indirects. When the Christian Socialists launched their *Politics for the People*, Kingsley and his colleagues had intended their writing as an antidote to the tracts of Newman and the Oxford Movement. *Yeast* and *Alton Locke* have similar purposes. In spite of the fictional method, Kingsley simply cannot write without some pamphleteering purpose working its way into the narrative.

Nevertheless, *Alton Locke* is not “a mere” tract. The narrator may at times be too dense and at other times too shrewd in his own retrospective account. He does a great deal of unnecessary explaining. But he is a character with genuine consciousness. Kingsley creates in Alton a self-educated and somewhat eccentric young man, but also a speaker who understands his readers and who tells a story that is both dramatic, or full of conflict, and diverse, as reminiscence alternates with reflection, biographical incident with historical or literary speculation.
Alton as a boy meets the Scot Sandy Mackaye, "the prophet" in this novel, the voice of Carlyle. Mackaye fosters Alton's interest in literature and he comes to be a kind of father. He introduces Alton to scenes of terrible poverty and suffering—scenes reminiscent in subject and in method of Mrs. Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, which Kingsley admired—where young girls are condemned to prostitution and where the sick die both hungry and cold. These, he says, are the proper subjects for Alton's poetry. Alton does not explain why he quotes Carlyle so often, but Mackaye is the main reason. However, prophet as he is, Mackaye also has his failings. Alton finds that Crosswaithe, a fellow worker and like Mackaye committed to The Cause, to Chartism, disagrees wholly with Mackaye about methods and goals, because he thinks of Mackaye as a tacit defender of existing institutions. Alton is caught between the two, just as he is caught between their combined world and the world of his mother, whose assumption is that whatever we do, the damned are damned and the saved are saved. So Kingsley makes Alton's life a series of choices or decisions, each following a "phase" of his life and each leading, with heavy foreshadowing, to the pathetic and lonely exile of the older narrator.

Alton's exile illustrates the irreconcilable aims of his life and his foolish, if understandable, choice of the wrong woman. Dickens allows David to marry Dora *and* to get Agnes, who has been admonished by the dying childwife to replace her. Alton meets Lillian, a woman above him in social station, for whom he abandons his fiery, working-class poetry, and about whom he is deceived. She marries Alton's wealthy and hypocritical cousin, a man who, when he becomes a clergyman, dies from wearing a piece of clothing contaminated by a diseased tailor. Kingsley may be arguing that Alton Locke should know his place and should work for his brothers, but he offers him real choices and he insists that those choices have lasting consequences. Thus Alton leaves London to visit Cambridge, becomes infatuated again by Lillian, whom he had first met in a London art gallery; he gradually compromises his role as poet of the people, until he rejects his new life and becomes a fervent Chartist. Chartism leads to involvement in a rural uprising, and the involvement results in a prison term. Alton's "conversion" follows a further stage of suffering, but it does not end the suffering. He finds no easy or unmerited reward.

Both Dickens and Kingsley share with Carlyle the sense of life as a difficult journey and the related preoccupation with heroes. Alton meets false heroes (missionaries who are arrogant hypocrites, scholars who are fools), and, like David Copperfield, he comes to the slow recognition of himself as a kind of hero. Dickens's indebtedness to Carlyle is tacit. Kingsley lets
Alton cite Carlyle. Sandy Mackaye tells him: "Ye're an unaccredited hero...; as Thomas Carlyle has it" (1:279). He is an unaccredited hero, not because he serves the Chartist cause, or suffers poverty and incarceration, but because he overcomes or endures adversity and undergoes a change of heart. Alton mentions Goethe's and Carlyle's "Wertherism" as something to live through. He passes a stage that he calls, if not the Everlasting No, then the "worship of negation." He learns Kingsley's lessons of patriotism and the rights of man along with a vaguer lesson, imparted by the saintlike sister of Lillian, about sacrifice, social responsibility, and the Anglican Church. His final conversion, neither defiant nor self-assertive, is a change of heart analogous to that urged by Carlyle, but it involves a humility and repentance, a rebirth that suggests the New Testament. "Repentance," as M. Scheler says, "forms the driving power of that miraculous process which the Gospels call the rebirth of a new man out of the old Adam, the acquiring of a new heart."36 Rebirth follows a radical shift of purpose, which alters the past, as it does the future, allowing Alton the double vision of his earlier self. From a representative Cockney he has become the confessing type of a rejuvenated Christianity. He is doubly the unacknowledged hero.

Like David Copperfield, Alton also learns to understand his unconscious desires (and "unconscious" is a favorite word with Kingsley, too) as he orders his reminiscences. His narrative includes a dream sequence that complements Alton's sense of inadequacy with his vision of himself as an eclectic creature in evolutionary process. Even in the dream, Alton's response to frightening natural states merges with a pastoralism that recurs throughout the novel (see chapter VII). Alton sees himself as

a vast sleepy mass [with "elephantine limbs" and a "little meek rabbit's head"]...

... Intense and new was the animal delight, to plant my hinder claws at some tree-foot, deep into the black rotting vegetable-mould which steamed rich gases up wherever it was pierced, and clasp my huge arms round the stem of some palm or tree-fern; and then slowly bring my enormous weight and muscle to bear upon it, till the stem bent like a withe, and the lacked bark cracked, and the fibres groaned and shrieked, and the roots sprung up out of the soil; and then, with a slow circular wrench, the whole tree was twisted bodily out of the ground, and the maddening tension of my muscles suddenly relaxed, and I sank sleepily down on the turf, to browse upon the crisp tart foliage, and fall asleep in the glare of sunshine which streamed through the new gap in the green forest roof. (2:265-66)

The effect of the dream is to put his change of heart in a vast historical context, to imply the profound forces working on his mind apart from the circumstances of his daily life.
Like David Copperfield, Alton is a writer, but he is a far more critical writer, aware of his own art, of the purposes of his poems, and of aesthetic theory. He is aware that he lives "in these days of Dutch painting and Boz." Dickens as Boz is the Dickens who can depict the busy and full life of urban England, providing an account of his characters and their settings as had never previously been seen. Alton pays his own debt to such writing. Here is a description of his room as a boy that might recall passages in Oliver Twist or Mary Barton or Jane Eyre:

I recollect it well, in the little dingy, foul, reeking, twelve foot square back-yard, where huge smoky party-walls shut out every breath of air and almost all the light of heaven, I had climbed up between the waterbutt and the angle of the wall for the purpose of fishing out of the dirty fluid which lay there, crusted with soot and alive with insects, to be renewed only three times in the seven days, some of the great larvae and kicking monsters which made up a large item in my list of wonders: all of a sudden the horror of the place came over me; those grim prison-walls above, with their canopy of lurid smoke; the dreary, sloppy, broken pavement; the horrible stench of the stagnant cesspools; the utter want of form, color, life, in the whole place, crushed me down. (1:144)

This has, as contemporary reviewers might have said, the verisimilitude of the daguerreotype.

Alton ends his first chapter by saying that his "next chapter is, perhaps, full enough of mere dramatic interest (and whose life is not, were it but truly written?) to amuse merely as a novel." He tells his readers to laugh at him if they will, but he also addresses an ideal reader, a reader who will understand the nature of his art and the reasons why it is not simply "Dutch painting"; "Those to whom the struggles of every, even the meanest, human being are scenes of an awful drama, every incident of which is to be noted with reverent interest, will not find [his recollections] void of meaning" (1:151). Alton's own story is "awful drama," the actions of a trapped human being, whose life will only be understood by those who can read with adequate sympathy. While technically different, the conception of the novel anticipates Ignazio Silone's Fontamara, in which the narrator is a kind of collective, saddened voice of an impoverished village.

Throughout his autobiography, Alton records his reading of poets as diverse as Byron, Shakespeare, and Macaulay. He moves away from an early infatuation with Byron to a love of Milton and the classics; he knows and cites the Old Testament; and he theorizes about the condition of poetry in his own time, understanding it in terms of the author himself, who lectured at Queen's College, London, about developments in English
literature, and who urged the young women in his audience to read their contemporaries. Alton does not quote his own poems, but he sees them in context. "I always knew," he writes, in another pastoral passage,

there was something beautiful, wonderful, sublime, in those flowery dykes of Battersea Fields; in the long gravelly sweeps of that lone tidal shore; and here was a man who had put them into words for me! This is what I call democratic art—the revelation of the poetry which lies in common things. And surely all the age is tending in that direction: in Landseer and his dogs—in Fielding and his downs, with a host of noble fellow-artists—and in all authors who have really seized the nation's mind, from Crabbe and Burns and Wordsworth to Hood and Dickens, the great tide sets ever onward, outward, towards that which is common to the many, not that which is exclusive to the few. (1:264)

So Alton recognizes that Dickens's art is more than clever description, that is related to his own narrative and to the work of Crabbe, Burns, Hood, and Wordsworth, all of whom write about "common things." Except for Dickens, Alton cites no other novelists. He himself is supposed to be a poet, and his readings would have tended to poetry, yet Dickens enters the list along with the author of *Peter Grimes*, the author of *Song of the Shirt*, and the author of *Lyrical Ballads*. In his defense of "democratic art," Alton implicitly argues (along the lines I suggested in a previous chapter) that Dickens's fiction attempts in its medium what Wordsworth had attempted in his, sharing with Wordsworth's verse the assumption that ordinary men and women are, though "low" to the advocates of "aristocratic" art, no less capable of tragic emotions and genuine stature. Alton wants to distinguish his own account from the cheap working-class fiction of the time—the "mere novels" or the penny dreadfuls—and to find its justification in the analogy with poetry.

Along with the poets of the older generation (Hood excepted), he places Dickens in the company of another "democratic" writer:

Then, in a happy day, I fell on Alfred Tennyson's poetry, and found there, astonished and delighted, the embodiment of thoughts about the earth around me which I had concealed, because I fancied them peculiar to myself. . . . What endeared Tennyson especially to me, the workingman, was, as I afterwards discovered, the altogether democratic tendency of his poems. True, all great poets are by their office democrats; seers of man only as man; singers of the joys, the sorrows, the aspirations common to all humanity; but in Alfred Tennyson there is an element especially democratic, truly levelling; not his political opinions, about which I know nothing, and care less, but his handling of the trivial everyday sights and sounds of nature. (1:263)

A final literary model (apart from the Bible and Milton) is again Carlyle,
whose *French Revolution*, “that great prose poem [is] the single epic of modern days” (1:262). Whatever Carlyle’s ranting against democracy and whatever his bitterness at mid-century, he represented for Kingsley and his narrator the voice of prophecy. His works became, in their sympathy and insight, prose poems, equivalents of Wordsworth’s verse and spiritual impetus behind novels like *Alton Locke*. Unfortunately for Kingsley, the prophet himself—always honest and rarely generous in these years—responded unfavorably to the work that he had helped to engender: “While welcoming a new explosion of red hot shot against the Devil’s Dung-heat,” Carlyle wrote to Kingsley, “I must admit your book is definable as crude. The impression is of a fervid creation left half chaotic.”

Carlyle’s criticism of *Alton Locke* is certainly not inaccurate, and as a description of another book, it might have heralded a deserved obscurity. *Alton Locke* remained for a long time largely forgotten, but—as the appearance of several recent editions suggest—it has won some belated recognition in our time. One reason for the attention is worth a concluding note here.

Kingsley’s definition of social and scientific crisis raises issues that surface today in Marxist assessments of literature. By way of example, his lower-class hero, gifted with partial self-understanding and punished by a society that makes him an outcast, offers an apt illustration of William Empson’s theory of “proletarian pastoral” (though Kingsley himself was not lower class, nor his pastoral tendencies untypical of various kinds of nineteenth-century literature). Kingsley articulates the sense of waste in his protagonist’s life; he equates Alton with the social upheavals of his age, setting him against middle-class virtues and assumptions; and he creates in Alton a psychic battle between social activism and pastoral escape.

Similarly, *Alton Locke* could figure in the survey that Georg Lukács makes of the middling hero in nineteenth-century historical fiction. If I have emphasized the models that Kingsley himself emphasizes, Wordsworth and Tennyson, one might argue as persuasively the model of Walter Scott. Lukács describes Scott as the great impetus behind a century of historical fiction, accounting for Scott’s strength in his sympathetic recreation of the conditions of earlier times: how it felt as an ordinary citizen to live in a particular era. This is very much Kingsley’s aim, though compounded by his mixing of present and recent past, by his recognition of class upheavals, and by his irrepressible desire to educate. I have mentioned Silone’s Marxist novel *Fontamara*. Kingsley’s interests are
also allied to those of Russian social realists of the twentieth century—
for whom conflicting demands of truth also present difficulties. More
directly, *Alton Locke* anticipates the self-conscious sociology of the
Goncourts’ *Germinie Lacerteux* (1864) and the novels of Bennett, Gissing,
and Dreiser.