



1945

# The Scientific Age as Reflected in Tennyson

Rose Francis Joyce  
*Loyola University Chicago*

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## Recommended Citation

Joyce, Rose Francis, "The Scientific Age as Reflected in Tennyson" (1945). *Master's Theses*. Paper 232.  
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THE SCIENTIFIC AGE AS REFLECTED IN TENNYSON

BY

SISTER ROSE FRANCIS JOYCE O. P.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

JUNE

1945

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## CHAPTER I

### TENNYSON REFLECTS HIS AGE

This poet of beauty and of a certain magnificent idleness, lived at a time when all men had to wrestle and to decide. Tennyson walked through the lowlands of life, and in them met the common man, took him by the hand, and showed him the unsuspected loveliness of many a common thing. The power possessed by him of speaking so that the common man could understand him, was a faculty he shared with the great writers of his time.

"In this country rectory home, with its reticence, its decency and reservations, Tennyson found cultured leisure, free from hot-gospeiling, with family music, and a general readiness to greet him as that divine being, a poet."<sup>1</sup> At the university, "with its mixture of Plato, of noble thinking, and of simple living, his stature and handsome face, his goodness and simplicity, made him at once at home with the class that feels itself born for the top drawer."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Tennyson," The English Review, 22:4-6, 1923.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

The era of conservative reform, of attachment to English institutions, combined with a philanthropic ardour for social betterment, had begun. The repeal of the Test Act, Catholic Emancipation, the first great Reform Bill, were all carried between the date at which Tennyson went to college and a year after he had gone down. Of this movement he was to make conscientious efforts to prove himself the poet, the rising hope of stern and unbending Tories.<sup>3</sup>

In the widened and altered vision of the universe which natural science was slowly unfolding, Tennyson was to find, at moments, a fresh justification of the deepest hopes and instincts of his heart, at moments their negation. "To the conflict between his sensitive and conservative temperament and that Lucretian vision of the universe which physical science seemed more and more to unroll, we owe some of the most haunting notes of Tennyson's poetry."<sup>4</sup>

Darwin's explanation of evolution, largely from the standpoint of natural selection, involving a dreadful struggle

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<sup>3</sup>"The Tennysons," The Cambridge History of English Literature, XIII, 26.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

for existence, delivered a staggering blow to faith in the goodness and love of God. Men rebelled against Darwinism because they feared its effects on morality. Evil in man was powerful, enchanting. They rebelled not because they had a fear that it would affect the Book of Genesis, but because they had a fear not altogether unreasonable or ill-founded, that it would affect morality. Man had been engaged through innumerable ages in the struggle with sin. But in this struggle he had always had Nature on his side. "He might be polluted and agonized, but the flowers were innocent and the hills were strong."<sup>5</sup> Tennyson would let science wing her exploring way as high and as far as she could. But where knowledge is divorced from love and faith, he believes that it is in danger of becoming

"But some wild Pallas from the brain  
Of demons, fiery not to burst

All barriers in her onward race for power."<sup>6</sup>

It is from the personal experience of the soul as from a living fountain, that the stream of Tennyson's faith flows forth.

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<sup>5</sup>E. H. Sneath, The Mind of Tennyson, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup>"Tennyson and the Questioning of Our Age," Arena, 10:64-65, June, 1890.

It is contradictory to all our instincts that God has created us merely to mock us and to scatter us in the dust. Human love implies a sweeter, stronger love in the Divine Source. This immortal love is the strong Son of God, "Who made all these orbs of light and shade," and therefore "All is well, though faith and form be sundered in the night of fear."<sup>7</sup> One of the leading forms that his faith assumes is, therefore, that of trust in a beneficent Providence.

God is to Tennyson, no less the one law, the one element. The world in his view is no mere machine or system ages ago started and left to run on, with only occasional assistance from its Creator; but God is the continuing Power that lives and loves in every place. "He realized the vital oneness of the whole universe, and that if he could understand the simplest flower which he plucks from the crannied rock, he would also know what God and man is."<sup>8</sup>

It is not easy for any person who lives in our time when the dust has settled and the spiritual perspective has been restored, to realize what the entrance of the idea of evo-

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<sup>7</sup>"Tennyson and the Questioning of our Age," Arena, 10:64-65, June, 1890.

<sup>8</sup>Loc. cit.

lution meant for the men of those days. To us it is a discovery of another link in a chain, which however far we follow it, still stretches back into a divine mystery. To many of the men of that time it would appear from their writings that it was the heartbreaking and desolating discovery of the end and origin of the chain. To them had happened the most black and hopeless catastrophe conceivable to human nature; they had found a logical explanation of all things.<sup>9</sup>

Chesterton<sup>10</sup> maintained that Tennyson might have been a greater poet if he had been less a man of his dubious and rambling age. But there are some things that no man with blood would sell for the throne of Dante, and one of them is to fire the feeblest shot in a war that really awaits decision, or to carry the meanest musket in an army that is really marching by. Tennyson may even have forfeited immortality, but he and the men of his age were more than immortal -- they were alive.

Tennyson's fame rests upon a securer basis than that of some greater poets, for acquaintance with him will always be indispensable to the history of thought and culture in

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<sup>9</sup>Gilbert Chesterton, Tennyson, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 8



England.

What George Eliot and Anthony Trollope are for the manners of the period, he is for its mind. All the ideas which in his day chiefly moved the elect spirits of English society, are to be found in him, clothed in the most exquisite language and embodied in the most consummate form.<sup>11</sup>

The first important tribute to Tennyson's genius came from Stuart Mill. In the course of his observations he declared that all that Tennyson needed to be a great poet was a system of philosophy, to which Time would certainly conduct him. If he only meant that Tennyson needed "the years that bring the philosophic mind," the observation was entirely just; if he expected the poet either to evolve a system of philosophy for himself or to fall under the sway of some greater thinker, he was mistaken. Had Tennyson done either, he could not have become the poet of his age, for the temper of his time, when it was not violently partisan, was liberally eclectic. There was no greater leading idea, such as that of evolution in the last quarter of the last century, so ample and so characteristic of the age that a poet might become its disciple without yielding to partly what was meant for mankind. Two chief currents of thought there were; but they were antagonistic.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

Gilbert K. Chesterton says:

Nothing was more characteristic of the age than the reaction towards mediaeval ideas, headed by Newman, except the rival, seemingly incompatible gospel of the railway and the steamship, and all their corollaries. It may be said that Tennyson, like Gladstone, found equal room for both ideas in his mind, for until old age had made him mistrustful and querulous, he was essentially a man of progress.<sup>12</sup>

Tennyson is the interpreter of the Victorian era, - firstly to itself, secondly to the ages to come.

No other poet since Shakespeare has produced such a body of poetry which comes so near to satisfying all tastes, reconciling all tendencies, and registering every movement of the intellectual life of the period.<sup>13</sup>

The poetic spirit of the era has found its fullest and most characteristic expression in his poetry. What is great and what is weak in his age, he exhibited as no other has done. He is likely to remain through all future time its one representative name.<sup>14</sup> In him we find the man who cannot be identified with any one of the many tendencies of the age, but with all. The Victorian stamp is unmistakably manifest in expression of the age's thought respecting itself, in Locksley Hall.

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<sup>12</sup>Tennyson, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas R. Slicer, From Poet to Premier, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup>Loc. cit.

As an intellectual force Tennyson is destined to be powerful and durable because the charm of his poetry will always be congenial to the solid, practical, robust, and yet tender and emotional mind of England.<sup>15</sup>

Gilbert Chesterton says that "Tennyson lived in the time of a conflict more crucial and more frightful than any European struggle, - the conflict between the apparent artificiality of morals and the apparent immorality of science."<sup>16</sup>

He lived in the hour, when to all mortal appearance, the whole of the physical world deserted to the devil. The universe, governed by violence and death, left man to fight alone, with a handful of myths and memories.<sup>17</sup>

Tennyson felt that time called to him to be an interpreter of such an hour. There is probably no other instance anywhere of a poet who for more than sixty years wrote better poetry than any one of his contemporaries who were not very old men when he began and who for exactly fifty years was recognized by the best judges as the chief poet of his country, if not of his time.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Richard Garnett, Tennyson, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup>Op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>George Saintsbury, A History of the Nineteenth Century, p. 253.

It is interesting to note how Tennyson was affected by the spirit of his age, wherein he led and inspired it by giving to it its highest ideal, and in what respects he seemed untouched by it. When Tennyson came to manhood, there was a new spirit of hopefulness in the air. The period of the long war was long past; the lethargy of the period of reaction was giving way to a renewed effort in the direction of social progress. England was girding her loins for the task of righting the social and political wrongs that had prevailed unchecked during the Napoleonic years. Science was making new conquests in the domain of theory, and finding new ways to enter into the service of man. "These were signs also," says William Payne, "of the new religious impulse that, proceeding from the universities, was destined to exercise so powerful an influence upon the coming generation, and restore something of vitality to the lifeless traditional creeds."<sup>19</sup> Modern democracy, though its roots stretch farther into the past, has been, as a realized political system, the work of the age of Tennyson. The process whereby democracy has become dominant in the West of Europe, has been marked by no great political convulsion com-

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<sup>19</sup>The Greater English Poets of the Nineteenth Century, p. 221.

parable to the French Revolution. Even on the Continent the movement which in 1848 shook so many thrones, was trifling in comparison with it; and in England the agitations of the Reform Bill, of the AntiCorn Law League, and even of the Chartists, either kept within the limits of the law or merely rippled the surface of the social order. Nevertheless, the work done was momentous. At the opening of the period we see political power placed by the first Reform Bill in the hands of the middle class; at its close this power is by the operation of the second Reform Bill, logically completed by the third, and transferred to the working classes. If we believe at all in the influence of social circumstances upon literature, we must believe that great changes such as those, have left their stamp upon it, and there is ample reference that they have done so.<sup>20</sup>

In In Memoriam Tennyson meditates long and seriously upon the great doctrine of God and immortality; upon the mysterious realities of sin and suffering; upon the problems of knowledge (the origin, nature, reality, development, extent), its distinction from faith - almost unconsciously constructing a kind of philosophy of life. "His age," says Sneath, "was one

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<sup>20</sup>Hugh Walker, The Age of Tennyson, p. 2.

of active questioning and of doubt, and indeed, in a large measure, of positive denial."<sup>21</sup> Science was making tremendous progress, and materialism attended her advance. The mechanical conception of the world, recognizing only necessary sequence in the explanation of phenomena, was conspicuous in scientific world. Its claims concerning the origin of species, especially man, were so at variance with previous and contemporary theological opinion, that for a while they caused grave anxiety in the world of religious thought and belief. Man being so completely a part of Nature, as this theory indicates, and seemingly to substantiate it by exceedingly convincing lines of evidence, what about his relations to the Supernatural? With such an apparently low origin, what about the divine stamp - the image of God - which the Christian world has always supposed him to bear? With such a low ancestry, and therefore such a common nature, how about his claims on immortality? Does not acceptance of this theory, it was asked, compromise the great beliefs on these questions in which the Christian soul has wrought and rested through the ages?<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Sneath, Op. cit., p. 12.

Tennyson was profoundly in touch with his age. There were not many men who understood it better than he. Sneath exemplifies this statement when he says:

He had his finger on its pulse, and his ear upon its breast; so that he heard its every heart-beat. He was acquainted with its problems, and he knew also the tremendous issues involved in the attitude of his age toward them. He used mediaeval sentiment with exquisite judgment, to mellow what might appear harsh or crude in the new ideas of political reform, diffusing of education, mechanical invention, free trade, and colonial expansion.<sup>23</sup>

Tennyson felt that the poet must not work "without a conscience or an aim," and his aim must be primarily an ethical one. It is his business, through his art, to help men live this life as it ought to be lived. Life, however, cannot thus be lived, if we rob it of great hopes, beliefs, and ideals. The poet must proclaim and maintain these if it be possible. "The most important of them refer to God, freedom, and the soul's destiny." These are the mighty hopes which make us men. But the age assails them, denies them, giving strong reasons for its unfaith. The effect of this upon life must be discouraging and demoralizing.<sup>24</sup>

This was the situation as Tennyson saw it in the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Sneath, Op. cit., p. 25.

light of the tendencies of the age. It stirred the great deeps of his soul, and aroused him to most earnest consideration of "the reasons for the faith" which much of the science and philosophy of the time denied, hoping in consequence, to be able, by means of his art, to give some helpful message to his fellowmen. This earnest consideration was an honest one.<sup>25</sup>

Tennyson was conservative by nature, and more or less predisposed to favor the Theistic and Christian beliefs in which he had been nurtured, and the significance of which he so thoroughly appreciated and emphasized. But, on the other hand, he could not rest in a blind dogmatism. He loved the truth, and was desirous of knowing it and of maintaining it. An unreasoned or an unreasonable faith could not satisfy him. What he wrote of Hallam was true of himself:

"He would not make his judgment blind,  
He faced the spectres of the mind."<sup>26</sup>

The history of thought and culture in England is to be found in Tennyson. In him we see the hour of conflict between faith and science, the emergence of a great hope born of

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>26</sup>Sneath, Op. cit., p. 30.



mental anguish, and the social changes of a changing England,  
the interpreter of a Victorian era.

## CHAPTER II

### TENNYSON AND THE NEW SCIENTIFIC MOVEMENT

Tennyson caught and utilized the spirit of his time. That he constantly sang the subjective view of nature may be due to the fact that he came after Wordsworth, though the fact that he sang it without the Wordsworthian dryness and dullness, must be set down to his own credit. In the sense of the history of former times, which is perhaps the chief glory of the nineteenth century in matters of thought, he had been anticipated by no one. He might not have attained it without Scott and Byron, but his expression of it was hardly conditioned in the slightest degree by the expression either of Byron or Scott.<sup>1</sup> "They were not in strictness men of the nineteenth century; he was, and he represented the very best features of his time in attending, from its point of view mainly, to the features of better times."<sup>2</sup>

The Princess and In Memoriam may be said to have shown for the first time that the poet was capable of produc-

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<sup>1</sup>George Saintsbury, A History of Nineteenth Century Literature, p. 260.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

ing in lighter and severer styles respectively, work not limited to short flights, and exemplifying what is called "thought," as well as style and feeling, colour and music.

Although Tennyson endeavoured to ignore the menacing tide of the industrial population, and to solace his uneasiness by prescribing common sense for the poor, and district-visiting for the rich, we can trace, even in his earliest poems, an uneasy suspicion that things were beginning, and with distressing rapidity. "Slowly," he had written in the first Locksley Hall,

"Slowly comes a hungry people, as a lion  
 creeping higher,  
 Glares at one that nods and winks behind  
 a slowly-dying fire."<sup>3</sup>

Tennyson did not by any means dislike democracy. No, the people were all right. It was all the fault of the politicians; it was the fault of "all the yells and counter yells of feud and faction; it was the fault of the tonguesters."<sup>4</sup>

In the deluge of their demagoguery they had succeeded in drowning old political common sense; they had pilloried

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<sup>3</sup>Walter Graham (Editor), The Best of Tennyson, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup>Andrew Lang, Alfred Tennyson, p. 256.

wisdom in their market places. Thus does the poet inquire in the second Locksley Hall - "Are we devils?"<sup>5</sup>

Andrew Lang maintains that Tennyson, "in his attitude towards the domestic politics of the day, reflected the prejudices, so-laced the anxiety, and assuaged the conscience of the vast public by whom his poems were published and admired."<sup>6</sup> We must admit that his political poems welled up from the clear spring of personal conviction. The most that can be said in favour of his attitude is "that it was shared by a large number of people who, while no less high-minded than Tennyson, were better educated and informed than he himself."<sup>7</sup> The Victorians were severely convinced that patriotism was all-sufficient, that it was the highest civic virtue; and this conviction flourished in the poetry of Tennyson. At its best the patriotic poetry of Tennyson, as indirectly in The Revenge, and in Lucknow, as more directly in the Wellington Ode, and in The Fleet, is of the highest order. His sense of England, and of her achievement, and her responsibilities, is in the main mag-

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred Tennyson, p. 258.

<sup>7</sup> Loc. cit.

there the idea of a hope for the world, is in itself an illustration of the great saying that the poets are the unacknowledged legislation of mankind. Those phrases have been stated by quotation, but they have sunk into the minds of millions, like the parallel phrases in which Darwin embodied his own great scientific generalization.<sup>10</sup>

Individuals may be unconscious of the quiet power of those great simple ideas in which worlds of struggling thought are suddenly summed up and delivered through a single lucid sentence. But it is impossible to set bounds to the power of those ideas; and it is quite certain that Darwin, through science, and Tennyson through literature, are still among the great forces that are determining the course of human events.<sup>11</sup>

Tennyson was far from being indifferent to current politics or theological controversies. He took a close interest in the Oxford Movement; nor did he make light of the grievances and demonstrations of the Chartists. Yet his attitude seems to have been that of the philosophic speculator who surveys from a height the fields of action. Andrew Lang says that:

. . . he did not fling himself into the fighting line, like Byron or Shelley, whose poetry glows with the fiery enthusiasm of combatants in the strife over political or

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Nicolson, Op. cit., p. 260.

nificent.

"Tennyson," says Harold Nicolson, "was by far the clearest-sighted critic of the characteristics of his own age."<sup>8</sup> He did not use our own phrases about it; and his language, occasionally, among those who have no historical sense and cannot read any literature but that of the hours, - has the unreal effect of a nineteenth century drawing on the mind of a child who has not yet realized the mutability of the fashions. Again he attacked with what Henley called the "fury of the seer," these evils of his age and ours. Tennyson was first and foremost a poet, and by his effort to point towards a better world he had at least earned the right to say to his critics, as he did, "I have not made the world, as it is."<sup>9</sup> Nicolson is of the opinion that it was Tennyson again, who endeavored to see steadily the whole appalling problem of peace and war. The fact that the phrases which he used about it have become a part of the language, and are so vital that they strike root in the mind of generation after generation and develop

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<sup>8</sup> Tennyson: Aspects of His Life, Character and Poetry, p. 160.

<sup>9</sup> Nicolson, Op. cit., p. 160.

religious causes and ideas, or like Coleridge, who declared that all the social evils of his day arose from a false and godless empiricism, and actually and anxiously expounded to Lord Liverpool the essential connection between speculative philosophy and practical politics.<sup>12</sup>

Alfred Noyes tells us "that it must have been disturbing to the complacency of some of our moderns to find a living critic of so wide a range as Saintsbury, placing Tennyson, with Vergil, among the twelve greatest writers of the world, in any age, in any tongue."<sup>13</sup> A large part of the recent depreciation of Tennyson, comes from those who are quite unaware of the regions of thought in which he moved.

Tennyson finds great satisfaction in the ideas of progress, and it enters as an element into many of his poems. Locksley Hall gives it a most perfect interpretation. "Growth under the conditions of law, Tennyson sees everywhere; and the progress that will in the remote future become real, the poet now sees in the ideals."<sup>14</sup> The slowness of this advancement in the world is a kind of Nemesis in some of his poems. He expects no radical overturning of the world, such as Shelley be-

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<sup>12</sup> Lang, Op. cit., p. 260.

<sup>13</sup> Some Aspects of Modern Poetry, p. 161.

<sup>14</sup> George W. Cooke, Poets and Problems, p. 154.

lieved in, and to ardent natures this snailing pace of progress is a cause of chafing and sadness.

. . . Tennyson is contented with the slow advance which comes of a growth through conditions of law, because his mind rests satisfied with the law itself as the basis of human good. To him the modern conception of law has become familiar and the miraculous has ceased to be satisfactory.<sup>15</sup>

Out of the revolutionary period came the idea of progress. If intuition opens to the individual the avenues of the highest truth, none the less for mankind there is a process of development and an order in the unfoldment of its manifestation.

In the poems of 1842 one remarkable feature is the diversity of subjects and motifs. The second volume opens with Morte d'Arthur, wherein Tennyson first tried his art upon the legends that are to be gathered upon the shores of old romance, enlarging the picture, and filling up his canvass with a profusion of exquisite details, the sights and sounds, the figures of the king and his knights, the ruined shrine, the lake in the full moon, the clanging of Sir Bedivere's armour, the ripple of the water on the bank.<sup>16</sup> Large as is the part of

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 155



religious philosophy in Tennyson's thought, it must not be forgotten that his outlook upon the world in which he lived included many other matters within its purview. He was not less awake to whatever concerned the permanent interest of his fellowmen in society and politics, in art, and in science, than he was to matters of deeper concern.<sup>17</sup>

Between the composition of the first Locksley Hall in the early thirties, and the publication of the second in 1886, the English body politic had passed from the phase of aristocratic Whiggism, through a sound phase of middle class Liberalism, to the achievement of democracy as we enjoy it today. During those fifty-five years, according to Nicolson, "Tennyson 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."<sup>18</sup>

In both Locksley Hall and in Maud there is the same outcry against almost exactly the same social abuses; there is the same distrust in science, though this is more decided in

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<sup>17</sup>William M. Payne, The Greater English Poets of the Nineteenth Century, p. 239.

<sup>18</sup>Loc. cit.

the later poem. We read in Locksley Hall:

"There methinks would be enjoyment more  
than in this march of mind,"

and in Maud:

"But these are the days of advance, the  
works of the men of mind."

In the first we have only the expression of doubt; in the second that of ironical conviction.

There is the same consideration of the possible benefits of commerce, of the more possible benefits of war, of patriotism, as the moving spirit of noble life.<sup>19</sup>

Also in The Princess we find "those two crowned twins, Commerce and Conquest."<sup>20</sup> In each the love motive is often overmastered by some other, such as patriotism, or war. In Maud, for instance, although Maud looks down from the regions of her nest and sees and cheers her lover, yet the complete cure of "disease" is left to a patriotic war. So in Locksley Hall the chief and the final hope of noble life is contained in the words "I go," to which we are bound to add, "With your mer-

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<sup>19</sup> Morton Luce, Handbook to the Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, p. 158.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

ry comrades," and we may suppose to fight somebody somewhere.<sup>21</sup>

The hero of Locksley Hall is a boy of twenty, an idealist who is sore and bruised by the envious contact of the world. The poem is full of 'saevia indignation.' The poverty that in Tennyson's own case kept him from marriage and the happy hearth, lies heavily on him. He rages against the "social wants that sin against the strength of youth," and cries:

"Every gate is thronged with suitors,

All the markets overthrow.

I have but an angry fancy; what is that

Which I should do?"<sup>22</sup>

Over the whole poem broods an indescribable light - the light of romance, mystery - call it what you will; even Locksley Hall itself, with its windswept gables overlooking the sand and the sea, has that air of mystery and emotion that transfigures the world.

The chief motive of Locksley Hall is to be found in that part of the subject-matter which was contemporary, which for many years had invaded and pervaded the poet's life, and

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<sup>21</sup>Luce, Op. cit., p. 159.

<sup>22</sup>Arthur C. Benson, Tennyson, p. 163.

which found expression, more or less full and distinct, in almost all the poems he wrote at that period.

The second Locksley Hall bears the same relation as the first does, to the time in which it was written and the poems near to it in date. The fitting character could be created at any time. In Locksley Hall Sixty Years After Tennyson gathered together the sadder topics of the day, the sombre reflections scattered among many contemporary poems, and then once more

"Bore down in flood, and dashed his angry heart  
Against the desolations of the world."<sup>23</sup>

Whatever he may have been in actual life, Tennyson is seldom joyous in his poetry; there he thinks deeply, feels soberly, takes the times seriously.

The narrative of Locksley Hall concerns a man and a woman who have known each other perhaps since they were boy and girl together. The result is love. The currents of their being flow on in one fair strong stress. But as long ago in Shakespeare's time,

"The course of true love never did run smooth,

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<sup>23</sup>Benson, Op. cit., p. 159.

But either it was different in blood,  
 Or else it stood upon the choice of friends,"  
 a choice determined by a too eager regard for gold, and a too  
 light regard for the interest and the holiest emotion of human  
 life. If the girl is weak, she forsakes her lover and marries  
 a fortune; if she is strong, she remains true and dies, and  
 this with more or less of heroism, for often the fashion of it  
 looks clandestine in a day like ours.<sup>24</sup>

In Locksley Hall of Sixty Years After the story is  
 different; the woman is not weak but vicious - "A worldling,  
 born of worldlings, she that holds the diamond necklace dearer  
 than the golden ring."<sup>25</sup> In this poem, moreover, the lover is  
 said to be of "easier," earthlier make.<sup>26</sup>

We turn to the second Locksley Hall and somehow the  
 glamour is gone. In The Miller's Daughter long before, he had  
 written words that were now to come sadly true,-

"So, if I waste words now, in truth  
 You must blame Love. His early rage  
 Had force to make me rhyme in youth,

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<sup>24</sup> Benson, Op. cit., p. 159.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 165

<sup>26</sup> Loc. cit.

And makes me talke too much in age."<sup>27</sup>

It is not that the old man has lost the passion of his youth, for he is infinitely more passionate; but where the young hero prophesied, the younger man rants, where the younger comforted his despair, by glowing hope and faith, the old man accentuates it by peevish railings and melodramatic fury. 'I never scream,' he had written to Spedding in 1834, '-I leave that to your vivid men.' The case is sadly altered now. Everything is poisonous, galling roaring, raving. The whole world is plunged into vile and shameless sensuality, filthy, selfishness, hopeless anarchy. The chariot has run away, and the Master of created things sits in helpless apathy. No hope is left in science or commerce; none is suggested by war, none by the present anywhere, except in a goodness itself exceptional. What other hope there may be is withholden in the future.<sup>28</sup>

In Locksley Hall and in Maud a remedy is proposed for wounded love; in the former it is a prospect of progress, due mostly to science; in Maud where the poet's faith in science has been shaken, it lies in the energizing of a nation by war.

Again in Locksley Hall we are confronted by the irresolute figure of modern youth depressed and bewildered by his own inability to face the bustling competition of ordinary English life, disappointed in love, denouncing a shallow-hearted cousin, and nursing a momentary impulse to ". . . wander far away

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, Op. cit., pp. 165-166.

On some island unto island at the gateways of the day." Restlessness, ennui, impatience of humdrum existence, set him dreaming of something like a new Odyssey. But the hero of Locksley Hall is no Ulysses; the bonds of culture and comfort are too strong for him; the project of wild adventure is abandoned as quickly as it is formed; he remains to console himself with the march of mind and the wonders of scientific discovery.<sup>29</sup> Lyall says:

. . . The contrast of ancient and modern character and circumstance was probably unintentional; but in noticing it we may take into account that while the Englishman had been crossed in love, the Ithacan had been remarkably successful with Circe and Calypso, and appears to have been always well-treated by women, who may be overcome, like the rest of the world, by stalwart perseverance.<sup>30</sup>

The great and lasting success of Locksley Hall shows the power of genius in presenting an ordinary situation poetically; how it can transform common emotions, dealing boldly with the facts and feelings of everyday life.<sup>31</sup>

Morton Luce is of the opinion that "Tennyson allowed the lover to rave and exaggerate in Locksley Hall in order that

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<sup>29</sup>Sir Alfred C. Lyall, Tennyson, p. 48.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>31</sup>Loc. cit.

he might represent him later as a man whom time had made wiser, kinder, and more worthy to be loved."<sup>32</sup> But surely, Time, the physician, never had a more unsatisfactory patient; it would be much easier to show that sixty years had made Amy's lover sixty years older and not a year wiser.

Locksley Hall, with its presentation of social problems, entitles Tennyson to a high rank as a poet of humanity. In that age of prosperity and settled government, in that unseen warfare which ever wages between truth and error, right and wrong, freedom and oppression, light and darkness, he indeed did bear his part well. He is full of energy and passion, and the lyric quality of his mind manifests itself with spirit and force. It is the peaceful life of his own time he has surcharged with feeling.

A close examination of the first Locksley Hall discloses almost as great an impatience with existing conditions as the second poem displays, and in both cases the dramatic element must be taken into account. In his religious poems he depicted the depths of despair that he might more effectively urge his message of hope; he plunged his readers once and again

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<sup>32</sup>Lyall, Op. cit., p. 164.



into "the sunless gulfs of doubt" that they might the more fully realize the consolations of sunlit faith. In the second Locksley Hall he dips his brush in the darkest colours in order that he may intensify the radiance of his prophetic vista.<sup>33</sup>

"Earth at last a warless world  
 a single race, a single tongue,  
 I have seen her far away - for is  
 not Earth as yet so young?"<sup>34</sup>

According to William Payne, "Tennyson enforced the lesson that all life needs for life is possible to will."<sup>35</sup> He showed us the difference between the freedom that is one with license, and the far nobler freedom that can restrain itself from excess, that "broadens slowly down from precedent to precedent," instead of convulsing the social organism by some outburst of reckless energy.<sup>36</sup> He showed us the true path of duty and how

"He that walks it, only thirsting  
 For the right, and learns to deaden

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Graham, Op. cit., p. 619

<sup>35</sup>Payne, Op. cit., p. 245

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 255

Love of self, before his journey closes,  
He shall find the stubborn thistle bursting,  
Into glossy purples, which out-redden  
All voluptuous garden-roses."<sup>37</sup>

Locksley Hall enjoyed unbounded popularity. No other poem interpreted so fully the spirit of the age, its unrest, its hopes, and aspirations, its boundless belief in its ability to accomplish all that it dreamed. The period was one of exultant anticipation. This feeling, it was believed, was not the vague mental intoxication which heralded the approach of the French Revolution, but a just expectation of the future based upon a calm and clear-sighted survey of the forces that were then in operation for the improvement of mankind. Modern science has begun to enter upon its career of immeasurable conquest. It had already accomplished much and was fairly reckless in its promises of what further it was to accomplish. Distance of space seemed already on the road to annihilation through the further application of steam to motive power. Electricity was already bringing the most distant regions of the earth into the close proximity of intercourse. The barriers that parted man from man and nation from nation were in consequence speedily to be burst. These wonder-working

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

achievements of science it was that held out the hope of a happy solution of the numerous vexing problems which had long been lying heavy on the hearts of all who thought and felt.<sup>38</sup>

As a result of these transforming processes, when at last they had been brought into full and active cooperation, little limit was placed on the moral and political progress of humanity. Under the influence of these agencies, life would be made purer and loftier. A better race than ours would come to inherit the earth, men would be braver and nobler than now, and women fairer and purer. That younger day was about to dawn when the conventions that made man the sport of the accidents of birth and fortune were destined to disappear; that younger day, which, in the fulness of time, when war had ceased was to witness the federation of man, the parliament of the world. It was a fascinating picture with which the youthful poet held the minds of men ready to sympathize with its most glowing promises. It was and perhaps will always remain a gorgeous vision to uplift the hearts of enthusiasts and to inspire the efforts of reformers. But when it appeared, it was in strictest accord with the dominant feeling of the younger gen-

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<sup>38</sup>Thomas Lounsbury, The Life and Times of Tennyson, pp. 440-441.

eration of the time. In its glowing lines were recorded the optimistic views which prevailed about the future of the race.<sup>39</sup> It is little wonder, accordingly, that an age which found its most cherished idea expressed in loftiest language, should have welcomed with enthusiasm the poem, and placed the poet in the highest rank of living authors.

The truth is that the success which came to Tennyson in the first instance and remained the secret of his continuous popularity, at times in face of frequent depreciation or intermittent attack, was largely due to the fact that he mirrored as did no other poet of his period, the changing feelings and the varying moods of the generations to which he successively appealed.<sup>40</sup>

As in Locksley Hall of 1842, he reflected the hopes and aspirations of the era of his youth, so in Locksley Hall of 1886 he reflected the fears and disappointments of the generation which had succeeded. The optimism of the earlier time had given place to the despondency, almost partaking of the nature of pessimism, which had come largely to characterize the latter. Saintsbury maintains that

It is a palimode in so far as it gives a vivid picture of the change which had come over the minds of men as they contrasted the realities which confronted them, with the high-wrought expectation which had once been

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<sup>39</sup>Lounsbury, Op. cit., p. 442.

<sup>40</sup>Loc. cit.

cherished of the brilliant results that were to follow men's increasing conquests over the forces of nature.<sup>41</sup>

Reflected accordingly in the later poem was the reaction of the closing years of the century against the hope and confidence of its prime. The gods in whom men and women had been taught to trust had turned out to be vain gods. Distance of space and length of time were, it is true, on the road to annihilation. Luxuries once deemed possible only for the few, had become the indispensable necessities of the many. Marvels, once even undreamed of as belonging to the realm of reality, had shrunk by usage into the most matter-of-fact commonplace. Much had been added in many ways to man's material comfort. But how about man himself? Was he who was whirled fifty miles an hour along the Thames any wiser or better than he who more than a score of centuries ago sauntered slowly by the banks of the Ilissus? Furthermore, does the same author maintain:

. . . It was inevitable that the conviction should come that the material agencies from which so much had been expected, while they might increase men's resources and capabilities, could not of themselves add either to his real happiness or to his moral elevation, that the progress of humanity would be not the result of external forces triumphing over the inert resistance of matter, but of the slow processes of those internal changes which purify and elevate the soul; that the uplifting of the individual must invariably precede the up-

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 443.

lifting of the race; and that he accomplished most for the regeneration of the world who is in his sphere, whether high or humble, according to his means, whether vast or limited, gives up his life to the service of his fellowmen.<sup>42</sup>

So great was the interest inspired by this poem that it becomes a favorite belief of some that Tennyson was recording in it his own personal experience. Gilfellow spoke of the poem as telling "a tale of unfortunate passion with a gusto and depth of feeling which betray more than a fictitious interest in the theme."<sup>43</sup>

Locksley Hall was dedicated to Mrs. Tennyson, partly because it seemed to Tennyson that the two Locksley Halls were likely to be in the future, two of the most historically interesting of his poems, as descriptive of the tone of the age at two distinct periods of his life; partly because in it he portrayed the chief characteristics of Lionel, who had died shortly before its writing. Of the second Locksley Hall his son Hallam says:

My father said that the old man in the second Locksley Hall had a stronger faith in God, and in human goodness than he had in his youth; but he had also endeavored to give the moods of despondency which are caused by the de-

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<sup>42</sup>Lounsbury, Op. cit., p. 443

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 444.

creased energy of life.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, the four unpublished lines of the old Locksley Hall were the nucleus of the Locksley Hall Sixty Years After.

"In the hall there hangs a painting - Amy's  
arms about my neck;  
Happy children in a sunbeam sitting on  
the rims of wreck.  
In my life there was a picture - she that  
.clasped my neck had flown;  
I was left within the shadow, sitting  
on the wreck alone."<sup>45</sup>

Lord Lytton, in a letter to Miss Mary Anderson, says:

. . . But the old lover of Locksley Hall is exactly what the young man must have become, without any change of character by force of time and experience, if he had grown with the growth of his age. For that reason alone, the poem in its entirety has a peculiar historical importance as the impersonation of the emotional life of a whole generation. Its psychological portraiture is perfect - its workmanship exquisite - and its force and freshness of poetic fervour wonderful. But I admire it, not alone as a work of genius and a work of art. I admire it, if possible, still more as a work of courage - that is to say, as a moral action.<sup>46</sup>

In The Princess the poet who at first held aloof from the interests of everyday life, is now found devoting his longest work to a social question of the day. The subject had been

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<sup>44</sup>Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson- A Memoir, I, 83.

<sup>45</sup>Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson- A Memoir, IV, 88.

<sup>46</sup>Loc. cit.

in Tennyson's mind long before he undertook the composition of the poem, for it was not until about 1855 that he set seriously about the task of its preparation. Upon the part woman ought to play in life he had very definite opinions. In this as in many other of his speculations, he was much in advance of his age. According to Lounsbury:

To him the higher education of women was a social question transcending in importance the great political ones which at that time occupied the thoughts and inflamed the passions of his countrymen. That any mode of education or non-education that tended to restrict her intellectual powers, would not only work harm to her but to man also, was his firm faith. Naturally he sympathized with every effort put forth to increase the facilities for her fullest development.<sup>47</sup>

As far back as 1847 the poet's friends quote him as saying that one of the two great social questions impending in England was the higher education of women. This remarkable insight into the social problems of the future is shown again and again in the poem. The Princess holds up to ridicule the theory that woman is only undeveloped man, and needs the same education as he, in order to attain her best. He is sure that "the sooner woman finds out, before the great educational movement begins, that woman is not undeveloped man, but diverse,"<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Hallam Tennyson, Op. cit., p. 536

<sup>48</sup>Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson- A Memoir, I, 249.



the better it will be for the progress of the world. The Princess "is a plea for such training for woman, as shall best fit her to perform her own work in the world."<sup>49</sup> This is not the same as that of man, but it is peculiar to herself.

While The Princess is a plea in behalf of a higher social life for women and a greater justice for them in all their relations to men, it is far from being revolutionary or even radical in its attitude. Its motive is that of harmony and unity in human life, to be obtained by a perfect cooperation and a common aim on the part of man and woman.

"Till at the last she set herself to man

Like perfect music unto noble words."<sup>50</sup>

It is the purpose of the poem to teach that

"The woman's cause is man's - they rise or sink

Together, dwarf'd or godlike, bond or free."<sup>51</sup>

This solution of the problem of woman's destiny, though that of a poet, is the best and most satisfactory yet given us, so far as it goes. It is that of perfect equality of the sexes, built

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<sup>49</sup>William Gordon, The Social Ideals of Alfred Lord Tennyson, p. 78.

<sup>50</sup>George Cooke, Poets and Problems, p. 110.

<sup>51</sup>Loc. cit.

up and conserved by mutual sympathy and helpfulness - the theory of all men and women who are true to the facts of life and the noblest social ideals. The Princess presents a lofty and a noble conception of love and domestic life, especially in the brief songs appearing in the narrative. It is a fantastic idyllic romance, with a gentle undertone of moral purpose, not without a great deal of modern sentiment, and some graceful and ladylike banter. Here indeed, was a subject which was curiously in harmony with the poet's temperament and exquisite refinement.<sup>52</sup>

"Howitt's Journal," says Lounsbury, "hailed Tennyson as the poet of progress; and there is no question that in regard to the rights and true social position of woman he was far in advance of the men of his day."<sup>53</sup> He had shown in his poem the "inevitable tendency and results of the doctrines of those, who, to enfranchise woman, would unwoman her." Mary Howitt quoted from it an extract, in which according to her, the true philosophy of the question was given, "clear, simple, strong, and irrefragable." This is the passage beginning with

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<sup>52</sup> Cooke, Op. cit., p. 110

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 545.

the line, "The woman's cause is man's." The words which follow have an interest of their own because they very certainly represented Tennyson's view of the relation of the sexes.<sup>54</sup>

With his usual sensitiveness to criticism Tennyson was greatly distressed by the hostile reception which the work met at the very outset. In the moments of depression he expressed himself as inclined to abandon any further writing of poetry. Later he is said to have felt regret that he did not connect the subject with some stronger and more serious framework than what he called a medley. If so, the regret was needless; for at the time of its production a framework of the sort he chose was much the more effective for the end he had in view. He was dealing with what was to him a serious theme; and to most men of that day it was not serious.<sup>55</sup>

Appreciation of the poem advanced not only steadily but rapidly. When the shock produced by the unexpected character of the work had been dissipated, the exceeding foolishness of the early hostile notices of it struck men forcibly. In later criticism attempts were made to correct the unintelligent

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<sup>54</sup>Lounsbury, Op. cit., p. 545.

<sup>55</sup>Loc. cit.

misapprehensions which characterized the earlier work. Their complete misunderstanding of the nature and intention of the poem was brought out distinctly. Accordingly, with the progress of time, the contemporary praise of The Princess was more loudly expressed. The Princess with all her lovely court and glowing harmonies, had been born in London, among the fogs and smut of Lincoln's Inn, although like all works of true art, this poem must have grown by degrees in other times and places as the poet came and went, free, unshackled, meditating, inditing. In Nicolson we read that Tears, Idle Tears, was suggested by Tintern Abbey; but who shall define by what mysterious wonder of beauty and regret, by what sense of the "transient with the abiding?" "Tennyson," says the same author, "was adapted to the reception and the exploitation of the ideal."<sup>56</sup> Furthermore he maintains:

. . . He understood clearly what was required. 'In rude ages,' says Mr. Horton in his biography of the poet - 'in rude ages before marriage is sanctified by being treated as a symbol of the union between Christ and His Church, virginity is exalted as the true purity.' But it is impurity that conceived such an ideal. The higher truth is that which the poet saw, but a sad thought in bad times. As it is the product of an impure

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<sup>56</sup>Lounsbury, Op. cit., p. 165

age, so it adds to the impurity of the age which succeeds.<sup>57</sup>

It was not to be the least of the lessons to his time that Tennyson from the first saw Paradise regained, not in a monastery, but in a home . . . Tennyson flung the light of romance over the familiar, and the home shone with unearthly radiance.<sup>58</sup>

As Tennyson was impressed by law and order reigning everywhere, so we perceive his appreciation of it in his treatment of the ideas of progress. Exemplified in Locksley Hall and in Maud, we find his outcry against the social abuses a menace to law and order.

His sense of law and order is again expressed in The Princess, wherein the motive is harmony and unity in human life, obtained by perfect cooperation and a common aim on the part of man and woman. Although we do not entirely agree with Tennyson in his attitude towards woman's place in the world, yet may we conclude that basically his conception of her as the instrument of harmony and peace is worthy of due consideration.

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<sup>57</sup>Nicolson, Op. cit., p. 166.

<sup>58</sup>Loc. cit.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SPIRIT OF MODERN SCIENCE IN TENNYSON

It was Tennyson, who when all the religious creeds were crumbling under the assaults of a not unjustly incensed science, stood like a rock for certain fundamental truths; and what is more important, he compelled the respect even of that incensed science, for his restatement of those beliefs. Men like Tyndall, quoting him in their own scientific works, affirmed that "Tennyson understood the drift of modern science better than any poet since Lucretius."<sup>1</sup> Science, ever groping towards some one great simple generalization, which will cover the whole process of the universe, may yet discover that she has been anticipated by poetry. In a generation she may be expressing everything in terms of motion; but it will be Tennyson that put the generalization into its most perfect form, and enabled us to see in it

"That God which ever lives and loves  
One God, one Law, one Element,  
And one far-off Divine event

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Noyes, Some Aspects of Modern Poetry, p. 161.

To which the whole creation moves."<sup>2</sup>

Tennyson's mind was a delicate instrument that responded to and registered in itself the smallest and subtlest impressions that came to it from the widest varieties of source. According to Gingerick,

. . . it responded to the political and social activities of the ages, to the scientific movements, to the skeptical and also the mystical elements in those movements, to the classical forms and theses of the past, to the romantic tendencies of the present, to the beautiful phenomena of nature, to man as man, and also to man as a social being.<sup>3</sup>

The theory of evolution and the facts of science in general, and scientific materialism in particular, placed strict conditions and limitations on Tennyson's notion of the power of freedom as well as on his conceptions of external nature. Tennyson is duly impressed with the fact of the orderliness and the mechanical fixedness of the universe in which we live. He surrenders to it as much as any poet dare surrender. He surrenders the stars and all the hosts of heaven to absolutely blind but unchangeable forces. In The Palace of Art we read:

"A star that with the choral starry dance

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<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning, p. 122.

Join'd not, but stood, and standing saw  
 The hollow orb of moving Circumstance  
 Roll'd roundly on fix'd law,"<sup>4</sup>

and societies and nations are to adjust themselves to something that is very much like this admirable circumstance. In You Ask Me an ideal land is

"A land of settled government  
 A land of just and old renown."

And in Aenone the people who have lived in such a land are those who

" . . . To live by law

Acting the law they live, live without fear."<sup>5</sup>

The most conspicuous element that enters into the theory of freedom and marks its peculiarity, is the element of time. Time, to be sure, is a purely man-made affair, and its order is not applicable to the Deity: In The Princess we read "For was, and is, and will be, are but is."<sup>6</sup> In the age of Tennyson the truths of science brought home to men's minds in a new and im-

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<sup>4</sup>Gingerick, Op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.



pressive way the immensity of time and the vastness of its accompanying mysterious space. The fact of time's immensity gave Tennyson's imagination scope and freedom to build visions of the future greatness of man.<sup>7</sup> Though the will of men be hampered by original evil -

"Perchance from some abuse of Will

In worlds before the man

Involving ours . . ."

and though the general absence of plasticity and the presence of fixedness in all things make against the idea of any rapid progress, the race, nevertheless can, if it is facing in the right direction, arrive at the fullest realization of universal freedom in the latter ages of the world. It is the profound conviction of this possibility - for it is still only a possibility if man is free to choose - that animates the clarion call of Tennyson in Locksley Hall of his youth:

"Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward,

Forward let us range,

Let the great world spin forever down the

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<sup>7</sup> Gingerick, Op. cit., p. 149.

ringing grooves of change."<sup>8</sup>

However feeble one's speech may be, "if one cannot believe in the freedom of the human will as of the Divine, life is hardly worth living."<sup>9</sup>

What is true of Tennyson's poetry is this: that parallel to the idea of law that plays such a prominent part in his poetry, there runs the idea of the mystery of free-will. To say that the idea of law is the central idea of Tennyson's poetry is to utter a half-truth. The other half is the truth that freedom is written over the whole face of this poetry. In the Idylls of the King we learn that

"The old order changeth, giving place to new,  
And God fulfills Himself in many ways,"

that is, according to law and outward orderliness here below; and it is also written in the Idylls that

"Man is man and master of his fate,"

and that the purpose of these Idylls is that of

"Shadowing Sense at war with Soul -"  
ideal manhood closed in real man.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>10</sup>Loc. cit.

"There is no doubt that Tennyson held that the development of wider scientific knowledge will accompany the self-development of the will and the increase of freedom."<sup>11</sup> But the all-important thing is to see that scientific knowledge is to be only an accompaniment, and by no means the cause, that shall bring greater self-control and broader freedom to the race of the future. "If man, instead of ranging with Science, learns to trust in his own freedom and in God, there is much to be hoped for."<sup>12</sup> Before earth can gain her heavenly-best, man must learn to keep the fountain of his will from being poisoned and

"A God must mingle with the game.  
Nay, there may be those about us  
Whom we neither see nor name,  
Felt within us, as ourselves,  
The powers of Good, the Powers of Ill,  
Strewing balm, or shedding poison  
In the fountains of the will."<sup>13</sup>

In the development of Tennyson's faith the pendulum has swung slowly but surely, from faith in scientific knowledge to faith in the fact that man is man and master of his faith.

It is quite true that in his early life Tennyson put great faith in scientific knowledge. It is also true that

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 161.

<sup>12</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

through all his life he felt under the obligation to give that knowledge the most favorable hearing and to square his experience with it - not to make his judgment blind.<sup>14</sup> But if in his career of many years there is any change in his attitude toward truth and life represented in his poetry, that change is this: that,

. . . whereas in the first Locksley Hall he based his optimistic faith on scientific knowledge and man's determination to move forward, in In Memoriam he questioned and criticized the scientific basis and found it wanting, and placed correspondingly more emphasis on the living will of man as the true basis; and lastly, in Locksley Hall 'of his old age' he repudiated the scientific basis and accepted the basis of man's power of acting as a free moral agent. In the latter poem his faith is practically as optimistic as in the earlier poem, but the basis upon which that optimism rests has swung from scientific knowledge to man's power and freedom simply to follow 'light and do the right'.<sup>15</sup>

"On the really great questions," observes Saintsbury, "Tennyson was not loath to speak, and spoke gravely enough; even to the ephemerality he paid rather too much than too little attention."<sup>16</sup> He usually neglected the negligible; and perhaps it would not hurt with posterity if he had neglected it a little more, though it hurt him a little with contemporaries that he

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 163

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 162

<sup>16</sup> A History of Nineteenth Century Literature, p. 267.

neglected it as much as he did.

Tennyson's son says of him: "He held the doctrine of a personal immortality and was by no means content to accept our present existence as a mere preparation for the life of more perfect beings."<sup>17</sup> He once asked John Sterling whether he would be content with such an arrangement, and Sterling replied that he would not. "I would not," added Tennyson emphatically. "I should consider that a liberty had been taken with me if I were made simply a means of ushering in something higher than myself."<sup>18</sup> Later in the poet's work there are, happily, evidences of peace attained at last. In a letter written in 1874 he says: "For I believe that the dead live, whatever pseudo-savants may say."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, he escaped from that mistake by which we blame our sorrows on to God and our sins on some diabolical enemy of God and man.

According to Nicolson, the problem which Tennyson set himself to solve was in its essence that of reconciling science

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<sup>17</sup>Frances Brookfield, The Cambridge "Apostles", p. 329.

<sup>18</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 330

with religion.

. . . For, whereas religious revelation remained where it was, the scientists evolved some new and startling revelation every few months. The vast majority of his contemporaries were confronted with the same dilemma. They desired to be liberal and broadminded; so did Tennyson. They were anxious not to be dismayed by the progress of science; Tennyson also felt that Science was both fruitful and important. They were determined not to lose their ultimate faith in a Supreme Power, and in the life after death; Tennyson shared and voiced this determination with passionate intensity.<sup>20</sup>

Another spirit came into poetry with the growth of scientific speculation, a spirit of doubt concerning the legitimacy of spiritual ideas and ideals. Over the fair dream of a world of light within this world of sense, a shadow of doubt was cast. To the new thought which came with science there was a lessening of faith in the spiritual as spiritual, and an increase of doubt concerning the ideal as something beyond the present apparent order of things. As yet no one can say what will be the final artistic and literary result of the movement toward a scientific speculation. That it has not been helpful to literature can now be said with perfect assurance, so far as its effect on poetry is concerned. George Cook remarks that "as yet science has given no inspiration, no grand themes, no

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 264

conception of life which is to them like a trumpet's call."<sup>21</sup> Theoretically, science would put no obstacles in the way of the poet; but practically it has acted as a check of the most serious kind. In an age when new speculative ardors are awakened in men by the doctrine of evolution, the poets turn back to Greece, to mediaeval life, or to the time of Chaucer, for their inspiration as for their themes. The new conception of the world which science has given us, working a vast change in our ideas about nature and man, must have a profound influence on the poets. That influence cannot at first be felt in any other manner than one of depression and exhaustion. "The scientific development of the eighteenth century was accompanied by weariness and weakness on the part of poetry. Every sign at the present time also indicates a lapse of poetic inspiration and a growth of the human spirit in the direction of the pictorial arts, prose fiction, and historic insight."<sup>22</sup> He accepts neither the revolutionary doctrines of the earlier years of the century nor the evolutionary doctrines of the present time.

He believes neither in the regenerated earth which man is to secure by blotting out the past, nor in the slow

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<sup>21</sup>Poets and Problems, p. 65.

<sup>22</sup>Cooke, Op. cit., p. 66.

evolution of a higher society by natural causes. The one increasing purpose he sees in history is the result of the united effort of God and man. A better time is surely coming in the future, "far away, not in our time," for change is the order in all things, change which leads to progress, -

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new,  
And God fulfills Himself in many ways."

The time of man's redemption from misery, vice, and ignorance, crawth nigh slowly, because God worketh in the world's order, now, and hitherto, and forever.

"This fine old world of ours is but a child  
Yet in the go-cart. Patience! Give it time  
To learn its limbs; there is a Hand that guides."<sup>23</sup>

The Idylls of the King most beautifully symbolizes the passing of the old order of the age which Tennyson so completely summed up and represented in his poetry. The last words of the King begin with a solemn charge in the music of the blank verse which is not to be paralleled in Milton or any other master of that great instrument. It is true, quoting Saintsbury,

. . . that the inner faithful, the sacred band of Tennysonians, grumbled a little that polish had been almost too much attended to; that there was a certain hardish mannerism glittering but cold, about the style; that there was noticeable a certain compromise in the ap-

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<sup>23</sup> Cooke, Op. cit., p. 104.



peal, a certain trimming of the sail to the popular breeze.<sup>24</sup>

These criticisms were not entirely without foundation, and they were more justified than their authors could know by the later installments of the poem, which, the latest not published until twenty-seven years later, rounded it off to the present bulk of twelve books. Another more pedantic in appearance but not entirely destitute of weight, was that which urged that in handling the Arthurian story, the author had, so to speak, "bastardized it," and had given neither mediaeval nor modern sentiment or colouring, but a sort of amalgamation of both.<sup>25</sup> Yet "the charm of the thing was so great, and the separate passages were so consummate, that even critics were loath to quarrel with such a gift."<sup>26</sup>

In Tennyson the sacred mount of Camelot rose into heights of symbolism. The mighty hall that Merlin built was built to the golden numbers of modern philosophy, with its four zones of sculpture:

"And in the lowest beasts are slaying men,

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<sup>24</sup>Cooke, Op. cit., p. 264

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 265

<sup>26</sup>Loc. cit.

And in the second men are slaying beasts,  
 And in the third are warriors, perfect men,  
 And in the fourth are men with growing wings."<sup>27</sup>

Arthur was the great figurehead of an allegorical system, and the hope of the world centered in him, as the sustainer of the moral order.

. . . His 'Last Great Battle in the West' is the most amazing prophecy in literature; it foretells in detail, physical and spiritual, the tragedy through which the world has been passing, and the hope of the end of wars, and the victory of the moral law is bound up in the corruption of the second coming of the King. To dismiss this great allegorical idea is as unworthy of a great poet, on the ground that it is too modern for Malory, was absurd enough; but it was even more absurd to criticize Tennyson for not making the King a replica of the human Lancelot. In the very nature of things, as Tennyson pointed out repeatedly, this King could only be represented as a king of objective Conscience, speaking not his own thought, but the highest thoughts of Lancelot and Guinevere themselves.<sup>28</sup>

Tennyson unfolds to us the real import of the Idylls in his words to the Queen, which he appends to the poem:

"Accept this old imperfect tale,  
 New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul."

These poems portray the conflict between the sensuous and the

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<sup>27</sup> Bayard Taylor, Critical Essays and Literary Notes, p. 182.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

spiritual man.<sup>29</sup> It may be said that the motif of the whole is to display the thought of a noble idea formed, and to a certain extent carried out, but thwarted again and again by selfishness and sin, and closing in apparent failure, but yet sowing the seed of truth and purity through the land.<sup>30</sup> Arthur Benson states that Arthur's object is "to establish law and order, civilization in the highest sense, a high standard of unselfish and noble life."<sup>31</sup> The attempt fails; his knights were meant to set a noble example of manliness, devotion and purity; but the court teems with scandal, and finally the evil and seditious elements are triumphant.<sup>32</sup>

"This noblest creation of Tennyson's genius," contends Richard Jones, "and the foundation of his highest fame, has been pronounced to be, not only the illustrious poet's great achievement, but also one of the greatest poetical creations of the century."<sup>33</sup> Of the first series of his poem Glad-

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<sup>29</sup>E. H. Sneath, The Mind of Tennyson, p. 155.

<sup>30</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup>Tennyson, p. 191.

<sup>32</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>33</sup>The Growth of the Idylls of the King, p. 9.

stone wrote in 1859, that "the chastity and moral elevation of this volume, perhaps unmatched throughout the circle of English literature in conjunction with an equal power, recalls the celestial strain of Dante."<sup>34</sup>

Quoting Saintsbury once more we read:

. . . The best passages of some of the later Idylls, notably those of The Holy Grail and The Last Tournament, were among the finest, not merely of the books, but of the poet. Nowhere has he caught the real, - the best spirit of the legends he has followed more happily; nowhere has he written more magnificent verse than in Percival's account of his constantly baffled quest and of Lancelot's visit to the 'enchanted towers of Carbon-ek.'<sup>35</sup>

Tennyson was great in the character and variety of his accomplishment, in the volume of it, and above all, in the extraordinarily sustained quality of his genius, and the length of time during which it dominated and pervaded the literature of his country. "The influences of Pope and Dryden were weak in force and merely external in effect, the influence of Byron was short-lived, that of Wordsworth was partial and limited, in comparison with the influence of Tennyson."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Jones, Op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 266.

The poet once told us that the song of the knights marching past the King at the marriage of Arthur was made one spring afternoon on Clapham Common as he walked along.

"Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll'd away!

Blow thro' the living world -- 'Let the King reign!"<sup>37</sup>

So sang the young knights in the first bright days of early chivalry.

"Clang, battle-ax and clash brand! Let the King  
reign,

The King will follow Christ and we the King."<sup>38</sup>

And then when the doom of evil spread, bringing not sorrow alone, but destruction in its train, not death only, but hopelessness and consternation, the song is finally changed into an echo of strange woe; we hear no shout of triumph, but the dim shocks of battle,

" . . . the crash

Of battle axe on shatter'd helms, and shrieks

After the Christ, of those who falling down

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<sup>37</sup> Lady I. C. Ritchie, Records of Tennyson, Ruskin, and the Brownings, p. 32.

<sup>38</sup> Loc. cit.

Look'd up for heaven, and only saw the mist."<sup>39</sup>

All is over with the fair court; Guinevere's golden head is low; she has fled to Almsbury.

Finally comes the conclusion, and the Passing of Arthur," and he vanishes as he came, in mystery, silently floating away upon the barge towards the East, whence all religions are said to come."<sup>40</sup>

In Thomas R. Slicer's Poet to Premier we read Mr. Gladstone's tribute:

We know not where to look in history or in letters for a nobler or more overpowering conception of man as he might be, than in 'Arthur.' Wherever he appears, it is as the great pillar of the moral order and the resplendent top of human excellence.<sup>41</sup>

The general view at that time was that God was a sort of oriental sovereign, sitting outside of the universe to watch it go, a kind of immeasurable clergyman whom some of them took at the same time for the devil. "Tennyson escaped from that mistake by which we blame our sorrows on to God and our sins on some diabolical enemy of God and man. He rises to a spiritual

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<sup>39</sup>Ritchie, Op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>40</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>41</sup>Slicer, Op. cit., p. 175.

eminence in The Passing of Arthur."<sup>42</sup> Tennyson goes on further about himself: "Yet it is true, that there are moments when the flesh is nothing to me, when I feel and know the flesh to be the vision of God, and the spirit of God, the only real and true."<sup>43</sup> Not how Browning treats the same thought. Tennyson says that "God and the soul are the only essential, the only real." That is a commonplace of spiritual minds who know that there are only two words in religion, God and the Soul.

. . . When Browning would deal with them apart he says: 'He at least believed in soul, was very sure of God.' Browning understood perfectly well that we are building bridges between these two all the time - the philosophy of religion, history of the philosophy of religion, theology of our outlook, whatever it may happen to be; but all these things are simply the effort to put supports under the bridges between God and the soul. When the flesh comes in, when the basic instincts of human life are treated, Browning says we are 'caught in this rose mesh of the flesh.' Browning takes man as he is. Tennyson promotes man, treats him as separate from the encasement of his spiritual nature, treats him in fact, as he never is. For man is always either 'caught in the rose mesh of the flesh' or has become a ghost.<sup>44</sup>

Tennyson continues:

Depend upon it, the spiritual is the real; it belongs to one more than hand and foot; you may tell me my hand and my foot are only imaginary, symbols of my existence,

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<sup>42</sup>Slicer, Op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

but you can never convince me that the 'I' is not the eternal reality, and the spiritual not the real part of me.<sup>45</sup>

This is Tennyson's own statement and has great significance because it is the essential and final truth with regard to human life. Everything else is instrument and organ; but the musician is not the organ, the scientist is not the instrument; the organ limits the musician's power and the instrument limits the scientist's inquiry; but the two are not to be confused in any sane mind. "These words," says his son, referring to this utterance of Tennyson, "he spoke with such passionate earnestness that a solemn silence fell on us as he left the room."<sup>46</sup>

As to the significance of the Idylls, Tennyson says: "Of course, Camelot, the city of shadowy places, is symbolical of human belief and institutions and the spiritual development of man."<sup>47</sup>

A question arises concerning the Lady of Shallot, - 'floated down to Camelot, 'dead'; how Lancelot saw her and said, 'She hath a lovely face,' -- Lancelot, the very embodiment of the forces of life that know only the texture of the flesh, - when you remember all these things, you can hardly find it consistent that this maiden, dead

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<sup>45</sup> Slicer, Op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>46</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.



of weariness, could float down, unconscious, to Camelot, if that was 'the growing institution and organization of the spiritual life.' Fabric does not hold together. If a living lady of Shalott, as sinful as you please, not weary, but worn out, not watching the shadows pass, but herself passes in all the fine instinct of her life, if she had lain prone in the shallop and floated down to Camelot, to the institutions of religion, she would have found them dead and of no help to her; she would have come to the city of the dead if they were the institutions of life; for it is the fact that sinful people who need them vitalize them for their needs, and good people vitalize them for people who need them.<sup>48</sup>

Yet there is not a single fact or incident in the Idylls, says Tennyson, "however seemingly mystical, which cannot be explained without mystery or allegory." "I hate," he says, "to be tied down to say this means that. There are always people who want meaning for everything."<sup>49</sup>

Tennyson never gave this common life his real thought. He was a democrat in thought and an aristocrat in fact. He was always trying to get down to the common people in his statements, but he came from the heights of class exclusiveness in terms of democracy.

There was little difference between Tennyson and Wordsworth - Wordsworth infinitely greater in moral power; Tennyson so concerned with the trappings of his poetic state that he would have scorned to write

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<sup>48</sup>Slicer, Op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>49</sup>Loc. cit.

so simple a thing as Wordsworth's Matthew. And yet there is power in Tennyson - power deserving of reverence and admiration.<sup>50</sup>

Tennyson portrays many different types of character, but he never asks the reader to forget that God made man in His own Image. Even when ruined by his sins, man still shows how great he is. Tennyson's conception of his true worth is indicated by the words of 'Harold' -

"The simple, silent, selfless man  
Is worth a world of tonguesters."<sup>51</sup>

"If In Memoriam" says Ritchie, "is the record of a human soul, the Idylls mean the history, not of one man or one generation, but of a whole cycle, of the faith of a nation falling and falling away into darkness."<sup>52</sup>

. . . The first "Idyll" and the last, I have heard Tennyson say, are intentionally more archaic than the others. The whole is the dream of a man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery, and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tabeland of life, and its struggle and performance.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Slicer, Op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>51</sup>Wm. C. Gordon, The Social Ideals of Alfred L. Tennyson, p. 66.

<sup>52</sup>Loc. cit.

As Dante spoke the largest and wisest thought of his time, and may be taken as a symbol of its spirit and aspirations, and Goethe of his, with George W. Cooke, we may say that "so may Tennyson be regarded as in some smaller measure the voice of his age in its deepest and truest spirit."<sup>54</sup>

Tennyson stood for certain great fundamental truths at a time when religious creeds were crumbling under the assaults of science. He held the doctrine of a personal immortality, and was not content to accept our present existence as a mere preparation for the life of more perfect beings. Indeed, he sought nobly to reconcile science with religion.

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<sup>54</sup>Cooke, Op. cit., p. 153.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONFLICT OF FAITH AND DOUBT IN TENNYSON

In his philosophic and religious tendencies Tennyson represents the idealistic movement, begun in Germany in the eighteenth century, in its later and English phases. He is not very near to Kant, Hegel, or Coleridge, but he shows close affinity with men who learned what the latter taught of Coleridge and his German predecessors. According to George Cooke, "he teaches idealism as tempered by science in its later and more agnostic phases. He has much to say of law and progress, but always with an idealistic interpretation."<sup>1</sup> When he sings, at the end of In Memoriam, of

"One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off divine event,  
To which the whole creation moves,"

he is not thinking of an evolution such as that described by Darwin and Spencer, but of one arising from a spiritual cause, and a directive purpose.<sup>2</sup> In Locksley Hall he presents the idealistic theory of development, caused by God's immanence in

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<sup>1</sup>Poets, and Problems, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

nature and humanity, not the scientific theory of evolution by natural selection and other physical causes.<sup>3</sup> This evolution is slowly going forward today in every phase of nature and life, for God is continually at work in the natural and moral order of the world.

From the speculative idea of progress, aided by wonderful investigations into the order of natural phenomena, grew the doctrine of evolution. The result has been a remarkable increase of confidence in historic continuity underlying all movements of humanity in every direction. There has followed an overthrowing of the revolutionary idea in politics, in speculative thought, and in literature. The past of mankind has been studied as never before. The effect on literature has been of great importance, leading to a sympathetic appreciation of the spirit of past times, and to a cultivation of the ideas expressed in the great periods of human thought.<sup>4</sup>

The main characteristics of Tennyson may be noted as ethical conception and classical execution; the latter being but the necessary concomitant and natural shadow of the former.

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<sup>3</sup>Cooke, Op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

The central sun of all Tennyson's writings is the heart; this is the reflection that lies in his deepest deeps. In Memoriam alone demonstrates Tennyson to possess the richest, purest, truest, natural heart, perhaps of any poet on record; and with this natural heart is involved what we name the whole ethical side of him. We know no poet that has ever displayed an equal sense of moral goodness in its two forms of greatness in man and purity in woman.<sup>5</sup>

In In Memoriam and other poems Tennyson touched with a hand so strong and sometimes so daring, upon the teaching of modern science, and yet he had spoken always so reverently of what modern civilization reverences, that the most opposite lessons were read from his utterances.

To one thinker it would seem that Tennyson had thrown himself boldly upon the very foremost wave of scientific thought. To another it would seem that Wordsworth was by temperament far more in touch with the new cosmogony than was Tennyson, who studied evolution more ardently than any poet since Lucretius. While Wordsworth, notwithstanding a conventional phrase here and there, had an apprehension of Nature without the everpresent idea of the Power behind her, Spinoza himself was not so 'God-intoxicated' a man as Tennyson.<sup>6</sup>

His son sets the question at rest in the following pregnant words:

. . . Assuredly Religion was no nebulous abstraction with him. He consistently emphasized his own belief in

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<sup>5</sup>James Stirling, Jerrold, Tennyson, and Macaulay, p. 109.

<sup>6</sup>Theodore-Watts-Dunston, Old Familiar Faces, p. 147.

what he called the Eternal Truths; in an Omnipotent, Omnipresent, and All-loving God, Who has revealed Himself through the human attribute of the highest self-sacrificing love, in the freedom of the human will, and in the immortality of the soul. But he asserted that, 'Nothing worthy proving can be proven,' and that even as to the great laws which are the basis of Science, 'We have but faith, we cannot know.' He dreaded the dogmatism of sects and rash definitions of God. 'I dare hardly name His Name,' he would say, and accordingly he names Him in The Ancient Sage, and The Nameless. 'But take away the belief in the self-conscious personality of God,' he said, 'and you take away the backbone of the world.' On God and God-like men we build our trust.<sup>7</sup>

Tennyson was unable to convince himself. The real interest of his religious poetry resides not in the compromise with which he sought to appease the anxieties of his generation, but in the doubts which he himself raised as to the validity of that compromise. "Indeed, we find him throughout his life endeavoring in anguish to rid himself of this obsession of Space and Time, of this crushing immensity of this dread of eventual annihilation."<sup>8</sup> "In In Memoriam, of which this theory of Love constitutes the central theme, he is confronted with the problem of how to reconcile the supremacy of the spirit of Love with the existence of evil."<sup>9</sup> Tennyson evolved the formula, the pa-

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<sup>7</sup>Theodore-Watts-Dunston, Op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 266.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 147

thetically inadequate formula, "that God must exist because the human heart felt an instinctive need of His existence; that the soul must be immortal because any other solution was unthinkable."<sup>10</sup>

It is quite demonstrable that the possession of a great and subtle instrument of language connotes in certain poets - and Tennyson is among them - a power to deal with certain profound ideas as no man could possibly deal with them without that instrument.

Inability to express certain fine shades of thought, inability to reach certain heights of expression, even for the most eminent men of science, remains nothing less than inability. And this is one of the explanations of the perpetual conflict between certain kinds of materialistic science in the nineteenth century and certain kinds of religion.<sup>11</sup>

The failure, on both sides, was in their inability to express the fullness of their own thought; and it was just here that Tennyson, in some degree, through the exquisite perfection of his instrument, came near to reconciling others. "When Tennyson speaks of a soul descending 'from the distance of the abyss, of tenfold complicated change,' he is expressing per-

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>11</sup>Alfred Noyes, Some Aspects of Modern Poetry, p. 180.



fectly an idea which in that form, is full of significance to every man of science; but has never been expressed in science or philosophy so precisely or so completely."<sup>12</sup> The possession of this instrument of language connoted in Tennyson the intellectual power that developed it, and was in turn developed by it.

It became an intellectual and spiritual instrument; and through it he was able to express gradations of thought, which, as he developed them, reacted upon his powers of thought; so that, one step leading to another, he was able to attain to heights of vision beyond the range of the philosopher whose exposition of this very development we so lately quoted. The music of which in Tennyson's early poems gave us that marvelous unstopped tone of the fen wind blowing over the reeds, begins with In Memoriam to soar into loftier regions.<sup>13</sup>

Tennyson's careful study of science naturally made him a firm adherent of the doctrine of evolution. He believed every man to be "the heir of all ages in the foremost files of time," as we read in Locksley Hall.

Again, in In Memoriam we read:

"nothing lost to men;  
So that still garden of the souls  
In many a figured leaf enrolls  
The total world since life began."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Noyes, Op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>14</sup>William Gordon, The Social Ideals of Alfred L. Tennyson, p. 70.

In Maud we find "Many a million of ages have gone to the making of man," and these ages of making indicate the value of the product. Science has in its vast conceptions tended to belittle man. He is lost in the vast cosmic world. The poet recalls us to the truth that the cosmic forces are focused upon the human being. The making of a man by evolution is a slow process, but it gives hope. It works out the beast, and lets the ape and tiger die. The great zones of sculpture that girded the hall of Camelot with their mystic symbols represent four stages in the progress of man.

"In the lowest beasts are slaying men,  
 And in the second men are slaying beasts,  
 And on the third are warriors, perfect men,  
 And on the fourth are men with growing wings;"

we read in The Holy Grail.<sup>15</sup> Now "we are far from the noon of men, there is time for the race to grow." Tennyson's whole philosophy of the onward march of man from the lowest level up to the summit of his grandest destiny is summed up in The Making of Man:

"Where is one that, born of woman,  
 Altogether can escape  
 From the lower world within him,

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<sup>15</sup>Gordon, Op. cit., p. 70.

moods of tiger, or of ape?  
 Man as yet is being made, and  
   ere the crowning Age of ages,  
 Shall not aeon after aeon pass  
   and touch him into shape?  
 All about him shadows still, but,  
   while the races flower and fade,  
 Prophet-eyes may catch a glory, slowly  
   gaining on the shade,  
 Till the peoples all are one, and  
   all their voices blend in choric  
 Hallelujah to the Maker - 'It is finished -  
   Man is made.'<sup>16</sup>

This triumphant message of the poet, philosopher, and idealist  
 prophesies the increasing glory of the individual as well as  
 that of the race.<sup>17</sup>

According to Tennyson Man is a spirit dwelling in a  
 body. He is a product of evolution and carries in himself the  
 history of the past; yet he is free and "strong in will, to  
 strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield." He has aspira-  
 tions the highest, hopes the grandest, and comes to self-  
 realization largely through action in service of his fellow-  
 men. He possesses reason and is by nature a doubter; yet he is  
 largely influenced by emotions, conventions, nature, and en-  
 vironment. He is capable of education, longs for knowledge,

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<sup>16</sup>Gordon, Op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>17</sup>Loc. cit.

purity, love. He is at once capable of the sublimest heroism in the performance of duty, and of most awful degeneration through selfishness and sin. Even failure nobly used may become a stepping stone in his progress. Faith, obedience, sorrow, suffering, struggle, self-sacrifice, each in its own way ministers to the advancement and highest achievement of the man whose noble destiny is proclaimed by his wondrous possibilities. That destiny is so great that it passes the bounds of earth and finds its perfect fulfilment only in the immortal life. This is the man of whom the poet thinks and sings, the man who puts himself into all his social compacts in family, government, church, and society. This is the unit which remains constant in every computation of social values.<sup>18</sup>

If ever the term "morbid" could have been applied to Tennyson, it would have been in the years immediately following Hallam's death. But the application would have been unjust. True, he was unhappy and was doing nothing. He was so poor that he sold his Chancellor's prize gold medal and he did not

"Scan his whole horizon

In quest of what he could clap years on,"

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<sup>18</sup>Gordon, Op. cit., p. 71.

in the way of money-making, the normal attitude of all men. A careless observer would have thought that the poet was dawdling. But he dwelt in no Castle of Indolence; he studied, composed, corrected verses. Like Sir Walter in Liddesdale, "He was making himself a' the time." He did not neglect the movements of the great world in that dawn of discontent with the philosophy of commercialism.<sup>19</sup>

Edgar Allen Poe declared that he regarded Tennyson as the great poet, in fact the greatest poet that ever lived. Certainly he is a great poet of the century, a master of literary workmanship. He touches us at great depths because of his understanding of human nature. The yearning of human love, and the sense of the Infinite go hand in hand with him. It is because he is a religious poet, that he is the most representative poet of our time.<sup>20</sup>

. . . Whatever may be said to the contrary by shallow unbelievers, our time is a time, not of growing unbelief, but of growing faith, and the poets who have greatest influence and a clear title to immortality are those who deal most with that which is immortal in man.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Lang, Alfred Tennyson, p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> Augustus Strong, The Great Poets and Their Theology, p. 522.

<sup>21</sup> Loc. cit.

"It is because Tennyson has seen the relation of nature and of man to the ineffable and eternal order, that he has commanded the affection and reverence of the world."<sup>22</sup>

It was on September 15, 1823, that Arthur Hallam died. Unheralded by sign or symptom of disease, the news fell like a thunderbolt from a serene sky. Tennyson's and Hallam's love had been "passing the love of woman." A blow like this drives a man on the rocks of the ultimate, the insoluble problems of destiny. "Is this the end?" Andrew Lang remarks, but

. . . nourished as on the milk of lions, on the elevating and strengthening doctrines of popular science, trained from childhood to forego hope and attend evening lectures, the young critics of our generation find Tennyson a weakling because he had hopes and fears concerning the ultimate renewal of what was more than half his life - his friendship.<sup>23</sup>

"That faith I fain would keep,  
That hope I'll not forego;  
Eternal be the sleep  
Unless to waken so,"

wrote Lockhart, and the verses echoed ceaselessly in the widowed heart of Carlyle.<sup>24</sup> These men were not children of cow-

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<sup>22</sup>Strong, Op. cit., p. 523

<sup>23</sup>Alfred Tennyson, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup>Lang, Op. cit., p. 31.

ards, though they dreamed and hoped, and feared. We ought to make allowance for failings incident to an age not yet fully enlightened by popular science, and still undivorced from spiritual ideas that are as old as the human race, and perhaps not likely to perish while that race exists. At times the scientific men have been mistaken, especially when they have declined to examine evidence, as in this problem of the transcendental nature of the human spirit they usually do. At all events Tennyson was unconvinced that death is the end, and shortly after the fatal tidings arrived from Vienna, he began to write fragments in verse, precluding to the poem In Memoriam.<sup>25</sup> He also began in a mood of great misery, The Two Voices, or Thoughts of a Suicide. The poem seems to have been partly accomplished by 1834, when Spedding commented on it, and on the beautiful Sir Galahad, intended for something of a male counterpart to St. Agnes. The Morte d'Arthur Tennyson then thought "the best thing I have managed lately."<sup>26</sup>

The death of Arthur Hallam made real and personal for Tennyson an experience which, before, he had sensed intuitive-

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<sup>25</sup>Lang, Op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>26</sup>Loc. cit.

ly. It was an experience fitted to develop the qualities characteristic in their morbidity, which were most remarkable in him. Coming as it did, during the period of mental and physical maturation, it naturally reacted upon and enhanced the capacity for intellectual self-torment which, in any case must have led Tennyson to suffer acutely in the age to which he was born.<sup>27</sup> "Private sorrow becomes, therefore, naturally associated with the conflict between faith and non-faith, which exercised the literary minds of the first half of the nineteenth century."<sup>28</sup> Moreover, it is easy for a generation which has passed either to the mundane pastures of paganism or into the folds of emotional ethics to belittle the agonies of mind into which its grandparents were thrown by the clash between physical science and ecclesiastical dogma. Indeed, Lang tells us that

. . . immortality is a matter of taste; in most western countries there are almost as many conceptions of life after death as there are individuals; and thought, perhaps, in the world as a whole, - the majority of civilized men still accept the programs of religious dogma, there is little doubt that a nearly equal minority is either definitely finalist or not given to think-

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<sup>27</sup> Lang, Op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Loc. cit.



ing of the matter at all.<sup>29</sup>

In Memoriam opens with the purely personal incidents of Hallam's death, the expression of an individual and particular sorrow. Tennyson's longing for the dead man leads him to seek the consolation of an ultimate reunion, but this solace is threatened by the seeming evidence which science brings against personal survival. The poem reached its climax with the realization of the awful personal blank which renunciation of the belief in human immortality must bring, and two or three stanzas have a note of maddened pathos.<sup>30</sup> But "Tennyson realizes also that, for him the repetition of his questions must bring madness, and the poem passes on to the construction of a working philosophy based on the never-failing presence of a sense of order in the universe."<sup>31</sup> As time passes, "regret lessens, but love grows, and finally he achieves a spiritual though mute consciousness of his friend, and closes the poem with the statement of faith established in the ultimate triumph of good."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>30</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

Mr. Fausset maintains that, though Tennyson performed a great service for his generation by celebrating man's instructive apprehension of spirit at a time when all evidence of other than motivial values in the universe was obscured by the bewilderingly sudden assertions of physical science, yet his faith was 'but a restatement of the old belief in Divine Providence, blindly held by the simple, with certain harmless scientific generalities grafted on to it.'<sup>33</sup>

Tennyson clung to the principles which he enunciated in In Memoriam, not so much because he discovered them for himself, but because they were those upon which "the wisest and best have rested through the ages."<sup>34</sup> This weakness of compromise Mr. Fausset finds not only in the doctrine of the poem, but in the treatment of its main theme.

'The poet,' he says, 'need not or rather must not be a disputant, but he must possess the passionate insight which pierces immediately to the truth of things beyond dispute.'<sup>35</sup>

Fausset further maintains that Tennyson's feeling lacked concentration, power, and particularity, and what is in his opinion most important, 'a fiery intellectuality.'<sup>36</sup> However, "the unique excellence of the poem lies not in the result of the un-

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<sup>33</sup>Lang, Op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

happy conflict which much of it describes, but in the poetic embodiment given to the conflict itself."<sup>37</sup>

Gladstone tells us that In Memoriam "is perhaps the richest oblation ever offered by the affections of Friendship at the tomb of the departed."<sup>38</sup> In the series of meditations which compose it, and which follow in long series without weariness or sameness, the poet never moves away a step from the grave of his friend, but while encircling it, has always a new point of view. Strength of love, depths of grief, aching sense of loss, have driven forth as it were, on a quest of consolation, and he asks of nature, thought, religion, in a hundred forms, which a rich and varied imagination continually suggests, but all of them connected by one central point, the recollection of the dead. Tennyson prosecutes this work in manly recognition of the fruit and profit even of baffled love, in noble suggestions of the future, in heart-soothing and heart-chastening thoughts of what the dead was and of what he is, and of what one who has been, and therefore still is, in near con-

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<sup>37</sup> Tennyson, A Modern Portrait, p. 56.

<sup>38</sup> "Gladstone on Tennyson," Quarterly Review, (October, 1859), p. 4.

tact with him is bound to be.<sup>39</sup> The whole movement of the poet is between the mourner and the mourned; it may be called one long soliloquy, but it has this mark of greatness, that, though the singer is himself a large part of the subject, it never degenerates into egotism - for he speaks typically on behalf of humanity at large, and in his own name, like Dante on his mystic journey, teaches deep lessons of life and conscience to us all.<sup>40</sup>

"In Memoriam," says George Cooke, "reflects the mood and thought of the time as in a mirror."<sup>41</sup> He further essays:

Its themes are the highest which can ever exercise the mind of man. Tennyson rises through doubt to confident faith; a faith resting not on tradition and history, but on the evidences of God's manifestation of Himself in nature, and on the testimony of the soul to its own reality and worth. It is a poem for serious and earnest minds, for those who would see the world as it is, and yet who would walk as if in the presence of that majesty of mystery which fills the earth and heaven with its subtle presence. Its spirit cleaves to one's thought, and its temper diffuses itself thru one's being.<sup>42</sup>

All through the seventeen years of its writing, a

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<sup>39</sup>Gladstone, Op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>40</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

soul knowing "its own bitterness," wrapped in profound meditation, tried manfully to beat back its own scepticism by patient, earnest, inquiry into the rational grounds for believing that God is; that He is personal; that He is essential Justice and Love; that life, with its love and duty, has intrinsic worth and meaning; that destiny is something loftier than the dust. It was a sublime struggle, and a triumphant outcome, as the prologue testifies.<sup>43</sup> In the prologue which was written practically after the rest of the poem was completed, and which in a sense, seems to sum up his belief after many years of struggle with doubt, he says: "There is a domain of knowledge and a domain of faith. These are not contradictory. The domain of faith merely lies beyond the reach of knowledge. Knowledge is of things we see."<sup>44</sup> The entire prologue to In Memoriam declares God as a personal being to be revealed to us by faith. When we try to further determine the nature of God as Love, we find our poet holding the same position. God's nature as Love is not a matter of knowledge, but of faith.

. . . Tennyson struggled with this question also in the light of what science and philosophy had to say. He

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<sup>43</sup>E. H. Sneath, The Mind of Tennyson, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

was greatly interested in the theory of organic evolution, and in the Darwinian nature of it. This "struggle of existence," with its dreadful suffering, is an awful fact. Nature, in her onward course, has left a trail of blood reaching far back into the ages. Tennyson was profoundly impressed by this fact. He made his appeal to Nature to find out whether the great author of Nature is essential Love.<sup>45</sup>

In Memoriam was not precisely planned. It had no conscious scheme; it is rather a garden of a sorrowing spirit, set with herbs of remembrance and regret, than a single tree, branching into sombre shade from a single stem. Arthur Benson says that much has been said about the Christian teaching of In Memoriam. Tennyson himself used to say when he was questioned about his Christian belief that his answer was, "You will find it in In Memoriam, where I have written it."<sup>46</sup> There is nothing to justify the idea that Tennyson felt Christianity to be the final revelation made to man.

If this poem stood alone, I think it might be maintained that it was a confession of faith; but I believe that taking it in conjunction with other poems, Tennyson made it doubtful on purpose, and left it ambiguous, not because he wanted to pose as a more definite Christian than he was, but because he had the deepest sympathy with the Christian spirit, and had no intention of alienating Christian readers by stating what I believe to be

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>46</sup>Tennyson, p. 173.

the fact, that he looked behind and beyond the Christian scheme of dogma for his own faith.<sup>47</sup>

Considering the allusion to Christianity in the poem, Benson further states that "it is clear that though he approached his subject with a passionate faith in God, and the deepest religious feeling, that faith cannot definitely be called a Christian faith, except in the way that rationalists would define Christianity, as a revelation of God without an historical basis."<sup>48</sup>

According to Benson, one point seems to be absolutely conclusive. "There is not an allusion in the whole poem to the Resurrection, the cardinal belief of Christianity, the very foundation-stone of Christian belief; the very essence of consolation, of triumph over death, of final victory."<sup>49</sup> It is impossible that one who was a Christian in the strictest sense should not have recurred again and again to this thought in a poem which deals from first to last with death and hope.

. . . This seems to outweigh all positive testimony; if the Resurrection had been part of the vital faith of

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

the poet, it must have been the very crown and sum of his sorrowing hopes, but if it was to him rather a hope than a belief, then In Memoriam alone entitles him to be called, in the ordinary acceptance of the word, a Christian poet.<sup>50</sup>

As the poet himself tells us, "In Memoriam is a Divina Commedia, a meditative poem, wherein thought on death, man's destiny, future life, and the purposes of the Creator, gradually lead up to Faith in His Goodness, and a sober sense of happiness in Resignation and love."<sup>51</sup> This makes it a real Divina Commedia - a bona-fide effort to "assert Eternal Providence and justify the ways of God to man." But then In Memoriam is a Divine Comedy, or a Paradise Lost. Putting aside the fact that Tennyson is not a Dante or a Milton, and that his graceful elegies do not pretend to vie with the mighty imagination of these immortal visions, can it be said that either the theology or the philosophy of the poem is new, original, with an independent force and depth of their own? Surely not. They are exquisitely graceful restatements of the current theology of the broad-Churchman of the school of F. D. Maurice and Jowett - a combination of Maurice's somewhat illogical piety with Jowett's philosophy of mystification. As the Darwinian

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<sup>50</sup>Benson, Op. cit., p. 178.

<sup>51</sup>Frederic Harrison, Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill and Other Literary Estimates, p. 10.



evolutionary theories discussed are not the original discoveries of the poet in natural science, so the theological and metaphysical problems are not original contributions to theology or philosophy. They are an admirably tuneful versification of ideas current in the religious and learned world.<sup>52</sup>

While Lycidas and Adonais use the thought of death as their groundwork, In Memoriam takes it as a starting point. "It is an inquiry after the real nature of death, and especially of the mystery beyond death and beyond the world of sense, as a progress to results which it verifies step by step, that In Memoriam demonstrates its character as more than a mere elegy."<sup>53</sup>

. . . The distinguishing feature lies beyond the domain of the elegy in its character of inquiry, of progress to the solution of doubts; in its reverent interrogation of the mystery beyond death, and its significance for dead and living.<sup>54</sup>

Like Shakespeare's sonnets, In Memoriam celebrates a friendship that was "wonderful, passing the love of women." But this, as it existed in the present world, is in In Memoriam only

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<sup>52</sup>Harrison, Op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>53</sup>John F. Genung, Tennyson's In Memoriam, p. 36.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

the starting point. It is beyond this, in the portrayal of a love that exists unimpaired by bereavement, of a love that Death has so idealized that its further steps must be traced in a holy region accessible only to faith, that the distinctive character of In Memoriam is to be found. "It exists for the purpose of not merely memorializing love, but of interpreting its religious depths."<sup>55</sup>

In the Nation, of January 28, 1909, there is to be found an interesting letter among the editor's notes, showing how the men who were leading English thought in those days felt toward the new poem:

'These lines,' writes Professor Henry Sidgwick, of one of the stanzas that express Tennyson's trust in the father-hand of God through all the questionings of science - 'lines I can never read without tears. I feel in them the indestructible and inalienable minimum of faith which humanity cannot give up because it is necessary for life; and which I know that I at least, so far as the man in me is deeper than the methodical thinker, cannot give up.'<sup>56</sup>

Sidgwick was not an ordinary man. He was, in fact, one of the keenest and hardest-headed thinkers of those days, and these tears of his were no cheap contribution of sentiment, but rose

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<sup>55</sup>Genung, Op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>56</sup>Loc. cit.

from the deepest wells of trouble. More tells us "that many men still living can remember the dismay and the sense of homelessness that came upon the trusting mind of England when it became aware of a growing hostility between the new school of science and the established creed."<sup>57</sup> When Arthur Hallam died in 1833, Darwin was making his first memorable voyage of investigation on the Beagle, and while Tennyson was elaborating his grief in long-linked sweetness, Darwin was writing that "first-notebook on Transmutation of Species," which was developed in the "Origin of Species," in 1859.<sup>58</sup>

. . . The alarm of the church over the assimilation of man and monkey, the bitter fight between Huxley and Wilberforce, and between Huxley and Gladstone - all this is well known, though the tumult of the fray begins to sound in our ears as distant as the battles about Troy.<sup>59</sup>

To these currents of thought Tennyson was quickly responsive. Without hesitation he accepted the new point of view for his In Memoriam, and those who were leading the revolution felt this and accepted enthusiastically a recruit from the

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<sup>57</sup>P. E. More, "Poet Who Represents National Life," The Nation, 88-32.

<sup>58</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>59</sup>Op. cit., p. 34.

writers of the imagination, who were commonly arrayed against them. It is unnecessary to point out the many passages of the poem in which the law of evolution, the survival of the fittest, and man's kinship to the ape were clearly hinted before Darwin had definitely formulated them in his epoch-making book.

' . . . What more impressed men like Sidgwick,' says More, 'was the fact that Tennyson felt with them the terrifying doubts awakened by this conception of man as part of a vast mechanism, but still clung to the creed which humanity cannot give up, because it is necessary for life.'<sup>60</sup>

Tennyson found this minimum of faith, not outside of the new science, but at its very heart. He does at times cry out against the harsher hypothesis, declaring that we are not magnetic mockeries, or only cunning casts in clay, but the gist of confidence, and what made him the spokesman of the age, was in bold completion of evolution by the theory of indefinite progress and by a vision of some magnificent consummation wherein the sacrifices of the present were to be compensated somehow, somewhere. This reconciliation of dogma and science, this re-discovery of a father near at hand, within the inexorable law of evolution, this vision of an eternal state to be reached in the progress of time -

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<sup>60</sup>More, Op. cit., p. 34.

"That God, which ever lives and loves,  
 One God, one Law, one Element,  
 And one far-off Divine Event,  
 To which the whole creation moves, -"

all this, like the prettiness which characterized the painting of the age, and Tennyson's non-religious verse, is what we have come to call the Victorian compromise.<sup>61</sup>

It is difficult to estimate to what extent Tennyson moulded or was moulded by the opinion of his age. It is the opinion of Fausset that "Tennyson may be said to be so far original as to have articulated the views on faith and doubt in very representative terms at least ten years before they were the staple utterance of educated opinion, and in particular of a group of progressive minded anglican clergymen."<sup>62</sup> It was not until Darwin's Origin of Species that men became acutely conscious of a problem, and this did not occur until 1859.

Tennyson was among the first to realize the vital and disordering infringement that a physical, as distinct from a philosophical theory of evolution was to make upon religious sentiment; and his foresight was founded

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<sup>61</sup>H. I'A. Fausset, Tennyson, A Modern Portrait, p.148.

<sup>62</sup>Loc. cit.

upon no more convincing evidence than Robert Chambers' far from scientific 'Vestiges of Creation,' also upon a general interest in physics, astronomy and anthropology. But if he attempted to 'lay the spectres of the mind' before either he or others had sufficient evidence to estimate their strength, his prevision of the coming dilemma was astonishingly accurate, and mere dates compel us to suppose that the theology of such Broad Churchmen as F. D. Maurice and Jowett, was derived, if derived at all, from him.<sup>63</sup>

It cannot be said that either Tennyson or they honestly fronted the attack of science and routed it. Circumstances did not allow them to do that; the assault of mind upon unexamined faith was too sudden. Yet, in the light of our day, they did something perhaps more important. They created a bridge upon which men, with their sacred heritage of humanity and religion could stand, if uncomfortably, until the threatening flood of materialism had begun to subside; they discovered a compromise, to which wise and ignorant alike could cling, until they learned that the world of human spirit was, in its highest realization, independent of that of matter:

"The hills are shadows, and they flow  
From form to form, and nothing stands;  
They melt like mist, the solid lands,  
Like clouds they shape themselves and go.  
But in my spirit will I dwell  
And dream my dream, and hold it true. . ."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Fausset, Op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>64</sup>Loc. cit.

It was no small achievement to render faith plausible for the time by a superficial absolution of science. In so doing Tennyson possibly "preserved his generation from being split up into two armed camps of fanatics, the one excommunicating science, the other denouncing not only the superstitious but the eternities of religion."<sup>65</sup> This was indeed to prove noble service to an age which, in spite of the moral support of such temperate idealism, was only too ready to prostrate its human spirit before the laws of physical nature, and the science which laboriously catalogued them.

Tennyson, in In Memoriam threw himself upon the foremost wave of scientific thought. Slowly he brought himself through the anguish of his obsession concerning Space and Time, of possible annihilation, and evolved the pathetic formula that God must exist because the human heart felt an instinctive need of His Existence. Again, he reflects the moods of thought of the time, and arrives at the conclusion that since faith and love exist, the only reasonable conclusion is hope in an Infinite Being, God.

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<sup>65</sup>Fausset, Op. cit., p. 150.

CHAPTER V  
TENNYSON THE MAN

Tennyson would have been a great man though he had never written a verse. He had the nobility, the strength, the individuality, and the complacency of greatness. Brookfield tells us that "he had also the presence of a great man; he was strikingly handsome, as all the world knows, splendid of face and strong of limb."<sup>1</sup> Carlyle describes him as "one of the finest looking men in the world," and again as "a life-guardsmen spoilt by making poetry."<sup>2</sup>

Tennyson was as close to the educated middleclass men and women of his time as the family clergyman. That he was ahead of his age on many points on which this could not be said of the family clergyman, one need not dispute. Every representative man is ahead of his age a little, but not enough to be beyond the reach of the sympathies of ordinary people.<sup>3</sup> His message and his song sprang from the same vision. His poems, as a whole, show one of the most marked tendencies of his time

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<sup>1</sup>The Cambridge "Apostles," p. 308.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Lynd, The Art of Letters, p. 134.



in a large degree. His has been an age of inclusion, and comprehension, not intense and passionate, but generous and wide-seeing. He has written many kinds of verse, has been in sympathy with many forms of thought and life, and has taught that truth is not of party or sect. A lyric, a descriptive, and a dramatic poet, he has drawn his inspiration alike from man, nature, and tradition. Indeed, George Cooke says, "Most truly a lyric poet, he has seen in man the subject of supreme interest in his mind, and in sympathy with man he has found the deepest stirrings of his emotions."<sup>4</sup>

Poe, who never lacked the courage of his convictions, proclaimed the superiority of Tennyson to all the poets of his generation. His conclusions were based largely upon the poems found in the edition of 1842. It went far beyond what most admirers were then willing to go, or at least were permitted to go in their published utterance. He wrote:

For Tennyson, as a man imbued with the richest and rarest poetic impulses, we have an admiration - a reverence unbounded. His Morte d'Arthur, his Locksley Hall, his Sleeping Beauty, his Lady of Shalott, his Lotos-Eaters, his Oenone, and many other poems, are not surpassed in all that gives to poetry its distinctive value, by the composition of anyone living or dead. - A year later - 'I am not sure,' he wrote 'that Tennyson

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<sup>4</sup> Poets and Problems, p. 104.

is not the greatest of poets.' The uncertainty attending the public conception of the term 'poet' alone prevents me from demonstrating that he is.' -- Again - 'In perfect sincerity I regard him as the noblest poet that ever lived.'<sup>5</sup>

Tennyson endeavored consciously to express the physical and intellectual rhythms which were being shaped by railways and the growth of scientific theories. The actual England of today finds in him a genuine reflection of its being and thought. It is this sympathy with life as he has known it, in all classes of English society, which give to his poetry its genuine merit in no small degree. Quoting Cooke, we read:

. . . He does not act as the voice and interpreter of a class, as Burns did. It is the English people as a nation he speaks for, whose life is the burden of his song, and whose hopes guide and inspire him. England triumphant by land and sea, pushing its enterprise into all quarters of the globe, growing in hope and solid comfort, becoming more refined, tasteful, and intelligent. It is this England of peace, prosperity and reform he has found himself in sympathy with, and which find in his poetry the sentiments and sympathies for which it craves.<sup>6</sup>

Tennyson sings of the loves and hopes and sorrows and burdens of men. There is pathos and tenderness in his poetry; the passion and energy of a strong man, and the sympa-

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas Lounsbury, The Life and Times of Tennyson, p. 461.

<sup>6</sup>Cooke, Op. cit., p. 120.

thy of one who loves his fellows. He delights in the simple duties and experiences and sentiment of men in cot and hall, city mansion or lone mansion. Again quoting from Cooke - "He sings of Enoch Arden, The Miller's Daughter, The Land of Bunleigh, and the fair women of his dream, with sympathy for each alike, because of his humanity and his life-experience."<sup>7</sup> He is the poet of life, and hope, who knows it is life and not death for which the men of his time are parting with eager anticipation.<sup>8</sup>

When we seek the chief characteristics of Tennyson, we find it in these lines:

"'Tis life whereof our nerves are scant,  
More life and fuller that we want."<sup>9</sup>

Not theories, not creeds, not forms of government, has he sought as a man and poet, but to realize life in some larger and diviner fashion, and to make it one with all that is beautiful, true, and good.

. . . He is the poet of manly joy, and of a vigorous sense of the worth of life. It is life on earth and among men he delights in; its sentiments, aspirations,

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<sup>7</sup>Cooke, Op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>8</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

and affections are those which win the suffrages of his thought. The life of this present time he would make greater in thought, fresher in spirit, nobler in aim; and he would bring to it the motives of an ideal faith in humanity.<sup>10</sup>

Man, in all the round of his human experiences, is the theme of Tennyson's verse, a theme often handled on the level of each day's most urgent need for hope, courage, and love. Life is to him full of infinite riches, and of these he has gathered such as he felt would best serve the ends of his own being and the good of the world.<sup>11</sup>

Gilbert Chesterton says that "the attempts which have been made to discredit the poetical position of Tennyson are in the main dictated by an entire misunderstanding of the nature of poetry."<sup>12</sup> When critics like Mathew Arnold, for example suggest that his poetry is deficient in elaborate thought, they only prove as Arnold proved, that they themselves could never be great poets. It is no valid accusation against a poet that the sentiment be expressed in commonplace. "Poetry," says Chesterton, "is always commonplace; it is vulgar in the noblest

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<sup>10</sup> Cooke, Op. cit., p. 129.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>12</sup> Varied Types, p. 250.

sense of that noble word."<sup>13</sup>

Unless a man can make the same kind of ringing appeal to absolute and admitted sentiments, made by a popular orator, he has lost touch with emotional literature. Unless he is to some extent a demagogue, he cannot be a poet. A man who expresses in poetry new and strange and undiscovered emotions is not a poet; he is a brain specialist.

Tennyson can never be discredited before any serious tribunal of criticism because the sentiments and thought to which he dedicates himself are those sentiments and thought which occur to anyone. These are the peculiar province of poetry; poetry, like religion, is a democratic thing, even if it pretends the contrary.<sup>14</sup>

The faults of Tennyson, so far as they exist, were not half so much in the common character of his sentiments as in the arrogant perfection of his workmanship.<sup>15</sup>

Tennyson's work, disencumbered of all that uninteresting accretion which he had inherited or copied, resolves itself like that of any other man of genius, into those things which he really inaugurated. Underneath all his exterior of polished and polite rectitude there was in him a genuine fire of novel-

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<sup>13</sup>Varied Types, p. 250.

<sup>14</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

ty; only that, like all the able men of his period, he disguised revolution under the name of evolution. He is only a very shallow critic who cannot see an eternal rebel in the heart of the Conservative.<sup>16</sup>

Tennyson had certain absolutely personal ideas, as much his own as the ideas of Browning or Meredith, though they were fewer in number. One of these, for example, was the fact that he was the first of all poets to attempt to treat poetically that vast and monstrous vision of fact which science had recently revealed to mankind. Scientific discoveries seem commonly fables, as fantastic in the ears of poets as poems in the ears of men of science. The poet is always a Ptolemaist; for him the sun still rises and the earth stands still. To quote Chesterton once more -

. . . Tennyson really worked the essence of modern science into his poetical constitution, so that its appealing birds and frightful flowers were really part of his literary imagery. To him, blind and brutal monster, the products of the wild babyhood of the Universe, were as the daisies and the nightingales were to Keats; He absolutely realized the great literary paradox mentioned in the Book of Job; 'He saw Behemot and he played with him as with a bird.'<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Chesterton, Op. cit., p. 252.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

Instances of this would not be difficult to find. But the tests of poetry are those instances in which this outrageous scientific phraseology becomes natural and unconscious. Tennyson wrote one of his own exquisite lyrics describing the exultation of a lover on the evening before his bridal day. This would be an occasion, if ever there was one, for falling back on those ancient and assured falsehoods of the doomed heaven and the flat earth in which generations of poets have made us feel at home. We can imagine the poet in such a lyric saluting the setting sun and prophesying the sun's resurrection. There is something extraordinarily typical of Tennyson's scientific faith in the lines -

"Move eastward, happy earth, and leave  
Yon orange sunset waning slow."<sup>18</sup>

Rivers have often been commanded to flow by poets, and the flowers to blossom in their seasons, and both were doubtless grateful for the permission. But "the terrestrial globe of science has only twice, so far as we know, been encouraged in poetry to continue its course, one instance being that of this poem, and the other the incomparable Address to the Terrestrial

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<sup>18</sup>Chesterton, Op. cit., p. 253.

Globe, in the Bab Ballads."19

Tennyson belonged undoubtedly, to a period in which men had queer ideas of the antagonism of science and religion, the period in which the Missing Link was really missing. But "his hold upon the old realities of existence never wavered; he was the apostle of the sanctity of laws, of the sanctity of customs, above all, like every poet, he was the apostle of the sanctity of words."20

Saintsbury says that

. . . Tennyson had justified that return to nature - of which the danger was that it should become as conventional, as cut and dried, as the generalizing away from nature which had preceded it - to a pitch, not merely by an infinity of fresh and felt observations, but by invariably touching these observations with the necessary point of generalization itself.<sup>21</sup>

Tennyson accepts the questioning spirit of his time so far as it doubts the old creeds in their cruder teachings; but he sees underneath the stumbling words and the broken affirmations, a truth sublime and substantial, and to this he ever holds. Science he knows in its larger and truth-seeking

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<sup>19</sup> Chesterton, Op. cit., p. 254.

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

<sup>21</sup> A History of Nineteenth Century Literature, p. 132.



spirit; but its mockery and its spirit of destruction he will not heed. He looks patiently into all which modern thought has to say about man, his origin, his destiny; but he will not accept the materialistic conclusion with which so many are fascinated. "To him," says Cooke, "the soul is its own witness, its own defense."<sup>22</sup> The struggle of existence, the transformations of force, do not appeal to him:

"I think we are not wholly brain,  
Magnetic mockeries; not in vain,  
Like Paul with beasts, I fought with Death."<sup>23</sup>

Tennyson's mission seems to have been the witnessing to and the insisting on, the true conception of law. His poetry is a perpetual "Sursum Corda," ever lifting up our hearts to what is noble and pure, and to the Eternal Source of all nobleness and all purity. He has told us in lines unsurpassed for calm and majesty, how "The old order changeth, giving place to the new."

. . . Yes, the old order changeth. We live amid a dust of systems and of creeds. To Tennyson one thing at all events was clear; that neither worthy life for

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<sup>22</sup> Cooke, Op. cit., p. 169.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

the individual nor social health for the body politic is possible unless we live by something higher than ascertained sequences or co-ordinations of phenomena; unless we appeal to some holier spring of action, than the desire of a remembered pleasure.<sup>24</sup>

"This ever-changing world of changeless law," he sings in one of his poems. Amid the constant flux of all things, the law of the universe does not change. It is necessary, immutable, absolute, and eternal. Nor does the power of Man's will change:

". . . A power to make

This ever changing world of circumstance,

In changing, chime with never changing law."<sup>25</sup>

In closing may we say with Joseph Rylance, - "Tennyson never harnessed his genius to the chariot of an ignoble triumph, never fawned to caste, or stage, or station; never shaped a phrase in glorification of even questionable honor."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Wm. Lilly, Studies in Religion and Literature, p. 51.

<sup>25</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>26</sup> A Tribute to Tennyson, p. 26.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Sister Rose Francis (Joyce), O.P. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 19, 1945  
Date

James J. Young  
Signature of Adviser