TENNYSON AS THE VOICE OF VICTORIAN ENGLAND

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by

Margaret E. Bonis.

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THE VICTORIAN AGE.

The Victorian Age was an age of high adventure for those enterprising spirits who are ever in the vanguard of progress. During the struggle with Revolutionary France there had been no time for anything but the grim details of the actual conflict. For a decade or more afterwards, the memories of the excesses of the Revolution, perpetrated in the name of Liberty, imposed what was, at the time, a wise restraint. But happily the time for such restraint passed, and there dawned in England an era of vigorous inquiry in the realms of politics, social life, religion and science. Although 1837 is the date of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne, 1832, the date of the passing of the First Reform Bill, a prelude to many reforms, may be considered as marking the starting point of the Age, while 1901, the year of the Queen's death, may be regarded as bringing the era to a close.

There was in England no great political convulsion such as occurred in France. England had settled her troubles with kings in the 17th century by a bloodless revolution. But in the early years of the 19th century there were, nevertheless, pressing political problems to be solved. These were made all the more evident by the Industrial Revolution. Chief of these was the need for a representative Parliament to replace the oligarchical one then functioning. When the Revolution came, because northern England was rich in both

coal and iron, there was a great shifting of population from the south to form industrial centres in the north. The people of these mushroom northern cities for a long time were without any, or adequate, parliamentary representation, while many decadent boroughs in the south were grossly over-represented. In the counties there was a very limited franchise. Because most of the land was in the hands of those with large country estates, and not in the possession of the farmers or labourers who worked it, the vote was possessed by a very small number - about 7000 nobility and gentry in the whole of the United Kingdom. The people in the rural districts had suffered, and would have continued to suffer, in silence for a long while. But the congregating of people into small areas led them to know each other better, to sympathize with each other's problems, and to organize for the more effective pressing of their demands. The ever present divisions between capitalists and labourers, made sharper by the new industrialism, necessitated a franchise more representative of the masses of the people, for little could be accomplished before that was secured.

Reform of Parliament was to come slowly. The Reform Bill of 1832 provided for a redistribution of seats and the granting of the franchise to the upper middle classes. Most of the people who had agitated for parliamentary reform found themselves still unfranchised, for the vote was granted to only about one person in thirty. But still the newly

enfranchised people were sympathetic enough to the lower classes to bring about many needed reforms. It is true they were as parsimonious with the franchise as many of the lords and gentry were, but it may also be true that they were instrumental in preventing much bloodshed such as had occurred in France. The next extension of the franchise came in 1867. This nearly doubled the number of voters. A third extension came in 1884, increasing the number of voters from over three millions to over five millions. Nearly every man except the unmarried labourer now had the vote.

The Reform Parliament immediately launched a vigorous programme of social reform. Among the first things they inquired into were conditions of labour. The slave trade had been abolished in 1807, but slavery had remained. As the financial interests of many were involved, even such a fervent Evangelical man as Ewart Gladstone's father owning a plantation worked by slaves, it was very difficult to arouse the public conscience. But at last, due to the agitations of Wilberforce, Buxton, and Zachary Macaulay, a bill was passed in 1833 providing for the gradual abolition of slavery. At home, however, many people still laboured under conditions nearly as bad as those in the plantations. The new Parliament almost at once set up a commission to investigate factory conditions, with the result that in 1833 a Factory Act was passed, limiting the hours of labour for children, providing more sanitary working surroundings, and

making some provision for education and recreation. Moreover, factory inspectors were to be appointed to enforce these laws. Other acts for the protection of labour followed. In 1842 the employment of women and children in mines was forbidden. Factory Acts of 1844 and 1847 shortened the working day. During the next thirty years many similar statutes were enacted for the improvement of labouring conditions.

In order to promote social reform, freedom of the press and freedom of speech were indispensable. These were hampered in the early years of the 19th century by heavy taxes on newspapers and by police surveillance. Few could buy a newspaper costing 7 pence. But in 1833, and again in 1836, these taxes were reduced by Parliament and twenty years later they were completely abolished. During the French Revolution and again in 1819, the government had censored the press and prevented the free expression of opinion in public meetings. But by the middle of the century, restrictions on the freedom of the press and on freedom of speech had disappeared.

The treatment of criminals was greatly improved. At the beginning of the century 250 crimes were considered as capital offenses. By 1861 these had been reduced to three. A parliamentary investigation in 1835 disclosed the shocking conditions of prisons. Gradually the whole prison system was changed. Inspectors were appointed, sanitary

conditions improved, and the idea of reform took precedence over the idea of punishment.

The Reformed Parliament made another notable advance by an improvement of Municipal Institutions. The growth of large cities almost overnight, with little attention to planning, produced much sordidness which revealed the total inadequacy of prevailing systems of local government. In 1833 a commission was appointed to investigate municipal government, with the result that in 1835 the Municipal Corporations Act was passed. Previously, municipal government had been as oligarchical as parliamentary government. The new Act did not provide for democratic government, but it extended the franchise to the wealthy and the middle classes.

It soon became evident that truly democratic government in both Parliament and municipalities was not favoured by the Reformed Parliament. Lord John Russell, who had sponsored the first Reform Bill, was dubbed "Finality Jack" for his uncompromising attitude when asked by the Radicals to establish more democratic institutions. Yet democratic government was to be won. Between 1838 and 1848 a lively agitation was carried on by the Radicals who put their demands in the form of"The People's Charter". Most of their demands were acceded to before the end of the Age. In 1858 the property qualification for members of parliament was abolished, and in 1872 vote by secret ballot was granted. Two more notable advances

were made in 1884. The Third Reform Bill gave the franchise to practically all men except unmarried labourers, and the Redistribution Act remedied inequalities of representation. Likewise gains were made for democracy in municipal government. Between 1867 and 1885 the qualifications for electors were altered so that municipal government became truly democratic.

The rapid growth of industrialism necessitated a change from the old protective policy of high tariffs and navigation laws. Early in the century an inroad had been made on the protective system by Huskisson's modification of the Navigation Laws and by the reduction in duties on foreign manufactures and raw materials. But the Corn Laws, the most formidable part of the system, remained. Manufacturers demanded free trade, believing that their foreign markets would be enlarged when England could buy foreign food freely. But their efforts counted for little as long as Parliament was composed of profit-seeking landowners. Even the Parliament after 1832 put up a stubborn fight for the Corn Laws. It required the Irish famine crisis of 1845 to secure the repeal of these laws in 1846; then England became reconciled to free trade with the result that the last of the Navigation Laws disappeared in 1849 and in the sixties Gladstone removed all protective duties, retaining only a few duties for revenue.

Class privileges were slow to disappear. The wealthier

middle classes might sympathize with the lower classes in their distresses, but they were reluctant to fraternize with them or admit their superiority. The duty of the struggling masses was, "to do my duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call me.". It was only after they were enfranchised by Disraeli in 1867 that they were able to assert confidently that their duty towards their neighbour was * "to do my duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call me". There followed the Education Act of 1870 which provided England with a national system of elementary education. In the same year the system of appointment to positions in the Civil Service was changed. Merit as determined by a competitive examination was to be the basis of appointment. Another advance in the same direction was made when the system of purchasing positions in the army was abolished by royal ordinance in 1871. The same year, the remaining religious tests in the Universities were abolished.

In this Age, women began, with a slight measure of success, to press their claims for equal rights with men. In the past, women's interests were expected to be subservient to those of men. The system of free elementary education was for all, but women had to struggle for a long while before they secured adequate opportunities for higher education. Newnham College, Cambridge was founded in

* Catechism of the Church of England.

1871, Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville Hall, Oxford were opened in 1879, but Cambridge still refuses degrees to women and Oxford did not grant them until 1915. However, the University of London admitted them to degrees in 1880. During the Victorian Era no woman was permitted to sit in Parliament, nor might she help to elect a member of Parliament. All but a very few women were denied the municipal franchise.

As well as political and social problems, there were pressing religious problems to be solved in the Victorian Age. At the beginning of the century, most of the Established Church bishops were men who had received preferment because they were good Tories, not because they were devout leaders in the Church. Their clergy were often kindly, respected men, but uninterested in the great problems of the age. However, the Church was to awake from its lethargy. Three movements within the Church may be traced.

Evangelicalism, which reached its climax about 1833, was really a descendant of the old 17th century Puritanism. It was so intent upon the salvation of the individual soul that it had, in some ways, a very narrow outlook. Beauty and truth for their own sakes it regarded as vain glories. Many of its followers concentrated upon the pursuit of piety or wealth, to the exclusion of science, literature and art. It ignored the history and theology of the Church as built up through the centuries. The Bible, interpreted

by the individual, it considered the one source of authority. But it exerted great influence in reform movements. It was responsible for the moral reform effected in many public schools, and for many humanitarian measures.

Tractarianism, or the Oxford Movement, was really a return to the teaching of the Church of Pre-Reformation times. It began as a protest against the spirit which would subordinate the Church to the State. This position was clearly defined in Keble's sermon on National Apostacy in 1833. The next year Keble and Newman, the real future leaders of the movement, began a series of tracts which asserted that the Holy Catholic Church of the early centuries was the only source of authority. This led to a revival of the study of the Church Fathers and the introduction of many practices of the mediaeval Church. Pusey, one of the most earnest patristic students, revived Confession and Absolution and the doctrine of the Real Presence. After the introduction of the latter came much mediaeval elaborate ceremonial with which Pusey, however, had little sympathy. Much discussion had been provoked by the tracts. Controversy aroused by them reached its zenith in 1841 when Newman published Tract XC which sought to prove that the Thirty-nine Articles though "the offspring of an uncatholic age, are, through God's good providence, to say the least, not uncatholic, and may be subscribed to by those who aim at being Catholic in heart and doctrine." So much excitement was aroused by this tract

that edition after edition was issued. Many wondered where the movement would end. Eventually, most of the leaders remained within the Church of England as Anglo-Catholics, but Newman and a few others had gone so far that they felt compelled to go over to the Church of Rome. All England watched them as they went.

The increase of rationalism was a factor, no doubt, in the revival of the principles of the mediaeval Church. Some men with deep religious convictions, bewildered, were afraid to face facts, for were not others, facing insufficient ones, arriving at wrong conclusions. Pusey, naturally sceptical, believed the existence of God could not be proved. Yet he held that in his mind there was an inner conviction of God. In Tract LXXXV, dealing with the difficulties of the creed and the canons of Scripture, he implied that belief in an infallible Church was necessary in order to surmount these difficulties.

Very different was the attitude of the Broad Church towards rationalism. "He is guilty of high treason against the faith who fears the result of any investigation, whether philosophical or scientific or historical," wrote Temple, a conspicuous member of the Broad Church and a future Archbishop of Canterbury. Certainly the Victorian Age was producing an abundance of scientific, historical, and philosophical material to be examined by members of the Broad Church Party.

The Evolution Theory engaged the attention of many minds. It was not a new theory; Aristotle, St.Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas all had a vague conception of it. But later the theory had been lost when zealous theologians had insisted upon a literal interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis. The publication of Principles of Geology (1830-'33) by Sir Charles Lyell, revealed facts incompatible with the generally accepted view. Lyell's book suggested that the surface of the earth had been changed by gradual natural processes in prehistoric times, just as it had been in historic times. On the continent, naturalists continued to explore in the way suggested by Lyell. The discovery of fossils and the remains of prehistoric man discredited old theories of the origin of species. Finally, the theory of evolution was arrived at separately in England by two naturalists, Darwin and Wallace, who had served on scientific expeditions in the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. Both had been influenced much by Malthus' idea of the survival of the fittest in the struggle of life, enunciated in an essay on Population in 1798. In 1859, Darwin's book On the Origin of Species put forth the hypothesis that the evolution of species in both the animal and vegetable world was brought about by natural selection. Huxley, himself a scientist of note, almost immediately championed the theory of evolution. In 1860, at the Oxford Meeting of the British Association, it was he who crushed effectively the anti-evolutionists

when Dr. Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, set out to disprove Darwin's theories.

Theologians found many other reasons for disputation. Biblical criticism, introduced from Germany, questioned the inspiration of the New Testament, the divinity of Jesus, the possibility of miracles. The old controversy about the existence and nature of God, waged in the days of classical Greece and Rome, and again at the time of the Renaissance, was revived. Huxley and quite a few others became agnostics. He did not deny the existence of God, but claimed that man was incapable of gaining a knowledge of Him. Much the same was the belief of Herbert Spencer, the philosopher, who saw God as a Cause back of everything, but Unknowable. Those who denounced the theology of the time, sometimes, however, had faith in the efficacy of religion. Both Huxley and Matthew Arnold valued the Bible and thought it should be taught in schools for its moral and literary values.

The members of the Broad Church party had to contend with much blind ecclesiastical intolerance. When Essays and Reviews was published in 1860 for the purpose of encouraging more liberal opinions within the Church, an official circular condemning it was issued by the bishops. Professor Seeley's Ecce Homo, in which he emphasized the human side of Jesus' nature, was described by a prominent Anglican divine as "the most pestilential volume ever vomited forth from the jaws of Hell".

The poets experienced the restlessness of the Age. Tennyson and Browning wrestled with its perplexing problems until they reached a positive faith. Both of them were definitely Christian, but unorthodox according to the dogmas of the times. Browning applied the new scientific methods of analysis to psychological studies, while Tennyson interested himself in political and social movements. Others struggled with the bewildering ideas to find only racking disbelief. Among these were Matthew Arnold and Clough, who while at Oxford had imbibed the scepticism but eschewed the faith of Newman. Arnold gave himself up to a melancholy resignation. Clough, ever seeking new truth, but never perfectly assured when he had attained it, was often tortured by the idea that he had taken the wrong turning when he had forsaken his earlier faith. Some, knowing that the answer to the doubts of the Age must be Faith, but not knowing how to reach it through rationalism, evaded the issue by taking refuge in the creed expressed by Keats - "Beauty is truth, truth beauty.". Such were Dante Rossetti and Morris, artists and poets of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, who sought a sanctuary in the beauty of mediaevalism. They gained from the Middle Ages an aestheticism and sense of wonder refreshing to those seeking escape from the ugliness of materialism. Although the Pre-Raphaelite influence showed itself in some of Swinburne's poetry in a spirit of submission, yet he was by no means a true member

of the movement. There was in his poetry also a spirit of revolt against the political and ecclesiastical institutions of the time, but unfortunately his work lacked the sincerity necessary for any practicable application.

The Victorian Age was essentially one of demolition and reconstruction. The land of the old régime, controlled by an oligarchical aristocracy, slowly adjusted itself to the democratic and socialistic ideas growing out of the Industrial System. The land of an inactive and rather dull religion awoke from its torpid prayers to question the values of old and new doctrines in religion and in science. To this subversion of the old order and the formation of the new, the poets of the Age contributed their part. Some were content to destroy alone, some to destroy and rebuild in part only, but from their number there emerged one, Alfred Tennyson, who expressed such a breadth and sanity of outlook that he may well be called the Voice of Victorian England.

POLITICS

The influences surrounding Tennyson during his youth and early manhood laid the foundation for his Liberal Conservative political views. *Strongest of these forces was the Rectory. Although a clergyman of the Established Church mixed with all classes of society, he was, in the rural parts, an English country gentleman. The Conservative opinions of Tennyson were those of any squire of the Age. Such a man had a veneration for his native land and the established forms of government. He had a very firm belief in the traditions of England and the Empire. But while the rector was an English country gentleman he was sometimes a man of keen intellect as well. Tennyson's father was a scholar who possessed an excellent library in which his son spent many hours. Here he read the works of such political writers as Milton, Addison, and Burke. Moreover he was, like his father, a man endowed with more than average ability. At Cambridge this gained him admittance to **"The Apostles" where he became the centre of

* Tennyson was the fourth child of Dr. Tennyson, Rector of Somersby.

**"The Apostles" was a group of students who held regular meetings for the purpose of discussing political, scientific, religious, and literary subjects in which they were interested. They read such authors as Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Butler, Hume, Bentham. The enthusiasm with which they greeted every new poem written by Tennyson may have fostered a certain snobbishness begun in early childhood when the Tennyson family usually played by themselves.

an admiring coterie. Excessive admiration of this group may account for a certain snobbishness in his opinions, but on the whole, association with its members, who were very much alive to the problems of a changing age, had a liberalizing influence which made him realize that adjustments must be made to meet altered conditions.

He had a profound love for his native land. For the greatness of her past and the promise of her future he loved her. Nor was he ashamed to admit that he loved her better than other lands, for he thought that a strong and worthy nationalism was the best means of freeing the world from international ill will. Such a nationalism must involve, at times, the sacrifice of individual and local interests for the service of the State. He rejoiced in England's insular position, for it was this that had made her the "regal seat" of freedom and the leading state in Europe.

*"O Statesmen guard us, guard the eye, the soul,
Of Europe, keep our noble England whole."

Her position had helped not only to unify England within herself, but had also kept off the contaminating revolutionary ideas of the Continent. He constantly referred to the narrow seas in lines such as these

**"God bless the narrow seas
I wish they were a whole Atlantic broad".

He thought the people did not realize sufficiently the bless-

* Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington
** Conclusion of The Princess.

ings of their position. They had failed to heed the warning of the Warden of the Cinque Ports, the Duke of Wellington, to fortify their "seaward wall". He agreed with those who were demanding adequate fortifications for the Crown Colonies and important coaling stations, and naval armaments strong enough to protect the mercantile fleet. After reading some articles in the Pall Mall Gazette on the weakness of the navy he wrote The Fleet. In this he pointed out how imperative it was that England should realize that her much cherished Freedom rested upon Sea Power. Her army alone, however brave, would be scattered, her millions cut off from their food supplies would starve, unless her statesmen realized:

"The fleet of England is her all-in-all
Her fleet is in your hands,
And in her fleet her Fate".

Tennyson was an ardent Imperialist. He was thoroughly in accord with the policy of the Colonial Reformers which during the critical thirties and forties, when the larger colonies were beginning to feel their self-sufficiency, had done much to prevent the breaking up of the Empire. In a poem written for the Opening of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition by the Queen, he deplored the lack of vision of the statesmen of the eighteenth century which had been responsible for the loss of the American Colonies. As a matter of fact, Britain had already taken cognizance of the growth of her oversea possessions and adjusted her colonial

policy accordingly, more than thirty years before this poem was written, but Tennyson thought that the principle involved was so vital for the welfare of the Empire that it should still be remembered.

After the self-government advocated by the Colonial Reformers had been achieved, the danger of the disintegration of the Empire was still imminent. In the sixties, the Colonial Office regarded the imperial connection as farcical. One Colonial Office civil servant in writing to another said, "I go very far with you in the desire to shake off all responsibly governed colonies". Then he proceeded to describe Canada as "a colony which is no good to us and has no real care for us". With this attitude towards colonies, and towards Canada in particular, Tennyson disagreed violently. He was but voicing the opinion of the Conservative party which was refusing to see the unity of the Empire jeopardized any longer. In 1872, Disraeli in his speech as Leader of the Opposition declared his determination, if returned as head of the government, to put an end to the disrupting Imperial policy of Liberalism. The next year, in the Epilogue to the Idylls of the King, Tennyson forcefully denounced the penny-counting selfishness of those who would spurn the loyalty of Canada.

> "And that true North, whereof we lately heard
> A strain to shame us 'keep you to yourselves;
> So loyal is too costly! friends - your love
> Is but a burthen: loose the bond, and go.'
> Is this the tone of empire? here the faith
> That made us rulers?"

In the same poem he warned England that although she was growing wealthier hour by hour, she could not afford to be indifferent to the Empire, if she were, she would sink to be "some third-rate isle half-lost among her seas". Loyalty to the Crown was not enough, it must be extended to reciprocate the allegiance felt by England's kinsmen in "ever-broadening England". In this poem and again in Hands All Round he pointed out that England must accept her own greatness, as dread of it could only bring about her own downfall.

Tennyson believed in a limited monarchy. He thought that a ruler should govern through the respect and love he inspired in his subjects, not by fear. Those who had limited the power of kings had "waged God's war". Proudly he asserted,

* "Our own we never fear'd
From our first Charles by force we wrung our claims,
Prick'd by the Papal spur, we rear'd
We flung the burthen of the second James.
I say we never feared".

Tyrants such as John and the Stuarts had but forced freedom, for freedom grew so much when restrained that she burst her bonds all the sooner. A monarch must be restricted by the nature of his office, for he held it as a sacred trust. In his description of Telemachus in Ulysses he suggested some of the requisite qualities of a good king. He should possess kindliness, discernment, assiduity in performing the routine duties of the State. In The Holy Grail he suggested that a king should be a man with vision, but he should never allow it to interfere with the performance of certain assigned

* The Third of February, 1852

tasks of the kingdom. That was why King Arthur could not go in search of the Holy Grail. He had realized that most of those setting out on the quest (like many idealists in politics) "would follow wandering fires, lost in the quagmire". He, as King,

> *"Must guard
> That which he rules, and is but as the hind
> To whom a space of land is given to plow
> Who may not wander from the allotted field
> Before his work be done; but being done,
> Let visions of the night, or of the day
> Come as they will".

Tennyson thought that a monarch who tried conscientiously to carry out the wishes of the people had laid a firm foundation for his own security. Yet a ruler should be a man strong enough to assert his authority should the need arise. He revered and loved Queen Victoria especially, for her keen interest in her people and the purity of her private life.

> ** "A thousand claims to reverence closed
> In her as Mother, Wife, and Queen."

For the last twenty years of his life the Queen and he kept up an intermittent correspondence, rejoicing with each other in times of happiness and sympathizing in times of distress.

Although Tennyson believed in Democracy he refused to champion its cause unreservedly. He had read history well enough to realize that too vehement demands for liberty result in Reigns of Terror and the despotic rule of men such as Caesar and Napoleon. It is true he went to Spain with money

* The Holy Grail
** To the Queen, 1851

for the Spanish rebels, but he was very young at that time and the despotism prevailing in Spain was of such a nature that it seemed that only bloodshed could break its power. But the despotism in England was of another nature, and there were better ways of dealing with it than spilling blood. England was not suffering from a ruling class who flagrantly abused their privileges as those in France and Spain had done. England was suffering from the failure of her aristocracy, those best fitted to lead in the past, to make the necessary adjustments to an altered age - the Industrial Era. When the Industrial Revolution came, the nobility ceased to be leaders who cared for their people's welfare, because they no longer came into close contact with them. In the past, the aristocracy had treated their servants well, often taking an almost paternal interest in them. But after the labourers had left their rural homes to become part of the new rapidly evolving Industrial System they found they had to deal with another type of master. The new industrial leaders came from a class who had not been trained for generations to command. They looked upon men as part of the huge machines which were rapidly bringing them to power. Moreover, the Giant Machines of the Industrial Barons were often so large that it was impossible for them to know and care for each hunan part separately. The fierce competition of a laissez-faire age also tended to discourage any manufacturer with a humanitarian bent.

Tennyson realized that the nobility had lost contact with the people. It was quite evident that they were blind to the new needs of the populace. They alone were quite unfitted to rule the country. But who was fitted to rule? Should the herds of labourers, many of them totally illiterate, be trusted with the destiny of the nation by a wholesale enfranchisement? This would be even more dangerous, in Tennyson's opinion. Democracy must come by degrees. Hence he rejoiced in 1832 at the passing of the First Reform Bill, he rang furiously the bells of the parish church, much to the disgust of the Tory parson, but the next year he wrote a group of patriotic poems in which he advocated a very gradual extension of freedom. In these poems he joyed because his native country was a land of free speech and settled government where,

* "Freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent".

Such a development prevented the bloody revolutions which other countries had experienced because they had gone to extremes. Forms of government must inevitably change. He already saw

** "Phantoms of other forms of rule,
New Majesties of mighty States".

It was his earnest desire that future forms of government would develop out of those of the past. Therefore he pleaded that patriotism, enriched by tradition, might spring forth

* You Ask Me, Why, Tho' Ill At Ease
**Love Thou Thy Land.

to meet transitional difficulties, and that noble thinking would eventually make a State in which true brotherhood would prevail. He did not say that the lower classes should never be enfranchised but he did think that the time was not yet ripe. They were a mob too easily aroused, too readily persuaded by fallacious reasoning. Yet he hoped that the growth of Knowledge would prepare them to assume the responsibilities of citizenship. He lauded freedom of speech because he considered discussion was the best means of furthering the interests of all. Never might the time come when individual freedom of opinion would have to give way before "banded unions", no matter how prosperous the State might be!

His views on Democracy changed little during the course of a long life. In July, 1884, he voted as a member of the House of Lords for the Extension of the Franchise, but very reluctantly. He did not consider the masses yet capable of governing, still he thought it no longer safe to thwart their ambitions. In December 1884, his poem Freedom appeared. It contained almost the same ideas as the group of patriotic poems written in 1833. He still had a vision of Freedom in some far distant future when England would have realized her

* "golden dream
Of Knowledge fusing class with class
Of civic Hate no more to be,
Of Love to leaven all the mass,
Till every Soul be free".

* Freedom

Just as in earlier days he had denounced the lower classes as,

* "The herd,wild hearts and feeble wings
That every sophister can lime",

so in later days he decried certain members of the lower orders as

** "Men loud against all forms of power -
Unfurnish'd brows,tempestuous tongues -
Expecting all things in an hour -
Brass mouths and iron lungs!".

Especially did Tennyson condemn Revolutionary France who had fallen into all the errors against which he wished to warn Britain. We feel that she was in the back of his mind constantly when he warned against hasty and radical changes and invoked God's blessing on the narrow seas. Through the old man in Locksley Hall Sixty Years After he inveighed against the clause in the Declaration of the Rights of Man, "Men are born and remain equal in rights".

"Equal-born? O yes,if yonder hill be level with
the flat
Charm us, Orator, till the Lion look no larger than
the Cat,

"Till the Cat thro' that mirage of overheated
language loom
Larger than the Lion, - Demos end in working its
own doom."

After the Revolution of 1848 he wrote of "the red fool-fury of the Seine". It was indeed a "fool-fury" to him for his sister Emily, looking out from a window in Paris had been shot at by one of the Revolutionists. Even at the end of his life he was bitter about the Revolution, for in the poem,

* Love Thou Thy Land.
**Freedom.

Beautiful City, published in 1889, addressing Paris he said,

"How often your Re-volution has proven but
E-volution
Roll'd again, back on itself in the tides of a
civic insanity".

After the appearance of Maud in 1855 Tennyson was accused of being a partisan of war. To many it seemed to be a justification of war, but Tennyson claimed that this was a misapprehension on the part of the readers. He was not speaking his own thoughts, but merely making a "Drama of the Soul". A disillusioned youth decried the iniquities of a commercial age and suggested that the evils of peace were worse than the horrors of war - the viler because they were not done openly. He thought that war would have a unifying and ennobling influence. Eventually he went to the Crimean War, rejoicing in it as a panacea for the ills of peace.

"Let it flame or fade, and the war roll down like
a wind,
We have proved we have hearts in a cause, we are
noble still,
And myself have awaked, as it seems, to the
better mind;
It is better to fight for the good than to rail at
the ill;
I have felt with my native land, I am one with
my kind,
I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom
assign'd."

As in Locksley Hall, the hero sought action in order to divert his attention from his own sorrows. Tennyson had no intention of glorifying war. He merely thought it an opportune time, when the people realized the ugliness of war, to point out that the insidious horrors of peace were even more

unmitigated. Perhaps when the war was over, the nobility of character evoked by strife would continue in civil life.

Probably Tennyson expressed his own views on war in the Epilogue of the Charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaclava. This was a dialogue between Irene (Greek for peace) who probably represented the pacificists, and the Poet. Irene suggested that the Poet had extolled war in order to achieve fame. He replied that he had no love of war for its own sake.

"And who loves War for War's own sake
Is fool, or crazed, or worse."

Sometimes, however, war was necessary in order to prevent the triumph of aggressive nations. Here, Tennyson no doubt, was thinking of Russia whom he hated bitterly for her treatment of Poland and Hungary and for her threats on the Afghanistan frontier. Towards the end of this poem he expressed an idea whose value it is well to question. He said that though the nation might be in the wrong, it still was right for the poet to extol the valour of the soldier who had fought for his country. Such a belief may gain popularity for the poet, but it fosters war.

Although Tennyson sang of Patriotism and Imperialism, he also sang of a world brotherhood. The lowering of tariff barriers, he believed, would do much to bring about such an ideal. In 1846, the year of the abolition of the Corn Laws, the young visionary in The Golden Year speeded on the merchantship thus:

"Fly,happy happy sails,and bear the Press;
Fly happy with the mission of the Cross;
Knit land to land,and blowing havenward
With silks, and fruits, and spices, clear of toil,
Enrich the markets of the golden year".

In 1862, shortly after Gladstone had swept away all except a few duties kept for revenue purposes, in the Ode Sung at the Opening of the International Exhibition, Tennyson expressed the belief that if men would rule only by obeying Nature's laws, and would work together in noble brotherhood, instead of raising tariff walls, each man would find his own good in the good of others. Forts and battleships could be smashed by this means. He picturesquely described the sailing vessel of his day in the lines,

"And let the fair white-wing'd peacemaker fly
To happy havens under all the sky".

In Locksley Hall he went so far as to prophesy the birth of the League of Nations.

"Till the war-drum throbbed no longer,and the battle
flags were furled
In the Parliament of man,the Federation of
the world.

"There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful
realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in
universal law."

But while he expressed again and again the idea that the individual man's good could be secured only by the individual working for the good of others, he did not refer specifically to a World Federation again. In the Victorian Age it was still too ill-defined an idea for Tennyson to mention often.

Tennyson's political opinions were those of many of his compatriots who saw the need for adapting existing theories of political thought to meet the exigencies of altered conditions. Like many Englishmen he cherished his native land and its ancient traditions of Freedom. He was but giving expression to the trend of the Age when he recommended an expansion of Freedom through the gradual extension of the franchise, an increased measure of autonomy in the colonies, and the abolition of restrictions on trade. His hatred of Revolutionary France, where Freedom had proved License, was typical of thousands of middle and upper class Englishmen who had seen France overwhelmed by a flood tide of Liberty. His views may have been in some respects too conservative, but History shows that, on the whole, those who live in a land "where Freedom slowly broadens down from precedent to precedent", are happier than those who live in one which delivers "the tasks of might to weakness".

SOCIAL LIFE

Tennyson's views of the social life of his day were those of a man who looked with a kindly, but none the less critical eye upon all classes of society. In his comments on social conditions there was little trace of that cautious conservatism so evident in his political opinions. Upon occasion, he could denounce the selfish attitudes of lords and professional men just as scathingly as he inveighed against the political aspirations of "unfurnished brows, tempestuous tongues". He declaimed the so-called "Progress" of an era so absorbed in the pursuit of the guinea that it seemed oblivious to the needs of the toiling masses without whom the "golden age" would have been impossible. At a time when men everywhere were pressing their claims to equality, he espoused, with certain reservations, the cause of those who were crying out for a recognition of the rights of women as human beings also. His outlook upon the social life of his period was essentially democratic.

In the Victorian Age, much of the rural life centred around the nobility and landed gentry. As in the past land had been the basis for wealth and position, all the best families still possessed large estates. For many generations the squire of England, unlike the aristocrat of France, had taken a real interest in his land,

living on it for most of the year, exhibiting an almost paternal regard for his tenants and labourers. Such a man was the Lord of Locksley Hall,"a sound and honest rustic Squire, kindly landlord, boon companion" who

*"Strove for sixty widow'd years to help his homelier brother men,
Served the poor,and built the cottage,raised the school and drained the fen".

Occasionally there was a landlord who neglected his estate for his books, thereby earning the contempt of his people. Tennyson described one such man in <u>The Village Wife</u>.

"Fur Squire wur a Varsity scholard,an' niver lookt arter the land,
Whoats or tonups or taates 'e 'ed hallus a boook i' 'is 'and,
Hallus aloan wi' 'is boooks,thaw nigh upo' seventy year,
An' boooks, what's boooks? thou knaws thebbe naither 'ere nor theer."

Class distinctions were still very strong. In several poems Tennyson depicted the difficulties arising from the ideas of caste still prevailing during his times. While he mercilessly flayed those who would keep class distinctions absolutely fixed, yet he realized that those who ignored them might become involved in much suffering. <u>Aylmer's Field</u> pictured the tragedy brought upon a family with very fixed ideas of the dignity of their station. Although Tennyson placed the date for this poem in the last decade of the eighteenth century, yet it is probable that he was describing conditions very similar to those of his own times. Sir Aylmer Aylmer was the "county God", owner of

*<u>Locksley Hall Sixty Years After</u>

all the lands to be seen from his manor windows, a man

> ". . . . . dull and self-involved,
> Tall and erect,but bending from his height
> With half-allowing smiles for all the world
> And mighty courteous in the main - his pride
> Lay deeper than to wear it as his ring".

He was not wholly bad, in fact he had "a hoary face meet for the hearth", but he allowed one vice, excessive ancestral pride, to bring about the ruin of himself and all whom he loved. From time immemorial, the Aylmers of the Hall and the Averills of the Rectory had been very friendly with each other. But when an Aylmer and an Averill ceased to "know their differences", everything changed. Determined that the "one transmitter of their ancient name" should make a marriage worthy of the House of Aylmer, Sir Aylmer and his wife refused to allow their daughter Edith to marry a promising young lawyer, Leolin Averill, whom she had known intimately since childhood. That an Aylmer should marry an Averill was a preposterous idea! Consequently when Edith refused to submit gracefully to her parents' wishes they badgered her until she was so worn out that she died of a fever. Leolin committed suicide soon afterwards. Lady Aylmer, distraught with grief, died within a month, while the old baronet lingered on two years more - a madman. The Lord of Burleigh was an aristocrat of quite another type, one who chose to ignore differences in station. Posing as a landscape painter, he wooed and won a village maiden. But unhappily, his wife, although she performed successfully

all the duties of her rank, growing weary of the struggle, pined away and died.* "The burthen of an honour unto which she was not born" had proved too heavy for her. However, in The Miller's Daughter, Tennyson pictured a marriage between a squire and one of lower rank as a very successful union.

Tennyson wrote little about the professional classes, but when he did introduce them into his poems he seemed to have more blame than praise for them as a class, although he frequently eulogized certain individuals of the class. He often pictured the clergyman as a rather dull, self-opinionated man, intolerant of change. The parson in The Epic was such a man.

> ". . . . . and half-awake I heard
> The parson taking wide and wider sweeps,
> Now harping on the church-commissioners,
> Now hawking at Geology and schism;
> Until I woke, and found him settled down
> Upon the general decay of faith
> Right thro' the world, 'at home was little left,
> And none abroad: there was no anchor, none,
> To hold by'."

The "fat-faced curate", Edward Bull, in Edwin Morris was equally illiberal, regarding woman as a mere chattel of man.

> "I take it, God made the woman for the man,
> And for the good and increase of the world."

Tennyson himself admired the energetic militant clergyman who held truth more precious than creeds. He thought

*The Lord of Burleigh

highly of the Rev. F. D. Maurice, a very active Broad Churchman who was forced to resign his professorship in King's College, London, because he condemned the doctrine of Everlasting Damnation. Writing to congratulate him on the stand he had taken, Tennyson said,

*"For, being of that honest few,
Who give the Fiend himself his due,
Should eighty-thousand college-councils
Thunder 'Anathema', friend, at you;

"Should all our churchmen foam in spite
At you, so careful of the right,
Yet one lay-hearth would give you welcome
(Take it and come) to the Isle of Wight".

In the Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington he sang the praises of the Iron Duke and mentioned his high regard for Nelson, but about the army and naval officers as classes he said very little. "A bought commission, a waxen face" hinted that he disapproved of the system of purchasing commissions in the army prevailing until 1871. The Captain, A Legend of the Navy, showed that he favoured the newer and more humane methods of discipline recently introduced into the navy.

The ideals of democracy demanded an increased sympathy for the lower classes. Such an affection for the rank and file Tennyson exhibited in many of his poems. He especially respected the virtues of the land loving tenant farmer, even while he good-naturedly laughed at his foibles. He gave an excellent character sketch of one of these men in

* To The Rev. F. D. Maurice

The Northern Farmer, Old Style. He showed the Lincolnshire farmer to be a conservative, hard-working, self-respecting man. While he smiled at his superstition, his self importance, and rather contemptuous attitude towards doctor and parson, nevertheless he admired the many sterling qualities of the man.

His understanding of the problems of the humbler classes, combined with a desire for a fuller realization for all of the spiritual values of life, led him to condemn roundly the "Opulent Avarice" of an age when commerce was increasing by leaps and bounds. In Locksley Hall, the suitor who had been rejected for a wealthier cried despairingly,

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

The hero in Maud declaimed vehemently the evils arising out of a lust for gain.

"Why do they prate of the blessings of Peace? we
have made them a curse,
Pickpockets, each hand lusting for all that
is not its own;
And lust of gain, in the spirit of Cain, is it
better or worse
Than the heart of the citizen hissing in war
on his own hearth stone?

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

He went on to show the ugliness of the life of the poor - the evils of child labour, unsanitary living conditions, the adulteration of food and drugs, the sufferings of the drunkard's wife. One passage is particularly worthy of notice - that in which he exposed the source of the wealth of one of the new nobility who had just built a "gewgaw" castle.

> "This new-made lord, whose splendour plucks
> The slavish hat from the villager's head?
> Whose old grandfather has lately died,
> Gone to a blacker pit, for whom
> Grimy nakedness dragging his trucks
> And laying his trams in a poison'd gloom
> Wrought, till he crept from a gutted mine
> Master of half a servile shire,
> And left his coal all turn'd into gold
> To a grandson, first of his noble line!!"

In Locksley Hall Sixty Years After, the aged speaker was very pessimistic about the achievements of an age which had been crying, "Forward, Forward" since his youth and still had many of her people living among filth, sin, and disease.

> "Is it well that while we range with Science,
> glorying in the Time,
> City children soak and blacken soul and sense
> in city slime?
>
> "There among the glooming alleys Progress
> halts on palsied feet,
> Crime and hunger cast our maidens by the
> thousand on the street.
>
> "There the Master scrimps his haggard sempstress
> of her daily bread,
> There a single sordid attic holds the living
> and the dead.

" There the smouldering fire of fever creeps across
the rotted floor,
And the crowded couch of incest in the warrens
of the poor."

The story of Rizpah shows Tennyson's sympathy with improvements made in the treatment of criminals and the insane. Although he dated it in the eighteenth century, it contained a description of conditions which humanitarians were seeking to improve during the early years of the Victorian Age. For several years before 1837 the death penalty was no longer inflicted, except for murder, yet at that date there were still, according to the statue-books, several lesser offenses for which the penalty was capital punishment. It was not until 1868 that public executions were abolished. Improvements in the treatment of mental diseases came very slowly. In Rizpah Tennyson related the sufferings of a poor woman who had undergone the terrible experience of having her son publicly executed for robbing the mail. Finally the anguish she was enduring made her the victim of hallucinations - she heard the voice of her son perpetually calling to her. What she really needed to restore her health was sympathy and tender care, but instead, she was shut up in an asylum where she was very badly treated. Her own words tell the story best.

"Then since I couldn't but hear that cry of my boy
that was dead,
They seized me and shut me up: they fastened me
down on my bed.
'Mother, O mother !'- he call'd in the dark to me
year after year -
They beat me for that, they beat me - you know

that I couldn't but hear;
And then at the last they found I had grown
so stupid and still
They let me abroad again - but the creatures
had worked their will."

Even after she had been released from the asylum there was still much agony in store for her. Night after night she crept to the gibbet to carry away her son's bones from which the flesh had rotted away. Her Church gave her little consolation. Stealthily she buried the bones of her son in the churchyard by night, for no criminal might be buried in consecrated ground. She was worried by the Church's teaching on Election and Reprobation which condemned her son to everlasting damnation. As she lay dying, her son's voice still haunted her.

Tennyson deplored the conventions which bound down the women of his day. Everywhere he saw women looked upon as mere chattels to be sold in the "woman markets of the west" to the wealthiest bidder. Time and again, in his poems, he told the story of a girl * "puppet to a father's threat and servile to a shrewish tongue" who was forced to cast aside the man of her choice to marry some opulent peer. He attacked the problem of woman's servitude in the same way that many before him had attacked it - perhaps the only way to achieve any success at a time when it was considered all woman's interest must centre in the home. He said that convention was preventing not only woman's

* Locksley Hall.

fullest self-realization but also the noblest development of men as well. Mary Wollstonecraft in her book, Vindication of the Rights of Woman, published in 1792, had set forth the very same idea. In the dedication of her book she had outlined her main argument, "built on this simple principle - that if woman be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge, for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence or general practice". At the time a great outcry had been raised over her book. Although the sensation caused by it soon died down, her ideas made themselves felt in a slowly increasing demand for the education of women. Shelley, her son-in-law, voiced her main idea in the line, *"Can man be free if woman be a slave"?. Proposals to establish Women's Colleges put forth early in Victoria's reign, no doubt inspired Tennyson to write The Princess. From it we are able to reconstruct his opinions on the higher education of women. He thought that "with equal husbandry the woman were an equal to the man", but that six thousand years of fear had so intimidated her that she dared not realize herself and so often appeared to be man's inferior and became his plaything.

". . . . . household stuff,
Live chattels, mincers of each other's fame,
Full of weak poison, turnspits for the clown,
The drunkard's football, laughing-stocks of Time
Whose brains are in their hands and in their heels,

* The Revolt of Islam. (I8I7)

But fit to flaunt, to dress, to dance, to thrum,
To tramp, to scream, to burnish, and to scour,
For ever slaves at home and fools abroad."

Some, he believed, feared the higher education of women because they thought it would make them no longer submissive to their Lords.

"Man to command and woman to obey
All else confusion."

He thought there was a nobility in woman worth developing and that advanced education for her would redound to the advantage of man.

"The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink
Together, dwarf'd or godlike, bond or free:
. . . . . .

If she be small, slight-natured, miserable,
How shall men grow?"

But it was doubtful whether woman's education should be exactly the same as that of men.

". . . . . let her make herself her own
To give or keep, to live and learn and be
All that not harms distinctive womanhood.
For woman is not undevelopt man,
But diverse: could we make her as the man,
Sweet love were slain: his dearest bond is this,
Not like to like, but like in difference."

Marriage was the true end of woman for which she should be prepared by education. Her mind should be filled with noble ideas so that she might cast off "the sins of emptiness, gossip and spite, and slander" and become an intellectual companion for her husband. Thus marriage itself would be enriched for:

"..... either sex alone
Is half itself, and in true marriage lies
Nor equal, nor unequal: each fulfils
Defect in each".

The highest ideal for any woman was saintly motherhood. He would have been horrified at the thought that higher education might give woman ideals excluding marriage altogether. The Victorian Age considered that woman's place was in the home. Until near the end of that Age it was a rare woman indeed who dared to turn down marriage.

Tennyson voiced the trend of the times - a more liberal outlook on society. He realized that he was living in a transitional period. A man of broad sympathies, he considered it his duty to point out the necessity for adjustment to changing conditions. Democracy sought to give each individual an opportunity to live happily. Tennyson likewise championed the cause of the individual, whether he lived in a castle or a tenement house. When he was critical of the higher classes it was not because he disapproved of them altogether, but because he saw that their hide-bound conservatism made them cling to principles no longer valuable under altered conditions. His reluctance to enfranchise the masses at once, showed that he still had faith in the ability of the upper classes to govern more effectively than the lower classes, but his exposure of injustices in all classes of society

manifested his desire to ameliorate conditions wherever there was need. Eventually, he hoped, "all men's good" would "be each man's rule".

SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Tennyson's poetry reflects the tremendous scientific and religious upheavals of his age. At a time when many men were seeing their most cherished beliefs swept away by the devastating winds of the new knowledge, he found a way through doubt to faith. He was not one of those obstinate religionists who refused to examine the new theories, nor was he one of those rabid enthusiasts for the new physical science who ruthlessly cast aside the great spiritual truths of the past. He did not pretend to be a theologian, nor did he profess to be a scientist. But a certain innate spirituality, fostered, no doubt, by his early life in the Rectory, tended to make him lean towards religion, while the candidness of his nature, combined with a very real interest in the material world, made him weigh carefully the claims of the scientists. As a result of his questionings, he was able to voice a "via media" which helped to make him the most widely read poet of a doubt-stricken age.

It is probable that until Tennyson attended Cambridge he had the usual conventional beliefs of a serious youth. But the university opened a wholly new world to him. As a member of the "Apostles", he was one of a group of young men keenly interested in the great literature of the past, and the rapidly developing modern schools of thought. They discussed with avidity many abstruse questions such as the

Origin of Evil, the Derivation of Moral Sentiments, Prayer, and the Personality of God. Even then, long before Darwin published his Origin of Species, Tennyson glimpsed Evolution. In a college discussion he suggested that the *"development of the human body might possibly be traced from the radiated, vermicular, molluscous and vertebrate organisms". Apparently, at this time, the students of Cambridge were more alive to the growing problems of the age than their professors were. In later years, Cambridge was to awake from her lethargic state to become a leader in modern life, but in Tennyson's time her apathy was such as provoked his vehement denunciation. He demanded some ** "soldier-priest . . . . . no sabbath-drawler of old saws". ***In Lines on Cambridge of 1830 he censured his Alma Mater:

"Therefore your Hills, your ancient Colleges,
Your portals statued with old kings and queens,
Your gardens, myriad-volumed libraries,
. . . . . .

Shall not avail you, when the Day-beam sports
New-risen o'er awaken'd Albion.
. . . . . .

. . . . . you that do profess to teach
And teach us nothing, feeding not the heart".

Tennyson's earlier poems bear evidence of the religious turmoil experienced by him while he was still at the university. Like many deep thinking young men he explored the mystery of Self. In Timbuctoo and again in The Mystic, he

* Page 44, Vol.1. Tennyson A Memoir by Hallam Tennyson
** To J.M.K.
***Page 67, Vol.1. " " " " "

described a state of suspended consciousness into which he used to pass occasionally. In the 'How' and the 'Why' he seemed to be struggling with something, he knew not what.

> "I feel there is something;but how and what?
> I know there is somewhat,but what and why?
> I cannot tell if that somewhat be I - -
> Why deep is not high,and high is not deep - -
> Why two and two make four;why round is not square - "

The Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind were not the confessions of a mind of inferior quality, but rather of a strong mind clouded for the time being by doubt. It pictured a young man with a fervent evangelical religious experience brought into contact with the new creed-wrecking ideas. Hampered by fear he refused to face facts, vacillating between his earlier faith and the formulation of a fresh one. No doubt this is an account of Tennyson's own sufferings during the transitional period of his own religious beliefs. The Two Voices set forth some of the philosophical problems which must have assailed Tennyson and his friends while he was at Cambridge. After wondering about man's place in the scale of Creation, the infinity of knowledge, the possibility of achieving last/good, the evolution of the soul, the poet, unable to solve any of these questions, finally took refuge in Love as the only hope and power he could rest in.

In Tennyson's opinion, doubt often fulfilled a definite purpose in life. He realized the immensity of Knowledge and the necessity of honest questioning, if one would enlarge

his faith. His attitude towards Knowledge was similar to that expressed by Milton in Areopagitica,

"The light which we have gained was given us, not to be ever staring on, but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge . . . . . To be still searching what we know not by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it (for all her body is homogeneal and proportional) this is the golden rule in theology as well as in arithmetic".

Tennyson believed that a strong faith often developed from facing bewildering facts. In Section XCVl of In Memoriam, in answer to one who maintained that doubt was Devil-born he asserted,

"There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds".

and then he proceeded to relate the experience of his friend Arthur Hallam. Hallam was an exceptionally brilliant young man who was much "perplext in faith". Refusing to blind his judgment, fearlessly,

"He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length
To find a stronger faith his own".

His faith was stronger, not only because it contained the best of both his old and new ideas, but also because it had been strengthened by the struggle.

But while Tennyson urged men to face unflinchingly the new ideas of the age, he warned them that doubt invol-

ved certain dangers. It was very easy to take the wrong course. He prefaced Geraint and Enid with a few very disconsolatory lines condemning those who failed to discern between the false and the true.

> "O purblind race of miserable men,
> How many among us at this very hour
> Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves,
> By taking true for false, or false for true;
> Here thro' the feeble twilight of this world
> Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
> That other, where we see as we are seen!"

Despair showed the sad plight of a man and wife who had exchanged their old cramped creeds for a purely mechanistic view of the universe. Unable to believe in a God of love who would condemn souls to everlasting punishment, they had reluctantly cast out Christ and had leaned to the darker side of doubt. Terrified by the vastness of space they saw themselves,

> "Poor orphans of nothing - alone on that lonely shore -
> Born of the brainless Nature who knew not that which she bore!
> Trusting no longer that earthly flower would be heavenly fruit
> Come from the brute, poor souls - no souls - and to die with the brute".

In contrast with Despair, which showed the result of adhering to the "darker side of doubt", was the poem following immediately after it, The Ancient Sage, which depicted an old man who had cleaved to "the sunnier side of doubt". In this were shown two forms of agnosticism. A young poet, worn from riotous living, read to an ancient sage his cynical comments on life and its

mysteries. As he was willing to believe only what could be proved, he had reached some very morbid conclusions. But the sage, realizing that nothing could be proved or disproved, had built up a worthy faith.

> "For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
> Nor yet disproven: wherefore thou be wise,
> Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
> And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith!"

As the last line suggests, he had found a faith fuller than that formally expressed in creeds, born of a confidence revealed by the best of life. The young man had rejected the idea of a Power higher than himself; the sage believed in such a Power, the Nameless, because he saw in man a higher self gradually evolving a nobler man. The young man looked upon man as mortal, the sage regarded man as living in an "Eternal Now". Where the young man saw a gradual decay towards death, the older man saw this life as but part of the development towards a higher one. The sage thought that man's unhappiness was due to the lack of

> ". . . .the last and largest sense to make
> The phantom walls of this illusion fade,
> And show us that the world is wholly fair".

From the many references to the revolutionary scientific developments of the age, we can construct a good outline of these new ideas and Tennyson's attitude towards them. At this time there was a conflict between those who still believed the Newtonian theory of the universe and those who upheld the newer theory enunciated in 1799 by a

Frenchman, Laplace, in his Treatise on Celestial Mechanics. Newton thought that the solar systems were created in an instant; Laplace taught that they were originally a fiery nebular mass which gradually separated to form suns and planets. Eventually, when the whole system had cooled off, everything would be dead. In Section CXVlll of In Memoriam, Tennyson set forth Laplace's theory:

" . . . . . they say,
The solid earth whereon we tread

"In tracts of fluent heat began,
And grew to seeming-random forms,
Till at the last arose the man".

In Locksley Hall Sixty Years After, he referred to the ultimate death of worlds.

"Warless? war will die out late then. Will it ever?
late or soon?
Can it, till this outworn earth be dead as yon
dead world the moon?

"Dead the new astronomy calls her."

The "new astronomy" seemed to take God out of the universe and to substitute a blind Force unsympathetic to the cries of man. The benighted man in Despair said:

"And the suns of the limitless Universe sparkled and
shone in the sky,
Flashing with fires as of God, but we knew their light
was a lie -
. . . . . .

No soul in the heaven above, no soul on the earth below,
A fiery scroll written over with lamentation and woe".

Tennyson's poetry shows the influence of the geological discoveries of the time. Apparently he had been much

impressed by Lyell's Principles of Geology. In the Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington he wrote of the "Giant Ages" which wrought such changes on hill and shore line. Again in Section CXXlll of In Memoriam he referred to the vast changes made by natural forces on the surface of the earth. He was interested in the new light thrown on older forms of life by the discovery of fossils. For a while, it tended to make him very pessimistic. As he examined fossils he saw evidences of many prehistoric animals. Would nature, so ruthless in her destruction of life, treat man any better than she had treated a thousand other types of life now extinct? But he still clung to a hope, as yet hidden by a veil, that the spirit of man would survive.

* "So careful of the type? but no.
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries, 'A thousand types are gone:
I care for nothing, all shall go'.

O life as futile, then, as frail!
O for thy voice to soothe and bless!
What hope of answer or redress?
Behind the veil, behind the veil."

There are many references to Evolution in Tennyson's poems. He had followed carefully many of the earlier evolutionists who had helped to prepare the way for Darwin. In November.1844, he wrote to Edward Moxon: **"I want you to get me a book which I see advertised in the Examiner; it seems to contain many speculations with which I have been familiar for years, and on which I have written more

*Section LVl In Memoriam.
**Page 222, Vol.l. Tennyson A Memoir by Hallam Tennyson.

than one poem. The book is called Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation. This book had aroused a great furore after its publication in 1844, for in it Chambers had set forth the theory that many species had developed from a few simple types. In several poems published after the advent of Chamber's book, but before the issuing of Darwin's The Origin of Species, Tennyson suggested that man, having evolved from lower forms of life, was developing into something even nobler than man.

* "Eternal process moving on,
From state to state the spirit walks;
And these are but the shatter'd stalks
Or ruined chrysalis of one!"

By an Evolutionist, published some time after The Origin of Species, set forth the views of a man who refused to allow himself to sink to the level of the animal kingdom, although he accepted the evolutionist's theory of the origin of man. When he first realized he was akin to the brute creation he was tempted to adopt an epicurean mode of life. He deplored the struggles of his past and wished to "bask amid the senses while the sun of morning shines". The experience of Old Age, however, pointed out that all the trials he had undergone had but prepared him for a higher form of life. He had starved the wild beast in man so that there was "less weight now for the ladder-of-heaven that hangs on a star". The evolutionist then decided that there was in man a Human Soul whose duty it was to control the

*Section LXXXll, In Memoriam.

brute within him and to make him catch a glimpse of loftier heights of living.

Many were not as optimistic as this man over the scientific discoveries of the age. Often those who discarded their old faiths failed to construct new ones. Some saw themselves as beings thrust by an Idiot Power into an infinite universe where everything was governed by pitiless, immutable Law. In Maud, Tennyson pictured a man held in the grip of the merciless mechanistic beliefs of the age. Unable to enjoy the beauty of his surroundings, he saw the cruelty of a Nature whose children lived by devouring each other. He himself seemed to be but a puppet of a callous Fate.

"For nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher
can heal;
The Mayfly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow spear'd
by the shrike,
And the whole little world where I sit is a world of
plunder and prey.

"We are puppets, man in his pride, and Beauty fair in
her flower;
Do we move ourselves, or are we moved by an unseen hand
at a game
That pushes us off the board, and others ever succeed?"

Some were inclined to look too much on the dark side of heredity. This had a deleterious influence similar to that which the doctrine of Reprobation had had in the past. Those with a poor inheritance refused to struggle, saying it was useless to fight against a law of nature. Tennyson thought that the individual should look upon his own defects as sins to wrestle with, not as afflictions dealt out by a Blind Force. He suggested this idea in the line,

* "If sin be sin, not inherited fate". He did not say how those with a poor inheritance should be regarded by others, but he showed the usual way of regarding the laws of heredity in several poems - it was to stress the uniformity of nature, not her individuality. In Walking to the Mail, James believed that Lady Head had become harsh and soured not because she had a husband "vexed with a morbid devil in his blood", but because she was born a cottager's daughter.

James. He left her,yes. I met my Lady once:
A woman like a butt,and harsh as crabs.
John. Oh yet but I remember,ten years back -
'Tis now at least ten years - and then she was -
You could not light upon a sweeter thing.
. . . . . .

James. Ay,ay,the blossom fades,and they that loved
At first like dove and dove were cat and dog.
She was the daughter of a cottager,
Out of her sphere. What betwixt shame and pride,
New things and old,himself and her,she sour'd
To what she is: a nature never kind!
Like men,like manners: like breeds like,they say.

The old man in Locksley Hall Sixty Years After, consoled his grandson who had been jilted for a wealthier thus:

"She the worldling born of worldlings - father,mother -
be content,
Ev'n the homely farm can teach us there is something
in descent".

Apparently the thought never entered the grandfather's head that the girl might have had a good reason for not loving his grandson.

In The Promise of May Tennyson showed the dangerous

* The Wreck.

tendencies of agnosticism. The play so riled one free thinker, the Marquis of Queensbury, at the Globe Theatre, that before the end of the first act, unable to contain himself any longer, he exclaimed,"I beg to protest.....! Then, realizing where he was, he added, "I will wait till the end of the act". At the end of the act he denounced the character of Edgar as an "abominable caricature". Undoubtedly it was a caricature, but Tennyson usually produced a grotesque representation of those whose proclivities he wished to frown upon. Such was the case in Maud, in Despair, in the two Locksley Halls. What Tennyson was really trying to do in The Promise of May, was to show the dangers which might ultimately result from free thinking. Many of those who had, in all honesty, cast off their theological beliefs, still adhered rigidly to the moral codes of their earlier training. Huxley and Matthew Arnold even favoured the use of the Bible in schools. But would not agnosticism eventually bring an inevitable loosening of moral restraints? Because Tennyson feared such a relaxing, he grossly exaggerated Edgar, the agnostic, depicting him as a man who had made the loss of his old beliefs an excuse for license.

> Edgar. The Gods! but they, the shadows of ourselves,
> Have past for ever, It is nature kills,
> And not for her sport either. She knows nothing.
> Man only knows, the worse for him! for why
> Cannot he take his pastime like the flies?
> And if my pleasure breed another's pain,
> Well - is not that the course of Nature too,

From the dim dawn of Being - her main law
Whereby she grows in beauty - that her flies
Must massacre each other? this poor Nature!

He resolved to "take his pastime like the flies" because it suited his pleasure. Accordingly he decided to cast aside the girl whom he had professed to love, for his marriage with her might cause his wealthy uncle to disinherit him. He declaimed all the long cherished institutions of England.

"The storm is hard at hand will sweep away
Thrones, churches, ranks, traditions, customs, marriage
One of the feeblest!"

He, following his own desires, lived only for the senses, unrestrained by morals.

"For the senses, love, are for the world;
That for the senses"

Tennyson, with his sensitive appreciation of the realms of spirit, could not rest content with a material world, but sought restlessly until he was able to reconstruct his faith, forming a synthesis of the best in old and new beliefs. His intuition led him to believe in a Divine Soul, the Source of all life. He could not prove His existence but he had felt his Power.

* ". . . . . ., that which knows,
And is not known, but felt thro' what we feel
Within ourselves is highest!"

The whole universe was the outward expression of this Soul, but only in rare moments of vision could man glimpse the Divine. Mr. Frederick Locker-Lampson who travelled with Tennyson in Switzerland described one such moment in

* The Ancient Sage

Tennyson's experience:

*"We were looking towards the higher Alps, and Tennyson said that perhaps this earth and all that is on it - storms, mountains, cataracts, the sun and the skies - are the Almighty; in fact that such is our petty nature, we cannot see Him, but we see His shadow, as it were, a distorted shadow; he added that possibly, at that moment, there might be beings invisible to us, who see the Almighty more clearly than we do, and he illustrated his meaning by saying that we have five senses, but that if we had been born with only one of these, our ideas of Nature would have been very different, much more limited". The same year his poem, "The Higher Pantheism, was read at the first meeting of the **Metaphysical Society.

"The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills
and the plains -
Are not these, O Soul, the vision of Him
who reigns?

"Dark is the world to thee; thyself art the
reason why;
For is he not all but that which has power to feel
'I am I'?"

In this poem Tennyson was an arbitrator between two conceptions of God - that of the strict religionist and that of the

* Page 68. Vol.II. Tennyson A Memoir by Hallam Tennyson
**Tennyson was one of the founders of the Metaphysical Society. It was established to bring about a better understanding between the theological and the agnostic parties at a time when there was much controversy over the theories of Darwin. Among others, Huxley, Ward, Froude, Tyndall, Gladstone, Manning, the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, were members of this society.

scientist. The religionist believed in a God who lived apart from the beautiful nature which he had created; the scientist saw a nature controlled by inexorable Law. Tennyson identified the religionist's God with the Scientist's Law. In The Passing of Arthur, Tennyson pictured the King as inclined towards pantheism but unable to accept the theory in its entirety.

> "I found Him in the shining of the stars,
> I marked Him in the flowering of His fields
> But in His ways with men I find Him not".

Tennyson believed in the divine nature of man. Especially did he recognize the divinity of Jesus. In Section XXXVI of In Memoriam, he referred to the special revelation of God in Christ.

> "Tho' truths in manhood darkly join,
> Deep-seated in our mystic frame,
> We yield all blessing to the name
> Of Him that made them current coin;
>
> "For Wisdom dealt with mortal powers,
> Where truth in closest words shall fail,
> When truth embodied in a tale
> Shall enter in at lowly doors.
>
> "And so the Word had breath, and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds
> In loveliness of perfect deeds,
> More strong than all poetic thought".

But he believed that God was revealed not in Christ only, he was to be found in man also. He had seen a divine light shining in the face of his dearest friend, Arthur Hallam, and he had found such humble people as ploughmen and shepherds, "Sons of God and kings of men in utter nobleness of

mind". Again, near the end of Locksley Hall Sixty Years After, he referred to the divine nature within man, but here he added the additional idea that because man possessed free will he must struggle to keep his higher nature.

"Ere she gain her Heavenly-best, 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,
Strowing balm, or shedding poison in the fountains
of the Will.

"Follow you the Star that lights a desert pathway,
yours or mine.
Forward, till you see the highest Human nature
is divine!"

It is interesting to notice how similar Tennyson's idea of the divine nature are to those of St. Paul and St. John. Apparently the rather harsh Biblical criticism of his day, combined with a rapidly growing materialism, had but stimulated his interest in the Bible so that he gained an understanding of some of the finest passages in the New Testament dealing with the personality of God. His doctrine of the Divine Soul was a restatement of the gist of Paul's sermon to the Athenians on Mars' Hill, when he declared that the Unknown God whom they ignorantly worshipped was the one

"not far from every one of us: for in him we live and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also his offspring".

His belief in the kinship of man with God was closely related to the teaching of John in the first chapter of his Gospel.

> "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.
> He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
> But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:
> Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
> And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us".

The death of Arthur Hallam had a profound influence on Tennyson's speculations about the nature of the soul. There had been such a spiritual affinity between the two friends that the separation seemed unbearable. A desire for communication with the spirit of the departed led Tennyson on to much conjecturing about the individual human soul. Its source, he believed, was the Divine Soul, but everything about it was so very indistinct. He felt so often like "an infant crying for the light". His own life he knew dimly, but had he lived before this life, and if he had, what was the nature of his previous existence? He was inclined to think that he had lived before, for sometimes there came to him,

> "A whisper from his dawn of life? a breath
> From some fair dawn beyond the doors of death
> Far - far - away?
>
> "Far, far, how far, from o'er the gates of Birth,
> The faint horizons, all the bounds of earth,
> Far - far - away?"

He hoped that the soul was eternally progressing from a

lower life to a higher one. In De Profundis he expressed the desire that the soul of his child, Hallam Tennyson, having come from "out of the deep" would

> " . . . . . still depart
> From death to death thro' life and life and find
> Nearer and ever nearer Him".

But the idea of progression from one state of existence to another made him fear that he might not be able to be the companion of Arthur Hallam in an after life, for he would be "evermore a life behind"! His longing to meet him again, no doubt intensified his desire for the survival of the personal soul.

> * "That each, who seems a separate whole,
> Should move his rounds, and fusing all
> The skirts of self again, should fall
> Remerging in the general Soul,
>
> "Is faith as vague as all unsweet
> Eternal form shall still divide
> The eternal soul from all beside;
> And I shall know him when we meet!"

He yearned to enjoy the companionship of Hallam forever in an after life, or, should this be impossible, he hoped at least to find,

> * "Some landing-place, to clasp and say,
> 'Farewell! We lose ourselves in light'."

Sometimes he was inclined to believe that though the soul beyond the grave could not communicate in words with the companion of his earthly life, yet one could have knowledge of the other. He thought that Hallam burned to tell him how he

* Section XLVll, In Memoriam

watched him and even touched his spirit. He did not think there was any possibility of communicating with the dead in the way reported by some experimentalists. Discussing with Longfellow the manifestations reported by spiritualists he said, *"Pucks, not the spirits of dead men reveal themselves". But it did seem possible to him that spirit could hold communion with spirit.

** "No visual shade of some one lost,
But he, the Spirit himself, may come
Where all the nerve of sense is numb;
Spirit to Spirit, Ghost to Ghost."

Indeed for one precious moment, when he was in a state of perfect receptivity, Hallam's living soul seemed to flash on his, but his doubt very soon caused it to vanish. It was an experience that he found it almost impossible to explain to others in words, or even to his own intellect afterwards, for he had been carried along by Hallam's living soul into realms hitherto unknown to him.

Those who judge Tennyson's attitude towards science and religion in the light of the twentieth century only, are apt to accuse him sometimes of purposeless and fanciful thinking. They say he was a dreamer, ***"lost amid the fancies of beauty". But those who look upon him with the full light of the Victorian Age, cast upon him, regard him quite differently. At a time when England was threatened by crass materialism on the one hand, and stupid orthodoxy on the other, he sought to

* Page 56. Vol.11. Tennyson A Memoir by Hallam Tennyson.
** Section XCIII, In Memoriam.
***Fausset - Tennyson A Modern Portrait

give her the sanity of a "faith beyond the forms of faith.". Fearlessly he faced the scientific discoveries of his day. Often he must have suffered intensely as he discarded much of his earlier faith. But as he studied the findings of science, his spiritual nature was crying out that physical science could never explain the soul behind matter. Rather than wallow in the mud of materialism, he climbed to the heights where passing clouds often enshrouded him. Many a time he seemed lost on the heights, but still he climbed, hoping that he and others might

> * ". . . . . beyond
> A hundred ever-rising mountain lines,
> And past the range of Night and Shadow - see
> The high-heaven dawn of more than mortal day
> Strike on the Mount of Vision!"

* The Ancient Sage

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