

TENNYSON AND HALLAM: THE RECORD OF A FRIENDSHIP

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CHAPTER I

TENNYSON AND HALLAM: A BRIEF FRIENDSHIP

In the life of Alfred Tennyson, greater than his early home environment, his natural sensitivity, and his close association with intellectuals--influences which he never overcame¹--was his close friendship with Arthur Henry Hallam. From their meeting at Trinity in 1829 until Hallam's death in 1833, Hallam's "intense, aesthetic interests" and generous, unselfish encouragement were very important to Tennyson's development as a poet.² Throughout their short relationship, Hallam's character dominated Tennyson's life and his poetry.³ Even after Hallam's death, his memory was an abiding influence.

Hallam came to Trinity with a background completely different from that of Tennyson. Brought up in a happy, socially-minded home, he was the son of Henry Hallam, one of the leading historical and literary scholars of the day.⁴ His wealthy parents spared no expense

¹Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson (New York: Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 538.

²Herbert Marshall McLuhan, "Tennyson and Picturesque Poetry," Essays in Criticism, I (July 1951), 262.

³Hugh I'Anson Fausset, Tennyson, A Modern Portrait (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1923), p. 49.

⁴Charles Tennyson, p. 63.

or effort for their son's education, and they offered him many cultural and educational advantages, including trips to the continent. As Hallam traveled with his family, his character developed with his study of the languages, the art, and the literature of the countries he visited. This background, a strong influence on his character and on his outlook, inspired in him an enthusiasm for Italian poetry, Petrarch, and Dante that later became the basis for many learned discussions with the Apostles, which were also a source of inspiration for Tennyson. In fact, Hallam's knowledgeable conversations were of notable importance to Tennyson's development as a poet, and his vast literary and philosophical insights intensely impressed Tennyson and richly affected him in his writing long after Hallam's death.

In contrast to Hallam, Tennyson was from an unstable, incompatible home.⁵ His father, George Clayton Tennyson, L. L. D., the disinherited son of a wealthy, domineering lawyer and businessman, has been described as poetic and artistic but troubled and bitter because of being disinherited and having to become a minister.⁶ As Dr. Tennyson's bitterness turned to violence, his children became the victims of his neurosis. His condition caused Tennyson to have thoughts that haunted and depressed him because he was convinced that he was sinful to think distressingly of his father. At the same time, too, Tennyson realized that he was drifting away from his religion;

⁵Jerome Hamilton Buckley, Tennyson, The Growth of a Poet (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 4.

⁶Ibid., p. 4.

and he found it difficult, without his faith, to endure the bitter times at the rectory.⁷ His experiences acted on his nervous temperament and often seriously affected his physical health as well as his mental health.

At this time, Tennyson's need for a friend was great; so his growing attachment to Hallam was not unusual. Their friendship was even more firmly established when Tennyson's father was persuaded to take an extended vacation on the continent. The period during the doctor's absence was of extraordinary importance in Tennyson's life, for it meant temporary relief from mental anguish, and it provided a time for the strengthening of his friendship with Hallam. In spite of the differences in home life, the two friends' respect for each other established an intimacy that lasted until Hallam's death and, through memories, "animated the long after-years of Tennyson's life."⁸

Though their early lives were dissimilar, Hallam and Tennyson had the same sensitive natures and enjoyed the same activities. They spent many happy hours tramping over the fields, strolling to the nearby village, or following the brook to Stockworth Mill. They also made longer journeys across France, to the Pyrenees, and through London. After their treks, they found respite in Hallam's den, where they smoked for hours and talked of modern authors, the unsettled conditions of the country, or the misery of the poorer class. Not knowing how to remedy the evils of the world, they resolved to continue

⁷Charles Tennyson, p. 66.

⁸Buckley, p. 31.

seeking the solution to its problems. These were probably the happiest years of their lives.

Having the same perceptive dispositions, possessing the same talents, and enjoying the same activities, Tennyson and Hallam also shared the same beliefs in love and in the existence of a God. Hallam's philosophical outlook, however, was so much stronger than Tennyson's that it gradually modified Tennyson's already weakened religious dogma. Finally, Tennyson accepted the liberal ideas that Hallam presented. After only two years of close association, Hallam's spirited intelligence improved Tennyson's technical ability and broadened and deepened his intellectual scope. Many times the two youths' wild imaginations took them to open fields of learned discussion, which their friends enjoyed as much as they. In their relationship, Tennyson gained new hope and confidence that rewarded him with the evidence of a new purpose and a more controlled aim.⁹ His "early morbid introspection and conviction of sinfulness,"¹⁰ the enigmas that had followed him since the early, black days of melancholy at Somersby, disappeared from his poetry as he yielded to Hallam's influence.

Hallam turned Tennyson's mind toward moral philosophy, a subject that absorbed their thoughts. They became intent on endeavoring to get nearer God, through religion. Hallam's theories about God and

⁹Charles Tennyson, p. 131.

¹⁰Ibid.

religion were the results of his study of Dante, which set in motion currents of thought that were very important influences on his character and on Tennyson. With his introduction to Dante's poetry, the story of Beatrice in Vita Nuova and the Commedia became one of the chief formative influences upon Hallam's mind and contributed to his sanguine attitude toward life.¹¹ Through Dante, Hallam discovered a creed strikingly similar to one that had been germinating in Tennyson's mind since boyhood. The principle involved belief in love as the "base and pyramidal point of the entire universe and the broad and deep foundation of . . . moral nature,"¹² and it required the existence of a personal god, "himself essentially Love and requiring the love of the creature as the completion of his being."¹³ Hallam's sincerity in these beliefs was shown in his essay "Theodicaea Novissimi," which Tennyson persuaded Henry Hallam to include in the memorial volume published after Hallam's death. In the essay, Hallam showed his belief that the presence of moral evil may be absolutely necessary to the fulfillment of God's essential love for Christ and that the eternal punishment of the wicked may not be incompatible with the doctrine of God's sovereign love.¹⁴ Hallam was very convincing with his abstract arguments, and soon Tennyson felt metapsychosis gradually weakening his own hold on religious beliefs about the existence of sin, suffering, and punishment. He never questioned Hallam's faith or moral worth, and his greatest inspiration was Hallam's search for the knowledge of truth.

¹¹Ibid., p. 65.

¹³Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁴Ibid.

Gaining in emotional and mental stability from his relationship with Hallam, Tennyson became more and more dependent upon Hallam's presence for reassurance; and just as Hallam's influence contributed to Tennyson's intellectual pursuits, so did Hallam's actual work in promoting his friend's career contribute to Tennyson's success as a poet. In 1831, Hallam persuaded the editor of the Westminster Review to publish Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, Tennyson's first independent poetical venture.¹⁵ Encouraged by the recognition Tennyson received from the prominent journal, Hallam sent copies of the book to other editors,¹⁶ who responded with warm and lengthy tributes. He also actively reviewed Tennyson's works for publishers, and Tennyson soon began to receive requests for poems from annuals, a class of publication very popular during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ With the success of Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, Hallam became even more energetic in his battle for Tennyson's recognition. He succeeded in obtaining an agreement for the publication of Tennyson's second book, and he continued to try to get regular monthly contributions published. His efforts on his friend's behalf never faltered.

As a part of his propaganda for Tennyson's acceptance, Hallam presented an essay for publication in The Englishman's Magazine for August, 1831. Since Hallam was Tennyson's closest friend, the review was very important, for it embodied Tennyson's own concept of his early

¹⁵Edgar Finley Shannon, Jr., Tennyson and the Reviewers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 5.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁷Charles Tennyson, p. 114.

work.¹⁸ In the paper, Hallam classed Tennyson with Shelley and Keats, picturesque poets of sensation whose writings were full of "deep and varied melodies."¹⁹ Of Tennyson, "whose mind conceives nothing isolated, nothing abrupt, but every part with reference to some other part,"²⁰ Hallam wrote:

One of the faithful Islam, a poet in the truest and highest sense, we are anxious to present to our readers. He has yet written little and published less; but in these "preludes of loftier strain" we recognize the inspiring god. Mr. Tennyson belongs decidedly to the class we have already described as Poets of Sensation. He sees all the forms of nature with the "eruditus oculus," and his ear has a fairy fineness. There is a strange earnestness in his worship of beauty which throws a charm over his impassioned song, more easily felt than described, and not to be escaped by those who have once felt it. We think he has more definiteness and roundness of general conception than the late Mr. Keats, and is much more free from blemishes of diction and hasty capriccios of fancy. He has also this advantage over that poet and his friend Shelley, that he comes before the public unconnected with any political party or peculiar system of opinions.²¹

And of Poems, Chiefly Lyrical, he wrote:

. . . it shows us much more of the character of its parent mind, than many books we have known of much larger compass and more boastful pretensions. The features of original genius are clearly and strongly marked. The author imitates nobody; we recognize the spirit of his age, but not the individual form of this or that writer.²²

¹⁸Arthur Henry Hallam, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry: And on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," Victorian Poetry and Poetics (New York: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1968), 848n.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 850.

²⁰Ibid., p. 853.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

In the essay, Hallam also listed Tennyson's five distinctive excellences of manner: luxuriance of imagination, power to embody himself in moods of character, picturesque delineation of objects, variety of lyrical measures, and elevated habits of thought.²³ He showed Tennyson as an author who knew what he was about, whose soul sought beauty, and whose ideas of good and perfection and truth were sacred.²⁴ Consequently, the essay, as a piece of literary criticism, showed a clear perception of Tennyson's genius.²⁵

After the appearance of this review, Tennyson turned more and more to Hallam for encouragement, inspiration, and faith. Many times Hallam's vivacious nature came to Tennyson's rescue during the periods of depression and despondency. Hallam responded, also, to Tennyson's sensitive reaction to criticism, and he was always nearby to lend his support and confidence. When Tennyson was criticized, Hallam argued for the superiority of Tennyson's poetry; when Tennyson was accused of being radical, Hallam tried to clear him. During one of Tennyson's states of depression, Hallam wrote encouragingly to him:

I am not without some knowledge and experience of your passion for the past. To this community of feeling between us I probably owe your inestimable friendship and those blessed hopes which you have been the indirect occasion of awakening. But what with you is universal and all powerful, absorbing your whole existence, communicating to you that energy which is so glorious, in me is checked and counteracted by other influences . . . You say pathetically, "alas for me, I have more of the beautiful than the good." Remember, to your comfort, that God has given you to see the difference.²⁶

²³Ibid.

²⁵Charles Tennyson, p. 115.

²⁴Ibid., p. 850.

²⁶Ibid., p. 117.

On another occasion, Hallam wrote to Tennyson's sister, to whom he was engaged, and he begged her to do what she could to help him in restoring his friend "to better hopes and more steady purposes."²⁷ He expressed his feelings thus: "I would sacrifice all my own peace to see you and him in peace with yourselves and with God."²⁸ Such loyalty was always a consolation to Tennyson.

Always, Hallam was complimentary to Tennyson. To the Apostles, the publishers, and the critics, he unceasingly praised his friend. In a letter, he told a colleague, "I consider Tennyson as promising fair to be the greatest poet of our generation, perhaps of our century."²⁹ In his last letter to Tennyson, he generously complimented his friend when he compared him with the great artists whose works were hanging in the galleries of Vienna:

And oh Alfred such Titians! by Heaven, that man could paint! I wish you could see his Danae. Do you just write as perfect a Danae! Also there are two fine rooms of Rubens, but I know you are an exclusive, and care little for Rubens, in which you are wrong: although no doubt Titian's imagination and style are more analagous to your own than those of Rubens or of any other school.³⁰

These words were the last that Tennyson received from the one "who had best understood his character as man and as poet and who had most warmly encouraged his gifts of imagination and style."³¹ For, suddenly, Hallam was dead, and Tennyson's legacies were only memories

²⁷Ibid.

³⁰Buckley, p. 58.

²⁸Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

²⁹Shannon, p. 2.

and philosophies. They were, however, of inestimable worth. Tennyson suffered from the knowledge of what his friend had really meant to him; he encountered the fear of death's import. Death's dreadful permanence provoked questions about undeserved life, the meaning of flesh and blood, and the ultimate worth of any art. Throughout all of Tennyson's questioning lay the underlying expression of Hallam's innocence and radiance. With words, Tennyson painted the appearance of his friend's power and thoughtfulness: "And over those ethereal eyes/The bar of Michael Angelo."³²And he also acknowledged: "He would have been known, if he had lived, as a great man but not as a great poet; he was as near perfection as mortal man could be."³³Following the initial shock of Hallam's death, Tennyson once again gave in to despondency and entered into a prolonged period filled with doubt, disillusionment, and self-examination. It seemed to him that his conscience and his poetic insight had also died with Hallam.

Arthur Hallam had been Tennyson's "artistic conscience" during critical times. After his death, scarcely anyone was left who believed, as Hallam had believed, that Tennyson was a potential poet of merit. And it seemed to Tennyson that not only was Arthur Hallam dead but that also a part of himself was missing. In the months following Hallam's death, in grief Tennyson suffered serious emotional disturbances. He questioned the value of human existence; he doubted the existence of God; he longed for absolute peace; he was terrified of death as an end to life.

³²Hallam Tennyson, p. 38.

³³Ibid.

Tennyson mournfully realized that he was alone and that he must remain loyal in seeking the "upward path to which Hallam had pointed him."³⁴ He began, then, to search for the meaning of death and to try to recall Hallam's spirit. Thus Hallam's death became both a real and a symbolic loss radiating from the center of Tennyson's work. By the end of the year, after Hallam's death, Tennyson had completed or sketched "Ulysses," "Tithonus," "Morte d'Arthur," and In Memoriam.³⁵ These poems all reflect the poet's intense feeling that resulted from his personal conflict, and they express his realization of the need for going forward and braving the battle of life, despite the crushing blow of Arthur's death. Embodying his philosophy on the subject of life and death, the poems record Tennyson's agonizing moods, his periods of hope, his states of despair over an existence void of purpose, and his eventual acceptance of death as a necessary and sanctifying complement to life. Although these works trace Tennyson's thoughts, they also stand as a tribute to Hallam, for they serve as a record of the relationship between Hallam and Tennyson and give testimony to the influence that Hallam's character exerted upon Tennyson.

³⁴J. B. Steane, Tennyson (New York: Arco Publishing Company, 1969), p. 31.

³⁵Charles Tennyson, p. 146.

CHAPTER II

TENNYSON'S POETRY, 1833-1850:

A TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF ARTHUR HALLAM

During the weeks of uncontrollable grief and emotional conflict following Arthur Hallam's death, Alfred Tennyson wrote some of his greatest poetry. The poems, born of grief, were expressions of Tennyson's real emotion and deep suffering. The laureate material in each of them illustrated the genius that was to earn the public applause Arthur Hallam had fought for. And even in death, Hallam touched Tennyson's hand and heart and mind, for his memory continued to give shape to the poet's life. Within three weeks after Hallam's death, Tennyson's bereft spirit conceived the immortal words of "Ulysses." By the end of the winter months following the tragedy, In Memoriam was in the process of composition, and three poems--"Tithonus," "The Two Voices," and "Morte d'Arthur"--were finished.

The news of Hallam's death intensified Tennyson's conflicting attitudes towards life and death. He was tempted to withdraw into his world of art, but, at the same time, he felt a responsibility to society. Although he was deprived of Hallam's support, he found "an internal prop in his writing and an external prop in his sense of

being at one with mankind."¹ In bringing his thoughts to consciousness through poetry, his writing alleviated his fears and relieved his emotions. Then, when his feelings were at their lowest and "braving the struggle of life was far from simple,"² Tennyson chose Ulysses as a symbol to give expression to his own complex feelings at this particular moment of crisis.

As Georg Roppen suggests, perhaps Tennyson selected Ulysses, a figure ready at hand, as a mask for his thoughts, because in all probability, Tennyson drew upon Dante's treatment of Ulysses in The Inferno. Undoubtedly, Tennyson was familiar with The Inferno, since Boyd's translation was in his father's extensive library, and certainly Dante was a subject that Tennyson and Hallam had enjoyed exploring. But in reading Dante, Tennyson was not so interested in the myth of Ulysses as he was in the Romantic idea of the spiritual quest. Moreover, since the eighteenth century, wandering and learning had been characteristic features of a hero's position and of a poet's career. During this time, too, one of man's highest ambitions was to be able to make a pilgrimage to a religious shrine for spiritual enrichment, to travel to an art center in search of knowledge, or to journey to a cultural capital to seek a richer experience in life.³ And to an age familiar with this literary tradition, Ulysses

¹John Pettigrew, "Tennyson's 'Ulysses': A Reconciliation of Opposites," Victorian Poetry, I(1963), 33.

²Ibid., p. 45.

³Georg Roppen, "'Ulysses' and Tennyson's Sea-Quest," English Studies, XL(April 1959), 78.

was certain to be recognized as the embodiment of the spiritual quester. While it is important to keep in mind the myth of Ulysses and its probable influence upon the poem, there can be little doubt that the most relevant context for an interpretation of the poem lies in the fact that the work was a product of Tennyson's emotional state in 1833.

During the first few weeks after Hallam's death, waves of depression swept Tennyson to the greatest depths, and he often wished for death. In spite of the first shock of his great grief, however, he realized that he must go on, and hope occasionally soothed his anxiety. Acknowledging the need for going forward, he once commented: "There is more about myself in 'Ulysses,' which was written under the sense of loss and all had gone by, but that still life must be fought out to the end."⁴ Admittedly weary of life, Tennyson, however, enriched "Ulysses" with his varying moods of grief and despair and hope. The poem is autobiographical, too, in that Achilles symbolizes Arthur Hallam; Ulysses, Tennyson. Although the dramatic contrast between the gulfs and the Happy Isles is the only direct reference to the poet's dead friend, from the beginning of the majestic poem to its magnificent end, Hallam's death is the immediate cause of Tennyson's doubt, the revered subject of his yearning, and the vital force behind his search.

With the loss of Hallam's guidance, Tennyson needed a vehicle to give vent to his grief, and in the tale of Ulysses, he recognized

⁴Fausset, p. 36.

the opportunity to express his own sense of loss, and, thus, in choosing the theme of the quest, he was also able to integrate the two worlds that Ulysses explores: the world of heroic action and the world of spiritual reality.⁵ Although the quest here is a mystical adventure, an embarkation for a fuller life, it is at the same time an exploration into the meaning of human existence, into the world of spiritual essence, and into the silence of approaching death. Just as Ulysses' last voyage is a journey impelled by a yearning for fulfillment, so is Tennyson's quest a journey within himself for new strength and ultimate vision.⁶ This impulse of the quest reaches a climax when Ulysses explains his ultimate goal:

. . . for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.⁷

The passage reflects Ulysses' fearlessness in the face of death, his desire for renewed life, his wish for escape, and his suicidal urge to pass to that "newer world" "beyond the sunset" of this life. It reveals a great deal more than a man going forward and braving the struggle of life, for its atmosphere is suggestive of death, and death is associated with the voyage and with the world beyond. As

⁵Roppen, p. 90.

⁶Carl Robinson Sonn, "Poetic Vision and Religious Certainty in Tennyson's Earlier Poetry," Modern Philology, LVII(November 1959), 87.

⁷"Ulysses," ll. 59-64, The Poetic and Dramatic Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, ed. W. J. Rolfe (New York, 1898), p. 17. Subsequent quotations from the poems are from this text.

Ulysses pursues the "knowledge" that lies "beyond the utmost bound of human thought," so Tennyson's recurrent "sense of diminished strength"⁸ leads him to a longing for the power he has lost and guides him to the realization that he must continue, even though his life is full of sorrow.

Ulysses is searching for the truth of the existence of spiritual reality. Disproving a living spirit are time, fate, and the weakness of human nature. Time is against Ulysses, since the future goal of the quest is infinite, but his past goal of the quest, his wife and his country was finite. Fate is against him, too, for it determines that he who could not rest from travel must become static in administering laws to people who are not improved by his efforts.⁹ Weakness of human nature is against him, also, for he feels that he is an "idle king," not because he is idle, but because his people are idle:

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

(11. 1-5)

In conflict with the forces of time, fate, and the weakness of human nature is Ulysses, his own evidence that spiritual reality does exist.

Ulysses has returned home after his long voyage, and feeling

⁸Sonn, p. 88.

⁹Charles Mitchell, "The Undying Will of Tennyson's 'Ulysses,'" Victorian Poetry, II(May 1964), 87.

disenchanted with his land and people, he is impatient to put to sea once more:

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees.

(11. 6-7)

Sensing alienation, he craves for new adventure. His past has been rich and full; his experience, heroic. And enduring the extremes of "enjoying greatly" and "suffering greatly," he has had exciting travels:

. . . all times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea.

(11. 7-11)

He is proud of the legendary magnificence of his adventurous life.

Although his subjects do not honor him, those Ulysses knew in the past do recognize his worth. His interests have been social and human interests, and he has enjoyed company and honor. He has seen cities, councils, and governments; he has observed manners, climates, and men. The things he has found have been valuable assets which his subjects do not possess, and he regrets that his people are not experienced in knowledge and self-knowledge and that they do not listen to him, their spiritual example:

. . . I am become a name;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart
 Much have I seen and known: cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,
 Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
 And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
 I am a part of all that I have met.

(11. 11-18)

Because he has been "a part of all" that he has met, Ulysses feels a close association with the spiritual reality of the "untravell'd world" and of experience:

Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
 Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
 For ever and for ever when I move.

(11. 19-21)

He believes that the "untravell'd world," like the horizon, is always just out of reach and that his goal can never be reached in the world of experience, since its "margin fades/For ever and for ever."

Ulysses perceives in his subjects, who fail to show individual spirit, only the bestial functions of hoarding, sleeping, and feeding. From his superior standpoint, such life is really death whereas the death he seeks is life:

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
 As tho' to breathe were life!

(11. 22-24)

He is concerned with the good life and with value. For this reason, he renews his condemnation of the sloth and inertia of those that hoard and sleep and feed, "As though to breathe were life."

Yearning for "life piled on life," Ulysses realizes that every hour he saves from that "eternal silence," death, brings the new knowledge that he seeks:

. . . Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things.

(11. 24-28)

He knows, however, that little of life remains for him.

Although he seems sure of the truth of spiritual fulfillment, Ulysses is still uncertain of death's promises. So, in attempting to prove that man is spirit, Ulysses presses "beyond the utmost bound of human thought":

. . . and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

(11. 28-32)

Tennyson uses images of the sea symbolically to show that life is "beyond the utmost bound." The "sinking star" symbolizes the vision that Ulysses aspires to but cannot completely attain because his voyage is life itself and thus must end in death. The star is also

symbolic of the spirit plunging into death, the dark, broad sea that is mysterious and limitless. Ulysses believes that he, "like the sinking star," can follow knowledge only by dying. Ulysses' last voyage thus becomes Tennyson's quest within himself of fresh strength and ultimate vision.

Impatient with his people and eager to begin his quest, Ulysses relinquishes the rule of Ithaca to his son Telemachus. With this act, he suggests that he intends a voyage from which he will not return:

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle--
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.

(11. 33-38)

Since Ulysses must continue in his attempt to prove that man is spirit, the menial tasks involved in subduing a rugged people do not interest him. The practice of "the useful and the good," while admirable, is in the "sphere of common duties" and reveals man's practical and moral nature, but not his spiritual nature, which Ulysses seeks.

Now that he is leaving, Ulysses recognizes the usefulness of his son's tasks and also speaks of his own:

Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

(11. 39-43)

Through a contrast with the "sphere of common duties," the passage dramatizes Ulysses' dedication. Leaving the boredom of life in society, Ulysses speaks affectionately of his son as he gives the rule of the people to Telemachus.

Embarking on his sea voyage, Ulysses observes the port on one side, and he views the gloomy sea on the other. The sea, like death, is dark and broad, mysterious and limitless:

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;
There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me--
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads.

(11. 44-49)

His mariners are souls, not common sailors, who have experienced happy times and difficult times with Ulysses. They are prepared now, for the spiritual voyage.

Ulysses' terms of achievement are not the classical ones of martial glory, but those of work:¹⁰

. . . you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil.
Death closes all.

(11. 49-51)

The emphasis that Ulysses gives to toil and work may be the poet's way of acknowledging the usefulness or need for perseverance in overcoming

¹⁰Roppen, p. 84.

problems and in mastering his art. In any event, except for the vague anticipation of the Happy Isles, Ulysses is bent on the experience of life, and he is determined to make the most of it, since life seems short and death appears to be the end of all.

Ulysses' search points to no definite goal, but he has a desire to achieve "some work of noble note," and he yearns to "follow knowledge." Behind this attitude lies Ulysses' conviction that the world is a place where action is meaningful, even though the land is barren, the people are savage, and he himself is unrecognized. Ulysses implies that he and his men, who strove with gods, have been god-like:

. . . but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

(11. 51-53)

In the past they apparently could perform like gods, possessing "that strength which in the old days moved heaven and earth."

The sea voyage, the quest, and the questions of death are a direct connection to the symbolic seascape and nightfall which Tennyson uses most effectively to probe beyond the limits that his words set:

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices.

(11. 54-56)

Used synonymously with death, the "deep" suggests the transcendent

sense and the mystical. The "deep moans round" and its many voices speak more of death than of life.¹¹ The "deep" implies the projection into the sea of human utterances of grief or sadness, as well as the voices of the dead.¹² It also invites Ulysses beyond the "bound," and it suggests to him a world of unlimited knowledge, new experience, and noble work.

The great energy with which Ulysses and his men rush toward their goal does not suggest that they are dying:

. . . Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows.

(11. 56-59)

The strength, however, is not physical, but volitional: "We are not now that strength," but "that which we are, we are. . . strong in will."

"Beyond the sunset," Ulysses seeks the Happy Isles, a dwelling of the virtuous after death:

. . . for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.

(11. 59-61)

The Isles suggest a goal of renewed life in opposition to the "gulfs

¹¹Pettigrew, p. 42.

¹²Roppen, p. 88.

that wash us down." Also clarifying his goal, the westerly direction Ulysses proposes to sail and the emblem of temporal life, which is the setting of the sun, point to a goal that is in hope.

In longing to see Achilles in the Happy Isles, Ulysses suggests that man is spirit and remains spirit in death. Significantly, Ulysses does not sail in order to reach the Happy Isles and join the great Achilles. His anticipation is merely to "touch," or to visit, the Isles of the Blest, and not, apparently, to enjoy Elysian life forever.¹³ Though the Happy Isles are a symbol of beatific existence, of life after death, they do not invite him to come at once:

It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.

(11. 62-64)

Because he hopes to find Achilles in the new world, Ulysses shows that the world he seeks is a spiritual world on the other side of death.

Ultimately, Ulysses creates order from chaos and builds up will from impulses that threaten to shatter his sense of direction and identity. In his search for truth, Ulysses, recognizing the essential order and beauty of the world, is yearning for wisdom and self-knowledge:

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;

¹³Sonn, p. 84.

One equal temper of heroic hearts,
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

(11. 65-67)

The body, "made weak by time and fate," dies, but the soul endures, so that the strength of "will/To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" supports Ulysses in his pursuit of self-realization.

Ulysses' immediate goal provokes many arguments. Charles Mitchell suggests that the voyage for which Ulysses is preparing is the act of dying and that his goal is spiritual reality.¹⁴ And Walter Houghton remarks, "In the 'Ulysses,' the hero and his men set forth in old age on a last voyage, determined to achieve some work of noble note."¹⁵ In another sense, John Pettigrew states: "The voyage may involve flight from duty or a search for it, a call to life or death of dreamful ease, a following of knowledge or a Byronic wallowing in experience."¹⁶ Still another view is Robert Langbaum's, that Ulysses' goal is death, and hence oblivion of self.¹⁷ The significance of the poem, however, seems to emphasize that Ulysses' goal is not death, but it is life in death. This seems especially pertinent since Tennyson, even though he wishes to join Hallam in death, is seeking, too, a way of life.

¹⁴p. 87.

¹⁵The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven, 1959), p. 295.

¹⁶p. 42.

¹⁷The Poetry of Experience (New York, 1957), p. 91.

Furthermore, the meaning of death is important to the emotional structure of "Ulysses." As the "end of action and experience" death is marked three times in the poem: ". . . but every hour is saved/From that eternal silence" (l. 27), "Death closes all" (l. 51), and ". . . to sail beyond the sunset, and the baths/Of all the western stars, until I die" (l. 61). And Tennyson, again through Ulysses, shows his love of life versus the ever-present question of death: ". . . will man be forever 'seal'd within the iron hills'?"¹⁸ Ulysses is face-to-face with this question, and the tension that Tennyson sets up "seeks release in fulfillment in the novel experience in the 'untravell'd world,' in the pursuit of knowledge 'beyond the utmost bound of human thought' (l. 32), and the hope of finding a 'newer world,' 'beyond the sunset' and 'the baths/Of all the western stars'" (l. 60).¹⁹ Tennyson, in these phrases, gives expression to his own doubts of transcendent existence.

As Tennyson in "Ulysses" struggles for answers to perplexities, so his painful experiences following Hallam's death are the beginnings of the direct confessions of "The Two Voices." Both poems struggle toward an expression of intellectual certainty and fullness of life. "The Two Voices" shows the same obsessive emotional conflict between life and death that "Ulysses" holds. In both poems the hero seeks strength, "though of different kinds and by different means."²⁰ In "Ulysses," the hero searches for a self-sustaining, religious vision;

¹⁸Roppen, p. 86.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 85.

²⁰Sonn, p. 88.

in "The Two Voices," the same vision is almost gained.²¹ Searching for the meaning of life and the rationalization of death, "The Two Voices," like "Ulysses," reflects the poet's moods.

Following Hallam's death, Tennyson's doubt became so extreme that he felt the urge to commit suicide. His own comment on the state of mind that produced the poem shows his despair: "I was so utterly miserable, a burden to myself and to my family, that I said, 'Is life worth anything?'"²² This emotional conflict underlies the whole debate in "The Two Voices," which Tennyson originally entitled "The Thoughts of a Suicide."²³ And again, as in the other poems written during this period, Tennyson seeks solace in his art.

Without myth or character, the conflict of life and death is developed directly in "The Two Voices." In the long "night of the soul in a darkness which is the very image of despair,"²⁴ the voice of denial rationalizes death, while the ego recalls its resolution to "strive a happy strife" (l. 130) and "not to lose the good of life" (l. 132). The first voice asks,²⁵ as Tennyson had asked:

Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be?²⁶

²¹Ibid.

²²Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir (New York, 1897), I, 139.

²³Ibid., 193n.

²⁴Buckley, p. 63.

²⁵Hallam Tennyson, I, 139.

²⁶"The Two Voices," ll. 47-48.

And both the voice and the ego argue about the cowardliness of suicide and about the fact that life after death may hold something more terrible than life's disappointments. The voice tells the self:

Though thou wert scattered to the wind,
Yet is there plenty of the kind.

(ll. 32-33)

The response, though, is clear and quick:

No compound of this earthly ball
Is like another, all in all.

(ll. 35-36)

While the voice sees man's insignificance and life's futility, the self beholds man as God's noble creation:

Let me not cast in endless shade
What is so wonderfully made.

(ll. 5-6)

Although it is consistently discredited by the voice, the poet's argument against suicide continues through the night. At first, the small voice of despair is vigorous in his argument; the speaker's, weak and unsure. During a sleepless night, the voice insists that self-destruction is the only answer to the purposeless suffering in the universe. He argues:

This is more vile,
To breathe and loathe, to live and sigh,
Than once from dread of pain to die.

(ll. 103-105)

He recognizes that the speaker's replies are weak, that he is afraid of life, and that he desires only an existence in isolation; so he presses his advantage:

Sick art thou--a divided will
Still heaping on the fear of ill
The fear of men, a coward still.

(ll. 106-108)

The small voice points out that a dream is good, but it is, nevertheless, only a dream, and that knowledge, like a shadow, has no animate hold. The only goal worthy of attainment, then, is death:

Why inch by inch to darkness crawl?
There is one remedy for all.

(ll. 200-201)

The speaker answers with difficulty until the balance of the argument turns, at last, in his favor. Only after the speaker ceases to confine his argument to life upon earth does he begin to get the better of the voice. Man, the speaker says, has intimations of immortality, "inklings of an ideal which cannot be found on earth; the mind and heart refuse to accept earthly existence as the only life, for they cannot believe in the absolute finality of death."²⁷ In what is obviously a reference to Hallam, the speaker seems to hear a "Heavenly Friend" (l. 295), and "thro' thick veils to apprehend/A labor working to an end" (ll. 296-297). In his conflict, the speaker

²⁷Clyde de L. Ryals, Theme and Symbol in Tennyson's Poems to 1850 (Philadelphia, 1964), p. 118.

envisions the heavens:

Heaven opens inward, chasms yawn,
Vast images in glimmering dawn,
Half shown, are broken and withdrawn.

(ll. 104-106)

He tells the voice that man's very doubt about the future life is sufficient reason for him to hold onto his present existence.²⁸ After this, the speaker notes that "the voice with which I fenced/A little ceased" (ll. 317-318).

Ultimately, as daylight comes, the small voice sullenly withdraws, and despair turns to hope. Then, declaring that "no life that breathes with human breath/Has ever truly longed for death" (ll. 395-396), the speaker overcomes the nagging voice. The voice of hope enters and begins to argue against the voice of despair:

'Tis life whereof our nerve is scant,
Oh life, not death, for which we pant:
More life, and fuller, that I want.

(ll. 397-399)

His announcement causes the speaker to reflect on the day's importance. Then, suddenly, the speaker's depression lifts, and he looks about with divination on the familiar surroundings. He looks at the churchgoers, who represent the repudiation of the temptation to suicide,²⁹ and he is moved even to bless them as a new hope urges him on. The parents and

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Pettigrew, p. 33.

their child, in well-ordered family life, symbolize a goodness that the voice cannot argue out of existence. As the ego blesses them, they wander on, and the speaker, now conscious of something other than himself, realizes that he is a part of the universe and that he shares a common bond with mankind. The dull and bitter voice of despair, realizing that he cannot argue against the good in mankind,³⁰ disappears:

As from some blissful neighborhood,
A notice faintly understood,
I see the end, and know the good.

(ll. 430-432)

And new hope replaces despair.

The new hope is in the form of the second voice, who, with "A little whisper silver-clear/A murmur, 'Be of better cheer'" (ll. 428-429), tells the poet that "I may not speak of what I know" (l. 435). The whisper, music to the poet's ears, is a cry of "hidden hope" (l. 441), and in that hour, "like the rainbow from the shower" (l. 444), he feels that every cloud is love. Feeling that love is the "animating principle of all creations,"³⁰ the speaker accepts the second voice, the affirmation of joy. And the love of life is victorious.³²

The voice of hope overpowers the voice of despair, but the poet is still in the shadow of despondency. His dejection is shown in the

³⁰Steane, p. 46.

³¹Buckley, p. 64.

³²Roppen, p. 80.

persistent desire for death, which lingers from "The Two Voices" to "Tithonus." The two poems' common theme of despair is one growing directly from "Ulysses," which is a companion piece to "Tithonus." Conflicting at times with the poet's desire for personal immortality, a life-weariness and a longing for rest through oblivion³³ are characteristic of both "Tithonus" and "Ulysses." The two poems complement each other: a longing for oblivion is overwhelming in "Tithonus"; a longing for rest adds complexity of meaning to "Ulysses." And, while Ulysses' journey is taken with diminishing strength, impotency causes Tithonus to wish for death. Masked as age, the familiar theme appears early in the poems and works its way to the end of each.

Throughout "Tithonus," impotence and the profoundness of life and death project Tennyson's despair over life's intolerable burden. Tithonus represents the despair of continuing an existence void of purpose.³⁴ His power withers as decay offers release in death to all other natural objects:

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapors weep their burthen to the ground;
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.³⁵

As a "gray shadow" (l. 11), he roams the "quiet limit of the world"

³³Langbaum, p. 90.

³⁴Buckley, p. 62.

³⁵"Tithonus," ll. 1-4.

(l. 7) and consumes the eternal life his goddess once granted him. She had neglected, however, to give him eternal youth, and he is weary:

. . . thy strong Hours indignant worked their wills,
And beat me down and marred and wasted me,
And though they could not end me, left me maimed.

(ll. 18-20)

As Aurora renews her beauty each day, the white-haired shadow, symbolic of Tennyson's grief for Hallam, realizes that he can have only his memories, for "the saying learnt/In days far-off, on that dark earth" (ll. 47-48) is true, and "the gods themselves cannot recall their gifts" (l. 49). So he dreams of his youth, and he is envious "of happy men that have the power to die" (l. 70). His death wish, "release me, and restore me to the ground" (l. 72), pathetically reiterates Tennyson's own sorrow.

Tithonus' longing for death creates a dark mood where light and dark, warmth and cold, beauty and ugliness, and youth and age express the sense of ever-present longing to know life's purpose. Tithonus is the ugly, gray shadow that Aurora's contrasting beauty and loveliness make even more repulsive. Occasionally, as the clouds part, he glimpses the "dark earth" which he chose to leave for her shining eyes and "dim curls that kindle into sunny rings" (l. 54). He feels small remorse for his youth and his love; however, he realizes the difference between their ages:

How can my nature longer mix with thine?
 Coldly thy rosy shadows bathe me, cold
 Are all thy lights, and cold my wrinkled feet.

(11. 65-67)

Knowing that she will always be young because she renews her youth and her beauty "morn by morn" (l. 74), Tithonus shrinks from Aurora's light and constantly identifies himself with the dark. The more brilliant her light, the more drab, his. His spirit longs for death as the replacement for rest and warmth.

Though death is the underlying current of both "Tithonus" and "Ulysses," in many ways the poems qualify each other. While Tithonus is weary of living, Ulysses defies the decay and the laxity of age and is determined to remain vigorous, even though his quest may consume his last brief period of life. And where Ulysses is masculine, vigorous, and hopeful, Tithonus is impotent, helpless, and despairing. Ulysses responds to the gleam of the untraveled world and the challenge of the western stars; Tithonus finds frustration in the "gleaming halls of morn" (l. 10), the "empty courts" (l. 75), and "the ever-silent spaces of the East" (l. 9). As Ulysses believes it "dull to pause," Tithonus feels it tragic that any man should desire to pass "beyond the goal of ordinance/Where all should pause, as is most meet for all" (11. 30-31). Wanting to travel and rejecting his wife and son, Ulysses directs his mind and efforts toward adventure and men; longing for death and sorrowing at losing his love and forsaking his friends, Tithonus reflects his feelings through fatigue and weariness. Thus, Tithonus longs for death; Ulysses, for "life piled on life." For Ulysses, a

new world opens up as he looks about him to the horizon:

. . . my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.

("Ulysses," ll. 59-61)

But for Tithonus, the heavens, "the gleaming halls of morn" (l. 10), bring only the painful renewal of an existence that is not life. Tithonus' existence is dreamlike; Ulysses' life is sharp and exact. The contrasting thoughts and feelings of each hero point to the poet's different emotions.

Although Tithonus' attitude clearly contrasts with that of Ulysses, Tennyson called "Tithonus" a pendant to "Ulysses," suggesting affinity rather than contrast between the poems.³⁶ In both poems, the poet wears the mask of an old man, for he feels the mark of age that the death of his friend Hallam has left. Each poem complements the other, expressing Tennyson's variability in moods. Weariness with life and longing for death appear in both "Ulysses" and "Tithonus." In both, too, the poet expresses the nature of lost vitality that cannot be revived or replaced.³⁷ With symbols of frustration and age, Tennyson shows his divided sensibility in the two poems.

Tennyson, however, unites the themes of "Ulysses" and "Tithonus"

³⁶Pettigrew, p. 35.

³⁷Sonn, p. 90.

in another work, "Morte d'Arthur." Frustration and the mask of age are again shown in the figure of Sir Bedivere and in the death of King Arthur. The poem introduces a medieval story, a mythology that all the Apostles earnestly meditated upon.³⁸ Embellished with emagery, the tone is Tennyson's,³⁹ and it furnishes another insight into the poet's emotions at the time. Symbolic of the relationship between Hallam and Tennyson, "Morte d'Arthur" is a mournful expression of the poet's continued efforts to find a fuller life.

Many of the ideas in "Morte d'Arthur" are like those of "Ulysses." Arthur, wearing the mask of age, is a king who is going to die, and, like Ulysses, he greets death as a new experience.⁴⁰ In both poems, symbolic journeys are begun. Ulysses embarks upon a lonely journey into darkness; King Arthur, upon a voyage to Avalon, the island-paradise. Both kings are accompanied on their trips by shadowy, ghost-like comrades. And both poems have reunion as their controlling idea⁴¹; despair, as their undercurrent. King Arthur does not really die, for he is borne to a mystical retreat, from which he will return to rule again.⁴² A vision of his return and a dream of reunion with him close the verse that frames the epic :

³⁸William Doremus Paden, Tennyson in Egypt (Lawrence, 1942), p. 81.

³⁹Buckley, p. 65.

⁴⁰Ryals, p. 140.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 212.

⁴²Paden, p. 87.

To me, methought, who waited with the crowd
 There came a bark that, blowing forward, bore
 King Arthur, like a modern gentleman
 Of stateliest port; and all the people cried,
 "Arthur is come again; he cannot die."
 Then those that stood upon the hills behind
 Repeated--"Come again, and thrice as fair";
 And, further inland, voices echoed--"Come
 With all good things, and war shall be no more."
 At this a hundred bells began to peal,
 That with the sound I woke, and heard indeed
 The clear church-bells ring in the Christmas morn.⁴⁴

Like King Arthur, Ulysses looks forward to a reunion. Underneath his yearning for life, for knowledge, and for Achilles, though, is a pervasive consciousness of death which objectifies Tennyson's own personal feeling of despair. Throughout both poems, Tennyson uses the figures of mythic nobility and Hallam to unite the past with the present.

Like "Ulysses," too, "Morte d'Arthur" is autobiographical. In this poem Sir Bedivere, or Tennyson, is left to face an alien world, for King Arthur, or Hallam, sleeps. This idea germinated when Tennyson realized that he and his friend could never again enjoy life at Somersby, their Camelot:

They sleep--the men I loved. I think that we
 Shall never more, at any future time,
 Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
 Walking about the gardens and the halls
 Of Camelot, as in the days that were.

(ll. 17-21)

The king sleeps in the "chapel nigh the field":

⁴⁴"Morte d'Arthur," ll. 292-303.

A broken chancel with a broken cross,
 That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
 On one side lay the ocean, and on one
 Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

(11. 9-13)

Merlin says, however, that the king will return "to rule once more" (1. 24), and this is the hope for reunion that keeps parting the clouds of despair.

Bedivere's attempt and failure to retain the magical sword also suggest Tennyson's despair. When he is instructed to throw the sword into the sea, Bedivere, on the third bid, finally follows King Arthur's instructions, but he performs without faith. Bedivere, thinking only of himself, sees that he will be left alone in a hostile world, and he is lost:

. . . now I see the true old times are dead,
 When every morning brought a noble chance,
 And every chance brought out a noble knight.
 Such times have been not since the light that led
 The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
 But now the whole round table is dissolved
 Which was an image of the mighty world;
 And I, the last, go forth companionless,
 And the days darken round me, and the years,
 Among new men, strange faces, other minds.

(11. 229-238)

The king bids him to turn his attention to faith, for "God fulfills himself in many ways/Lest one good custom should corrupt the world" (11. 241-242). The times may be difficult, but hardships can be overcome with prayer:

If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of.

(11. 246-248)

Bedivere knows that he must go forth, companionless, into the world, and he cries, "Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go" (l. 227)? And Arthur, from the funeral barge and even beyond life altogether, gives his last words of wisdom:

The old order changeth, yielding place to new
And God fulfills himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

(11. 240-242)

Change, he says, is divinely ordained, lest men stagnate in human satisfactions.⁴⁵ So he should pray, for prayer distinguishes men from the beasts of the field.⁴⁶ Yet Arthur is not sure of peace and rest, for his "mind is clouded with a doubt" (l. 258).

The king, however, plans to look for rebirth and healing in Avalon, the haven of refuge and regeneration. On his island-paradise, neither rain nor snow nor hail falls:

Nor ever wind blows loudly, but it lies
Deep-meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea.

(11. 260-263)

⁴⁵Buckley, p. 67.

⁴⁶Ibid.

In a dream, then, the speaker fancies himself sailing with Arthur:

And so to bed, where yet in sleep I seem'd
To sail with Arthur under looming shores,
Point after point; till on to dawn, when dreams
Begin to feel the truth and stir of day,
To me, methought, who waited with the crowd,
There came a bark that, blowing forward, bore
King Arthur, like a modern gentleman
Of stateliest port.

(ll. 239-246)

When they sight the returning king, the watchers on the hills cry out in greeting:

. . . and all the people cried,
'Arthur is come again: he cannot die.'
Then those that stood upon the hills behind
Repeated--'Come again, and thrice as fair';
And, further inland, voices echoed--'Come
With all good things, and war shall be no more.'

(ll. 346-351)

At this moment, the poet is awakened by the Christmas bells:

At this a hundred bells began to peal,
That with the sound I woke, and heard indeed
The clear church-bells ring in the Christmas morn.

(ll. 352-355)

Symbolically the bells are ringing out "the faithless coldness of the times" (*In Memoriam*, CVI, 18), and with their sound, the poet's faith in the Christian tradition returns.

Although "Morte d'Arthur" points a way to faith, death and despair and the need to seek knowledge are certainly characteristic of

Tennyson's poetry during this period of crisis. The poet's emotional bias shows his weariness and his desire for oblivion. He wishes for personal immortality in "Ulysses"; he begs for release in "Tithonus"; he presents death in "Morte d'Arthur." The same loss provides the theme for the short lyric "Break, Break, Break," a melancholy poem that pictures Tennyson in the shadowy valley of death:

Break, break, break,
 On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
 And I would that my tongue could utter
 The thoughts that arise in me.

O well for the fisherman's boy
 That he shouts with his sister at play!
 O well for the sailor lad,
 That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
 To their haven under the hill;
 But O for the touch of a vanished hand,
 And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break,
 At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
 But the tender grace of a day that is dead
 Will never come back to me.

Tennyson's ambivalence appears in the anguish for the dead against the call for life. The happy shouts of the children and the confident songs of joy ring out against the breakers, as the sea expresses its grief with its sounds. The joyfulness, however, only reminds the poet of the sounds he is wishing to hear. The ship moves on, yet it recalls only the "vanished hand." The sea, itself, in its endless circle of movement, symbolizes life, but not the lost experiences. The poet sees that life, like the sea, works in a cycle: it

it gives and it takes away.⁴⁷ And even though he is not wholly resigned to the loss of the vanished hand and the still voice, he knows that he must accept the loss.

"Break, Break, Break" is probably about Hallam's burial place, the humble old Clevedon Church, Somersetshire, that was on a lone hill overlooking the sea. Tennyson also refers to the chancel in his elegy In Memoriam, which describes the loss of hope, and as Tennyson called it, the "way of a soul."⁴⁸ In Memoriam is a journey through the first confusion of grief in "The Two Voices" to peace and joy experienced with the assertion of faith. Hallam is the "symbol of life" whose passing brings death into the poet's world, and death, "in its many connotations, as the survivor must learn to accept or transcend it,"⁴⁹ becomes at the outset Tennyson's essential theme.

⁴⁷Killham, p. 107.

⁴⁸Hallam Tennyson, I, 139.

⁴⁹Ibid., I, 111.

CHAPTER III

IN MEMORIAM: A MONUMENT TO ARTHUR HALLAM

The elegy In Memoriam firmly establishes Alfred Tennyson's genius. Portraying man's love and immortality, the English classic is memorial to his past. As it advances from despair to hope, from doubt to faith, it expresses Tennyson's experiences with life and death. Written over a seventeen-year period following Arthur Hallam's death, it is the greatest tribute that Tennyson could give his dearest friend. The death that In Memoriam commemorates came suddenly, parting a beautiful companionship between Tennyson and Hallam and terminating a love rare between men. Death, however, revealed rather than impaired their love, and the poem shows the hallowed influence of that affection. In Memoriam progresses from the initial shock of grief caused by the sudden news of Hallam's death and burial, through reminiscences of early days with Hallam at Cambridge and at Somersby, to memories of Hallam's character and his influence on others, and finally to Tennyson's acceptance of Hallam's death, which leads to resolutions of new faith.

In Memoriam is introduced by an invocation in which Tennyson acknowledges that God is the conqueror of death, and the poet professes

faith that God so planted hope in man that He will not disappoint him because He is just. The poet asks forgiveness for his sin of grieving for Hallam, God's "creature" (l. 38) whom he "found so fair" (l. 38). Apologizing for his inadequacy, he fears his words are wild and wandering "confusions of a wasted youth," and he asks for wisdom. The prologue, like the elegies, is a part of Tennyson's being, "the very body of his changing emotion."¹

The first twenty-seven poems of In Memoriam, written several years before the prologue, are the real introduction to the elegy.² In the first eight poems, Tennyson describes his despair and grief in one of the main ideas of the elegy, that love is the supreme good and can defy time.³ In the opening verses that preface the whole poem, Tennyson questions his ideal, Goethe, who held that men may rise to higher things,⁴ a principle that both Tennyson and Hallam believed:

I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.⁵

¹Buckley, p. 109.

²Martin J. Svaglic, "A Framework for Tennyson's In Memoriam," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LXI(1948), 812.

³Andrew Cecil Bradley, A Commentary on Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' (London, 1902), p. 84.

⁴John D. Rosenberg, "The Two Kingdoms of In Memoriam," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LVIII(April 1959), 228.

⁵In Memoriam, I, 1-4.

Their theory was that their dead selves, or experiences, should lead to greater things. Tennyson thought the special loss he had sustained in the death of Hallam should rouse him to higher things, rather than leave him to be pointed out as the man who loved and lost.⁶ The poet finds it difficult to understand that in the loss of his dear friend, a gain can be found, nor does he believe that time will erase his sorrow:

But who shall so forecast the years
And find in loss a gain to match?
Or reach a hand through time to catch
The far-off interest of tears?

(I, 5-8)

If a gain can be found in loss, will he be able, before his time, to reach into the future for the reward his tears should reap? Expressing his despair in his experience, Tennyson reaffirms his faith. He decides that he should not suppress his grief for fear of suppressing love, too. The strength of love and the intensity of loss, he believes, are exactly proportionate:

Let Love clasp Grief lest both be drowned,
Let darkness keep her raven gloss.
Ah, sweeter to be drunk with loss,
To dance with Death, to beat the ground.

(I, 9-12)

As he greets death in raven darkness, the poet alludes to the Dance of Death, a spectacular ancient custom that was practiced following

⁶Alfred Gatty, A Key to Lord Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' (London, 1902), p. 2.

the death of a loved one. He is fearful that, years from now, Time, having worn away both the grief and the love of the poet, will boast of his conquest and laugh at the miserable outcome of such a long love:⁷

Than that the victor Hours should scorn
 The long result of love, and boast,
 "Behold the man that loved and lost,
 But all he was is overworn."

(I, 13-16)

As the poet's "love clasps Grief" (I, 9), so the yew tree grasps at the stones at its roots. Tennyson symbolizes death in the old yew of the churchyard where Hallam is buried. As the old tree wraps its roots about the bones, it seems to typify Tennyson's state of mind, for the roots hold the skull, "the dreamless head" (II, 3), and the bones of the dead. In the same way, Tennyson's thoughts cling to the dead:

Old yew, which graspest at the stones
 That name the underlying dead,
 Thy fibers net the dreamless head,
 Thy roots are wrapped about the bones.

(II, 1-4)

Flowers and animals and men are born, but the struggle to attain contentment and happiness is difficult. In the shadow of the tree, the clock of the church tower tolls away the years as it strikes the hours of death:

⁷Bradley, p. 84.

The seasons bring the flower again,
 And bring the firstling to the flock;
 And in the dusk of thee the clock
 Beats out the little lives of men.

(II, 5-8)

Spring comes, blooms return, and new life arrives, but the branches of the old yew do not bloom. The tree preserves its thousand years of gloom, and neither the summer sun nor the spring breeze can change the color of the yew or cause it to flower or put forth new shoots:

O not for thee the glow, the bloom
 Who changest not in any gale,
 Nor branding summer suns avail
 To touch thy thousand years of gloom.

(II, 9-12)

Since sorrow sees only the winter gloom of the foliage, the tree appears sullen to the poet. And in his sorrow, Tennyson feels an identity with the church-yard guardian of the dead. He stands in the tree's unchanging gloom, and he abandons himself to sorrow:⁸

And gazing on thee, sullen tree,
 Sick for thy stubborn hardihood,
 I seem to fail from out my blood
 And grow incorporate into thee.

(II, 13-16)

Recognizing his sorrow, Tennyson knows that Hallam has "risen

⁸John Franklin Genung, Tennyson's 'In Memoriam,' Its Purpose and Its Structure (Boston, 1894), p. 107.

in immortal glory."⁹ He questions whether or not it is half sinful to try to put his grief in words that only partially declare what the soul feels, as nature only half reveals inner life:

I sometimes hold it half a sin
 To put in words the grief I feel;
 For words, like Nature, half reveal
 And half conceal the Soul within.

(V, 1-4)

He finds some negative relief in expressing sorrow in his metrical language, however, for the words are narcotic and capable of numbing his pain:

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
 A use in measured language lies,
 The sad mechanic exercise,
 Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.

(V, 5-8)

Oppressed by the poverty of language, he is conscious of its imperfections, and he realizes that his words give no more than an outline of his grief, just as his mourning garb serves merely to cover his body. Though his words can only scantily describe his grief, he will continue to seek solace in his writing as he wraps his thoughts in verse:

In words, like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er,
 Like coarsest clothes against the cold;
 But that large grief which these enfold
 Is given in outline and no more.

(V, 9-12)

⁹Rosenberg, p. 230.

With his work, the poet isolates himself, and friends who attempt to comfort him write that "other friends remain" (VI, 1) and that his "loss is common to the race" (VI, 2). But knowing that his loss is commonplace does not ease the pain for the poet. Nothing can fill the vacuum created by the loss of his beloved friend. Groping for a resolution, the poet turns back to the now darkened world of the past and visits the scenes where he and his friend were happy together. He visits Hallam's house, "the dark house" on the "unlovely street," in an attempt to find his friend's spirit:

Dark house, by which once more I stand
 Here in the long unlovely street,
 Doors, where my heart was used to beat
 So quickly, waiting for a hand.

(VII, 1-4)

He stands as a restless ghost at the door of Hallam's house. Aware that Hallam has risen to immortal glory, he stares at the darkened, empty house that is the image of a tomb. Because he moves in darkness and because he believes grieving is sinful, he feels like a criminal in his furtive actions. Shrouded thus in darkness, he moves "like a guilty thing":

A hand that can be clasped no more--
 Behold me, for I cannot sleep,
 And like a guilty thing I creep
 At earliest morning to the door.

(VII, 5-8)

Finding no one, he contemplates his grief. He is forced, again, to

realize that Hallam is dead. The "blank day" breaks, symbolizing rebirth, but it is still without light, for the drizzling rain makes the day only less dark. Tennyson hears the waking sounds of the city and feels apart from the "noise of life":

He is not here; but far away
 The noise of life begins again,
 And ghastly through the drizzling rain
 On the bald street breaks the blank day.

(VII, 9-12)

From the initial shock of his grief over Hallam's death, Tennyson moves to a description of the arrival of the ship carrying Hallam's body and his burial at Clevedon Church. Symbolic of the bier, the "fair ship" brings the body back to England:

Fair ship, that from the Italian shore
 Sailedst the placid ocean-plains
 With my lost Arthur's loved remains
 Spread thy full wings, and waft him o'er.

(IX, 1-4)

The poet is afraid that the ship may founder and the body be lost at sea; so he prays for its return. He appeals to the boat for care and tenderness with its cargo. And he begs it to come quickly, for the faster the ship is run through the water, the more the mast will be "ruffled" on its surface:

So draw him home to those that mourn
 In vain; a favorable speed
 Ruffle thy mirrored mast, and lead
 Through prosperous floods his holy urn.

(IX, 5-8)

He asks that no rude air "perplex the keel," until the morning star, bright as the poet's love for Hallam, glimmers on the decks:

All night no ruder air perplex
 Thy sliding keel, till Phosphor, bright
 As our pure love, through early light
 Shall glimmer on the dewy decks.

(IX, 9-12)

And he prays that during the night the lights above and the winds around be gentle. Following the ship in spirit, he prays, too, that its voyage may be a quiet voyage:¹⁰

Sphere all your lights around, above;
 Sleep, gentle heavens, before the prow;
 Sleep, gentle winds, as he sleeps now,
 My friend, the brother of my love.

(IX, 13-16)

In thinking of the ship and of the burial that will follow its arrival, the poet finds relief from his sense of loss.¹¹ Now realizing that Hallam is really dead, Tennyson knows that he will not see his friend until his life, deprived of Hallam's affection, is over:

My Arthur, whom I shall not see
 Till all my widowed race be run;
 Dear as the mother to the son,
 More than my brothers are to me.

(IX, 17-20)

¹⁰Genung, p. 111.

¹¹Bradley, p. 90.

His own ship of uncertainty and aimlessness, therefore, must be abandoned.¹²

The calm of an autumn day descends, then, symbolizing Tennyson's despair upon finally acknowledging Hallam's death. And the storm that follows the calm reflects the turmoil that comes upon the poet's initial recognition of Hallam's death. The winds blow from the west, where daylight is hiding:

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

(XV, 1-4)

The tempest begins with the woods where Tennyson stands at sunset. And then the gale fills the whole sky. Limbs snap from the trees in the forest, the ocean churns, the cattle gather closely in the meadows. The winds are wild, but one ray of hope, like a shaft of light, strikes through the clouds:

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

(XV, 5-8)

All the sights and sounds of the storm frighten him, and he worries about the ship's safety. The poet's sorrow, like the storm at sea, would be overwhelming were he not able to imagine that the ship bear-

¹²Ryals, p. 202.

ing his friend's body is peacefully sailing toward home:

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

(XV, 9-12)

Tennyson still feels a wild unrest that causes him to be alert to the movements of the cloud. He is afraid that the sea calm is not true and that the ship may be in a tempest:

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

(XV, 13-16)

The storm finally abates at sunset, and here it contrasts with the calm of despair that the poet felt earlier:

That rises upward always higher,
 And onward drags a laboring breast,
 And topples round the dreary west,
 A looming bastion fringed with fire.

(XV, 17-20)

As the storm passes, the ship nears the landing. It arrives with its precious freight, and the burial follows in Clevedon Church, Somersetshire.

Tennyson is relieved by the return of Hallam's body to England and with its burial in English soil. With some comfort, too, he thinks of his friend, buried "in the hearing of" the Wye:

The Danube to the Severn gave
 The darkened heart that beat no more;
 They laid him by the pleasant shore,
 And in the hearing of the wave.

(XIX, 1-4)

From the Danube to the Severn, from Europe to England, the body of his friend is transported. As the tide passes up the Wye, a tributary of the Severn, its silent flood deepens and hushes the river; as it ebbs again, the river grows shallower, becomes vocal, and babbles:

There twice a day the Severn fills;
 The salt sea-water passes by,
 And hushes half the babbling Wye,
 And makes a silence in the hills.

(XIX, 5-8)

The poet's power of expressing his grief alternates, too, like the tide. When the tide of sorrow floods his heart, he cannot sing or even weep, for he "brims with sorrow":

The Wye is hushed nor moved along,
 And hushed my deepest grief of all,
 When filled with tears that cannot fall,
 I brim with sorrow drowning song.

(XIX, 9-12)

When the tide ebbs, his grief finds voice, although he can speak only of his "lesser griefs" (XX, 1):

The tide flows down, the wave again
 Is vocal in its wooded walls;
 My deeper anguish also falls,
 And I can speak a little then.

(XIX, 13-16)

Tennyson's new feeling of restfulness gives him the ability to contemplate his sorrow now with a calm control of his mind, instead of with his early bewildered feeling of sudden shock.

In the months immediately following Hallam's death, Tennyson's heart has been heavy with despair and grief, but now his thoughts begin to recall his happier days with Hallam and he writes of Cambridge days and gives glimpses of Somersby. He visits Cambridge where he and Hallam had been students. Wandering through the town, he views the familiar scenes:

I passed beside the reverend walls
 In which of old I wore the gown;
 I roved at random through the town,
 And saw the tumult of the halls.

(LXXXVII, 1-4)

He hears the music of the organ, "high-built" between the choir and the nave. The thunderous tones shake the panes of the stained glass windows of the cathedral:

And heard once more in college fanes
 The storm their high-built organs make,
 And thunder-music, rolling, shake
 The prophet blazoned on the panes.

LXXXVII, 5-8)

He hears, too, the shouts of the oarsmen as they rhythmically pace the drag of the oars, and he walks along the shore, and back. He mentally crosses many bridges as he wanders about the school:

And caught once more the distant shout
 The measured pulse of racing oars
 Among the willows; paced the shores
 And many a bridge, and all about.

(LXXXVII, 9-12)

On the grounds of Trinity College, up "that long walk of limes," he climbs the steps to Hallam's old room. He does not have the sense of pain and bitterness that he thought he would have:

The same gray flats again, and felt
 The same, but not the same; and last
 Up that long walk of limes I passed
 To see the rooms in which he dwelt.

(LXXXVII, 13-16)

But another name, not Hallam's, is on the door, and new sounds greet him from the noisy wine party within the room. Unaffected by Hallam's death, the undergraduates are doing what students have always done and will always do. The poet begins to understand, now, that life goes on:

Another name was on the door.
 I lingered; all within was noise
 Of songs, and clapping hands, and boys
 That crashed the glass and beat the floor.

(LXXXVII, 17-20)

In this room, the two friends and other members of the Apostles had debated on philosophy, art, labor, and trade:

Where once we held debate, a band
 Of youthful friends, on mind and art,
 And labor, and the changing mart,
 And all the framework of the land.

(LXXXVII, 21-24)

Memories of the quick wit and repartee in the discussions come to him as he recalls the manner of their talk, rather than the precise matter:

When one would aim an arrow fair,
 But send it slackly from the string;
 And one would pierce an outer ring,
 And one an inner, here and there.

(LXXXVII, 25-28)

He recalls, also, the congenial atmosphere the Apostles provided for the debates. In his recollections, Hallam is the "master-bowman," respected among the Apostles for his brilliant mind and for his power of speech. In the old room, Hallam was the life and the grace of the party, and there, in the familiar confines, he achieved controversial triumphs that won for him the name of "master-bowman." The young Apostles all enjoyed his discussions, for he always "hit his mark" in the arguments. He held their attention with his flowing oratory, and they accepted his philosophy and his God-like wisdom:

And last the master-bowman, he,
 Would cleave the mark. A willing ear
 We lent him. Who but hung to hear
 The rapt oration flowing free.

From point to point, with power and grace
 And music in the bounds of law,
 To those conclusions when we saw
 The God within him light his face.

(LXXXVII, 29-36)

Strength was in his face as well as in his voice. His brow was straight and prominent, a sign of intellectual power:

And seem to life the form, and glow
 In azure orbits heavenly-wise
 And over those ethereal eyes
 The bar of Michael Angelo?

(LXXXVII, 37-40)

As he reviews the Cambridge days, Tennyson realizes that love made the daily burdens light and that for this reason life at Cambridge and at Somersby was incredibly happy.

A tranquility envelops him as his thoughts lead him to Hallam's happy visits in the Tennyson home at Somersby. He remembers the witch-elms that checkered the flat lawn in sharp patterns of light and shade.¹² And he envisions his favorite sycamore, towering in its mightiness:

Witch-elms that counterchange the floor
 Of this flat lawn with dusk and bright;
 And thou, with all thy breadth and height
 Of foliage, towering sycamore.

(LXXXIX, 1-4)

Living over the past, the poet envisions scenes at Somersby, the summer retreat he and Hallam enjoyed. There in the shadows of the sycamore, Hallam was able to forget the heat and dirt of city living:

How often, hither wandering down,
 My Arthur found your shadows fair,
 And shook to all the liberal air
 The dust and din and steam of town!

(LXXXIX, 5-8)

¹²Buckley, p. 117.

Coming from his study of law and from the "brawling courts" of London, Hallam relaxed with his friends in simple sports, and he enjoyed the peaceful beauty he found:

He brought an eye for all he saw;
 He mixed in all our simple sports;
 They pleased him, fresh from brawling courts
 And dusty purlieus of the law.

(LXXXIX, 9-12)

The air was cool in "the ambrosial dark, " and the distant landscape winked through the heat:

O joy to him in this retreat,
 Immantled in ambrosial dark,
 To drink the cooler air, and mark
 The landscape winking through the heat!

(LXXXIX, 13-16)

Their cares drifted in the morning with the sound of the scythe against the damp grass. And as soft morning breezes wafted through the garden, small gusts dropped pears from the trees in the orchard:

O sound to rout the brood of cares,
 The sweep of scythe in morning dew,
 The gust that round the garden flew,
 And tumbled half the mellowing pears!

(LXXXIX, 17-20)

In this pastoral setting, Tennyson and his friends often gathered upon the lawn at Somersby to hear Hallam read the Tuscan poems:

O bliss, when all in circle drawn
 About him, heart and ear were fed
 To hear him, as he lay and read
 The Tuscan poets on the lawn!

(LXXXIX, 21-24)

Occasionally the poet's sister brought her harp and joined the group as they sang in the starlight:

Or in the all-golden afternoon
 A guest, or happy sister, sung,
 Or here she brought the harp and flung
 A ballad to the brightening moon.

(LXXXIX, 25-28)

Other happy hours were spent in the woods beyond the hills, where the friends enjoyed a quiet picnic:

Nor less it pleased in livelier moods,
 Beyond the bounding hill to stray,
 And break the livelong summer day
 With banquet in the distant woods.

(LXXXIX, 29-32)

On their journeys through the countryside, conversations sometimes turned to their favorite subjects of philosophy, politics, and literature:

Whereat we glanced from theme to theme,
 Discussed the books to love or hate,
 Or touched the changes of the state,
 Or threaded some Socratic dream.

(LXXXIX, 33-36)

No discussion, however, ever took place without sparking quick, friendly debates. The friends often argued the merits of town and country as they lay by the stream where their wine-flask cooled:

But if I praised the busy town,
He loved to rail against it still,
For ground in yonder social mill
We rub each other's angles down,

'And merge,' he said, 'in form and gloss
The picturesque of man and man.'
We talked; the stream beneath us ran,
The wine-flask lying couched in moss.

(LXXXIX, 37-44)

After a restful outing in the woods, they retraced their steps. And the enchanting sounds of twilight greeted them as Venus disappeared in the horizon:

Or cooled within the glooming wave;
And last, returning from afar,
Before the crimson-circled star
Had fallen into her father's grave.

(LXXXIX, 45-48)

And walking through the wild flowers, they heard the milk that bubbled in the pail as the maidens performed their evening chores. Even the sounds of insects were audible as the bees gathered their last stores of the day. The poet holds fast to each memory in his groping for hope in the dark despair of his life.

Life at Somersby was so wonderful that the poet questions the former gaiety, wondering if his grief makes the good times only appear great, or if living far in the past causes happiness to only seem per-

fect. He hopes to prove, though, that "no lapse of moons can canker love/Whatever fickle tongues may say" (XXVI, 3-4). Gradually he rises from mere suffering to a clearer conviction that "'tis better to have loved and lost/Than never to have loved at all" (XXVII, 15-16). Although his companionship with Hallam is ended, he is thankful to have had the association for even a little while.

When the time comes for departure from the old home, the poet bids barewell to the scenes of his youth and to the life in the past which he has been living, though the thought of new life is also present. Although the memories of days at Somersby are always happy memories to Tennyson, he still mourns for Hallam. Every feature of Somersby reminds him of his departed friend:

I climb the hill. From end to end
Of all the landscape underneath,
I find no place that does not breathe
Some gracious memory of my friend.

(C, 1-4)

To leave the hill, the grange, the stile, and the sheepwold is to think "once more he seems to die" (C, 20). As the poet leaves the "well-beloved place/Where first we gazed upon the sky" (CII, 1-2), "two spirits of diverse love" (CII, 7) contend for his attention. One is the love for his boyhood; the other, the love for his friend, with whom his "feet have strayed in after hours" (CII, 14).

On the night before leaving the old home at Somersby, Tennyson has a vision of Hallam that leaves him with a feeling of contentment, dispels the last unrest, and gives a hint of the future:

On that last night before we went
 From out the doors where I was bred,
 I dreamed a vision of the dead,
 Which left my after-morn content.

(CIII, 1-4)

He dreams that he is living in a sheltered hall with the aesthetic qualities that he calls "the maidens." Not understanding the high, divine origin of life, the poet learns that human powers and talents go along with life but do not pass with it:¹³

Methought I dwelt within a hall,
 And maidens with me; distant hills
 From hidden summits fed with rills
 A river sliding by the wall.

(CIII, 5-8)

A veiled statue stands in the center of the hall, where the maidens, symbolic of Tennyson's aspirations, honor the dead with song:

The hall with harp and carol rang.
 They sang of what is wise and good
 And graceful. In the center stood
 A statue veiled, to which they sang.

(CIII, 9-12)

Tennyson recognizes the veiled statue by its shape. He knows that it is Hallam, the beloved friend whom he will always love. Suddenly a dove brings a message from eternity, summoning him to come:

¹³Bradley, p. 197.

And which, though veiled, was known to me,
 The shape of him I loved, and love
 Forever. Then flew in a dove
 And brought a summons from the sea.

(CIII, 13-16)

The maidens, learning that he must go, "weep and wail," but they lead him to a "little shallop" lying in the stream below:

And when they learnt that I must go,
 They wept and wailed, but led the way
 To where a little shallop lay
 At anchor in the flood below.

(CIII, 17-20)

In the shallop, accompanied by the maidens, the poet begins the long journey to the great ship, Eternity. Between the vast banks of the river, the stream widens, symbolizing the broadening and deepening of life and the spiritual expansion that will fit the poet to meet Hallam again.¹⁴ As the shallop carries Tennyson and the maidens out to sea, the muses seem to gather strength, grace, and majesty:

And still as vaster grew the shore
 And rolled the floods in grander space,
 The maidens gathered strength and grace
 And presence, lordlier than before.

(CIII, 21-28)

Tennyson sits apart and gazes at the muses, who become stronger as he watches. He feels in himself the muscular power and physical strength of the Anakim giant, but his heart, like the Titan's, is

¹⁴Bradley, p. 198.

ruled by someone stronger than he:

And I myself, who sat apart
 And watched them, waxed in every limb;
 I felt the thews of Anakim,
 The pulses of a Titan's heart.

(CIII, 29-32)

Then he hears the muses sing their mighty songs. They sing of war
 and of all the great hopes of science and of men:

As one would sing the death of war,
 And one would chant the history
 Of that great race which is to be,
 And one the shaping of a star.

(CIII, 33-36)

At last they reach the great ocean of immortality, and they see, before
 them, a great, splendid ship:

Until the forward-creeping tides
 Began to foam, and we to draw
 From deep to deep, to where we saw
 A great ship lift her shining sides.

(CIII, 37-40)

On the ship's deck is Hallam, great and glorified, and Tennyson is
 at last rewarded by reunion, not with a statue, but with a living pre-
 sence. In silence, he embraces Hallam:

The man we loved was there on deck,
 But thrice as large as man he bent
 To greet us. Up the side I went,
 And fell in silence on his neck.

(CIII, 41-44)

The maidens upbraid the poet for deserting them, for they believe they deserve more since they have been faithful so long. He knows that he has been wrong to drop his earthly hopes and powers. The muses have served him long and may still be of use to him. In scorning the muses, who are symbolic of his poetry, Tennyson demeans his work. Wailing and reproaching, the muses appear to signify that they recognize their ideal only in its earthly forms. Under these conditions, they take the poet's departure to be a desertion of these forms and of them:

Whereat those maidens with one mind
 Bewailed their lot; I did them wrong:
 "We served thee here," they said, "so long,
 And wilt thou leave us now behind?"

(CIII, 45-48)

The poet is so intent on Hallam that he ignores the maidens. Hallam, however, invites them to come aboard, and they enter. Their passing with him to the other life suggests that everything that made life beautiful here may pass on beyond the grave:

So rapt I was, they could not win
 An answer from my lips; but he
 Replying, "Enter likewise ye
 And go with us," they entered in.

(CIII, 49-52)

They all sail away, then, on the great deep:

And while the wind began to sweep
 A music out of sheet and shroud,
 We steered her toward a crimson cloud
 That landlike slept along the deep.

(CIII, 53-56)

Sung to Hallam, Tennyson's verses are the music of the maidens, who, the poet is sure, will accompany him in the glorious ship of new life. The poet's hopes are that he will again face the friend who has stood so long as the veiled statue in his thoughts. Evidently the relation of a true experience, the poem appears to be an epitome of the entire elegy, for it shows the growth of love for Hallam into love for the divine humanity to which mankind is advancing.

Reverting, as always, to Hallam, Tennyson's thoughts begin to dwell on his friend's intellect and character. He describes Hallam's attributes in words that only love can dictate. He says that Hallam's intellectual home-life is responsible for his being rich in conversation and for his having highly critical power over all poetry:

Heart-affluence in discursive talk
 From household fountains never dry;
 The critic clearness of an eye
 That saw through all the Muses' walk.

(CIX, 1-4)

Hallam is intellectual, eloquent, and logical. His keen and rapid thought is displayed in his arguments, and he can dissuade the doubts of any man. Generously endowed with strength and grace, he is Tennyson's ideal:

Seraphic intellect and force
 To seize and throw the doubts of man;
 Impassioned logic, which outran
 The hearer in its fiery course.

(CIX, 5-8)

Delighting and inspiring those who love the good, Hallam strengthens
 the feeble and the fearful, and he shames all evil and untruth:

High nature amorous of the good,
 But touched with no ascetic gloom;
 And passion pure in snowy bloom
 Through all the years of April blood.

(CIX, 9-12)

He loves freedom, but he demands an ordered freedom:

A love of freedom rarely felt,
 Of freedom in her regal seat
 Of England; not the schoolboy heat,
 The blind hysterics of the Celt.

(CIX, 13-16)

In his countenance, the strength of man unites with the grace of woman.
 And children love and trust him and find comfort in his kind appearance:

And manhood fused with female grace
 In such a sort, the child would twine
 A trustful hand, unasked, in thine,
 And find his comfort in thy face.

(CIX, 17-20)

All these aspects of wisdom, intellect, eloquence, logic, lofty
 aspiration, moral purity, love of freedom, and manly tenderness, the

poet has seen and loved in his friend. He hopes that he will be wiser because of his association with Hallam:

All these have been, and thee mine eyes
Have looked on; if they looked in vain,
My shame is greater who remain,
Nor let thy wisdom make me wise.

(CIX, 21-24)

Hallam's wisdom not only influences Tennyson but exerts a tremendous power over all classes of men. Fond of the society that he commands at Cambridge, Hallam moves among men of literary habits, remarkable for free and friendly discussion and differing in personalities and opinions. No offense is ever taken, though, and Hallam always holds their respect. The young and the old, the weak and the strong feel his presence:

Thy converse drew us with delight,
The men of rathe and riper years;
The feeble soul, a haunt of fears,
Forgot his weakness in thy sight.

(CX, 1-4)

He gives confidence to the timid; he exposes the deceitful. Even the loyal, the proud, the accuser are impressed with his poise, and the true-hearted "hold to him":

On thee the loyal-hearted hung,
The proud was half disarmed of pride,
Nor cared the serpent at thy side
To flicker with his double tongue.

(CX, 5-8)

The stern, the flippant, and the fool listen to his authority:

The stern were mild when thou wert by,
 The flippant put himself to school
 And hear thee, and the brazen fool
 Was softened, and he knew not why.

(CX, 9-12)

All who hear him are enthralled, and the poet, enjoying Hallam's triumph, sits back and loves the audience for its rapture:

Nor mine the sweetness or the skill,
 But mine the love that will not tire,
 And, born of love, the vague desire
 That spurs an imitative will.

(CX, 13-16)

Though possessing neither the tact, the art, the sweetness, nor the skill, Tennyson can share in them through the love and admiration they inspire. He knows that the "sweetness of the skill" (CX, 13) cannot compare to the deep, spiritual love he has for his friend, the gentleman in whom "God and Nature" meet. Because of his love for Hallam, Tennyson has the desire to be like his friend.

As he turns from his grief for Hallam to a hope for the future of man, Tennyson quits his remembrances. His determination to overcome the despair that isolates him and that is useless to others comes on the third Christmas after Hallam's death. The Christmas Eve is strange and solemn and silent when the midnight bells strike up. The poet breaks forth into a song, crying to the bells to ring out the old epoch, with all its sin, its strife, and its suffering, and to ring in the better time:

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
 The flying cloud, the frosty light;
 The year is dying in the night;
 Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

(CVI, 1-4)

As the bells of New Year chime, the poet no longer thinks of his own petty sorrows. His song, now, is for the new age of fulfillment of human thoughts:

Ring out the old, ring in the new,
 Ring, happy bells, across the snow;
 The year is going, let him go;
 Ring out the false, ring in the true.

(CVI, 5-8)

Bidding grief to disappear, the poet turns to hope for the future of man:

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
 For those that here we see no more;
 Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
 Ring in redress to all mankind.

(CVI, 9-12)

He wishes also for the introduction of better customs and for the banishment of unrighteousness:

Ring out a slowly dying cause,
 And ancient forms of party strife;
 Ring in the nobler modes of life,
 With sweeter manners, purer laws.

(CVI, 13-16)

Tennyson has always been painfully aware of the changes taking place within his country in the fields of politics, science, and society.

Being a very religious person, he has also felt sin all about him. Now he would have the new year bring more changes for the people and for his own mournful writing:

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rimes,
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

(CVI, 17-20)

Longing for the reign of new principles, the poet also hopes for new character:

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

(CVI, 20-24)

He cannot reconcile himself to a life that sees no spiritual world and makes a "golden calf" for its moral God and a war for its moral law. The bells symbolize the glorious future awaiting mankind when the Christ-like humanity, "the Christ that is to be," arises:

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

(CVI, 28-32)

Tennyson's conviction, shown in "Ring Out, Wild Bells," is that the forms of Christian religion will alter, but that the spirit of Christ

will grow "in the roll of the ages," until "each man find his own in all men's good/And all men work in noble brotherhood."¹⁵ In discussing the meaning of "Ring in the Christ that is to be," Tennyson said:

One of my meanings is: when Christianity without bigotry will triumph,
when the controversies of creeds shall have vanished, and
 Shall bear false witness, each of each, no more,
 But find their limits by that larger light,
And overstep them, moving easily
Thro' after-ages in the Love of Truth,
The Truth of Love!¹⁶

As the bells ring out the poet's "mournful rimes" to ring in the "fuller minstrel," he resolves that he will no longer live alone with sorrow, brooding on the past and on the mysteries of life and death:

I will not shut me from my kind,
And, lest I stiffen into stone,
I will not eat my heart alone,
Nor feed with sighs a passing wind.

(CVIII, 1-4)

No longer will he make the mistake of seeking the meaning of his experience in the delusions of "vacant yearning," for they are profitless, even though they may carry him in thought to the highest height of heaven or to the deepest depth of death:¹⁷

¹⁵Hallam Tennyson, I, 325.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Gatty, p. 119.

What profit lies in barren faith,
 And vacant yearning, though with might
 To scale the heaven's highest height,
 Or dive below the wells of death?

(CVIII, 5-8)

As he resolves to become a part of society, he becomes more and more convinced that if sorrow is indeed to bear the peaceable fruit of righteousness in him, he must no longer brood over it in solitude.¹⁸ In the wisdom gained from associating his loss with the common lot, he can now perceive that, at times, a "human face" has shone on him from the "depths of death":

What find I in the highest place,
 But mine own phantom chanting hymns?
 And on the depths of death there swims
 The reflex of a human face.

(CVIII, 9-12)

He wants to share the human burden, and he says that he has learned from Hallam's death, but that he does not know what Hallam has learned. Sorrow may bring him wisdom, but it will not be the wisdom Hallam would have given him if he had lived:

I'll rather take what fruit may be
 Of sorrow under human skies;
 'Tis held that sorrow makes us wise,
 Whatever wisdom sleep with thee.

(CVIII, 13-15)

Instead of spending his days in selfish, contemptuous seclusion, the

¹⁸Elizabeth Rachel Chapman, A Companion to "In Memoriam" (London, 1901), p. 58.

poet will accept human life as he finds it, with all its disappointments and sorrows. These will, at least, teach him part of the wisdom that Hallam possessed.

As his thoughts continue to turn from the dead to the living, Tennyson emerges from his long night of sorrow over Hallam's death into the light of living faith. Because the passing years have brought the poet knowledge of the transcendent power of love, Hallam seems nearer than ever to him. He finds, too, as he begins to concentrate on the living, that love is stronger because of its suffering. At last he has risen "on stepping-stones" to "higher things" of greater faith. Despair has turned to hope; doubt, to faith. And In Memoriam becomes a testament to the immortality of man and a monument to Arthur Henry Hallam.

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