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The Influence of Politics and Patriotism on the Poetry of Alfred, Lord Tennyson

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The Influence of Politics and Patriotism on the
Poetry of Alfred, Lord Tennyson

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in English at
Longwood College

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Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
Acknowledgement	iii
Introduction	v
I. The Victorian Age: A Background of The Period	1
II. Alfred, Lord Tennyson: A Biographical Background	9
III. The Influence of Social and Political Conditions on Tennyson's Poetry	32
IV. The Reflection of Tennyson's Patriotism in His Poetry	59
V. Conclusion	88
Biographical Sketch	90
Footnotes	91
Bibliography	105

Introduction

Political and patriotic poetry are usually suspect because they are so often characteristically polemic. Very few poets who are considered good, let alone excellent, indulge in this kind of poetry. Those who do are usually severely criticized. A contemporary example is Edna St. Vincent Millay, whose later works survived the cultural denunciation of "Make Bright The Arrows" in 1940. However, because of the feeling that patriotism was a sine qua non of existence in the last century, one acknowledged great poet, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, could write poems dealing directly with political issues and patriotism and not incur criticism. Tennyson was not the only Victorian poet to comment on social and political issues, but there was no one of his stature who devoted a considerable portion of his works to overt political and patriotic poetry.

The poetry of Alfred, Lord Tennyson and the Victorian age came into being about the same time during the early nineteenth century. It was an era which gave rise to many changes that were both social and political, and as much a part of everyday life as they were of the government. It was an age of "national emotion."¹ The social and political issues were crucial. Tennyson was interested in them and tried to understand them. His works tended to reflect the mainstream of

middle-class thinking. He was a true patriot--he loved England and had reverence for her past. Like other literary men and women of the time, Tennyson was concerned about the stormy social and political climate that seemed to be tearing apart his beloved country. He wrote about the changes that were taking place too rapidly, the terrible conditions of the poor, the Industrial Revolution, women, war, patriotism, and his fearful feeling for the future of England.²

There was an atmosphere in England, despite the political and social uncertainties, unlike any that had ever previously existed. There was a recognition of a mutual need tied to a new silent understanding, and unwritten laws governing that understanding which prevailed between the new upper middle-class and the aristocracy. Though they viewed each other with suspicion, the new middle-class gave the aristocracy its silent acquiescence that it would not rebel against it, and the aristocracy gave them the silent understanding that it would not resist their invasion into the aristocratic world. This silent understanding between the classes led, in turn, to its own modes of courtesy, its own way of life, and ultimately to its own generations of poets, writers, and painters who gave expression to them. At the time, the new atmosphere had no name; but because in 1837 Victoria was crowned queen at Westminster Abbey, other generations called it the Victorian age.³

Any cultural period suffers distortion from a generalized indictment, however speciously formulated. But the outlines of the Victorian era blur beyond

recognition in the confusion of contradictory charges. The Victorians, we are told, were a poor, blind, complacent people; yet they were torn by doubt, spiritually bewildered, lost in a troubled universe. They were crass materialists, wholly absorbed in the present, quite unconcerned with abstract verities and eternal values; but they were also excessively religious, lamentable idealistic, nostalgic for the past, and ready to forego present delights for the vision of a world beyond. Despite their slavish conformity, their purblind respect for convention, they were, we learn, rugged individualists, given to 'doing as one likes,' heedless of culture, careless of a great tradition; they were iconoclasts who worshipped the idols of authority. They were, besides, at once sentimental humanitarians and hard-boiled proponents of free enterprise. Politically, they were governed by narrow insular prejudice, but swayed by dark imperialistic designs. Intellectually and emotionally, they believed in progress, denied original sin, and affirmed the death of the Devil; yet by temperament they were patently Manichaeans to whom living was a desperate struggle between the force of good and the power of darkness.⁴

Alfred, Lord Tennyson was "Victorian in his ardent, widespread, slightly frightened interest in science."⁵ He was "Victorian in his religious doubts and fears, in his burning need of reassurance that God is merciful and immortal life is assured."⁶ He was,

. . . Victorian in his attitude to women: an attitude of worship, puritanism and condescension. He is Victorian in his class-consciousness, in his insularity, his jingoism. But he is, above all, Victorian in his sense of mission. For while Tennyson possessed the evident weaknesses of his age, he was also endowed with its strength. His poethood was, to him, a responsibility; his Laureateship was a heaven-sent duty. His gift of words demanded that he should lead his countrymen in the paths of rectitude. . . He felt . . . that his every word 'should be consecrated to the service of Him Who had touched his lips with the fire of Heaven', that he must 'speak in God's name to his age'. And more: 'to try and find out what God had made him to be, and then to resolve to be that very self, and none other, was

his constant aim . . . No man ever came nearer than he did to perfect truthfulness.' Tennyson's sense of mission embraced more than poetry: it included every action of his life. He determined to be a living example of rectitude.⁷

Tennyson's political and patriotic poetry reflected the evolution of the Victorian age.

Chapter I

The Victorian Age: A Background of the Period

Oh, so, when modern things are thrust
By death below the coffin lid,
Our liberal sons will spurn our dust
And wonder what it was we did.⁸

During the Victorian age Tennyson's England was the greatest power on earth. Queen Victoria, who reigned over this great power, was not an intellectual, but she had considerable knowledge of history and constitutional law, as well as being a reasonable and wise queen. She was well-born, well-bred, had innate grace and tact, liked music and literature, and liked to dance.⁹ She was the symbol of England's status as a world power, a power recognized by her people which influenced them in many ways. It was a very formal period. The clothing was stiff and formal and the furniture was very decorative. The Victorians had a fear of empty space, and their homes were full of over-stuffed rooms with over-stuffed furniture, cluttered objects on tables, and wall hangings.¹⁰ The interior of a home was described quite well by Tennyson in these lines from The Princess:

And on the tables every clime and age
Jumbled together; celts and calumets,
Claymore and snow-shoe, toys in lava,
fans
Of sandal, amber, ancient rosaries,
Laborious orient ivory sphere in
sphere,
The cursed Malayan crease, and battle-
clubs
From the isles of palm; and higher on
the walls,

Betwixt the monstrous horns of elk
and deer,
His own forefathers' arms and armor
hung. (Lines 16-24)

The symbol of success was a man's ability to support his family in luxury, to keep his wife and daughters at home in idleness, and to have many servants. Victorians made a great show of tangible things, but the age in a hidden way was deeply pernicious.¹¹ It was a prudish and moralistic age which placed great value on domestic virtue, and on the pieties of religion, but "failed to tap the well-springs of creative faith."¹²

Victoria's reign was long and one in which many great events took place; chief among these being the Industrial Revolution at home and colonial expansion in other parts of the world. The most startling social change introduced by the Industrial Revolution was the rapid increase in the urban population. City populations grew also from the influx of the Irish. The potato famine in Ireland in 1845 caused terrible living conditions, and the peasants who lived off the land moved to the cities, but the move did not improve their standards of living. This great population growth caused great slum growth. The urbanization and population growth presented problems, since machines took over jobs and there were many people unemployed. The Industrial Revolution was well underway before the social order made significant efforts to cope with the changes related to it.¹³

The Victorians were disturbed by the "monster civilization" that they had created, and watched uneasily as it

moved farther and farther from their control. At the same time, however, they pretended that all was well with their age--that they were a happy people who knew where they were going and were delighted that everything was progressing so rapidly.¹⁴ Tennyson recognized that progress was necessary if the standard of living was to rise, but he also realized what industry would do to England. He tried to ignore the threatening flow of the new industrial population, and to soothe his feeling of apprehension by "prescribing common-sense for the poor, and district visiting for the rich."¹⁵ He had a fearful suspicion that things were beginning to change when he wrote in the first "Locksley Hall" in 1842,

Slowly comes a hungry people, as a
 lion, creeping nigher,
 Glares at one that nods and winks
 behind a slowly-dying fire. (Lines 135-136)

Although there were many problems confronting England during the Victorian period, she enjoyed exceptional prosperity during the middle years of the nineteenth century. "As the greatest manufacturing, colonizing, and naval power of the world, Britain enjoyed a unique position in world affairs, a position which the Whig leader, Lord Palmerston, influential in foreign affairs throughout the period from 1830 to 1865, maintained vigorously by brandishing a big stick over the lesser nations."¹⁶ During this Palmerstonian Era there was a spirit of complacency among the ruling classes which remained undisturbed by "the exploited masses pleading for social justice,"¹⁷ or the terrible "blunders of the

Crimean War."¹⁸ The rapid industrial growth brought great wealth "to a growing number of businessmen, who were disposed to agree that all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds."¹⁹

Social and political changes of the highest importance were brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Two classes of people were raised to new prominence by the Industrial Revolution, but it also widened the gulf which separated them. There were the men of wealth who had capital and initiative to build the factories which would enable them to obtain the status of an industrial aristocracy.²⁰ On the other side were the workers, "or proletariat, a class waxing in number, but without property, without any share or direction in the industry that employed them, and without any means to better their condition."²¹ In the years of social tension and economic adjustment, the two classes became aware of their importance and both classes "began to seek political power"²² at the same time.

The new upper middle-class set not only the cultural, moral, and social tone of England, but the political course as well. In fact,

The bourgeois spirit, conventional in its outlook, acquisitive in its instincts, and brushed by an evangelical sobriety, thus became the dominant spirit of the age of Queen Victoria, whose own temperamental sympathy with many of its aspects was reinforced by her marriage to that virtuous and industrious prince, Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. As in the "ages" of so many great rulers, the temper of the time and the beliefs, aims and personality of the monarch so interacted that it is

impossible to say which had the deeper influence. In any event, Victoria's girlhood resolution, "I will be good," became the symbol of the time--even though it was paradoxically a time of troubled faith, rising materialism and almost baronial manipulation in finance and industry.²³

The Victorian age did not achieve the stability that one associates "with a semimythical neoclassic culture. It moved from form to form and nothing stood. Throughout the period there were vast differences between rural and urban society; the fields of the agrarian South were a far cry from the smokey cities of the industrial North."²⁴ As old traditions crumbled, the Victorians had to learn to adapt to new and different values.²⁵ There was concern in regard to manners and morals and the Victorian age "was not unlike the Elizabethan age, when conduct-books, pamphlets, plays, sermons, and poems explored the problems of degree in an expanding economy. Both periods brought to the present a deep sense of the national past."²⁶

During this period of expanding economy and increasing bitterness and suspicion between the classes, there was an onward trend toward democracy, which was disturbing for the Victorians. They believed that democracy either led to dictatorship and the end of freedom, or "to communism and the end of civilization."²⁷ They were sure, however, that democracy--whatever it was--was inescapable.²⁸ These lines from "You Ask Me, Why, Tho' Ill at Ease" expressed the uneasiness of Tennyson and the Victorians.

It is the land that freemen till
 That sober-suited Freedom chose,
 The land, where girt with friends or foes
 A man may speak the thing he will;

Should banded unions persecute
 Opinion, and induce a time
 When single thought is civil crime,
 And individual freedom mute; (Stanzas 2 and 5)

The onward march of democracy in England was one of the most significant developments in the history of Great Britain. "Without revolution, without serious disorder or bloodshed, the English liberalized their institutions and made their Parliament, once a stronghold of the privileged ruling classes, a flexible and responsive instrument of the people's will. This was a truly remarkable achievement, unmarred by violence or persecution."²⁹ The problem of "bringing the Crown into harmony with the trend toward political democracy"³⁰ was brought about "during the long reign of Victoria (1837-1901), not through any formal program, but half-accidentally, half-purposefully, through a combination of circumstances and personalities."³¹ Victoria had strong and assertive prime ministers and she learned to work with them in matters of state. She did not formally relinquish her constitutional authority as queen, yet she understood,

. . . the need for some adjustments in the practical exercise of sovereignty; and though she might expostulate with her ministers, she had too keen a sense of the times to challenge their considered decisions. By the end of her reign, custom and precedent had placed the royal prerogative (the executive power of the Crown) "in abeyance"--that is, for all practical purposes in the hands of the cabinet ministers, who represented and were responsible to the majority party in Parliament. But as the Crown's actual power shrank to the point

of disappearance, its symbolic value increased beyond all logic. In this development, too, Queen Victoria was the key figure. To an uncanny degree she embodied in her dumpy, but imposing person the virtues, tastes, and moral standards of the British middle class, and she recaptured for the Crown the respect and admiration which the later Hanoverians had alienated. At the same time, in her sixty-four year sway, she inspired in her subjects a deep affection for the Crown and the Royal Family that has persisted to this day. Thus in one of the most democratic countries of the world the monarch came to be a focus of loyalty and a symbol of national unity.³²

As far as the Victorians were concerned, Parliament at last was truly representative. The proletariat, however, was not represented. The Victorians had political power and they were well satisfied that landowners, aristocrats, and prelates could no longer abuse their privileges. It was the end of aristocratic privilege and power. The people were free, the age of monopolies was over, and England belonged to herself.³³

The Victorian age was a period of change and progress, but in 1886 Tennyson expressed a "thoroughly disillusioned view"³⁴ in "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After":

It is well that while we range with
Science, glorying in the Time,
City children soak and blacken soul
and sense in city slime?

There among the glooming alleys Pro-
gress halts on palsied feet,
Crime and hunger cast our maidens by
the thousand on the street. (Lines 217-220)

Tennyson's verbal picture of the degrading and tragic results of the industrialization of England was very pointed. He

felt a sense of disaster "involved in the failure of social adaptation to keep pace with the scientific"³⁵ discoveries and the industrial, economic, and political developments of the Victorian age.

Chapter II

Alfred, Lord Tennyson: A Biographical Background

Alfred, Lord Tennyson was the most characteristic poet of Victorian England--a poet who lived and "wrote through the very heart of the Victorian age, and his name is to be identified with the age almost as surely as that of Queen Victoria herself."³⁶ The Queen was born in 1819 and reigned from 1837 until 1901. By the time Victoria came to the throne, Tennyson had already written and published poetry, but it was not until the publication of his 1842 volume that his reputation as a poet became assured. Many of his poems written before 1842 were not reprinted, but many were revised and reprinted after this date. He was granted a pension by the Queen in 1845, and with this official recognition his increasing fame and prestige established him as a great poet in the eyes of the Victorians.

Alfred Tennyson was born in 1809 in the small village of Somersby, Lincolnshire. The Reverend George Tennyson, his father, the "Rector of Somersby and Bag Inderby, incumbent of Benniworth and Vicar of Great Grimsby, in Lincolnshire,"³⁷ was a man permanently embittered because of actions taken years earlier by his own father. The elder Tennyson had,

. . . for reasons which have never been fully explained, early formed an unfavourable opinion of his elder son--perhaps he thought (possibly with justice) that the boy was not likely to be capable of leading the family to the exalted position which he coveted for it. At any rate he seems, when young George was still little more than a boy, to

have decided to make his second son, Charles, future head of the family and owner of Bayons Manor and the considerable estates associated with it. George he more or less compelled to go into the Church, for which he felt no vocation, and, according to the pluralist practice of the time, secured him as many livings as he thought necessary to keep him and his family in comfort.³⁸

The poet, one of eleven children, grew up in a crowded household³⁹ during the years of economic depression, unemployment, Reform, riots, and social strain,⁴⁰ but the quiet village of Somersby was only lightly touched by these problems.⁴¹ "And of the public events, through all of this, only the faintest ripple can have reached Somersby: the battle of Waterloo came to them as a belated rumour, only very belatedly confirmed; the accession of George the Fourth passed in a still vaguer impression of rosettes and ribbons one morning at Louth."⁴² Tennyson's problem during his early years was having to attend the school at Louth. He hated the school, disliked the Master, and did not get on well with his schoolmates. He attended school there for about four years. Then, much to his relief, he returned to Somersby and was tutored by his father.⁴³ His home life, however, was not a happy one. His father ". . . exhausted himself by taking on the education of his seven sons himself, seeking to find compensation in their success for the frustration and waste of his own abilities . . . The result was disastrous. Dr. Tennyson's health, both mental and physical, rapidly deteriorated. Before long he sought relief in drink, causing distressing scenes of violence at the Rectory,"⁴⁴ and scandal and gossip

in the village. The impact of this sad situation on Alfred was severe since he passed through "the worst of the crisis during the acutely sensitive years of adolescence. Often, when he could endure the tension no longer, he would run across the narrow land and fling himself down among the tombstones, longing for death."⁴⁵ It was to these experiences in his early life that he owed his "morbid shyness, the horror of gossip, the extreme sensibility to criticism and the frequent bouts of depression which were to afflict him throughout his long life."⁴⁶

Alfred's mother, Elizabeth Fytche, was the daughter of the Vicor of Louth. She had married George in 1805 and they settled at Somersby in 1808. Alfred portrayed his mother in several of his poems, but the following passage from The Princess was his best:

Not learned, save in gracious household ways,
 Not perfect, nay, but full of tender ways
 No angel, but a dearer being, all dipt
 In angel instincts, breathing Paradise . . .
 (Part VII, lines 299-302)

. . . Happy he
 With such a mother'. Faith in womankind
 Beats with his blood, and trust in all things high
 Comes easy to him, and tho' he trip and fall
 He shall not blind his soul with clay.
 (Part VII, lines 308-312)

She was a "gentle, timid, delicate woman, it appears. Rather frightened of her sombre husband during his lifetime; rather frightened of her big, sombre sons after his death. For the first ten years of Alfred's life she must of necessity have led an immobile existence, and have had little time to give to the elder children."⁴⁷

Alfred and his brothers and sisters "were remarkable individuals; tall, handsome, looking more Spanish than English, exquisite speakers, capable of saying anything in any company, preferring genteel poverty to work, lazy, and constantly a prey to almost psychotic melancholia."⁴⁸ They were known as the Black Tennysons. This description was an allusion to their dark complexions and to their "weakness for melancholia and personality instability."⁴⁹ Even as a young man, Tennyson's face and figure were both described as remarkable:⁵⁰ "tall and lank in figure, dressed carelessly, wears black beard and moustache. His face is thoughtful and full of power. A deep furrow running from brow to chin on either side gives a peculiar expression to it, and a lofty forehead increases the same."⁵¹

Alfred wrote "his earliest verses at fourteen or fifteen years of age,"⁵² and these verses showed "uncommon promise."⁵³ His two older brothers, Frederick and Charles, also were gifted in verse-making, and the three of them shared in the publication of the volume Poems by Two Brothers in 1827. Tennyson was not quite eighteen when this volume was published, but even at this age he had been a proficient poet for several years.⁵⁴ His poetic contributions to this first volume "were not at all like his early surviving poetry. Years later Tennyson called the volume 'rot.' He never printed any of it again."⁵⁵ The poems in this volume were interesting because they were indicators of the education the three boys had received from their father, "rather than for any marked poetic

ability."⁵⁶ Alfred continued to write poetry at home, and "before he left for Cambridge he had written in Greek hexameters an Homeric composition on the 'Seven Against Thebes,' and an Ovidian poem on the death of a young lady who had died for love of the Apollo Belvedere."⁵⁷

Frederick entered Cambridge in 1827, and Alfred and Charles entered in 1828. By this time, George Tennyson's drunkenness and violence had made life at home almost intolerable;⁵⁸ and this ambiance, plus the fact that he had not passed through the preparatory ordeal of public school, made Alfred feel especially ill at ease and solitary at Cambridge. He wrote in a letter to his aunt,

I know not how it is, but I feel isolated here in the midst of society. The country is so disgustingly level, the revelry of the place so monotonous, the studies at the University so uninteresting, so much matter of fact. None but the dry-headed, calculating angular little gentlemen can take much delight in them.⁵⁹

It was at Cambridge that he became a close friend of Arthur Henry Hallam. Alfred had grown up with two older, dominating brothers, and he needed a friend for whom he could play the role of older brother--an older brother who was protective and loving instead of dominating. He found in the visits to Hallam's home the tranquil and rational domestic life that he had missed as a child.⁶⁰ The sophisticated Hallam had taken from his historian father, "the middle-class belief that in the value of innovation he found, like so many of the Romantics, the authority for it not in the supposed logic and structure of Nature, but in the Creative Imagination,

the Imaginative Reason, the Spirit, that is the unique individual."⁶¹ The two young men needed each other, and their friendship derived from an irresistible need for self-justification and "self-definition."⁴² The "Imaginative Reason found its incarnation"⁶³ in the Tennyson-Hallam relationship--Tennyson representing the Imagination and Hallam representing the Reason.

In June 1829, Tennyson received the Chancellor's Medal at the Cambridge Commencement for his poem "Timbuctoo," and with this honor the elite society named the Apostles called him "their"poet.⁶⁴ He and Hallam were both elected members of this group in late January, 1830. This was "a secret society of university intellectuals which had been founded a few years before and which still exists."⁶⁵ Tennyson was honored to be a member of such a group--a group who discussed religion, philosophy, and politics. He felt "that from this group would emanate forces which would redeem English society and culture from the materialism into which it had sunk, and from the revolutionary spirit which was penetrating the working class."⁶⁶ This was the age of Reform, and each of the apostles made significant intellectual and social contributions to the social revolution that was in progress.⁶⁷ Tennyson was strongly influenced by his association with the Apostles, and from them "drew in the long breaths of political freedom and loyalty to the highest ideals of English life, which were later to find expression in Maud,"⁶⁸ and other poems.

While still an undergraduate at Cambridge, Tennyson published the first volume to bear his name--Poems, Chiefly Lyrical--in June, 1830. "This was the most accomplished first volume put out by an English poet up to that time, and arguably since."⁶⁹

During the summer of 1830, he and Hallam "started off for the Pyrenees, with money for the insurgent allies of Torrijos--a noble, accomplished, truthful man, worthy to be a leader."⁷⁰ John Sterling, one of the Apostles, knew Torrijos personally and supported him in his efforts to overthrow the despot King Ferdinand VII of Spain. Sterling had asked Hallam to deliver the needed money to Torrijos' insurrectionaries in the north of Spain. This money was to be used in a plan that would enable Torrijos to enter Spain from the south. Hallam asked Tennyson to join him in this adventure.⁷¹ They had a secret meeting with Senor Ojeda⁷² and his liberals in the Pyrenees and delivered the money. The insurrection was unsuccessful, but Tennyson never forgot the beauty of the mountains, and his poem "Oenone" contains vivid descriptions of the Pyrenees landscape.

In the years following this adventure, Tennyson had to leave Cambridge and return to Somersby. His father was ill and died a few weeks after his return. Fortunately, it was not necessary for him to find work since there was enough money left in the family to support them.⁷³

Tennyson continued writing and published his second volume of poems at the end of 1832. This volume contained

several of his most famous poems--"Oenone," "The Lotos Eaters" and "The Lady of Shalott,"⁷⁴ but the volume was not warmly received by the public. In fact, to

. . . the British Public the volume of 1832 was not merely a failure; it was a disaster. The Cambridge circle alone approved of it, and we read of Fitzgerald mumbling the assonances of "The Lady of Shalott" in the dawn while driving on the top of the coach from Cambridge to London. The Apostles were almost alone in their approval. Even before the reviewers had condemned the volume, the public had pronounced it 'affected and obscure.' Those few who had appreciated the 1830 collection were perplexed by its successor. And when the reviewers began on the latter volume, this perplexity changed into a convinced and vocal disappointment. On the crest of the reaction came the famous Lockhart review in the Quarterly, and with it Tennyson's reputation sank to zero. And what was worse, he had become a joke--he was not an author whom any intelligent young lady could be caught reading. For it must be remembered that at that date the Quarterly for most people was 'second only to God's Bible,' and its opinions constituted an authority which no man or woman of culture could ignore. Thus by 1834 we find the Oxford Magazine expressing the view that 'Alfred Tennyson is still more laughed at than wept over.'⁷⁵

Tennyson was stung by this criticism, which, along with the tragic news of Hallam's death in Vienna, led to a decade of silence. Those silent years were not wasted, however, but led to one of "the most productive periods of Tennyson's life."⁷⁶ He reshaped many of his previous verses, and visited many parts of England. From these visits, "he gained impressions which contributed much to his grasp of Victorian realities. And as he recovered from his previous gloom, he learned to view his private doubts in broad perspective."⁷⁷

Tennyson and the family lived in the old Somersby Rectory until 1837, and then he moved his mother and those

brothers and sisters who were still at home to a house in Epping Forest on the outskirts of London. "This gave him not only access to the life of literary London, but also, and more important, the opportunity to explore the great and increasingly terrible city. Above all, it gave him the chance to become something of a Bohemian, to loiter in London bars and drink a great deal of brandy."⁷⁸ Tennyson felt very optimistic about the move to Epping Forest. He now had the opportunity to make new friends and renew relationships with old ones. "People had not yet grown disillusioned about the hopes excited by the passage of the Reform Act of 1832, the abolition of slavery and Catholic Emancipation. The rapid development of the railways and other scientific and industrial advances seemed to offer the prospect of unprecedented material and spiritual development."⁷⁹ His poem "Locksley Hall" was written in 1842, and it expressed these half-realized apprehensions and hopes of the Victorian age.⁸⁰ In this poem Tennyson was optimistic about the progress of man, and the future of England.⁸¹

When the centuries behind me like a
fruitful land reposed;
When I clung to all the present for
the promise that it closed;

When I dipt into the future far as
human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world and all
the wonder that would be. (Lines 13-16)

At the time Tennyson wrote "Locksley Hall" he was emotionally involved with a girl named Rosa Baring, but she was engaged to a man named Robert Shafto. "This association of 'Locksley

Hall' with Tennyson's life is strengthened by the fact that the marriage of Shafto and Rosa was a marriage of arrangement."⁸² Rosa's aunt wrote in her diary that "the marriage was the result, not primarily of Shafto's romantic attraction to Rosa, nor presumably of hers to him, but of the desire of her parents for a match suitable to their financial circumstances and family background."⁸³ In "Locksley Hall," Tennyson revealed his bitterness over losing her:

Better thou and I were lying, hidden
 from the heart's disgrace,
 Rolled in one another's arms, and silent
 in a last embrace.

Cursed be the social wants that sin
 against the strength of youth!
 Cursed be the social ties that warp us
 from the living truth!

Cursed be the sickly forms that err
 from honest Nature's rule!
 Cursed be the gold that gilds the
 straitened forehead of the fool! (Lines 57-62)

. . . .

What is that which I should turn to,
 lighting upon days like these?
 Every door is barr'd with gold, and
 opens but to golden keys. (Lines 99-100)

. . . .

Falser than all fancy fathoms, falser
 than all songs have sung,
 Puppet to a father's threat, and servile
 to a shrewish tongue!

Is it well to wish thee happy?--having
 known me--to decline
 On a range of lower feelings and a
 narrower heart than mine! (Lines 41-44)

His jealousy of Shafto was obvious in the lines:

As the husband is, the wife is; thou
art mated with a clown,
And the grossness of his nature will
have weight to drag thee down.

He will hold thee, when his passion
shall have spent its novel force,
Something better than his dog, a little
dearer than his horse. (Lines 47-50)

He recovered from his loss of Rosa when he met and fell in love with Emily Sellwood at the wedding of his brother Charles in 1836. The Sellwood family recognized their engagement in 1838, but two years later they insisted that Emily break it. Her father, "conventional and strictly religious, opposed his daughter's marriage to a penniless poet who looked like a gypsy, was heavily addicted to pipe and cigar smoking, had broad religious views, and a family background with a disturbing substratum of instability, melancholia and dipsomania."⁸⁴

Tennyson published his Poems, in two volumes, in 1842 which received good reviews and sold quite well.⁸⁵ It was shortly after this, in 1843, that he lost about two thousand pounds in a bad investment. "The shock to the highly sensitive poet's health, both mental and bodily, was so severe that his friends began to fear for his reason, and even for his life."⁸⁶ He regained new hope when several prominent people arranged for him to be awarded a pension from the Civil List of two hundred pounds a year. He now was able to finish The Princess and to work again on his "Elegies," as he called them, which became In Memoriam. Published on June 1, 1850,

this long poem became the most famous poem of the Victorian age. Albert, the Prince Consort, was one of its most fervent admirers.

During the years between 1840 and 1850, Alfred and Emily Sellwood had not forgotten each other. They had met occasionally and had corresponded with each other; in fact, it was Emily who had suggested the title In Memoriam for the "Elegies."⁸⁷ Then, in 1850, her father became ill, and since he feared that if he died that Emily would be left alone, he withdrew his opposition to their marriage, in large measure because by this time Tennyson had become famous as a poet. The month of June 1850 was a memorable one for them--his In Memoriam was published on June 1, and on June 13, "he and Emily, no longer a young couple, were married, at a quiet wedding. The bride was thirty-seven, the bridegroom forty-one. Tennyson enjoyed lifelong happiness in his marriage. In keeping with the times it was a perfect marriage."⁸⁸

In Memoriam not only established his fame, but placed him "on a pedestal where he was recognized as a master spirit by the great public."⁸⁹ In this long poem dealing with the central problem of faith, he expressed his deep sorrow for the death of his dear friend Hallam, and in this expression he involved "the same interweaving of personal sadness with the mystery of all human experience and the special threats of contemporary doubt."⁹⁰ This poem expressed not only the grief for a friendship broken by death, but also revealed the poet's most deeply personal spiritual experiences. The

Prologue of In Memoriam expressed the universal feelings of all men, and the Prologue was one of the reasons that the poem was so popular.

Strong Son of God, Immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;

Thine are these orbs of light and shade;
Thou madest Life in man and brute;
Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot,
Is on the skull which thou has made.

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust,
Thou madest man, he knows not why,
He thinks he was not made to die;
And thou hast made him: thou art just.
(Stanzas I, II, and III)

We have but faith: we cannot know,
For knowledge is of things we see;
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow.
(Stanza VI)

In In Memoriam, Tennyson used Hegel's dialectic method of reasoning,⁹¹ and "sometimes the contrast between the two worlds of imagery--the heavens and earth--is so vivid that Tennyson is led to ask 'Are God and nature then at strife?' (In Memoriam, LV)."⁹² The following lines express the feeling that "the world of natural images is unstable, shifting, inextricably entangled with seasonal events and processes, and with 'becoming' rather than (cosmic) 'being.'"⁹³ They express the "Hegelian doctrine that the object to be understood in its full particularity is a fixed but ever-changing relation to the totality of the becoming universe."⁹⁴

Tonight the winds begin to rise
 And roar from yonder dropping day:
 The last red leaf is whirled away,
 The rooks are blown about the skies;

The forest cracked, the waters curled,
 The cattle huddled on the lea;
 And wildly dashed on tower and tree
 The sunbeam strikes along the world:

And but for fancies, which aver
 That all thy motions gently pass
 Athwart a plane of molten glass
 I scarce could brook the strain and stir

That makes the barren branches loud;
 And but for fear it is not so,
 The wild unrest that lives in woe
 Would dote and pore on yonder cloud

That rises upward always higher
 And onward drags a labouring breast,
 And topples round the dreary west,
 A looming bastion fringed with fire. (Section XV)

Tennyson expressed in In Memoriam "the struggle experienced by all Victorians interested in science, between a naturalistic and a spiritual--or . . . 'mystical'--view of the world,"⁹⁵ but most of all "he showed the progress of the pilgrim-soul to God."⁹⁶

Tennyson said that, at first, he wrote "for the mere relief that poetical expression gives to sorrow,"⁹⁷ and certainly writing acted as a catharsis. But, in addition, he longed for personal assurance that his friend was in the presence of God, and thus In Memoriam, over the years of its composition, became a record of his attempts to "reason out immortality."⁹⁸ Not that he was ever an unbeliever; he once said that if he ever ceased to believe in an all-powerful Being somewhere in the universe and prospects of an afterlife,

he would not "care a pin about anything,"⁹⁹ but he could not put his intellect aside. The following stanza from In Memoriam clearly expressed his tenuous, groping faith:

I stretch lame hand of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.
(Sec. LV, Stanza 5)

When William Wordsworth, the Poet Laureate died in April 1850, Tennyson, almost immediately, was considered one who was worthy enough to fill the vacancy.¹⁰⁰ In addition, the Queen and Prince Albert were very impressed with In Memoriam, and requested that discreet inquiries be made regarding Mr. Tennyson's position and character. When these were completed, the Prince was "informed that Mr. Tennyson was a fit person to be Laureate,"¹⁰¹ and he was offered that position in November. There were other competitors: "Lord John Russell submitted to the Queen the four names of Leigh Hunt, Sheridan Knowles, Henry Taylor, and last on the list, Tennyson. The Prince Consort's admiration of In Memoriam determined Her Majesty's choice"102

Hallam Tennyson wrote that,

. . . . on November 19 my father was appointed Poet Laureate, owing chiefly to Prince Albert's admiration for 'In Memoriam.' Wordsworth had been now dead some months; and my father, as he assured me, had not any expectation of the Laureateship, or any thought upon that subject: it seemed to him therefore a very curious coincidence, that the night before the offer reached him he dreamt that Prince Albert came and kissed him on the cheek, and that he said in his dream, 'Very kind, but very German.'

In the morning this letter about the Laureateship was brought to his bedroom He took the whole

day to consider and at the last wrote two letters, one accepting, one refusing, and determined to make up his mind after a consultation with his friends at dinner. He would joke and say, 'In the end I accepted the honour, because during dinner Venables told me, that, if I became Poet Laureate, I should always when I dined out be offered the liverwing of a fowl.'¹⁰³

Tennyson took his official position seriously, and regarded his post "as Poet Laureate in the light of a high poetic and patriotic ardor."¹⁰⁴ He had been interested in the generalities of social and political development for a long time, and his interests "now embraced the practical problems of the hour."¹⁰⁵ In his first Laureate poem "To the Queen," "he was thinking especially of a stanza in which the empire of Wordsworth should be asserted: for he was representative Poet Laureate, such a poet that kings should honor, and such a one as would do honor to kings;--making the period of a reign famous by the utterance of memorable words concerning that period."¹⁰⁶

Victoria--since your royal grace
 To one of less desert allows
 This laurel greener from the brows
 Of him that uttered nothing base;

And should your greatness, and the care
 That yokes with empire, yield you time
 To make demand of modern rhyme
 If aught of ancient worth be there;

. . . .

Her court was pure; her life serene;
 God gave her peace; her land reposed;
 A thousand claims to reverence closed
 In her as Mother, Wife, and Queen;

And Statesmen at her council met
 Who knew the season when to take
 Occasion by the hand, and make
 The bounds of freedom wider yet

By shaping some august decree
 Which kept her throne unshaken still,
 Broad-based upon her people's will,
 And compassed by the inviolate sea.
 (Stanzas 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9)

Tennyson sang to the Victorians "what oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed."¹⁰⁷

Tennyson, as Poet Laureate, felt it was his duty to write poetry for all types of occasions: royal weddings, deaths of public figures, and his country's battles.¹⁰⁸ In his poetry, he perpetuated such events as the charge of the Light Brigade and the death of the Duke of Wellington:

. . . he mourned with the Queen over sorrowful events affecting the Royal Family and rejoiced with her over happy ones. Through this interaction between events, suitable emotions and official utterances, Tennyson undoubtedly came to be regarded as the High Priest of the Age. And as each occasional poem appeared, the Victorians murmured to themselves: 'This time Tennyson really has expressed the feelings of the nation.'¹⁰⁹

When Tennyson became Poet Laureate the majority of the people in England could not read, but his name was known even to that majority.¹¹⁰ Poems went into the eighth edition in 1853. The Princess went into its fifth edition, and Maud sold 5000 copies "on the first day of publication and in spite of, or perhaps because of, the controversy it aroused, it went on selling. The Idylls of the King, published between 1859 and 1885, was bought and read by thousands as each volume appeared. In July 1864, 60,000 copies of Enoch Arden were subscribed, 40,000 sold very rapidly and the book was soon out of print."¹¹¹

"'Why am I so popular?' he asked a friend in 1866. 'I don't

write in a common language. I think it is because I am Poet Laureate. It's like being a Lord.' He was, in the course of time, to be both."¹¹²

The undiminishing sales of his works enabled him to buy the beautiful eighteenth-century house, Farringford, in 1856. It was located on the sparsely inhabited Isle of Wight, but it was still impossible for him to escape completely from admirers and curiosity seekers. On one occasion, some Americans who "marched to his front door demanding to see the poet got short shrift when Tennyson answered the door-bell himself and said to them, 'Well, now you have seen me, will you kindly go away?'"¹¹³

England was saddened when Prince Albert died on December 14, 1861. The Queen's second daughter, Princess Alice, sent a message to Tennyson and asked him if he would write something about the Prince Consort, her father. The form of commemoration that he decided to use was "a dedication to the Prince's memory of a new edition of the Idylls of the King of 1859, which was already with the printers."¹¹⁴

These to his Memory--since he held them dear,
Perchance as finding there unconsciously
Some image of himself--I dedicate,
I dedicate, I consecrate with tears--
These Idylls. (Lines 1-5)

. . . .

May all love,
His love, unseen but felt, overshadow thee,
The love of all thy sons encompass thee,
The love of all thy daughters cherish thee,
The love of all thy people comfort thee,
Till God's love set thee at his side again!
(Lines 49-53)

Tennyson's first personal introduction to the Queen took place on April 14, 1862, and this is when their friendship began. The visit was briefly recorded by Victoria in her diary:

I went down to see Tennyson who is very peculiar looking, tall, dark, with a fine head, long black flowing hair and a beard--oddly dressed, but there is no affectation about him. I told him how much I admired his glorious lines to my precious Albert and how much comfort I found in his 'In Memoriam.' He was full of unbounded appreciation of beloved Albert. When he spoke of my own loss, of that to the Nation, his eyes quite filled with tears.¹¹⁵

The visitors continued to make the pilgrimage to the Isle of Wight, so the Tennysons had a large and comfortable house, Aldworth, built for them on an isolated hill in Sussex, near Haselmere. Tennyson moved with his family to the estate in the summer of 1869, and "there in the beautiful Sussex countryside, with a magnificent view across the Downs to the Channel to inspire him, he made his home for the rest of his life."¹¹⁶

Tennyson continued to write his poetry, and even though he led a life of seclusion he remained a well-known and popular man. He created a majestic and commanding impression. This impression, "eminently suited to a Poet Laureate, undoubtedly owed much to his noble, ideally 'poetic' looks to which his stature, his fine head with its lofty brows and aquiline nose, his dark flowing locks and luxuriant beard, all contributed. His myopia lent him an air of aloofness and dignity which rendered him in appearance every inch the Victorians' conception of a poet."¹¹⁷

He lived to see himself become a name, esteemed as a knower of men and manners, climates, councils, governments. And he lived also to see his work recognized in quarters of which the earnest Cambridge Apostles could have had no inkling. Indeed, perhaps his warmest tribute came not from genteel eulogists, but rather from the lips of a vagrant in Covent Garden who stopped the poet with humble entreaty: 'Look, sir, here am I. I've been drunk for six days out of the seven, but if you will shake me by the hand, I'm damned if I ever get drunk again.' Such was the power of poetry.¹¹⁸

The Queen raised Tennyson to the peerage in 1884, and he became Baron of Aldforth and Farringford. His friendship with the Queen contributed to the high esteem in which he was held, and her interest in him was doubtless due to the fact that he was willing to accede to personal requests where publication was not even involved. For example, he received an appeal from Princess Beatrice early in 1890 requesting him to write "a few appropriate words in verse to be placed at the beginning"¹¹⁹ of a prayer book that the children were giving the Queen, their mother, on the fiftieth anniversary of their parents' wedding. He was eighty years old at the time, but, as usual, he graciously complied and sent the following lines:

Remembering Him who waits thee far away,
And with thee, Mother, taught us first to pray,
Accept on this your golden bridal-day
The Book of Prayer.¹²⁰

Many startling political changes occurred in England during his lifetime, but his point-of-view was always one of the well-ordered British gentlemen--"of Whiggism in her carriage with a very gracious smile and salute for Conservatism in

hers."¹²¹ This was the view that he tried to convey in his poetry, but during his lifetime, the politics of England passed from the phases of "aristocratic Whiggism, through a sound phase of middle-class liberalism, to the achievement of democracy. During those fifty-five years"¹²² between the two "Locksley Hall" poems, "Tennyson, for his part, passed from an early suspicion of democracy, through a wholesome dislike of democracy, to a loathing of democracy so fierce and so violent that it upset not only his health and his temper, but even his prosody."¹²³ He could not ignore the muse of liberty, so he hedged. He felt that liberty was fine so long as she was well-behaved, "sober-suited,"¹²⁴ and completely English. His views on government never changed. It is indeed strange that he had such views since his grandfather was a landowner and Tennyson was aware of the evils of the landed aristocracy. He should have hated landed aristocracy, but he did not. He was a Conservative, and his views remained those of the Tory and the "provincial squire; they are based upon the old territorial and not on the new industrial system. There was the instinctive distrust of the growing commercial aristocracy"¹²⁵ Tennyson's own "views upon the principle of governance never advanced, in spite of the superficial influences of . . . the Cambridge Apostles, and . . . Carlyle, beyond the opinions which he had imbibed at Somersby Rectory."¹²⁶

In a sense the early Tennyson, the Tennyson of 1831 was in advance of his time . . . Tennyson became a reactionary at the age of twenty-two. The early enthusiasm which had led him to ring the

church bells at Somersby on hearing of the passing of the Reform Bill had already received a severe shock from the French Revolution of July, and was not to survive . . . rick-fire days, or that mysterious interview with Senor Ojeda in the Pyrenees. Not that the Tennysonian reaction was ever carried to excess: he was careful never to give himself wholly away. The praise of freedom and progress was in the best tradition of English poetry . . . He did not ignore . . . Liberty . . . He suggested merely that, however admirable, she was perhaps a little premature; he suggested that, if she would only wait 'ten thousand years,' she could then behave exactly as she liked. And thus, when people asked him for his opinion on the condition of England, he would reply: 'I am of the same politics as Shakespeare, Bacon and every sane man.' And there was obviously no more to be said.¹²⁷

Tennyson continued to publish until his death.

"Indeed the final volume was in press at the time of his death which occurred October 7, 1892. He was buried in the Poet's corner of Westminster Abbey on the 12th of the same month."¹²⁸ The post of Poet Laureate remained unfilled until 1896, ". . . an extraordinary tribute to the poet who had conferred an honour on his office. And it was this sense of vocation in life and in art, this sense of heaven-sent mission in deed and in word, that had made Tennyson unique among our Laureates."¹²⁹ Tennyson was a "Victorian husband and father, a Victorian philosopher and moralist, a Victorian social figure, a Victorian poet who was, to his contemporaries, the incarnation of poetry and, indeed, of their own higher thinking. Tennyson was more than a Poet Laureate: he was an extraordinary symbol, and apart from Queen Victoria, no one was better fitted to be the symbol of the Victorian age."¹³⁰ The Laureateship gave him a pulpit from which to expound his views,

but his sincerity and integrity were deep-rooted and genuine. It is not without reason that he has been named the "Pre-eminent Victorian."¹³¹

Chapter III

The Influence of Social and Political Conditions on Tennyson's Poetry

The atmosphere of the nineteenth century was one of silent understanding and false optimism. There was also an undercurrent of violent uncertainty. The glorious prosperity of the Industrial Revolution had brought with it the growth of the population, a growing radicalism leading to trade unions,¹³² and the miserable conditions of men, women, and children who were over-worked, under-fed, and in many cases cruelly mistreated in the mills and mines by the billy-spinners and the overseers.¹³³ Tennyson "assailed the new 'tyranny' of the masses, the petulant haste of a too-eager democracy, as a threat to the well-being"¹³⁴ of England. The country had progressed in a fairly slow, moderate manner, but this orderly process was being threatened by the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution.

In burgeoning mills and factories, on railroads, highways, and canals, in banks, courts, and Parliament itself, the Industrial Revolution rushed ahead. Old cities spilled out beyond their ancient limits; new cities chewed up the once green landscape. In the countryside, the expansion of large-scale capitalist agriculture had destroyed the traditional pattern of village life. The independent farmer and secure tenant of former years were now often reduced to the status of wage laborers, hopelessly poor and frequently charges upon their parishes. Increasingly, their only prospect of earning a livelihood lay in tending the new machinery. Into the roaring textile mills of the northern counties, into the pestilential slums of new and unplanned cities, poured the

dispossessed of the countryside, to work and suffer and sicken and die. ¹³⁵

Many of Tennyson's shorter poems and the longer works such as The Princess and The Idylls of the King were direct or oblique commentaries on the intellectual and social life of the Victorian age. "He had no pronounced political opinions, but in many of his poems he touched upon contemporary problems and conditions which were the topics of party dispute and parliamentary debate. Tennyson revered the monarchy, the House of Lords, and by and large, all forms of authority. This conservatism was combined with a vague and paternalistic desire for social reform."¹³⁶ As a poet, he claimed that the art of poetry was "first of all a means for the propagation of truth, and for aiding the alliance of wisdom and human freedom."¹³⁷ Thomas Carlyle stated in his essay on Burns, published in the Edinburgh Review in 1828, that poets, "were sent forth as missionaries to their generation, to teach it a higher Doctrine, a purer Truth; they had a message to deliver, which left them no rest till it was accomplished."¹³⁸ Tennyson apparently shared Carlyle's view, that the poet must exercise a social and moral function,¹³⁹ and, furthermore, a uniqueness, expressed in "The Poet" of 1830:

The poet in a golden clime was born,
 With golden stars above;
 Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
 The love of love. (Stanza I)

Carlyle stated that the poet is "a seer; a gift of vision has been given him."¹⁴⁰ Tennyson saw the poet as a seer who used

truth as a weapon.¹⁴¹ Freedom clothed in Wisdom spoke in
this poem, and,

Her words did gather thunder as they ran,
And as the lightening to the thunder
Which follows it, riving the spirit of man,
Making earth wonder,

So was their meaning to her words. No sword
Of Wrath her right arm whirled,
But one poor poet's scroll, and with his word
She shook the world. (Stanzas 13 and 14)

Tennyson was not a professional politician nor a political philosopher, and even though he was a man of good common sense, he was not politically sophisticated. He was aware that conditions were very bad, but hoped that they would be improved by the steady, but slow improvement of the social system. He wrote a number of poems which were truly political.¹⁴²

Tennyson usually "restricted his political interests to English affairs,"¹⁴³ but because of the deep pride he felt in English freedom and his almost constant fear of France, he was sympathetic "with the cause of freedom in another country."¹⁴⁴ "Sonnet: Written on Hearing of the Outbreak of the Polish Insurrection," and "Poland" were his own protests "against Russia's absorption of Poland in 1831."¹⁴⁵ These two poems were written in 1833. In the sonnet he told the Polish people to:

Blow ye the trumpet, gather from
afar
The hosts to battle: be not bought
and sold.
Arise, brave Poles, the boldest of the
bold;
Break through your iron shackles--
fling them far. (Lines 1-4)

And in "Poland" he cried:

How long, O God, shall men be ridden
 down,
 And trampled under by the last and
 least
 Of men? The heart of Poland hath
 not ceased
 To quiver, tho' her sacred blood doth
 drown
 The fields, and out of every smoulder-
 ing town
 Cries to thee, lest brute Power be in-
 creased,
 Till that over grown Barbarian in the
 East
 Transgress his ample bound to some
 new crown,--
 Cries to Thee, 'Lord, how long shall
 these things be?' (Lines 1-9)

The poet had sympathized with Poland in his youth, and later with Montenegro, but he never mentioned the Civil War in America, nor Italy's struggle for liberty.¹⁴⁶ "The higher conception to which love of his own nation is to lead--the love of all nations as contained in one nation, the nation of Man--did not shine in the mind of Tennyson."¹⁴⁷ Two unpublished poems were written during this period--"Written During the Convulsions in Spain" and "Hail Briton."

"You Ask Me, Why, Tho Ill At Ease" was the first of three political poems that were composed in 1833, but not published until 1842. These poems "reflect the unsettled conditions attendant upon the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832,"¹⁴⁸ and this particular poem "was instigated by popular demonstrations protesting the rejection of the Reform Bill by the House of Lords."¹⁴⁹

You ask me, why, tho' ill at ease,
 Within this region I subsist,
 Whose spirits falter in the mist,
 And languish for the purple seas.

It is the land that freeman till,
 That sober-suited Freedom chose,
 The land, where girt with friends or
 foes,
 A man may speak the thing he will:
 (Stanzas 1 and 2)

Tennyson was so disillusioned and so unsure during this period that he even considered going elsewhere to live if the unions were to take over.¹⁵⁰ He expressed this disillusionment in the same poem:

Should banded unions persecute
 Opinion, and induce a time
 When single thought is civil crime,
 And individual freedom mute:

Though Power should make from land to land
 The name of Britain treble great--
 Though every channel of the State
 Should fill and choke with golden sand--

Yet waft me from the harbour-mouth
 Wild wind! I seek a warmer sky,
 And I will see before I die
 The palms and temples of the South.
 (Stanzas 5, 6, and 7)

Tennyson never left England, of course, and this short-lived threat to emigrate was never executed. He became more and more vocal, and his dislikes and concerns were expressed in his poetry. Even before 1840, he warned the British electorate not to imitate France. He also spoke out against the "falsehoods of extremes,"¹⁵¹ and implored his contemporaries to "regard gradation."¹⁵² He warned them against haste and stressed that discipline, common-sense, and loyalty must also be cultivated along with progress.¹⁵³

The second political poem, "Of Old Sat Freedom on the Heights," was also instigated by the "turbulence connected with the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832."¹⁵⁴ In the following stanzas Tennyson described his feelings about England, and the last stanza contains the warning of the falsehood of extremes that was "characteristic of the politically conservative Tennyson."¹⁵⁵

Her eyes desire the truth
 The wisdom of a thousand years
 Is in them. May perpetual youth
 Keep dry their light from tears;

That her fair form may stand and shine,
 Make bright our days and light our dreams,
 Turning to scorn with lips divine
 The falsehood of extremes! (Stanzas 5 and 6)

The third and last of these early political poems, "Love Thou Thy Land with Love Far-Brought," expressed Tennyson's political conservatism and, again, the "unrest connected with the passing of the Reform Bill."¹⁵⁶ He believed that the ideal change was gradual change and stated:

So let the change which comes be free
 To ingroove itself with that which flies,
 And work, a joint of state, that plies
 Its office, moved with sympathy. (Lines 45-48)

. . . .

Even now we hear with inward strife
 A motion toiling in the gloom--
 The spirit of the years to come
 Yearning to mix himself with Life. (Lines 53-56)

. . . .

Tomorrow yet would reap today,
 As we hear blossom of the dead;
 Earn well the thrifty months, nor wed
 Raw haste, half-sister of Delay. (Lines 93-96)

The first "Locksley Hall" was written in 1842. This poem was a product of Tennyson's youth and strongly influenced the young men of the day. It was an enthusiastic poem which expressed a forward look toward the future.¹⁵⁷

When I dipt into the future far as
 human eye could see,
 Saw the vision of the world and all
 the wonder that would be. (Lines 13 and 14)

. . . .

Men, my brothers, men the workers,
 ever reaping something new;
 That which they have done but earnest
 of the things that they shall do.
 (Lines 117 and 118)

. . . .

Not in vain the distance beacons.
 Forward, forward let us range,
 Let the great world spin forever down
 The ringing grooves of change.
 (Lines 181 and 182)

. . . .

O, I see the crescent promise of my
 spirit hath not set.
 Ancient founts of inspiration well
 thro' all my fancy yet. (Lines 187 and 188)

Even though these lines expressed a young Tennyson's optimistic view toward the future, he also expressed his uneasiness about the times:

Eye, to which all order festers, all
 things here are out of joint.
 Science moves, but slowly, slowly,
 creeping on from point to point;
 (Lines 133 and 134)

. . . .

Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers,
 and I linger on the shore,
 And the individual withers, and the
 world is more and more. (Lines 141 and 142)

The Victorian age was a trying and stormy period. The poor were cramped in filthy, unsanitary rooms, worked long hours for a pittance, and knew very little about the better things of life. In the poem "Lady Clara Vere de Vere," published in 1842, Tennyson suggested that conditions might be improved if each person helped in his own way.¹⁵⁰ He advised the aristocracy, who were suffering from idleness in their luxury, to seek out the poor and needy. This action would cure their boredom and help those in need.

Clara, Clara Vere de Vere,
 If time be heavy on your hands,
 Are there no beggars at your gate,
 Nor any poor about your lands?
 Oh! teach the orphan-boy to read,
 Or teach the orphan-girl to sew,
 Pray heaven for a human heart,
 And let the foolish yeoman go. (Lines 65-72)

Another poem that was published in 1842 was "Ulysses." Although the sources were Homer and Dante, the poem was "also a Victorian document."¹⁵⁹ Much of Tennyson's "own thought about the necessity of 'slow prudence' in governmental matters"¹⁶⁰ was contained in Ulysses' description of his son Telemachus:

This is my son, my own Telemachus,
 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,--
 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
 This labor, by slow prudence to make mild
 A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
 Of common duties (Lines 33-40)

Tennyson's conservative views and the instinctive worship of the older territorial aristocracy were expressed in

"The Lord of Burleigh." ¹⁶¹ This poem also expressed the Victorian views of women's place in the world--at home. The Victorian wife,

Shaped her heart with woman's meekness
 To all duties of her rank:
 And a gentle consort made he
 And her gentle mind was such
 That she grew a noble lady,
 And the people loved her much. (Lines 71-76)

The problem of social class was the basis for this poem--the Lord of Burleigh had married a girl who was not of his social rank, and "in this poem the village maiden sinks under the burden of an honor to which she had not been born."¹⁶² For Tennyson, discrepancy in rank usually resulted in similarly unpleasant situations. This same theme was expressed in "Lady Clara Vere de Vere," "Walking to the Mail," "Aylmer's Field," and above all, in "Maud."¹⁶³ These poems on domestic politics mirrored the prejudices of the times,¹⁶⁴ but Tennyson's own attitude toward women was one of respect and protectiveness.

The woman question had arisen during this period, and as early as 1847, Tennyson "had made the acquaintance of a new type of young woman, who, contemplating the achievements of great queens of ancient times,"¹⁶⁵ stated in The Princess:

. . . There are thousands now
 Such women, but convention beats them down:
 It is but bring up; no more than that:
 You men have done it: how I hate you all!
 Ah, were I something great! I wish I were
 Some mighty poetess, I would shame you then,
 That love to keep us children!

(Prologue, lines 127-133)

These strong sentiments were spoken by Lilia in The Princess, a poem in the satiric mood, published in 1847. This work expressed the poet's concern about one of the most interesting movements of his time--the higher education of women. He attempted to satisfy a desire to write a long poem that was of contemporary importance, and at the same time meet the demands of his many readers.¹⁶⁶ There were public schools and private schools, but the education of women depended on whether parents wanted their daughters to be educated. The French language was considered terrible, and nice young ladies did not read novels. The belief of the time was that it was not necessary for women to have an education because it was not good for them to use their brains. At the same time, however, the education of the children was left to the mothers who were uneducated.¹⁶⁷ The Victorians professed manliness while yielding to feminine standards. They felt that they would rob women of their vital place in society if they emancipated her from the age-old bondage of the home.¹⁶⁸ However, there was a rise in the employment of women during the period which led to more women working outside of the home.¹⁶⁹ Tennyson is suggesting in The Princess "that if a college for women seems fantastic, that is no reason why it would not be considered with an open mind Tennyson was attempting through an experiment to make his readers think about social questions in an unprejudiced and intelligent way."¹⁷⁰ This poem was "a serious attempt, artfully

disguised, to change an outworn attitude to an important human problem,"¹⁷¹ and "to give artistic expression to some of the beliefs and ideals of his age."¹⁷² The Princess resembled the Victorian age, and the following review was published in 1843.

In this work, too, Mr. Tennyson shows himself more than ever the poet of the day. In it more than ever the old is interpenetrated with the new--the domestic and scientific with the ideal and sentimental. He dares, in every page, to make use of modern words and notions, from which the mingled clumsiness and archaism of his compeers shrinks, as unpoetical. Though . . . his stage is an ideal fairy-land, yet he has reached the ideal by the only true method,--by bringing the Middle age forward to the Present one, and not by ignoring the Present to fall back on a cold and galvanized Mediaevalism; and thus he makes his 'Medley' a mirror of the nineteenth century, possessed of its own new art and science, its own new temptations and aspirations, and yet grounded on, and continually striving to reproduce, the forms and experiences of all past time.¹⁷³

Princess Ida's prophecy in The Princess was one the Victorians would not have expected to come true. Princess Ida,

. . . rose upon a wind of prophecy
 Dilating on the future: 'everywhere
 Two heads in council, two beside the hearth
 Two in the tangled business of the world,
 Two in the liberal offices of life.
 Two plummetts dropt for one to sound the abyss
 Of Science and the secrets of the mind;
 Musician, painter, sculptor, critic, more;
 And everywhere the broad and bounteous Earth
 Should bear a double growth of those rare souls
 Poets, whose thoughts enrich the blood of the world'.
 (Sec. II, Lines 154-164)

. . . .

For woman is not undeveloppt man,
 But diverse. Could we make her as the man,
 Sweet Love were slain; his dearest bond is this,
 Not like to like, but like in difference.
 Yet in the long years liker must they grow;

The man be more of woman, she of man;
 He gain in sweetness and in moral height,
 Nor lose the wrestling thews that throw the world;
 She mental breadth, nor fail in childward care,
 Nor lose the childlike in the larger mind;
 Till at the last she set herself to man,
 Like perfect music unto noble words;
 And so these twain, upon the skirts of Time,
 Sit side by side, full-summed in all their powers,
 Dispensing harvest, sowing the to-be,
 Self-reverent each and reverencing each,
 Distinct in individualities,
 But like each other even as those who love.
 (Sec. VII, Lines 259-276)

In 1850, Tennyson succeeded William Wordsworth as Poet Laureate of England. In the formal British sense, Tennyson, because he was a clergyman's son, was more of a "gentleman" than Wordsworth, and because of this position he was in closer contact with the upper class. The Laureateship thus became "something more considerable than it had been in the hands of Wordsworth."¹⁷⁴ Tennyson's sense of poetic mission "led him to take his role as Poet Laureate very seriously,"¹⁷⁵ and his laureate verse was "the vigorous creation of new forms for a new national consciousness."¹⁷⁶ These new poetic forms were demonstrated in such poems as "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," "The Charge of the Light Brigade," and Maud.

Tennyson looked with disapproval and apprehension at the situation in France, and this feeling of alarm was shared by the Queen and the British people. They were concerned about the maneuvers of Napoleon III, and nervous about the lack of military preparedness in their own country.¹⁷⁷ Tennyson had voiced at the end of The Princess his strong feelings concerning France.

God bless the narrow sea which keeps her off,
 And keeps our Britain, whole within herself,
 A nation yet, the rulers and the ruled.
 Some sense of duty, something of a faith,
 Some reverence for the laws ourselves have made,
 Some patient force to change them when we will,
 Some civic manhood firm against the crowd--

(Lines 51-57)

Tennyson, with uncharacteristic violence, rushed into the political arena in 1852.

Prince Louis Napoleon, who had been elected President of the French Democratic Republic soon after the fall of Louis Philippe in 1848, had ever since been working cautiously and craftily to destroy the party of the left and acquire absolute authority for himself. On December 2nd., 1851, he carried out a coup d'etat, with what the wife of the British Ambassador called 'dreadful and indiscriminating bloodshed' and had himself proclaimed 'Emperor of the French'. Early in 1852, it became known that he was restoring the Imperial Eagles to the uniforms and flags of the French army. A wave of apprehension swept through Britain.¹⁷⁸

A plan for setting up volunteer Rifle Clubs all over Britain was launched by Tennyson's young poet-friend Coventry Patmore. The plan appealed to him, and, caught up in the infection of action, he wrote a spirited poem entitled "Rifle Clubs!!!"¹⁷⁹ He sent Patmore the following three stanzas:

Peace is thirty-seven years old,
 Sweet Peace can no man blame,
 But Peace of cloth or of avarice born,
 Her olive is her shame;
 And I dreamt of Charon alone in my bed--
 His boat crammed and he rose and said
 'I carry the dead, the dead, the dead,
 Killed in the Coup d'Etat'.

Half a million of men in arms,
 Yet peace we all require,
 Half a million of men in arms,
 And the head of them all a liar
 'They wronged him not', the ferry man said
 'Yet look at his bullets in heart and head--
 So I carry the dead, the dead, the dead,
 Killed in the Coup d'Etat'.

Some love Peace for her own dear sake,
 Tradesmen love her for gain,
 But in France the rifle is all-in-all,
 And the crimson trousers reign--
 'Children and women--their wounds are red,
 And I wait for Louis', the ferryman said,
 'To follow the dead, the dead, the dead,
 Killed in the Coup d'Etat'.

This burst of political activity was by no means his last. He looked with disapproval and suspicion at the overbearing arrogance of the social and political leaders from the very beginning of his term as Poet Laureate. There were several parliamentary factions, but he had no sympathy with any of them and often voiced his strong dissent. These dissents were often expressed in poems which were published under the pseudonym "Merlin," or anonymously.¹⁸⁰ Several of these anonymous poems strongly protested the policy of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, "who had given at least a tacit approval to the 'coup d'etat' of Louis Napoleon."¹⁸¹ Tennyson attempted in these poems to "rouse a dormant nationalism to resist the possibility of a French invasion."¹⁸² In "Britons, Guard Your Own," a poem of extraordinary violence, he warned about trusting the new dictator of France. He branded him as a liar and a traitor, and cautioned England to be wary of any friendly proposals he might make.¹⁸³

Rise, Britons, rise, if manhood be not dead;
 The world's last tempest darkens overhead;
 The Pope has blessed him;
 The Church caressed him;
 He triumphs; may be, we shall stand alone.
 Britons, guard your own.

. . . .

We hate not France, but France has lost her voice.
 This man is France, the man they call her choice.
 By tricks and spying,
 And craft and lying,
 And murder, was her freedom overthrown.
 Britons, guard your own.

. . . .

Should he land here, and for one hour prevail,
 There must no man go back to bear the tale:
 No man to bear it,--
 Swear it! We swear it!
 Although we fought the banded world alone,
 We swear to guard our own. (Stanzas 1, 4, and 10)

This poem was published under the pseudonym "Merlin" because "Tennyson feared that, if he used his own name, his views might be taken as official and compromise the Queen and the government who had decided to remain passive on the issue."¹⁸⁴

His most powerful and most statesman-like poem on the English-French situation was "The Third of February--1852," also published under the signature "Merlin." In this poem he "assailed a House of Lords eager to placate Napoleon and anxious to hush denunciations in the press,"¹⁸⁵ which had also "rejected the Bill for the organization of the Militia, which had been brought forward because of the crisis."¹⁸⁶ He wrote:

My Lords, we heard you speak: you
 told us all
 That England's honest censure went
 too far,
 That our free press should cease to
 brawl,
 Not sting the fiery Frenchman into
 war.
 It was our ancient privilege, my Lords,
 To fling whate'er we felt, not fearing,
 into words.

We love not this French God, the child
of Hell,
Wild War, who breaks the converse
of the wise;
But though we love kind Peace so
well,
We dare not even by silence sanction
lies.
It might be safe our censures to with-
draw,
And yet, my Lords, not well; there is
a higher law.

As long as we remain, we must speak
free,
Tho' all the storm of Europe on us
break.
No little German state are we,
But the one voice in Europe; we
must speak,
That if tonight our greatness were
struck dead,
There might be left some record of
the things we said. (Stanzas 1, 2, and 3)

As "Merlin," Tennyson continued his attack on France,
and in "Hands all Round" he called on America to come to
Britain's aid if needed:

Gigantic daughter of the West
We drink to thee across the flood,
We know thee most, we love thee best,
For art thou not of British blood?
Should war's mad blast again be blown,
Permit not thou the tyrant powers
To fight thy mother here alone,
But let thy broadsides roar with ours.
Hands all round! (Lines 37-44)

Although the "Merlin" poems came dangerously close to
doggerel, the great "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Welling-
ton," also published in 1852, proved that Tennyson was the
Poet Laureate of the right spirit, courage, and disposition.
The Duke was a hero who had given excellent service. Tennyson
credited him in this poem with an unselfish and keen sense of

the destiny of England. Everyone was made aware of the contrast between Wellington and the "ambitious lords abroad"¹⁸⁷ and the modern English leaders. This ode "was in no sense what it is often wrongly called, a laureate piece. It was written out of spontaneous feeling toward a man whom he had admired for some forty years."¹⁸⁸ He told England to:

Mourn for the man of long-enduring blood,
The statesman-warrior, moderate, resolute,
Whole in himself, a common good.
Mourn for the man of amplest influence,
Yet clearest of ambitious crime
Our greatest yet with least pretence, (Lines 24-29)

On God and Godlike men we build our trust,
Hush, the Dead March wails in the people's ears;
The black earth yawns; the mortal disappears;
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust;
He is gone who seemed so great. (Lines 266-270)

During the 1950's Tennyson became increasingly apprehensive

. . . . at the exploitation of the populace by the rugged captains of industry and all the entrepreneurs and speculators of a laissez-faire economy. The golden year of 1846 looked with hope to the extension of free trade; but 'Maud,' less than a decade later begins by giving the golden age a new and bitter connotation of a time.¹⁸⁹

This apprehension is clearly expressed in Maud:

But these are the days of advance, the works of the men
of mind,
When who but a fool would have faith in a tradesman's
ware or his word?
Is it peace or war? Civil war, as I think, and that
of a kind
The viler, as underhand, not openly bearing the sword.

. . . .

Peace sitting under her olive, and slurring the days
gone by,
When the poor are hovell'd and hustled together,
each sex, like swine,

When only the ledger lives, and when only not all men
 lie;
 Peace in her vineyard--yes! but a company forges the
 wine. (Sec. I, Stanzas VII and IX)

Maud, published in 1855, was Tennyson's main political poem and his first attempt to describe the state of society to his readers. The corruption in society was the major cause of the speaker's neurosis. The unnatural state of the community had nearly ruined his life, and he was sick with the "disease of his age, the inability to find reason or purpose in anything."¹⁹⁰ In this poem Tennyson "allowed the unpopular Crimean War, which England had entered in March, 1854, to be a cure-all for the troubles of the speaker (one could hardly call him a hero) in his poem. This gave the poet a chance to express dramatically, through the person of the deranged speaker, comments on the social evils of England which had been brought about by the industrial revolution."¹⁹¹ Both evil and fear are expressed in the following lines from Maud:

And the vitriol madness flushes up in
 the ruffian's head.
 Till the filthy by-land rings to the yell
 Of the trampled wife,
 And chalk and alum and plaster are
 sold to the poor for bread,
 And the spirit of murder works in the
 very means of life.

And Sleep must lie down armed, for
 the villainous centre-bits
 Grind on the wakeful ear in the hush of
 the moonless nights,
 While another is cheating the sick of
 a few last gasps, as he sits
 To pestle a poison'd poison behind his
 crimson lights. (Sec. I, Stanzas ix and x)

Tennyson had already expressed in "Locksley Hall" his uneasiness with the times, in that the age was one in which ". . . the individual withers, and the world is more and more" (line 142). Thirteen years later in Maud, the speaker again cried out against the chaos and turmoil in the Victorian world around him and prayed that "a great man might come to reorganize society."¹⁹²

Oh God, for a man with heart, head, hand,
 Like some of the simple great ones gone
 For ever and ever by,
 One still strong man in a blatant land,
 Whatever they call him--what care I?--
 Aristocrat, democrat, autocrat--one
 Who can rule and dare not lie! (Sec. X, stanza v)

During the years that followed Maud, Tennyson was busy writing dramatic plays and other poetry. Three political poems were written during these years--"Ode Sung at the Opening of the International Exhibition" in 1862, "Montenegro" in 1877, and "Despair" in 1881. The International Exhibition was held in May, 1862, and because the Prince Consort, who was responsible for the exhibition, had died five months "before the opening of the exhibition, this tribute to him was very timely. Tennyson here voices his hope for the beneficial effects of widespread commerce in a world at peace."¹⁹³

The world-compelling plan was thine,--
 And, lo! the long laborious miles
 Of Palace; lo! the giant aisles,
 Rich in model and design
 Harvest-tool and husbandry,
 Loom and wheel and enginery,
 Secrets of the sullen mine,
 Steel and gold, and corn and wine,
 Fabric rough, or fairy-fine,

And Hope will have broken her heart,
 running after a shadow of good;
 For their knowing and know-nothing books
 are scatter'd from hand to hand--
 We have knelt in your know-all chapel, too,
 looking over the sand. (Stanza XVI)

The political poem "Compromise" was "printed (apparently unauthorized) in St. James Gazette, 29 Oct. 1884 . . . and was addressed to Gladstone, at the heights of the agitation about the Franchise Bill."¹⁹⁷

Steersman, be not precipitate in thine act
 Of steering, for the river here, my friend,
 Parts in two channels, moving to one end--
 This goes straight forward to the cataract:
 That streams about the bend;
 But though the cataract seem the nearer way,
 Whate'er the crowd on either bank may say,
 Take thou the 'bend,' 'twill save thee many a day.

Tennyson was offered a Peerage in 1884, and "Freedom" was his first political poem after he became a peer. The poem "embodies one of Tennyson's fixed political ideas, that of the desirability of gradualism in political change."¹⁹⁸ England is again warned against haste toward democracy:

Who yet, like Nature, wouldst not mar,
 By changes all too fierce and fast
 This order of her Human Star,
 This heritage of the past;

 Men loud against all forms of power--
 Unfurnish'd brows, tempestuous tongues,
 Expecting all things in an hour--
 Brass mouths and iron lungs! (Stanzas VI and X)

In 1885 "Britain was on the verge of war with Russia over Afghanistan,"¹⁹⁹ and when the Liberal government made "the move to reduce the size and power of the Navy,"²⁰⁰ Tennyson attacked them in "The Fleet." He deplored "what seemed to him a flagrant disregard for British security."²⁰¹

You, you, if you shall fail to understand
 What England is, and what her all-in-all
 On you will come the curse of all the land,
 Should this old England fall
 Which Nelson left so great.

. . . .

You, you, that have the ordering of her fleet,
 If you should only compass her disgrace,
 When all men starve, the wild mob's million feet
 Will kick you from your place,
 But then too late, too late. (Stanzas I and IV)

Tennyson was presented to the House of Lords by his personal friend, George Campbell, the Duke of Argyll, shortly after he became a peer. The Duke was opposed to Gladstone's Irish policy²⁰² and resigned the office of Privy Seal in 1881. Tennyson, also, was vehemently opposed to it, and this conflict caused a rift in his friendship with Gladstone.²⁰³ The fear of "organic change"²⁰⁴ is reflected in the last two lines of his poem "To the Duke of Argyll":

This ever-changing world of circumstance,
 In changing, chime with never-changing Law.

Tennyson's belief in progress was unfulfilled in 1886, and the speaker in "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" is old, as well as disillusioned. The optimism and enthusiasm expressed in the first "Locksley Hall" were no longer with him. He now decried "the present age for disappointing his early hopes"²⁰⁵ and he seemed to shout:

Gone the cry of 'Forward, Forward,'
 lost within a growing gloom;
 Lost, or only heard in silence from
 the silence of a tomb.

Half the marvels of my morning, tri-
 umphs over time and space
 Staled by frequency, shrunk by usage
 into commonest commonplace!

'Forward' rang the voices then, and
 of the many mine was one.
 Let us hush this cry of 'Forward' till
 ten thousand years have gone. (Lines 73-78)

. . . .

Chaos, Cosmos! Cosmos, Chaos! Who
 can tell how all will end?
 Read the wide world's annals, you,
 and take their wisdom for your friend.

Hope the best, but hold the Present
 fatal daughter of the Past,
 Shape your heart to front the hour,
 but dream not that the hour will last.
 (Lines 103-106)

Tennyson had turned from the "early Victorian cry of 'Forward'"²⁰⁶ and an optimistic look toward the future to an apocalyptic fear of the social progress of the time. He "turned from his general survey of human confusion to a specific indictment of his own society; he gave himself a last opportunity to play Tiresias to the times directly and at length."²⁰⁷ He was convinced that the age had "lost its capacity for wonder until even the miracles of science are taken for granted."²⁰⁸ He had nostalgic yearning for a past that he saw crumbling about him:

Truth for truth, and good for good!
 The good, the true, the pure, the just--
 Take the charm 'For ever' from them,
 and they crumble in the dust. (Lines 72-73)

"Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" was far removed from the romanticism of his first "Locksley Hall," and he expressed with alarm the evil that had settled over England. The youth who had looked to a future of bright promise, found this

promise unfulfilled with the new mechanical age. He was alarmed that "the social imagination had not kept pace with its development."²⁰⁹ He saw that,

There the master scrimps his haggard
 sempstress of her daily bread,
 There a single sordid attic holds the
 living and the dead.

There the smouldering fire of fever,
 creeps across the rotted floor,
 And the crowded couch of incest in
 the warrens of the poor. (Lines 221-224)

In these lines his generation was reminded of the great price they were paying for their prosperity--"in ugliness, and squalor, and human waste."²¹⁰ Tennyson was doubtful that progress was beneficial to man, especially when everything moved too quickly, and again in the second "Locksley Hall" he wrote:

Forward then, but still remember how
 the course of Time will swerve,
 Crook and turn upon itself in many a
 backward curve. (Lines 235-236)

Tennyson believed that the moral malaise of his society was caused by the political evils of the age--that the popular and political movements, and the terrible sufferings of the poor threatened the unstable society with disintegration.²¹¹ His world had greatly changed from the first "Locksley Hall," and a world of order and peace that he longed for was described in these lines from the second "Locksley Hall":

Every tiger madness muzzled, every
 serpent passion killed,
 Every grim ravine a garden, every
 blazing desert till'd.

Robed in universal harvest up to
 either pole she smiles,
 Universal ocean softly washing all her
 warless isles. (Lines 167-170)

He wanted to defend the society that he knew from change, and his defense is what dominates "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After."

In the poem "Politics," written in 1889, the need for gradual change was reiterated.

We move, the wheel must always move,
 Not always on the plain,
 And if we move to such a goal
 As wisdom hopes to gain,
 Then you that drive, and know your craft,
 Will firmly hold the rein,
 Nor lend an ear to random cries,
 Or you may drive in vain;
 For some cry 'Quick' and some cry 'Slow,'
 But, while the hills remain,
 Up hill 'Too-slow' will need the whip,
 'Down hill 'Too-quick' the chain.

His last statements on the subject of industrial progress and change were expressed in the poem "Mechanophilus." This poem was written in the 1830's during the time of the first railway, but was not published until 1892.²¹²

As we surpass our father's skill,
 Our sons will shame our own:
 A thousand things are hidden still
 And not a hundred known.

You, what the cultured surface grows,
 Dispense with careful hands:
 Deep under deep for ever goes,
 Heaven over heaven expands. (Lines 21-28)

Tennyson's political poems expressed his deep concern for England and her social and political problems. The Victorian age presented outwardly "a facade of solid community

belief:"²¹³ while inwardly it displayed "all the symptoms of a disintegrating culture."²¹⁴ He fulfilled, as a poet-prophet, Carlyle's belief that a poet possessed a social and moral function toward society. Tennyson expressed his views on the political and social evils of the age. He was sensitive to these evils and believed that they were caused by the politicians, not by the people as a whole.

Of the poems which have been noted in this chapter as having been politically inspired, four are generally recognized as Tennyson's strongest political poems. These poems, Maud, "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," and "Politics" represent most clearly the separate facets of the social-political milieu. Maud was his most important political poem. The sociological evils of the Industrial Revolution were expressed in "varied metres for the different moods of the speaker."²¹⁵ His "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" is "perhaps the last great public occasional poem in England. The Iron Duke is the embodiment of all those values in the English tradition which Tennyson admired, and in writing of him the poet is able to speak out with . . . full authoritative power and simplicity. . ."²¹⁶ The poem is more effective if read aloud because the reader is able "to reproduce the progress of the funeral, strophe by strophe."²¹⁷ "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" reflect that "his youthful hopes had turned out to be baseless. Materialism and commercialism had molded the

character of the age,"²¹⁸ and the poem was "an indictment against progress and liberalism,"²¹⁹ and the "excesses of democracy."²²⁰ Tennyson also thought "that the revelation of the spirit of the times in two different eras would make his two "Locksley Halls" the most historically interesting of all his poems."²²¹ The short poem "Politics" also well expressed his plea for gradual change and for moderation. These political poems reveal the fact that while Tennyson, in his youth, expressed sympathy for other countries in their struggles for freedom, this "vague fire"²²² did not last, and throughout his life he voiced a consistent feeling of chauvinism for England.

Chapter IV

The Reflection of Patriotism on Tennyson's Poetry

Alfred, Lord Tennyson in addition to being concerned about England's social and political problems, was also a devout patriot. This patriotism was reflected in many of his poems. He was strongly opposed to revolution, and took a negative view of the one in France,²²³ and when the French Revolution ended and Paris fell, liberal ideas fell at the same time.²²⁴ "The English War Song" and the "National Song" were written in 1830, and both of these patriotic poems were "filled with a young man's patriotic pride, and with a contempt of the French people."²²⁵ The "breezy chauvinism"²²⁶ expressed in "English War Song" was "an appropriate precursor to Tennyson's later imperialistic verse. He seems always to have had an idea that the English were the only free people in the world,"²²⁷ and this idea and his strong anti-French sentiments were expressed in the following lines from "English War Song":

Come along! we alone of the earth are free;
The child in our cradles is bolder than he;
For where is the heart and strength of slaves?
Oh! where is the strength of slaves?
He is weak! we are strong: he a slave, we are free;
Come along! we will dig their graves.

There standeth our ancient enemy;
Will he dare to battle with the free?
Spur along! spur amain! charge to the fight:
Charge! charge to the fight!
Hold up the Lion of England on high!
Shout for God and our right! (Stanzas 4 and 5)

The anti-French element contained in "English War Song" and "National Song" was a prominent note in many of Tennyson's poems. "He grew up in a generation that had been disillusioned and terrified by the excesses of the French Revolution and he never got over his unreasonable prejudice against them. The Francophobia in his poetry was often gratuitous."²²⁸ His patriotism, and his feelings toward France, were loudly voiced in these lines from "National Song":

These is no land like England
 Where'er the light of day be;
 There are no hearts like English hearts,
 Such hearts as oak as they be.
 There is no land like England
 Where'er the light of day be;
 There are no men like Englishmen,
 So tall and bold as they be. (Stanza 1)

Chorus

For the French the Pope my shrive 'em.
 For the devil a whit we heed 'em:
 As for the French, God speed 'em
 Unto their heart's desire,
 And the merry devil drive 'em
 Through the water and the fire

Full Chorus

Our glory is our freedom
 We lord it o'er the sea;
 We are the sons of freedom,
 We are free.

His contempt for the French was expressed again in the sonnet "Buonaparte," but the poem, "insisting that the lust for power was self-defeating, seemed irrelevant to the England of 1832,"²²⁹ just as his two later poems on Poland seemed irrelevant. "The four defeats of Napoleon by the

British, coupled with Tennyson's hatred of the French, supply the material for this poem."²³⁰

He thought to quell the stubborn
 hearts of oak,
 Madman!--to chain with chains, and
 bind with bands
 That island queen who sways the
 floods and lands
 From Ind to Ind, but in fair daylight
 woke,
 When from her wooden walls, lit by
 sure hands,--
 With thunders, and with lightnings,
 and with smoke,--
 Peal after peal, the British battle
 broke,
 Lulling the brine against the Coptic
 sands.

England in 1833 was changing. Tennyson was disturbed by the changing order of things, and he longed for a stability for the old order of the past. In these lines from "The Palace of Art" he expressed this sentiment:

And one, an English home--gray twilight
 light pour'd
 On dewy pastures, dewy trees,
 Softer than sleep--all things in order stored
 A haunt of ancient Peace.

Nor these alone, but every landscape
 fair,
 As fit for every mood of mind,
 Or gay, or grace, or sweet, or stern,
 was there,
 Not less than truth design'd. (Lines 85-92)

The poem "The Lotus-Eaters" showed his deep interest in the classics, and at the same time voiced his feelings about change. The readers of this beautiful and serene poem probably agreed with Tennyson that to live "the life of the lotos-eaters . . . was the only way to escape from a life

of sharp distress."²³¹ These lines expressed his feeling about wanting things to stay the same:

The charmed sunset lingered low adown
 In the red West: through mountain clefts the dale
 Was seen far inland, and the yellow down
 Bordered with palm, and many a winding vale
 And meadow, set with slender galingale;
 A land where all things always seemed the same!
 And round about the keel with faces pale,
 Dark faces pale against that rosy flame,
 The mild-eyed melancholy Lotos-eaters came.
 (Lines 19-27)

One of the strongest bases for Tennyson's patriotism was his deep reverence for the past, which the following lines from "Love thou Thy Land, With Love Far-Brought" expressed:

Love thou thy land, with love far-brought
 From out the storied Past, and used
 Within the Present, but transfused
 Through future time by power of thought.
 (Lines 1-4)

The Victorians believed that patriotism was the "highest civic virtue,"²³² and the patriotic contributions of the Poet Laureate were of the highest order. He had a keen sense of England--he had a reverence for her past, was interested in her responsibilities and achievements, and was deeply concerned about her future.²³³ "Shortly after assuming the post he did bring himself to write the dedication of his collected poems 'To the Queen,' as a gracious tribute to a benevolent sovereign and at the same time a formal statement of his willingness to accept the honor that Wordsworth had made honorable, 'This laurel greener from the brows. Of him who utter'd

nothing base.'"²³⁴ He was devoted to the Queen, and in his dedication poem "To The Queen" he told her:

Revered, beloved--O you that hold
 A nobler office upon earth
 Than arms, or power of brain, or birth
 Could give the warrior kings of old,

. . . . May you rule us long,

And leave us rulers of your blood
 As noble til the latest day!
 May children of our children say,
 'She wrought her people lasting good;
 (Stanzas 1 and 6)

Tennyson's flag-waving poems were more concerned with courage and failure than they were with conquest and victory.²³⁵ He celebrated the near failures of a military operation instead of the military success--as "the charge of the Light Brigade, the battle of 'The Revenge,' and the defence of Lucknow. These incidents were not, in the ordinary sense of the word, triumphs; what Tennyson celebrates in them is the capacity of the human spirit to stand out against all odds."²³⁶ He was a peace-loving man and wanted peace, but his battle poems really stirred English hearts.²³⁶ These are indeed moving words from "The Charge of the Light Brigade":

'Forward, the Light Brigade.'
 Was there a man dismayed?
 Not though the soldier knew
 Some one had blundered:
 Their's not to make reply,
 Their's not to reason why,
 Their's but to do and die:
 Into the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.

. . . .

Cannon to right of them,
 Cannon to left of them,
 Cannon behind them
 Volleyed and thundered;
 Stormed at with shot and shell,
 While horse and hero fell,
 They that had fought so well
 Came through the jaws of Death,
 Back from the mouth of Hell,
 All that was left of them,
 Left of six hundred.

When can their glory fade?
 O the wild charge they made!
 All the world wondered.
 Honour the charge they made!
 Honour the Light Brigade,
 Noble six hundred. (Stanzas II, V, and VI)

This was an inspiring and patriotic poem, and Tennyson sent copies of it to the Crimea, after hearing from an army chaplain that it was a great favorite of the soldiers--they were even singing it. Tennyson was not indifferent to the praise and appreciation of his works that were expressed by the men on the battlefield.²³⁸ "His homage to the Light Brigade helped to crystallize national feeling during the Crimean War, just as his condemnation of mutinous sepoys as 'traitors' interpreted public feeling at the time of the Indian Mutiny."²³⁹ These poems and all of his patriotic poems "helped to strengthen the nation's loyalty to the monarch."²⁴⁰

Late in December 1857, Tennyson received a letter "saying that the Queen desired that a stanza should be added to 'God Save the Queen' for a concert to be given at Buckingham Palace on the evening of the Princess Royal's wedding day."²⁴¹ He sent the following two stanzas to the Queen, and they were published in January in the Times:

God bless our Prince and Bride!
 God keep their lands allied,
 God save the Queen!
 Clothe them with righteousness,
 Crown them with happiness,
 Them with all blessings bless,
 God save the Queen!

Fair fall this hallowed hour,
 Farewell, our England's flower,
 God save the Queen!
 Farewell, first rose of May!
 Let both the peoples say,
 God bless their marriage-day,
 God bless the Queen!²⁴²

Tennyson loved peace, but he felt that England should be prepared for war. He wrote "Rifleman, Form" to further "the cause of a Volunteer Force to meet possible assault from the darkening south."²⁴³ France, Piedmont, and Austria were at war, and the poem helped "in creating favorable esprit for the organization of volunteer rifle corps."²⁴⁴ In this poem he "urged England to look to her defenses."²⁴⁵

There is a sound of thunder afar,
 Storm in the South that darkens the
 day!
 Storm of battle and thunder of war!
 Well if it do not roll our way.
 Form! form! Riflemen, form!
 Ready, be ready to meet the
 storm!
 Riflemen, Riflemen, Riflemen,
 form!

. . . .

Let your reforms for a moment go!
 Look to your butts, and take good
 aims!
 Better a rotten borough or so
 Than a rotten fleet or a city in
 flames!
 Form! form! Riflemen, form!
 Ready, be ready to meet the
 storm!
 Riflemen, Riflemen, Riflemen,
 form! (Stanzas I and III)

This poem was published as "The War" in 1859, and later published as "Riflemen, Form."²⁴⁶

All of Tennyson's major works after In Memoriam, in 1850, were more concerned with failure than with triumph. He had intended the long, beautiful, and tragic The Idylls of the King to be his masterpiece, but even this work "presents not the triumph but the corruption and collapse of an ideal."²⁴⁷ He was concerned with an orderly society and great men who were great leaders--he wanted the same peace and order that he found in his own garden and in the British Constitution,²⁴⁸ but this was a futile desire. The Idylls of the King was a work that mirrored the dilemma of society in the Victorian age. The Round Table and Arthur's Camelot were destroyed by the selfishness of the knights, and Tennyson was afraid that his generation was following the same road to destruction. It was his desire to communicate to the public the social and political ills of England, to offer a remedy for these ills, and to move the people toward a moral and noble end. The social conditions of the age were really not the cause of what was wrong with England, but the symptom; just as the sins of Lancelot and Guinevere were the symptom of the ills of Camelot, not the cause. Tennyson wanted his generation to have high ideals and to work toward these high ideals--each "according to his best capacity and through the common instruments of everyday experience."²⁴⁹ He wanted the people of England to recognize truths and high ideals while there was

still time to do something about them--not wait until it was too late as Guinevere did in her true recognition of Arthur:

Ah my God,
 What might I not have made of thy fair world,
 Had I but loved thy highest creature here?
 It was my duty to have loved the highest:
 It surely was my profit had I known:
 It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
 We needs must love the highest when we see it,
 (Lines 649-654)

The freedom of the individual was crushed because of the industrialization, and this caused England to be less than great.²⁵⁰ She was living in a world of illusion while coming apart at the seams. This condition is reflected in The Idylls of the King. "It seems to me," he wrote in 1887, 'as if there were much less of the old reverence and chivalrous feeling in the world than there used to be . . . I tried in my Idylls to teach men these things and the need of the Ideal. But I feel sometimes as if my life had been a very useless life.'"²⁵¹ The poet wanted England to return to a high moral society--the old order of things. The old order that he was so eager to regain was expressed by Arthur in the two books "The Coming of Arthur" and "The Passing of Arthur", while still recognizing that change was inevitable.

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
 And we that fight for our fair father Christ,
 Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old
 To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,
 No tribute will we pay. (Lines 508-512)

. . . .

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
 And God fulfills himself in many ways,
 Least one good custom should corrupt the world.
 (Lines 408-410)

There was a genuine warning in The Idylls of the King, and this long poem had a deeper significance to the reader than just the story of Arthur and Camelot. There was the "age-old conflict between good and evil, and between man's baser nature and his own high ideal."²⁵² Symbolically, Arthur represented the Soul, and Guinevere represented Sense, or "the spirit of this world."²⁵³ Camelot was "symbolic of the gradual growth of human beliefs, and institutions, and the spiritual development of man. It was apparent that in the Idylls evil triumphed over good--at least outwardly."²⁵⁴ The poet was "obsessed by a great vision of society and of the right relations of men to one another and the cosmos."²⁵⁵

The theme of the Idylls was to show that the highest and most noble ideas can be defeated by the selfishness and sin of society, but even this defeat can "sow the seed of truth and purity through the land."²⁵⁶ Arthur's attempt to establish a kingdom of law and order, and a decent civilization, did not succeed because his knights were not examples of unselfishness and noble manliness. The dominant note that was in the Idylls was that of failure--"failure to realize great aims."²⁵⁷ Tennyson was saying to England in "The Passing of Arthur" that there was still hope, and not all was lost. He was saying that societies fail and great leaders pass away, but another hero would come in the hour of need.²⁵⁸ Arthur's last words to Bedivere were:

Wherefore, let thy voice
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
 For what are men better than sheep or goats
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands or prayer
 Both for themselves and those who call them friends?
 For so the whole round earth is every way
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God. (Lines 417-
 423)

Although the great dream closed with the passing of Arthur,
 it closed with a "hint of future triumph."²⁵⁹

Tennyson had such a strong dislike for democracy that
 it was ironic that he represented "in the 'Idylls,' whether
 consciously or not, the complete breaking down in practice of
 the theory of the heaven-born ruler who makes everyone into
 his own pattern."²⁶⁰ He probably did not mean "to give us
 this good democratic lesson, but he has given it."²⁶¹

Tennyson modeled King Arthur on the Prince Consort,
 Prince Albert, and it was appropriate that a dedication to
 the memory of the Prince Consort preceeded The Idylls of the
King. Arthur, like Prince Albert, never lapsed from virtue.
 He was a heroic figure and a faultless husband.

And indeed He seems to me
 Scarce other than my king's ideal Knight,
 'Who revered his conscience as his king;
 Whose glory was, redressing human wrong,
 Who spake no slander, no, nor listened to it;
 Who loved one only and who clave to her--!(lines 6-11)

The hearts of the English people were saddened by the
 death of Prince Albert, but true to their heritage and tradi-
 tion they endured the great loss and moved to a brighter pe-
 riod with the marriage of the Prince of Wales to Princess
 Alexandra of Denmark. In honor of their marriage Tennyson

"struck precisely the right note, in associating the racial blend of the British people with their friendship for the sea-kings of the North":²⁶²

Sea-Kings' daughter from over the sea, Alexandra!
Saxon and Norman and Dane are we,
But all of us Danes in our welcome of thee, Alexandra!
(Lines 1-3)

The sea-kings' daughter as happy as fair,
Blissful bride of a blissful heir,
Bride of the heir of the kings of the sea--
O joy to the people and joy to the throne,
Come to us, love us and make us your own;
For Saxon or Dane or Norman we,
Teuton or Celt or whatever we be,
We are each all Dane in our welcome of thee, Alexandra;
(Lines 24-31)

He sent the poem to the Queen, and soon after received a message of appreciation from her through one of her Ladies-in-waiting, Lady Augusta Bruce.²⁶³ She wrote:

Her majesty desires me to thank you warmly and to tell you with how much pleasure she had read the lines and how much she rejoices that the sweet and charming Princess should be thus greeted.²⁶⁴

The poet received a difficult request from the Queen in 1864. She asked him to write a few lines to be inscribed on the pedestal of the statue of her mother, The Duchess of Kent, that was to be placed in the Frogmore Mausoleum.²⁶⁵ Tennyson sent the following four lines:

Long as the heart beats life within her breast,
Thy child will bless thee, guardian-mother mild,
And far away thy memory will be bless'd
By children of the children of thy child.²⁶⁶

The Queen began to show increasing interest in Tennyson, and in early 1885 "sounded through his friend Frederick

Locker, Lady Augusta's brother-in-law, on the possibility of a baronetcy being conferred on him. After some hesitation, owing to his fear that his refusal might be misunderstood by the Queen, he indicated that he would not feel able to accept, and the matter was dropped."²⁶⁷

There was much interest in imperialism during the Victorian age, and Tennyson's defensible attitude toward Imperial questions could be called advanced.²⁶⁸ "He shared, of course, the current convictions of the white man's burden: he was convinced that subject races naturally preferred good British government to bad self-government; he flaunted occasionally in the gold and purple of Empire . . . But he bitterly regretted the way the previous generation had handled the American question."²⁶⁹ He told England, in the poem "England and America in 1782,":

O Thou that sendest out the man
To rule by land and sea,
Strong mother of a Lion-line,
Be proud of these strong sons of thine
Who wrenched their rights from thee!
(Stanza I)

Tennyson urged England "to be very careful that it didn't happen again; and he possessed and inculcated a quite definite idea of the Commonwealth of English-speaking nations. For assuredly these lines"²⁷⁰ from the poem "Opening of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition by the Queen in 1886, "are salutary and sensible."²⁷¹

Britain fought her sons of yore--
Britain failed; and never more
Careless of our growing kin,

Shall we sin our father's sin,
 Men that in a narrower day--
 Unprophetic rulers they--
 Drove from out the mother's nest
 That young eagle of the West
 To forage for herself alone;
 Britons, hold your own! (Stanza III)

The Idylls of the King was not written in the order that we read it today. This long poem was written in installments, and "with the addition of 'Gareth and Lynette' and 'The Last Tournament' in 1872, the work seemed to have reached what might be its final form."²⁷² It was during this final printing that Tennyson decided to add to the volume a dedicatory Epilogue 'To the Queen.' He sent her a copy of this in advance and received a very cordial message of thanks through Lady Augusta" ²⁷³ The following lines were written in this Epilogue:

. . . . witness too, the silent cry,
 The prayer of many a race and creed, and clime--
 Thunderless lightnings striking under sea
 From sunset and sunrise of all thy realm,
 And that true North, whereof we lately heard
 A strain to shame us, 'Keep you to yourselves:
 So loyal is too costly! friends--your love
 Is but a burthen; loose the bond, and go.' (Lines 9-16)

But thou, my Queen
 Not for itself, but thro' thy living love,
 For one to whom I made it o'er his grave
 Sacred, accept this old imperfect tale,
 New-old, and shadowing Sense at War with Soul,
 Ideal manhood closed in real man, (Lines 33-38)

Tennyson was implying in the Epilogue that the Queen had been in seclusion and mourning long enough since Prince Albert's death, and that it was time for her to again actively reign over England as its Queen.²⁷⁴

In late 1873, the Queen asked Tennyson if he would be willing to compose an ode for the wedding of her son Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburg and the Grand Duchess Marie Alexandrovna, Grand-daughter of Czar Nicholas I of Russia, which was to take place in January 1874.²⁷⁵ Tennyson composed "A Welcome To Her Royal Highness Marie Alexandrovna, Duchess of Edinburgh":

The Son of him whom we strove for power--
 Whose will is lord through all his world domain--
 Who made the serf a man, and burst his chain--
 Has given our Prince his own imperial Flower,
 Alexandrovna.

And welcome, Russian flower, a people's pride,
 To Britain, when her flowers begin to blow!
 From love to love, from home to home you go,
 From mother unto mother, a stately bride,
 Marie Alexandrovna (Stanzas I and II)

During the following years Tennyson was occupied, "with amazing obstinacy, in writing plays,"²⁷⁶ but he returned to poetry again in the late 1870's. He had read about the heroic battle of the the Revenge in the Westminster Review in 1852. The battle had occurred three centuries before between the Revenge and the Spanish Armada in the Azores in 1588.²⁷⁷ Tennyson wanted to record this famous and tragic battle, and he composed the ballad "The Revenge: A Ballad of the Fleet" in 1878. It is a spirited poem of the sea-fight "with all the atmosphere of the winds and the waves; it is a noble chanson de geste, and the poem ends with the closing of the waters over the ship."²⁷⁸

And a wave like the wave that is raised by an earthquake
 grew,
 Till it smote on their hulls and their sails
 and their masts and their flags,
 And the whole sea plunged and fell on the
 shot-shattered navy of Spain,
 And the little Revenge herself went down
 by the island crags
 To be lost evermore in the main. (Lines 115-119)

Another ballad, written shortly after "The Revenge," was "The Defence of Lucknow." Both of these ballads celebrated national honor and were immensely popular.²⁷⁹ The poem concerned an incident that took place during the mutiny in India, and "celebrates typical British heroism in disaster. Tennyson emphasizes the valor of the British at the expense of the Indians, whom he calls traitors."²⁸⁰

Then on another wild morning another wild
 earthquake out-tore
 Clean from our lines of defence ten or twelve
 good paces or more,
 Rifleman, high on the roof, hidden there
 from the light of the sun--
 One has leapt up on the breach, crying out:
 'Follow me, follow me.'--
 Mark him--he falls! then another, and him too,
 and down goes he.
 Had they been bold enough then, who can tell
 but the traitors had won?
 Boardings and rafters and doors--an embrasure!
 make way for the gun!
 Nor double-charge it with grape! It is charged
 and we fire, and they run. (Stanza V, Lines 61-68)

The Princess Alice died in December 1878, and this "terrible blow aroused Tennyson's deepest sympathy, for the dead Princess had been closely associated with him during those early months of his first introduction to the Queen."²⁸¹ "The Defence of Lucknow" was published in April 1879, and with it

the "Dedicatory Poem to the Princess Alice." The Princess Alice had died of diphtheria contracted after kissing her son Prince Ernest who was ill with the disease.²⁸²

Dead Princess, living Power, if that which lived
True life on--and if the fatal kiss,
Born of true life and love, divorce thee not
From earthly love and life--if what we call
The spirit flash not all at once from out
This shadow into Substance--then perhaps
The mellow'd murmur of the people's praise
From thine own State, and all our breadth of realm,
Where Love and Longing dress thy deeds in light,
Ascends to thee. (Lines 1-10)

Tennyson's next Laureate poem was written to celebrate the marriage of the Princess Frederika of Hanover to Baron von Pawel-Rammingen in April 1880. She had been the constant companion of her blind father, the ex-King, who had died in 1878, and there are letters which indicate that Tennyson knew her personally.²⁸³ His poem "To the Princess Frederica on Her Marriage" is short, but impressive.

O you that were eyes and light to the King till he
past away
From the darkness of life--
He saw not his daughter--he blest her: the blind King
sees you today,
He blesses the wife.

His next patriotic poem was the poem "Hands All Round" published in 1882. The poem was hailed as "incomparably the best convivial song in the language,"²⁸⁴ but,

. . . the poem's apparent advocacy of drinking aroused a great deal of adverse comment. The Temperance party and the Little Englanders criticized this aspect of the poem, and the Society of Good Templars sent a formal resolution of protest. For the sake of national unity, Tennyson was conciliatory. He replied that he had used the word 'drink' only to refer to the common cup, the traditional symbol of unity.²⁸⁵

His patriotism is profoundly expressed in this poem, which was written shortly after the Queen had escaped from an assassination attempt.²⁸⁶

First pledge our Queen this solemn night,
Then drink to England, every quest,
That man's the best Cosmopolite
Who loves his native country best.
(Stanza I, lines 1-4)

. . .

To all the loyal hearts who long
To keep our English Empire whole!
To all our noble sons, the strong New England
of the Southern Pole!
To England under Indian skies,
To those dark millions of her realm!
To Canada whom we love and prize,
Whatever statesman hold the helm.
Hands all round!
God the traitor's hope confound!
To this great name of England drink, my friends,
And all her glorious empire, round and round.
(Stanza II)

In March 1883, a faithful servant of the Queen, John Brown died. She had depended on him more than anyone else after Prince Alberts' death and she wrote to Tennyson asking him to send two lines to be inscribed on the pedestal of a statue of John Brown which was to be placed on the grounds.²⁸⁷ He sent "four alternative suggestions . . . (he sent lines by Shakespeare, Byron, and Pope, and a set of anonymous lines). The Queen replied accepting the anonymous lines which she rightly divined to be by Tennyson himself. Tennyson evidently knew what the Queen wanted and they are at any rate entirely truthful and free from sycophancy."²⁸⁸

Friend more than servant, loyal, truthful, brave!
Self less than duty, even to the grave!²⁸⁹

The following March, 1884, the Queen was shocked to receive the message that her youngest son, Leopold, Duke of Albany, had died. He was only thirty-one years old. Tennyson composed the following lines and sent them to the Queen.²⁹⁰

Prince Leopold

An Epitaph

Early-wise, and pure, and true,
 Prince, whose Father lived in you,
 If you could speak, would you not say:
 'I see, but am not, far away;
 Wherefore should your eyes be dim?
 I am here again with him.
 O Mother-Queen, and weeping Wife,
 The Death from which you mourn is Life.'

General Gordon's death in 1885 at Khartoum also shocked England. He had appealed to England for relief, but it arrived too late. When the relief troops arrived in Khartoum they found Gordon and his men massacred. General Gordon had said to Tennyson in 1878,

'Mr. Tennyson, I want you to do something for our young soldiers. You alone are the man who can do it. We want training-homes for them all over England.' The Gordon Boys' Home, initiated by Tennyson, was founded in Gordon's memory. Tennyson was attracted to Gordon personally, and was undoubtedly pleased because Gordon read his poetry in the field.²⁹¹

Tennyson composed his "Epitaph on General Gordon" and it was published in May 1885.

Warrior of God, man's friend, and tyrant's foe
 Now somewhere dead far in the waste Soudan,
 Thou livest in all hearts, for all men know
 This earth has never borne a nobler man.

The "Epitaph on Lord Stratford de Redcliffe" was also

published in 1885. "Stratford Canning, first Viscount Stratford de Redcliffe (1786-1880), was the youngest son of the elder Stratford Canning and first cousin of George Canning . . . the foreign minister."²⁹²

Thouthird great Canning, stand among our best
And noblest, now thy long day's work hath ceased,
Here silent in our Minister of the West
Who wert the voice of England in the East.

Tennyson was asked in April 1883 to "compose an epitaph for Caxton to go on the painted window at St. Margaret's . . . William Caxton (1421-1491) was England's first printer, having set up a press in 1476. He printed Malory's Morte d'Arthur and The Canterbury Tales. He was also a prolific translator."²⁹³ This "Epitaph on Caxton" was published in 1885.

Thy prayer was 'Light--more Light--while Time shall
last.'
Thou sawest a glory growing on the night,
But not the shadows which that light would cast,
Till shadows vanish in the Light of Light.

The major theme of the older Tennyson was courage. This was evident in his military poems and his epitaphs. It is the kind of courage that resists and stands up against all odds, and "it is this courage which Tennyson offers as a hope to what he saw as a self-destroying society."²⁹⁴ He wanted the British people to share his patriotic sentiment, and he expressed this in "Tiresias":

No sound is breathed so potent to coerce,
And to conciliate, as their names who dare
For that sweet mother land which gave them birth
Nobly to do, nobly to die.
Their names, graven on memorial columns, are a song
Heard in the future. (Lines 116-121)

"The Charge of the Heavy Bridgade at Balaclava" was first published in 1882 and published again in the 1885 volume, Tiresias and Other Poems, "at which time it was accompanied by 'Prologue: To General Hamley' and 'Epilogue.'"²⁹⁵ "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaclava" deals with an incident that occurred during the same battle as the charge of the Light Brigade.²⁹⁶ The poem had much force and it praised heroism.²⁹⁷

The trumpet, the gallop, the charge,
 and the might of the fight!
 Thousands of horsemen had gathered
 there on the height,
 With a wing push'd out to the left and
 a wing to the right,
 And who shall escape if they close?
 (Stanza II, Lines 1-4)

Fell like a cannon-shot,
 Burst like a thunderbolt,
 Crash'd like a hurricane,
 Broke through the mass from below,
 Drove through the midst of the foe,
 Plunged up and down, to and fro,
 Rode flashing blow upon blow,
 Brave Inniskillens and Greys
 Whirling their sabres in circles of light!
 (Stanza III, Lines 1-9)

. . . .

Glory to each and to all, and the charge that
 they made,
 Glory to all the three hundred, and all the
 Brigade!
 (Stanza V)

General Hamley had visited Tennyson at Aldworth in November 1883 and they "discussed the details of the charge and Tennyson's poem on the event."²⁹⁸ Tennyson admired Sir Edward Hamley "who had remodelled the Staff College and had

become famous for his military writing. This prologue is Tennyson's expression of sympathy with Hamley's protests against official disparagement of him after the Egyptian campaign of 1882."²⁹⁹ Aldforth was located on a hill in Sussex with a view of the Channel. Tennyson wrote:

You came, and looked and loved the view
 Long known and loved by me,
 Green Sussex fading into blue
 With one gray glimpse of sea;
 And, gazing from this height alone,
 We spoke of what had been
 Most marvellous in the wars your own
 Crimean eyes had seen:
 And--now like old-world inns that take
 Some warrior for a sign
 That therewithin a guest may make
 True cheer with honest wine--
 Because you heard the lines I read
 Nor utter'd word of blame,
 I dare without your leave to head
 These rhymings with your name.

The "Epilogue" to "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaklava" was added because Tennyson had been accused of being a lover of war, and the "Epilogue" is "a dialogue between Irene (Greek Goddess of Peace) and the poet."³⁰⁰ It was in this poem.

. . . where he strove to explain his motives as a writer, he weighed all 'our brief humanities' in the grim scales of modern physics. The earth--and all its poetry with it--would one day pass 'In what they prophesy, our wise men, /Sun-flame or sunless frost'; and man's only hope of continuance must then be sought in some unearthly realm of spirit. But, meanwhile, the poet could play his vital part in reminding his culture of the ideal values man must live by; and even the praise of heroism in a chant like the 'Heavy Brigade' might serve some worthy purpose.³⁰¹

He did not advocate war in his poems; and these lines from

"Epilogue" explained what he considered "justifiable wars,"³⁰² and that only a fool could love war.

He needs must combat might with might
 Or Might would rule alone;
 And who loves War for War's own sake
 Is fool, or crazed, or worse. (Lines 28-31)

. . . .

And here the Singer for his art
 Not all in vain may plead
 'The song that nerves a nation's heart
 Is in itself a deed.' (Lines 79-82)

The Queen wrote to Tennyson on July 5, 1885 and asked him if he would write three or four lines on the marriage of her daughter Princess Beatrice to Prince Henry of Battenberg.³⁰³ The following lines are from his poem "To H. R. H. Princess Beatrice":

Two Suns of Love make day of human life,
 Which else with all its pains, and griefs, and deaths,
 Were utter darkness--one, the Sun of dawn
 That brightens thro' the Mother's tender eyes,
 And warms the child's awakening world--and one
 The later-rising Sun of spousal Love,
 Which from her household orbit draws the child
 To move in other spheres. (Lines 1-8)

The spring of 1886 brought Tennyson and his family the tragic news of the death of his second son, Lionel. His promising career at the India Office had just begun when he died of jungle fever on April 20.³⁰⁴ During the weeks of Lionel's illness, Tennyson had, "at the special request of the Prince of Wales, been working on an ode to be sung at the opening by the Queen, on May 4, 1886, of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition. He carried this commission out faithfully in spite of his personal anxiety and grief, making his

ode an expression of the romantic Imperialism which the Queen so passionately shared."³⁰⁵ The ode "Opening of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition By the Queen" was sung on May 4, and the great throng who heard it were "deeply moved in thinking of the poet's sorrow."³⁰⁶ The last stanza expressed his patriotism, his reverence for England's past, and his call for unity.

Sharers of our glorious past,
 Brothers, must we part at last?
 Shall we not thro' good and ill
 Cleave to one another still?
 Britain's myriad voices call,
 'Sons be welded each and all,
 Into one imperial whole,
 One with Britain, heart and soul!
 One life, one flag, one fleet, one Throne!
 Britons, hold your own! (Stanza IV)

The Queen's Fiftieth Jubilee was celebrated in 1887. Tennyson had written and published "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After" in 1886, and was highly criticized for this pessimistic poem--"that the Jubilee of the Queen would be marred by"³⁰⁷ the disillusionment expressed in the poem. But although the Queen and England are generally praised in "On The Jubilee of Queen Victoria," in stanza XI there is a change of tone, "which if not actually tragic, was at least one of apprehensive warning."³⁰⁸ The following stanzas from the poem expressed the jubilant celebration and the final warning:

Fifty years of ever-broadening Commerce!
 Fifty years of ever-brightening Science!
 Fifty years of ever-widening Empire!

You, the Mighty, the Fortunate,
 You, the Lord-territorial,
 You, the Lord-manufacturer,
 You, the hardy, laborious,

Patient, children of Albion,
 You, Canadian, Indian,
 Australasian, African,
 All your hearts be in harmony,
 All your voices in unison,
 Singing, 'Hail to the glorious
 Golden year of her Jubilee!'

Are there thunders moaning in the distance?
 Are there spectres moving in the darkness?
 Trust the Hand of Light will lead her people,
 Till the thunders pass, the spectres vanish,
 And the Light is Victor, and the darkness
 Dawns into the Jubilee of the Ages.

(Stanzas IX, X, and XI)

In 1889 Tennyson felt that it was his duty to England to express what was wrong with the country, but just as he "was extremely sensitive about criticism of himself, he was also irritated at criticism of England."³⁰⁹ The poem "To One Who Ran Down The English" was a retaliation to criticism:

You make our faults too gross, and thence maintain
 Our darker future, May your fears be vain!
 At times the small black fly upon the pane
 May seem the block ox of the distant plain.

This poem was published in Demeter and Other Poems, as were "To the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava" and "Merlin and the Gleam." The poem "To the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava" expressed his appreciation to Lord Dufferin and his wife for their kindnesses to his son Lionel while he was serving in the India Office, and praised Lord Dufferin's administration in India as Viceroy.³¹⁰

Your rule has made the people love
 Their ruler. Your viceregal days
 Have added fulness to the phrase
 Of 'Gauntlet in the velvet glove.'

But since your name will grow with time,
 Not all, as honoring your fair fame
 Of statesman, have I made the name
 A golden portal to my rhyme;

. . . .

Beneath a hard Arabian moon
 And alien stars. To question why
 The sons before the fathers die,
 Not mine! and I may meet him soon;

But while my life's last eve endures,
 Not settles into hueless gray,
 My memories of his briefer day
 Will mix with love and you and yours.

(Stanzas III, IV, VII, and VIII)

Tennyson was seriously ill during the winter of 1888-1889, "but his great strength and will-power pulled him through and his eightieth birthday on August 6, 1889 was an occasion of national rejoicing, letters and telegrams pouring in from all over the world. The Queen, in spite of many absorbing engagements, did not forget the day."³¹¹ Tennyson wrote and published "Merlin and the Gleam" in August, 1889. He expressed in this beautiful poem that "the Gleam--the magic taught by Merlin--is the higher poetic imagination."³¹² He expressed, also, that there must be a revival and a recommitment to the things that made England great. He recalled the dreams of Camelot, and said that all ideas at first are only a gleam. He assumed the role of Merlin the sage for those of his own time, and said that one must continue to follow the gleam even in old age.³¹³ He was speaking to England in his last days.

O young Mariner,
 You from the haven
 Under the sea-cliff,
 You that are watching
 The gray Magician
 With eyes of wonder,

I am Merlin,
 And I am dying,
 I am Merlin
 Who follow the Gleam. (Stanza I)

As we read the poem, we follow Tennyson, stanza by stanza, toward the Gleam. "To pursue it is the love of life; to die in its pursuit is joy, for beyond death its glory shines. Therefore now, on the verge of death, he gives his last message to the young, calling on them to follow, as he has done, the light that was never reached, but never failed;"³¹⁴ the light that was hope, idealism, and faith--the Gleam.

As so to the land's
 Last limit I came--
 And can no longer,
 But die rejoicing,
 For thro' the Magic
 Of Him the Mighty,
 Who taught me in childhood,
 There on the border
 Of boundless ocean,
 And all but in Heaven
 Hovers the Gleam.

Not of the sunlight
 Not of the moonlight,
 Not of the starlight!
 O young Mariner,
 Down to the haven,
 Call your companions,
 Launch your vessel
 And crowd your canvas,
 And, ere it vanishes
 Over the margin,
 After it, follow it,
 Follow the Gleam. (Stanzas VIII and IX)

Tennyson's final Laureate poem "The Death of the Duke of Clarence and Avondale" was published in February, 1892, in the volume The Death of Oenone, Akbar's Dream and Other Poems. Tennyson regarded this volume "as his last will and testament

to the world. He comforts the mourners with the thought that the dead are in a better state than they were in when they were alive."³¹⁵ When the Duke celebrated his twenty-first birthday his mother had suggested to Tennyson that he compose a few lines in his honor, but Tennyson had not complied. Therefore, when the Duke died at the age of twenty-eight, he wanted to write some lines that would be comforting to his Mother, the Princess of Wales.³¹⁶

. . . Yet be comforted;
 For if this earth be ruled by Perfect Love,
 Then, after his brief range of blameless days,
 The toll of funeral in an Angel ear
 Sounds happier than the merriest marriage-bell.
 The face of Death is toward the Sun of Life,
 His shadow darkens earth: his truer name
 Is 'Onward,' no discordance in the roll
 And march of that Eternal Harmony
 Whereto the worlds beat time, though faintly heard
 Until the great Hereafter. Mourn in hope! (Lines 7-17)

"Tennyson was the most English of Englishmen, he loved his country with every fibre of his heart; he was, inevitably, the one Laureate who spoke with the nation's voice."³¹⁷ His age was vividly with him, and "if his political views were narrow, his patriotism had remained intense."³¹⁸ In fact, only a "few English poets, with the exception of Shakespeare, have been so unashamedly patriotic."³¹⁹

His four outstanding patriotic poems are The Idylls of the King, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," "Merlin and the Gleam," and "The Revenge: A Ballad of the Fleet." In The Idylls of the King, Tennyson used the Middle Ages as a vehicle to demonstrate how greatness can be used to show the decline of greatness.³²⁰ He was idealistic--he wanted England to be

the epitome of greatness, and this long poem symbolized England's failure to be great because of her internal and external social and political problems. "The Charge of the Light Brigade" is "still one of the best known of Tennyson's poems."³²¹ It gives the reader a candid report of the tragic blunder that was a disgrace to the English military high command. "Merlin and the Gleam" may not be one of Tennyson's most popular poems, but it is certainly one of his most beautiful. In it, he asks England to follow the Gleam of hope, idealism, and faith. "The Revenge: A Ballad of the Fleet" is, like "Merlin and the Gleam," not as well known as The Idylls of the King and "The Charge of the Light Brigade," but it is unique because it gives the reader a verbal account of the sea battle, and also expresses Tennyson's interest in historic events and his pride in England.

It is not surprising that Tennyson was a popular poet; his patriotic poetry alone would have commended his work to the "tall, broad-shouldered, genial"³²² Englishmen who comprised the majority of his readers.

Conclusion

It has been the purpose of this thesis to show that the poetry of Alfred, Lord Tennyson was greatly influenced by the politics of the Victorian age and by his own devout patriotism. It is true that his poems In Memoriam and "Crossing the Bar" were influenced by his personal emotions concerning life and death--emotions which he expressed in many of his poems; but the majority of his works reflected the mood of the age. It was Tennyson's strong belief that as Poet Laureate he was obligated to express the mood and the spirit of his beloved England. This he did.

He was disillusioned with his age, but he "was not completely naive about changing history in his time. He agreed with Hegel³²³ that you cannot wrench change too quickly."³²⁴

Tennyson was a man who

. . . had no pomp or hauteur. He was simple and unaffected as a child, and as the greatest only are, in his simplicity sublime. Truthful, too, like a truthful child, even to bluntness and brusquerie when unduly intruded on, yet regretting his brusquerie the moment he perceived, or thought he had really hurt anyone . . . His voice was like the wind in a pine forest--musical, metallic, fit for loud laughter and piercing wail and all that may lie between. With his great strength went the greatest sensitiveness. He could not have felt or written his poems without this. It made him shy, even awkward: some people said, gruff.³²⁵

Nevertheless, in the words of Joanna Richardson,

He had achieved his unparalleled prestige not only by his gift of words, but by his living

example: by his domestic felicity, his unswerving morality, his support of the persecuted and the promising, his dignity, his spiritual presence, his sense of pastoral dedication. 'However we rank him,' wrote Stephen Swynn in 1899, 'we are grateful to the man merely for having existed.'³²⁶

Finally, Tennyson was the only poet of stature during the Victorian age who wrote political and patriotic poetry. He represented his age so well "because his response to the mood and colour of the period is fuller and more alive than that of any other contemporary poet."³²⁷

The views and ideas that Tennyson had of brotherhood, democracy, and freedom were not those shared by some of the poets and writers of the age,³²⁸ but no other poet or writer mirrored in his works the social and political conditions of the Victorian age so candidly, shouted his patriotism so loudly, or described "the noble elements of British character, their long descent to us from the past, and the sacred reverence that we owe to them, than Tennyson. He has strengthened, by the expression of this reverence, love of country among his people, and the strength he has added to it will endure as a power in England."³²⁹ Alfred, Lord Tennyson was not only a poet, but a man who wanted peace, order, and the improvement of humanity in his beloved England, and these desires were given voice in his political and patriotic works.

Biographical Sketch

Phyllis Turbeville Sizemore was born in Columbia, South Carolina. She is the wife of a Longwood College Professor, and the mother of two children--a son and a daughter. She received her B.S. Degree from Longwood College in 1976.

While working on her Master's Degree, she was a Graduate Assistant in the English Department where she served as an instructor in the writing and reading labs. She has also served as a substitute teacher in the schools of Charlotte County.

The Sizemores live in Keysville, Virginia where Mrs. Sizemore is active in the Keysville United Methodist Church and Keysville Civic Clubs.

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⁴²Nicolson, pp. 46-47.

⁴³Nicolson, p. 44.

⁴⁴Dyson and Tennyson, p. 15.

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⁴⁸Peckham, p. 18.

⁴⁹Peckham, p. 18.

⁵⁰Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1947), p. 4.

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⁵³Lyall, p. 4.

⁵⁴Peckham, p. 8.

⁵⁵Peckham, p. 8.

⁵⁶Warren, p. xvii.

⁵⁷Nicolson, p. 46.

⁵⁸Peckham, p. 18.

⁵⁹Lord Hallam Tennyson, Alfred, Lord Tennyson: A Memoir (1897; rpt. 2 vols. in I, New York: Macmillan, 1905), I, p. 34.

⁶⁰Peckham, p. 18.

⁶¹Peckham, p. 17.

⁶²Peckham, p. 18.

⁶³Peckham, p. 18.

- ⁶⁴Nicolson, p. 75.
- ⁶⁵Dyson and Tennyson, p. 17.
- ⁶⁶Peckham, p. 11.
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- ⁶⁹Peckham, p. 8.
- ⁷⁰Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, I, p. 5.
- ⁷¹Nicolson, p. 80.
- ⁷²Nicolson, p. 252.
- ⁷³Peckham, p. 31.
- ⁷⁴Dyson and Tennyson, p. 17.
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- ⁷⁷Buckley, The Victorian Temper, p. 79.
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- ⁷⁹Dyson and Tennyson, p. 24.
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- 197 Ricks, p. 1339.
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- 319 Anderson and Warnock, p. 202.
- 320 Sprague, Notes.
- 321 Marshall, p. 135.
- 322 Sprague, Notes.
- 323 Robert L. Heilbroner, The Worldly Philosophers (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1966), p. 118. Heilbroner writes that, "Change, according to Hegel, was the rule of life. Every idea irrepressibly bred its opposite and the two merged into a synthesis which in turn produced its own contradiction. And history, said Hegel, was nothing but the expression of this flux of conflicting and resolving ideas as they fired now this and then that nation."
- 324 Dr. Donald C. Stuart, "Discussion of Tennyson," Longwood College, Farmville, Virginia, April 13, 1978.
- 325 Warren, p. xv.
- 326 Richardson, p. 292.
- 327 Johnson, p. 51.
- 328 Brooke, p. 41
- 329 Brooke, p. 35.

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