

A STUDY OF DEATH IN THE NON-DRAMATIC  
POETRY OF ALFRED TENNYSON

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under our supervision by Annie Pearl Heaton entitled A STUDY OF DEATH IN THE NON-DRAMATIC POETRY OF ALFRED TENNYSON

be accepted as fulfilling this part of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

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## PREFACE

The purpose of this study has been to show how Tennyson's interest in the subject of death and the immortality of the soul was reflected in his non-dramatic poetry. This investigation has attempted to form an accurate estimate of death's importance to the poet by showing how he used it as the theme in over one-third of his poems, including all of his best known works.

To Dr. Constance L. Beach, whose patient encouragement and untiring efforts have made this work possible, I am deeply grateful. To my family, who urged me to write this thesis, I wish to express my gratitude. And to the memory of Dr. Lee Monroe Ellison, I affectionately dedicate this work.

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CHAPTER I  
THE THEORETICAL STAGE

Alfred Tennyson in Poems by Two Brothers liked, as do most young poets, to write about death and the mysteries of life after death. His interest in the subject, however, did not fade with the passing of his youth but continued throughout his long career as a poet, for he was working on "The Death of OEnone" in 1892 when his own life passed into that "fair dawn beyond the doors of death-far-far-away."<sup>1</sup> From "Claribel," the first poem in Juvenilia, to "Crossing the Bar," which, at his own request, is placed at the end of his complete works, the theme of death runs like a dark cord through his non-dramatic poetry, appearing in one hundred twenty-five poems with nineteen titles and nineteen first lines dealing directly with death. In these poems the words Death, Deathless, Dead, Die, and Dying occur nine hundred twenty-three times, their frequent occurrence making Tennyson truly seem the poet "for whom death was at the end of every way."<sup>2</sup>

To his father, the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, the poetic but melancholy Rector of Somersby, Alfred owed not

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Tennyson, "Far, Far Away," The Poetic and Dramatic Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (Cambridge ed.; Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1898), p. 555.

<sup>2</sup>Humbert Wolfe, Tennyson (London: Faber and Faber, 1930), p. 2.

only his early gift of verse-making but also his questioning spirit about the mysteries of life and death, a questioning that placed the study of death in so many of his poems. Credit can be given also to his father for those depressing moods of darkness which were to come upon him from time to time and which were to make him "flinch with proud but morbid agony from the stark realities in which he feared to find himself alone."<sup>1</sup> Tennyson was, nevertheless, lonely at Somersby; he was morbid and according to his son:

More than once Alfred, scared by his father's frequent fits of melancholy, went out through the black night and threw himself upon a grave in the old churchyard, praying to be beneath the sod himself.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, he was afraid of life with its disturbing realities and of death with all its implications and doubts. But above all and beyond all, Tennyson was afraid to look into the misty realm past death, not for what he might find there but for what he might not find--eternal life.

It does not seem strange at all, then, that this changeling in a family of poets should receive for a poem written on the death of his grandmother the first money he was to earn by writing. That it was not considered very good poetry is evidenced by the fact his grandfather gave him half a guinea with the words: "Here is half a guinea for you, the first you have ever earned by poetry, and, take

<sup>1</sup>H. I. Fausset, Tennyson: A Modern Portrait (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1923), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son (London: Macmillan Co., 1899), I, 15.



my word for it, the last."<sup>1</sup> This prophecy proved to be untrue, for the life of the old man has been kept alive by the poetry of the boy whose father he disinherited. Indirectly it was the grandfather's unkind act toward the Rector which contributed largely to the melancholy moods of both the Rector and Alfred at Somersby:

He passed through moods of "misery unutterable" but he eventually shook them off. He remembered how, when in London for almost the first time, one of these moods came over him as he realized that "In a few short years all its inhabitants would be lying horizontal, stark and stiff in their coffins."<sup>2</sup>

It was the boy of twelve, in one of these moods, who wrote to his sisters' governess and included in her letter the following verses:

The first is a review of death:  
Why should we weep for those who die?<sup>3</sup>

To him there was no answer to that age-old question then, or three years later, when he heard the news of Byron's death, over which he was heartbroken and because of which the universe seemed to fade into nothingness. In his own words, Tennyson let the whole world see his grief over the death of his friend:

Byron was dead! I thought the whole world was at an end! I thought that everything was over and finished for everyone. I remember I walked out and carved "Byron is dead" into the sandstone.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., I, 13.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., I, 40.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., I, 4.

<sup>4</sup>T. R. Lounsbury, The Life and Times of Tennyson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1915), p. 38.

But when Hallam Tennyson went to Somersby in 1892, he looked in vain for this inscription made there by his father.

From the Rectory at Somersby in 1828, Alfred, that young man with the melancholy tempest in his blood, went to Cambridge, to the Apostles, and to Arthur Hallam. There the Apostles imbued him with a deep conviction that it was the function, the privilege, and even the duty of every poet to teach the basic truths of life and death to a world at that time sorely besieged by doubts of deepest gloom. How well this Apostolic doctrine of a divine mission became a part of Tennyson is best shown in these lines from "The Poet:"

The poet in a golden clime was born,  
     With golden stars above;  
 Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,  
     The love of love.

He saw thro' life and death, thro' good and ill,  
     He saw thro' his own soul.  
 The marvel of the everlasting will  
     An open scroll  
 Before him lay.<sup>1</sup>

Here at Cambridge Hallam's character dominated Tennyson's mind and challenged his uneasy conscience torn by the hidden struggle between the contrasting sides of his nature--"the pleasure-loving and the duty-seeking"<sup>2</sup>--which the Apostles had called into being. This struggle but for the glow, the Titianesque glow, of his love for Hallam and his deep respect for his opinions, according to Nicolson:

. . . might have degenerated into the charnel-house morbidity of Beddoes, into the intricate sentimentalities

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<sup>1</sup>Harold Nicolson, Tennyson: Aspects of His Life Character and Poetry (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1898), pp. 95-96.

<sup>2</sup>Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 82.

of the spasmodic, or have passed unheard as a cry of weakness upon the storm. And I am convinced that all that is greatest in Tennyson's poetry--and there is much which is very great indeed--was enhanced by his love for Hallam, by the fact that at the essential crisis of his life that he was mastered by no enervating influence but by this all-absorbing, persistent, and intensely emotional stimulus.<sup>1</sup>

During his stay at Cambridge and while under the direct influence of the Apostles group to which he and Hallam were admitted January 24, 1830, Tennyson published his first volume of verse called Poems Chiefly Lyrical. In this volume were fifty-six poems, twenty-three of which were subsequently rejected by Tennyson and never appeared in any other authorized edition during his lifetime. Of the remainder, four more were suppressed until 1872. Twenty-one of the fifty-six poems of the 1830 edition either mentioned or discussed some phase of death or doubts concerning life after death.

The first poem in Juvenilia, under which head Tennyson in the one-volume and seven-volume editions of 1884 included some of the 1830 and 1833 poems, is "Claribel," which Mill looked upon as a comparative failure.<sup>2</sup> In this early poem Tennyson expressed the grief most people experience as they look at noon "about the moss'd headstone" or as they pause when "the breezes die" to listen to the sounds around the grave:

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>2</sup>Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 349.

. . . . the solemn oak-tree sigheth,  
 Thick-leaved, ambrosial,  
 With an ancient melody  
 Of inward agony  
 Where Claribel low-lieth.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to "Claribel" Mill also rated "A Dirge" as unworthy of praise. As poetry perhaps it does not measure up to the highest standards set by the Victorians; but as a study of man's comparatively short tenure on earth with its many slanders and abuses to plague him until at last "the green folds thy grave,"<sup>2</sup> the poem does show how conscious Tennyson was, even in his youth, of that ever-approaching friend or foe of mankind, death.

Nor is death confined to the world of man. There is a grotesque note in "The Kraken" as the titanic Scandinavian monster who has lived majestically in the ocean depths rises:

Then once by man and angels to be seen,  
 In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.<sup>3</sup>

In sharp contrast with this poem is the doleful gray doom of "The Dying Swan" on the river adown which it floated in the middle of the day:

The wild swan's death-hymn took the soul  
 Of that waste place with joy  
 Hidden in sorrow.<sup>4</sup>

As the last sad notes of the swan die away, Tennyson revealed another kingdom to which death brought sadness,

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, Juvenilia, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

distortion, and destruction. In the short poem "Song" one catches a glimpse of death as it chases life and color from the world of flowers:

The air is damp, and hush'd and close,  
 As a sick man's room when he taketh  
     repose  
     An hour before death;  
 My very heart faints and my whole soul  
     grieves  
 At the moist rich smell of the rotting  
     leaves,  
     And the breath  
     Of the fading edges of box beneath,  
 And the year's last rose.  
     Heavily hangs the broad sunflower  
     O'er its grave in the earth so chilly;  
     Heavily hangs the hollyhock,  
     Heavily hangs the tiger-lily.<sup>1</sup>

With death as the universal certainty of both man and nature, and with so many doubts about immortality, there was a wide spread of pessimism in the hearts of the Victorians; and this phase of life found abundant expression in the early poetry of Tennyson. Here was a man who had suffered and lost, who had observed the effect of death on the human race, and who had reflected how death could bring despair in the future progress of mankind. In "Oriana" he retold again the bitter truth that it is infinitely easier to die than to see a dear one die, leaving only sorrow and mortal pain caused by the separation, a separation which the bereaved hopes is but a step from his earthly house to a "mansion incorruptible."<sup>2</sup> Even with this hope, there were the sigh and the faint,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

futile prayer of millions of bereaved people whispering,  
 "Would they could have stayed with us,"<sup>1</sup> embodied in Tennyson's  
 words:

'Twere joy, not fear, clasp'd hand-in-hand with thee,  
 To wait for death-mute-careless of all ills.<sup>2</sup>

In "Circumstance," the life story of two children  
 who met as strangers, became lovers, married, and grew old  
 together, Tennyson felt the poem would be incomplete without  
 including their death:

Two graves grass-green beside a gray church tower.  
 So runs the round of life from hour to hour.<sup>3</sup>

With death as the grand finale to life, there would seem to  
 Tennyson to be little hope for humanity if he did not intro-  
 duce here the saving grace of love, which alone can triumph  
 over death and the grave. Because he held love in an honored  
 place, in "Love and Death" he made Death listen as Love said:

Thou art the shadow of life, and as the tree  
 Stands in the sun and shadows all beneath,  
 So in the light of great eternity  
 Life eminent creates the shade of death.  
 The shadow passeth when the tree shall fall,  
 And I shall reign forever over all.<sup>4</sup>

While advancing this weak note of optimism, based as  
 it was on hope or faith and not on any actual proof, Tennyson  
 knew that love's victory perfected itself not on earth but  
 possibly in some vague tomorrow lying beyond the silent grave.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

Two of his early poems, "Nothing Will Die" and "All Things Will Die," set forth the theory that though all things die, death is nothing more than a physical change, proving one of science's greatest maxims that matter is indestructible:

Nothing will die;  
All things will change  
Thro' eternity.  
'Tis the world's winter,  
Autumn and summer  
Are gone long ago;  
Earth is dry to the center  
But spring, a new comer,  
A spring, rich and strange  
Shall make the winds blow.<sup>1</sup>

However great or small was Tennyson's belief in eternal life, he knew firsthand the proof positive of the darker side of death. He wrote:

O, vanity!  
Death waits at the door.  
· · · · ·  
O, misery!  
Hark! death is calling  
While I speak to ye.<sup>2</sup>

These two poems have been contrasted with "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," by a writer who considered them superior to those written by Milton.<sup>3</sup> The fact that Tennyson did not agree with the reviewer is evident; he suppressed them himself in the 1842 edition.

Again we are reminded that for Tennyson death seemed to be at the end of every way.<sup>4</sup> He became the hero or the

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Anonymous, "Tennyson's Poems," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, XXXII (1832), 721.

<sup>4</sup>Supra, p. 1.

speaker in many of his poems; certainly, he was the "Mariana" of his own tortured soul and heart--"this tall swarthy black-maned exile"--and it was his own truth that he spoke<sup>1</sup> in this poem in the 1830 volume:

The broken sheds looked sad and strange.  
 Unlifted was the clinking latch;  
 Unweeded and worn the ancient thatch  
 Upon the moated grange.  
 She only said, 'My life is dreary.  
 He cometh not,' she said;  
 She said, 'I am aweary,  
 I would that I were dead.'<sup>2</sup>

It is in this perfect painting of the things of nature which correspond exactly to the sense of depression and solitude and intolerable, prolonged neglect in a human soul<sup>3</sup> that one gets a true picture of Tennyson, who too often in his life wishes "O, God that I were dead."

Hallam Tennyson, who recognized the poetry of his father as the best possible biography of the Laureate, said in his Memoir, "For my own part I feel strongly that no biographer could so truly give him as he gives himself in his own works; . . . I see him in every word he has written."<sup>4</sup> And although Tennyson chose as a subject for his poetry a question that was puzzling all thoughtful men in the nation, religious theories in conflict with scientific data, his poems were not written "to express the national feeling but to

<sup>1</sup>Wolfe, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Van Dyke, Studies in Tennyson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 54.

<sup>4</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., I, xi.



express his own."<sup>1</sup> This personal application was true in the quasi-religious poem of the 1830 edition which Tennyson called "The Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind." The opening lines of the poem:

O God! My God! have mercy now.  
I faint, I fall.<sup>2</sup>

echoed the same cry for divine help that the Sweet Singer of the Old Testament voiced in his soul as he prayed: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"<sup>3</sup> It was the same cry for succor that Jesus sent to His Father as the Son of God died on the cross, a death that was "for me," explained Tennyson, in the third line of "Confessions."

After Tennyson's plea for mercy he expressed the hope of the whole human race in his fervent prayer for more abundant faith in the immortality of the human soul:

How sweet to have a common faith!  
To hold a common scorn of death!  
And at a burial to hear  
The creaking cords which wound and eat  
Into my human heart, whenever  
Earth goes to earth, with grief, not fear,  
With hopeful grief, were passing sweet!<sup>4</sup>

Conscience stricken and afraid as he was, the poet yearned to go back to the old easy days at Somersby, to his early heaven, and to his mother's love. As he tried to pray, doubts from every side overwhelmed him while he asked himself

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<sup>1</sup>Stopford Brooke, Tennyson: His Art and Relation to Modern Life (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1905), p. 61.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Psalms 22:1.

<sup>4</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 5.

over and over, but with no satisfactory answer, the question man has asked and always will ask about unanswered prayers:

. . . . . Why pray  
To one who heeds not, who can save  
And will not? Great in faith, and strong  
Against the grief of circumstance  
Wert thou, and yet unheard.<sup>1</sup>

Brooding over the sorrow culminating from these unanswered prayers, which he could not reconcile with a good and loving God, Tennyson asked himself other vital questions. Would it not even be better to be a beast of the field, with placid lows, than to be tortured by the endless dread of eternal death? Was man born to suffer and to be launched helpless upon life's angry sea, which draws the soul unpiloted into the whirlpool of death? Despite the futility of trying to answer these questions, the poet endeavored to gain some measure of comfort by rationalizing:

It is man's privilege to doubt,  
If so be from that doubt at length,  
Truth may stand forth unmoved of change.<sup>2</sup>

For Tennyson, however, doubting did not evolve the truth he so earnestly desired to embrace, at least not for many troubled years. For him the fears of "Confessions" changed very little during his entire life. According to some sources they never did change for him who would look into "the laws of life and death" and "analyze our double nature." Nicolson's discussion of "Confessions" shows how the young Tennyson already knew his mission to England:

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

"Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind Not in Unity with Itself" contains the whole of Tennyson's later philosophy if it can be so styled. For in this composition, in the first place, employed, as so often in his later poems, the device of an alias--the vehicle, that is, of an imaginary character, who, if need be, could be disassociated from himself; could even, if necessary, be repudiated. And he also employed this method to illustrate the theological which had already arisen within him, and which more acutely, but not with any essential difference, was to disturb and puzzle him all his life. And with it all--with all the familiar Tennyson formulae on faith and doubt and the immortality of the soul--is the faint echo here and there of the curious Calvinistic moods of the Poems by Two Brothers. If we exclude this element, this spiritual abasement and fear of Hell, the "Confessions" of the 1830 volume are but little different in substance from the agonized perplexities of his later theological manner.<sup>1</sup>

The poem ends with an appeal for wider knowledge and with a cry of misery born of doubt:

Oh teach me yet  
Somewhere before the heavy clod  
Weighs on me, and the busy fret  
Of that sharp-headed worm begins  
In the gross blackness underneath.

Oh weary life! Oh weary death!  
Oh spirit and heart made desolate!  
Oh damned vacillating state!<sup>2</sup>

At Cambridge the Apostles, especially Hallam, praised the poetry of Tennyson's first volume but passed over, with little or no comment, its weaknesses. The reviewers, on the other hand, were not so considerate of Tennyson's sensitivity to adverse criticism, and their reception of his volume caused the poet many hours of added unhappiness. Less than a year after its publication Tennyson left the university

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 6.

without taking a degree, for his father had become seriously ill at Somersby. One March morning shortly after his arrival home, the Rector was found leaning back in his chair, having passed away peacefully.<sup>1</sup> Again it was that the poet met Death, about whom he talked so freely in his first volume of verse:

Once through mine own doors death did pass,  
One went who never hath return'd.  
He will not smile--nor speak to me  
Once more.<sup>2</sup>

Only those who have lost the sound of familiar voices to the ever-silent grave can sympathize with Tennyson's obsession to communicate just once more with his father. In the Memoir Hallam Tennyson has given us a vivid account of his father's mental anguish at that time:

My father told me that within a week after his father's death, he slept in the dead man's bed, earnestly desiring to see his ghost, but no ghost came. "You see," he said, "ghosts do not generally come to imaginative people."<sup>3</sup>

Tennyson, now more than at any other time in his life, felt alone at Somersby. He missed his father; he missed the inspiration he had received from Hallam back at Cambridge; he hated the "strong troubles" of life and its "bitter fancies."<sup>4</sup> At this time, as some of his poems plainly show, he was not averse to playing with the idea of death as a kind and perhaps permanent narcotic to ease all pain or sorrow. To a poet

<sup>1</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., I, 72.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>3</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., I, 72.

<sup>4</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. 57.

who was by nature melancholy, this unhappy period of gloom which lasted two years was but a prelude to the despair he was to experience in 1833 at the death of Hallam. Van Dyke has described Tennyson's mental state in the following terms:

The blow that fell on Tennyson was inward. The death of Arthur Henry Hallam caused no convulsion in English politics; brought no visible disaster to church or state; but to one man it was a shock of a spiritual earthquake upheaving the foundations of life and making the very arch of heaven tremble. Bound to Hallam by one of those rare friendships passing the love of women, Tennyson felt his loss in the inmost fibers of his being. The world was changed, darkened, filled with secret conflicts. The importunate questions of human life and destiny thronged upon his soul. The ideal peace, the sweet art-satisfied seclusion, the dreams of undisturbed repose, became impossible for him. He must fight for spiritual freedom and immortal hopes.<sup>1</sup>

Tennyson's poetic record of his grief over his friend's death may be found in "The Two Voices" or "Thoughts of a Suicide." Hallam Tennyson said his father told him that this poem was begun under the cloud of this overwhelming sorrow, which "blotted out all joy from his life and made him long for death."<sup>2</sup> This poem, from the 1833 edition Poems, was cast in the form of a dialogue between his weaker and his stronger self. Nicolson said the poem was composed in "that curious minor key that flickers half-light between the sane and the insane."<sup>3</sup> Throughout the entire poem the promptings of Tennyson's weaker self beat upon his brain the need for peace and release from the torment and the despair

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., I, 109.

<sup>3</sup>Op. cit., p. 124.

in his soul. There was a whispered hint that suicide could bring relief:

A still small voice spoke unto me,  
 "Thou art so full of misery  
 Were it not better not to be?"<sup>1</sup>

Word by word, the "still small voice" infused the poison of doubt in his soul as it taunted him about the insignificance of the human brain compared to the vastness of time:

'Twere better not to breathe or speak,  
 Than cry for strength, remaining weak,  
 And seem to find but still to seek.<sup>2</sup>

He listened to his weaker self also tell him that the immortality of the soul was but a myth:

A life of nothings, nothing-worth,  
 From that first nothing ere his birth  
 To that last nothing under earth!<sup>3</sup>

How could a stronger self answer such insidious suggestions? As usual when Tennyson tried to construct a pattern of faith for his soul to follow, he became vague and a little angry. He fell back, at first, upon conscience, then upon intuitive theology, and finally upon the "heat of inward evidence." In the last section of the poem he told his own heart that he had a "hidden hope" that "God is love" and will not let man share the fate of eternal night with beasts. Again he prayed for a fuller faith:

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

'Tis life whereof our nerves are scant,  
 Oh life, not death, for which we pant,  
 More life and fuller, that I want.<sup>1</sup>

And with the heavenly voice, on the Sabbath morning as the poet watched the villagers going to church, bidding him "Rejoice! Rejoice!", Tennyson tried to make his own the words of Him who said "In my father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you."<sup>2</sup>

This poem of the 1833 volume received much adverse criticism, for the British public considered the thin volume of thirty poems not merely a failure but a disaster.<sup>3</sup> The Cambridge group alone approved it despite the fact that the public pronounced the poems "affected and obscure." Seventeen of the thirty poems in this edition cast Death in a leading role. In five of the seventeen, Tennyson developed the theme that death and unrequited love go hand-in-hand. He wrote "The Lover's Tale" in 1828 but did not publish it until 1833. For the rejected suitor in this poem, life without Camilla became a "daily life and a daily death." He prayed to understand how the same God who gives life "deals the shadow of death" from His left hand. In a similar theme the girl in "Mariana in the South" sang her "Ave Mary" as she waited in vain for her lover to return so that she might not "live forgotten and die forlorn."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>John 14:2.

<sup>3</sup>Nicolson, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>4</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 29.

The lover in "Eleanore" chanted her same lament:

Drink the cup of costly death  
Brimm'd with delirious draughts of warmest life.  
I die with my delight before  
I hear what I would hear from thee.<sup>1</sup>

Known to thousands of girls who have lost their lovers, in one way or another, was the heartbroken cry of the dying maid in "Fatima":

I will possess him or will die.  
I will grow round him in his place,  
Grow, live, die looking on his face,  
Die, dying, clasp'd in his embrace.<sup>2</sup>

For Fatima there was death. For one of the sisters in "The Sisters" there was also death; but for the other sister there was the mission of death, for she felt impelled to kill the man who had betrayed her dead sister and with whom she herself had had the misfortune to fall in love. Her love for her sister and her hate of the man found relief in her confession:

I hated him with the hate of hell,  
But I loved his beauty passing well.  
Three times I stabbed him thro' and thro'.<sup>3</sup>

Turning his thoughts toward his own personal doubts and fears about dying, Tennyson once more resumed his endless questioning as he hoped to find surcease from sorrow. In "Choric Song" he wrote:

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 42.



Death is the end of life;  
 What is it that will last?  
 All things have rest and ripen toward  
   the grave  
 In Silence--ripen, fall, and cease;  
 Give us long rest or death, dark death or  
   dreamful ease.<sup>1</sup>

Since he could find no comforting answer to dispel his doubts, he lived in "confusion worse than death." In this state of mind his thoughts turned again and again to the time when he, too, would be underground. Of that time he wrote in "My Life is Full of Weary Days":

I cannot sink  
 So far, far down, but I shall know  
 Thy voice and answer from below.<sup>2</sup>

In the same melancholy mood the Laureate wrote "The Death of the Old Year," in which he contemplated suicide:

I've half a mind to die with you,  
 Old Year, if you must die.<sup>3</sup>

As has been stated before, Tennyson hated the "bitter realities" of life.<sup>4</sup> His desire for escape from them prompted the writing of two poems in the 1833 volume. The first one, "The Lady of Shalott," portrayed the doom of the lovely maiden of "shadows" when she came into direct contact with reality. For her there was infinite pity as the poet pictured Lancelot looking on her dead face and praying:

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>4</sup>Supra, p. 25.

She has a lovely face,  
God in his mercy lend her grace,  
The Lady of Shalott.<sup>1</sup>

In the second poem, "The Palace of Art," there was a more optimistic note. Here the soul, unhappy in its contacts with people, sought peace of mind by living in a palace where art and beauty reigned. Away from realities in her isolated home, the soul was however never able to forget death; for, pictured on her canvasses, were the maid-mother and "her babe who was to die on a cross," Uther's son "deeply wounded," and the dying Islamite awaited by a group of Houris. Her life away from realities became almost unbearable:

Death and life she hated equally.<sup>2</sup>

The soul began to feel as if she had been buried and sealed inside "a crumbling tomb." Having discovered that one cannot find peace by living in a dream-world, the soul left the life of seclusion for a "cottage in the vale," where she could again find some measure of relief by mourning and praying. Stopford Brooke called the conclusion of "The Palace of Art" Tennyson's confession of his duty as a poet:

This is Tennyson's confession of the duties of his art, and of the law of its practice, and it is characteristic of this conclusion that now for the first time, he begins that poetry of common human life, of the daily love of child and lover, and wife and father and mother, of the ordinary joys and sorrows of men which he wove all his life long.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>Op. cit., p. 90.

Included in the 1833 volume was "OEnone," which Lounsbury rates as one of the most important poems of this collection, "as no student of Tennyson's needs to be told."<sup>1</sup> Lockhart severely criticized "OEnone," however. He ridiculed especially the line which Tennyson had repeated sixteen times: "Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die."<sup>2</sup> Bad as this number of repetitions was in Lockhart's opinion, Tennyson showed his disregard for criticism by repeating the line nineteen times in the revision of 1842. And yet, in its way, "what can be more exquisite than OEnone making Mount Ida echo with her complaints?"<sup>3</sup> In her plea for death Tennyson revealed the ache in his own heart:

O death, death, death, thou ever-floating cloud  
 Pass by the happy souls that love to live;  
 Weigh heavy on my eyelids; let me die.<sup>4</sup>

Like OEnone, in her desire to die, was the young girl in "The May Queen." She had received words of peace from her clergyman and she longed to pass on, for she had decided that "sweeter far is death to me than life." As is often the case, one cannot die simply by wishing he were dead. The new year found her alive but still wishing to die. Even as she voiced her wish, she felt certain regrets and doubts crowding in upon her. She wanted to see a flower "before the

<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 394.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>3</sup>Lounsbury, op. cit., p. 448.

<sup>4</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 38.

day I die," and to comfort her mother, whose grief disturbed the dying girl. To her mother she spoke these words of comfort:

If I can, I'll come again, mother, from out my  
   resting place;  
 Tho' you cannot see me, mother, I shall look  
   upon your face;  
 And be often, often with you when you think  
   I'm far away.<sup>1</sup>

The three words, "If I can," in the above poem were typical of Tennyson, who tried to bolster his lack of faith by a statement he wanted to believe. Even in his dreams death was ever-present. As he paraded the lovely ladies of the past before his readers in "A Dream of Fair Women," he prefaced the account with these somber words:

Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand  
 The downward slope to death.<sup>2</sup>

He saw Helen of Troy, whose beauty launched a thousand ships and brought proud Troy to its doom. He saw Cleopatra, who died a queen and for whom men "did die." The death of the Gileadite maiden, of Rosamond, and of Joan of Arc made Tennyson respect these fair women who had no fear of death. The lovely Hebrew girl said:

How beautiful a thing it was to die  
 For God and for my sire.<sup>3</sup>

In the poem, the line on which he liked to meditate,

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

"that Love can vanquish Death,"<sup>1</sup> expressed the faith which he seemed to lose completely in the first black days after Hallam's death. It was his passionate search for comfort and for a belief in the soul's immortality which sustained him during the ten years' silence, a time when his broken heart was slowly beating out its own "In Memoriam."

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY PERSONAL ACQUAINTANCE WITH DEATH

Tennyson was left alone at Hallam's death to seek with pathetic loyalty the upward path to which Hallam had pointed him. For seventeen years he was to brood over the nature of death, to puzzle over the meaning of God's purpose in letting death come to man, and to try to recall the onward spirit of his friend, whom he called "that noble being full of clearest insight."<sup>1</sup> Tennyson himself has given us a vivid picture of the years between 1833 and 1842 in a poem he published but three years before his death. This is the version of that period of ten years' silence which he gave to posterity in "Merlin and the Gleam":

Once at the croak of  
A Raven who crost it,  
A barbarous people,  
Blind to the magic  
And deaf to the melody,  
Snarl'd at and curst me

A demon vext me,  
The light retreated  
The landskip darkene'd,  
The melody deaden'd,  
The Master whispered  
"Follow the gleam."<sup>2</sup>

Although he published almost nothing in this ten-year period, Tennyson was not idle. During these months he was revising the poems of both the 1830 edition and the 1833 edition

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<sup>1</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 550.

for inclusion in the first volume of poems published in 1842. The second volume of 1842 was made up almost entirely of new poetry, such as "Morte d'Arthur," "Locksley Hall," "Ulysses," "Saint Agnes," "Sir Galahad," "Edward Gray," "Saint Simeon Stylites," and "The Vision of Sin." Each of these poems expressed some phase of Tennyson's observations about death. The general recognition of Tennyson as the greatest poet of the times dates from these poems in the 1842 edition, which "reflects very nearly the perfect Tennyson, all his energy and beauty, and nearly all the fullness of his range."<sup>1</sup>

For a record of the spiritual catastrophe brought on by Hallam's death and for a record of the emotion of those dark winter months, one must look to "Break, break, break," composed in the lanes at Somersby at five o'clock in the morning. Humbert Wolfe in writing about this poem made the following observations:

Arthur Hallam died in 1833, and for the moment the power of mortal love in Tennyson died with him. I am not interested in whether Tennyson's feeling for Hallam was unusual or passing the love of man for woman. I know only that it was a consuming fire as truly first love as any starlit shadow in a girl's eye. I do not know the exact date at which "Break, break, break," published in the 1842 volume, was written. I conjecture, however, that it was not possible for Tennyson to have found the key to his absolute heartache for some years after Hallam's death. I know no poem in the world so near a sob as "Break, break, break." And because I am certain that the poem was the frozen heart at last melting into tears, I believe Tennyson throughout all those years to have been ice-locked in a passionate sorrow that would not let him put out to sea.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Anonymous, "Tennyson," The Nation, Vol. 54 (October 13, 1892), p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., p. 26.

Every individual who has lost to death someone very near to him feels in his own heart the real agony of these verses:

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

And the stately ships go on  
     To their haven under the hill;  
 But O for the touch of a vanish'd 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.<sup>1</sup>

Tennyson's outlook on life would have, indeed, been morbid had he not clung to the "larger hope" that in the future life of the soul he would again touch the vanished hand. Hallam Tennyson said his father meant by a "larger hope" "that the human race would, through ages of suffering, be at length purified and saved."<sup>2</sup> It was of this theory of eventual salvation that the poet wrote in "The Vision of Sin." Here Tennyson restated a fact which he often let plunge him into one of his melancholy moods: "every moment dies a man." In spite of all progress, "Death is king," for who can escape its eventual victory?" "Vivat Rex!" If man then is powerless to check Death, why fight life's battles? Is there any hope? To the last question Tennyson wrote an answer of an everlasting "yes":

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<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., p. 322.



An answer pealed from that high land  
 But in a tongue no man could understand;  
 And on the glimmering limit for withdrawn  
 God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of the numbing misery which darkened his mind and clogged his faculties, Tennyson triumphed eventually over his grief and his own desire to die. As time passed, he found once more the truths he had learned from Hallam and had almost forgotten in his disappointment. He remembered that it was never too late to build a newer, and perhaps better, world on the ashes of the old one. In "Ulysses" Tennyson had the old warrior say:

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.<sup>2</sup>

With a resolve to go forward, Tennyson had Ulysses express the poet's own desire for an ultimate but certain reunion in these words:

It may be that gulfs will wash us down:  
 It may be that we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.<sup>3</sup>

Death is no respecter of persons. For the very active Ulysses, Death waited at the end of his last journey. For the recluse in "Saint Simeon Stylites" Death also waited at the end of a life wasted by inactivity and a desire to purify the soul by punishing the body. Ulysses died one

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

death; St. Simeon died, as he said, "Today and whole years long." In fact, his very life was a "life of death."

In the 1842 volume Tennyson often spoke of the regrets the living have after the death of their family or friends. In this busy world many unkind words are uttered, words one would like to call back as he looks for the last time on the face of the dead one to whom they were so harshly spoken. Over the grave of sweet Ellen Adair, the lover in "Edward Gray" tried to find comfort but, instead, found only emptiness and grief. Kneeling over her grave, he cried:

There I put my face in the grass--  
 Whispered, "Listen to my despair;  
 I repent me of all I did;  
 Speak a little, Ellen Adair!"<sup>1</sup>

And if Ellen could have spoken from the other side of her silent tomb, her reply would probably have been the following lines which Tennyson called "Stanzas":

Come not, when I am dead  
 To drop thy foolish tears upon my grave,  
 To trample round my fallen head,  
 And vex the unhappy dust thou wouldst not save.  
 There let the wind sweep and the plover cry;  
 But thou, go by.<sup>2</sup>

From the Arthurian legends, Tennyson found material for two poems in the 1842 volume. "Sir Galahad" told of Arthur's purest knight as he searched the world in his quest for the Holy Grail. Tennyson represented Galahad as a knight to whom such hope had been given that he knew no fear. Even death held no terror for him but only a promise of a new life

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

completely in accord with the Eternal Being. His desire to pass to that land beyond death he thus expressed:

I yearn to breathe the airs of heaven  
     That often meet me here.  
 I must on joys that will not cease,  
     Pure spaces clothed in living beams,  
 Pure lilies of eternal peace,  
     Whose odors haunt my dreams;  
 And, stricken by an angel's hand,  
     This mortal armor that I wear,  
 This weight and size, this heart and eyes,  
     Are touched, are turn'd to finest air.<sup>1</sup>

In the second poem based on the Arthurian stories, "Morte D'Arthur," Tennyson recounted the incidents marking the closing hours of the great king of the Round Table, hours when "authority forgets a dying king." Tennyson did not endow Arthur with the fearlessness of Galahad. Twice the waning monarch confessed to Bedivere his fears as he told him, "I shall die." He grieved over the fate of his knights, lamented the fact that the "true old times are dead." He, like many men of both yesterday and today, found some comfort, however, in knowing that the new order was but another way in which God was fulfilling himself to man. Tennyson's own belief in prayer found expression in Arthur's words:

Pray for my soul. More things are wrought  
                                     by prayer  
 Than this world dreams of.<sup>2</sup>

The poem ends on a note of hope, for it closes with the ringing of bells on Christmas morning, a day that ushered in a King whose conquests were to include Death.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

Of all the reviews of the poems in the 1842 volume, none can rival the praise which Edgar Allan Poe gave to "Morte D'Arthur." He said:

His "Morte d'Arthur," his "Lady of Shalott," and his "AEnone" [sic], and many other poems, are not surpassed in all that gives to Poetry its distinctive value, by the compositions of anyone living or dead.<sup>1</sup>

He even added in a later review that he would test "anyone's ideal sense by the enjoyment or the none-enjoyment of 'Morte D'Arthur' or 'AEnone.'"<sup>2</sup>

A third edition of the 1842 volume came out in 1846, and in 1847 Tennyson published "The Princess." Though the poem was not written to explain the poet's philosophy of death, yet in it he mentions death sixty-nine times. The words spoken by the princess and her prince could very well have been Tennyson's own, especially when she spoke to her girls:

Better not be at all  
Than not be noble.<sup>3</sup>

With this belief in mind, the princess urged her followers on to eternal life through the noble deeds which she wanted them to do:

But children die; and let me tell you, girl,  
Howe'er you babble, great deeds cannot die.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Edgar Allan Poe, "Our Amateur Poets," Graham's Magazine, August, 1843, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Edgar Allan Poe, "Marginalia," Democratic Review, December, 1844, p. 580.

<sup>3</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 123.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 132.



affections of humanity enter into the movement of the poem, Tennyson became very serious";<sup>1</sup> and in Elaine's song one can feel the heartbreak of the poet and, perhaps, his own agonized soul:

'Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
Tears from the depths of some divine despair  
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,  
In looking on the happy autumn fields,  
And thinking of the days that are no more.

'Dear as remember'd kisses after death,  
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy peign'd  
On lips that are for others; deep as love,  
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;  
O Death in Life, the days that are no more!<sup>2</sup>

In the battles which the women fought with the followers of the prince who disregarded the sign, "Enter here on pain of death," many on both sides died. In the bitter conflict more than one combatant wished that the "old god of war himself were dead." When the prince, who had saved Ida from drowning, fell in battle, the cold heart of the princess melted into the love she had for her warrior lying slain, as she believed, on the battle field. In contrast to her grief in the presence of Death was the grief of the wife about whom Tennyson wrote in this intercalary lyric:

Home they brought her warrior dead;  
She nor swooned nor uttered cry.  
All her maidens, watching, said,  
She must weep or she will die.<sup>3</sup>

For the princess, however, Death stepped aside and returned her prince to her alive and happy that the conflict was over.

<sup>1</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 134.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 149.

The last mention of death in the poem paved the way for "In Memoriam," for Tennyson ended his medley with this triumphant note: "Lift thine eyes; my doubts are dead."<sup>1</sup>

Though the days of her doubting were over, Tennyson never could say the same thing for himself. He was always troubled by life and its realities and by death and its mysteries; yet in spite of this doubting, he kept a profound trust that when all is seen face to face, all will be seen as a perfect whole. He had an eternal hope for man after death, and that hope shines like a beam of light in both his life and his verses. Many beautiful poems have come from the hearts of men touched by the finger of death. Such a poem was "In Memoriam," published in 1850. Had "In Memoriam" been only a wailing for loss, it would have perished; but since it describes death entering into life, it is sure to live.<sup>2</sup> Its subject impassioned Tennyson; its subject was simple, close to the heart of man; its subject, the poet's personal conquest of pain caused by Hallam's death, became the universal conquest of the whole human race, yesterday, today, or tomorrow. About its place in English literature, Van Dyke has written:

Many beautiful poems, and some so noble that they are forever illustrious, have blossomed in the valley of the shadow of death. But among them all

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 190.

none is more rich in significance, more perfect in beauty of form and spirit, or more luminous in the triumph of light and love over darkness and mortality, than "In Memoriam," the greatest of English elegies.<sup>1</sup>

In the same tenor of praise, Mr. Gladstone reviewed "In Memoriam," a review which Hallam Tennyson valued, for he mentioned the article several times in the Memoir. Here is the first paragraph of Mr. Gladstone's criticism:

In 1850 Mr. Tennyson gave to the world under the title of "In Memoriam" perhaps the richest oblation ever offered by the affection of friendship at the tomb of the departed. The memory of Arthur Henry Hallam, who died suddenly in 1833, at the age of twenty-two, will doubtless live chiefly in connection with this volume. But what nobler tribute than this, that for seventeen years after his death, a poet, fast rising toward the lofty summit of his art, found that young fading image the richest source of his inspiration, and of thoughts that gave him bouyance for a flight such as he had not hitherto attained.<sup>2</sup>

In making the study of death with all its implications, one must keep in mind that Tennyson himself did not consider this poem as a biography. In fact, he did not write the various lyrics with any view of weaving them into a whole, nor did he write them for publication until he discovered that he had written so many of them.<sup>3</sup> "Full of sad experience" and "moving toward the stillness of his rest," Tennyson dramatically gave his different views of sorrow and his personal conviction that fear, doubts, suffering, and even death will find answer and relief only through faith in

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>2</sup>William Gladstone to Gleanings of Past Years: 1879, in Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son, I, 136.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 304.



a God of Love. The "I" in the various poems in "In Memoriam" is not always the author speaking of himself. He told his son that many times the "I" became the voice of the human race speaking through him.<sup>1</sup> One American author has said that "In Memoriam" has never been truly evaluated as poetry because of the universality of its appeal to the heart of sorrowing man. He stated:

"In Memoriam" was spared much criticism by virtue of its subject. A mourning for the dead was to be revered. Pointing out faults in the verses was like pointing to the wreath on a dead man's brow and saying, "that flower is out of place."<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the writer of this thesis does not agree with Mr. Eidson is of little consequence. The fact remains that one hundred years have passed since "In Memoriam" was published; and during that time, the great, the near-great, and the average have praised its beauty and have found immeasurable consolation in its message. In the poem Queen Victoria found sustaining grace in the days following Prince Albert's death.<sup>3</sup> In the same passages a twentieth-century American whom death had visited seven times in a year also found a new faith.

"In Memoriam" did not bear, in 1850, on its title page either the name of its author or the person to whom it was dedicated. Tennyson, who spoke of himself as widowed by

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>J. O. Eidson, Tennyson in America: His Reputation and Influence (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1943), p. 82.

<sup>3</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., I, 485.

the loss of Hallam, seemed to write the poem with a two-fold purpose: to make it the glorious monument to the memory of his friend; to make it a monument to the belief in the immortality of the soul and the immortality of love, both human and divine.

In Vienna, a city which Tennyson would never visit,<sup>1</sup> on September 15, 1833, while Arthur Hallam seemed to be reposing quietly, the silver cord was loosed, the golden bowl was broken; God's finger touched him and Hallam slept. "In Memoriam" begins with the poet's confession of his dreadful sense of loss occasioned by Hallam's death and the firm resolve to hold fast to the memory of his overwhelming grief. In his blind groping for an answer "why?", he turned his face heavenward to God, who "madest Death," and asked Him, "Why was man made to die?" In the same breath he implored forgiveness for his grief over one removed whom he trusted "lives in Thee." Here in the first part of the poem was the typical and natural uncertainty of a lonely and sorrowful heart. In Lyric V Tennyson asked himself whether he would be guilty of sin by writing some verses to alleviate his pain:

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.<sup>2</sup>

In his questioning whether the writing of a memorial poem could be anything more than a "dull narcotic, ending

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 164.

pain," Tennyson remembered that his lost friend had loved and praised the poet's verse. Keeping this thought in mind, he wrote the poems for Hallam and consecrated them to his memory.

From this moment a "calm despair" entered his soul as he moved forward, with ever-deepening power and beauty, to pay his tribute "to the immortal meaning of friendship and to pour his light through the shadows of the grave,"<sup>1</sup> the grave of which he wrote:

The Danube to the Severn gave  
The darken'd heart that beat no more;  
They laid him by the pleasant shore,  
And in the hearing of the wave.<sup>2</sup>

As Tennyson pondered over his loss, he wrote into the poem the question that has perplexed man since the beginning of time: "Is death the end?" Tennyson made no attempt to answer his own inquiry; instead, he wrote this line to express further his bereavement: "I do but sing because I must."<sup>3</sup>

The companionship he shared with Hallam had been broken, and the way ahead looked dark and dreary to the poet. In his loneliness Tennyson imagined his friend walking a long path until he was joined by the "Shadow feared of men." Then Tennyson saw Hallam entering realms unknown, and though

<sup>1</sup>Ivan Dyke, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

the poet walked in haste, he could not overtake his friend.  
He comforted himself by thinking:

. . . . that somewhere in the waste  
The Shadow sits and waits for me.<sup>1</sup>

And if seeking to make his anguish more acute, Tennyson recalled former days of gladness spent with Hallam. The recollection of those days caused the poet to experience his grief anew, but the very capacity for such sorrow was better, he concluded, than the selfish placidity of the loveless life:

'Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all.<sup>2</sup>

With the coming of Christmas, Tennyson looked back over a year without Hallam:

This year I slept and woke with pain,  
I almost wished no more to wake,  
And that my hold on life would break  
Before I heard those bells again.<sup>3</sup>

This holiday brought sorrow touched with very little joy. The whole Tennyson household felt the presence of one "mute Shadow" watching them as each of them made vain pretences of gladness. In their eagerness to find some measure of relief from their grief, they began to talk of the departed ones whom they had so sorely missed. As they wept and talked, they voiced in one great affirmation the birth of their hope:

They do not die  
Nor lose their mortal sympathy,  
Nor change to us, although they change;

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Rise, happy morn, rise holy morn,  
 Draw forth the cheerful day from night;  
 O Father, touch the east, and light  
 The light that shone when Hope was born.<sup>1</sup>

At this point in "In Memoriam" Tennyson turned his attention to the story of Lazarus, who spent four days in the grave, and to the story of Mary and her faith in Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. Such a faith was so pure and sacred that it demanded reverence from Tennyson, who, at this time, did not share it. To him there were questions to be asked and answers, if given, to be considered. Lazarus had left his "charnel-cave"; he had explored the realms of death, and he knew its mysteries of life beyond the tomb. What, then, kept him from telling man "what it is to die"? Where was he those four days? There is no record of a reply, for something had sealed the lips of "that Evangelist." From the story of Lazarus Tennyson drew small comfort. With him were still his doubts and fears, which he revealed in Lyric XLI:

For tho' my nature rarely yields  
 To that vague fear implied in death,  
 Nor shudders at the gulf beneath,  
 The bowlings from forgotten fields;  
 Yet oft when sundown skirts the moor  
 An inner trouble I behold,  
 A spectral doubt which makes me cold,  
 That I shall be thy mate no more.<sup>2</sup>

It is this very assertion of his wavering faith in everything connected with death that makes "In Memoriam" a

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

poem of almost universal appeal. T. R. Lounsbury made these observations about the elegy:

Few are the households in which there are not vacant chairs. Few are the individuals who have not had to mourn the loss of those near and dear. To a world full of sorrowing hearts and sad but sacred memories, this work came as a solace and a help. Equally did it appeal to another class. Everywhere could be found thoughtful men haunted and perplexed by doubts and fears, uncertain where to find a secure resting-place in any possible solution of the ever-recurring problems of human life and destiny. To all such it was an unspeakable consolation and a help to dwell upon the struggles of a man who had fought his way through honest doubt.<sup>1</sup>

Gloom passed into gloom for the poet as he mused on the state of the dead, whom he wanted to believe "happy dead." From his own soul he remembered "little flashes," "mystic hints," which gave him hope:

That each who seems a separate whole,  
Should move his rounds and fusing  
all  
The skirts of self again, should fall  
Remerging in the general soul,  
  
Is faith as vague as all unsweet.  
Eternal form shall still divide  
The eternal soul from all beside,  
And I shall know him when we meet.<sup>2</sup>

This faith, born within the heart of Tennyson, was to be throughout the remainder of his life with him, to comfort and to point him on to triumph over death. In the Memoir his son, in speaking of the source of his father's faith, said his father often told him:

"We do not get faith from nature or the world.  
If we look at nature alone, full of perfection and

<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 622.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 174.

imperfection, she tells us that God is disease, murder and rapine. We get this faith from ourselves, from what is highest within us."<sup>1</sup>

This faith became the breath of life to Tennyson and "never, I feel, really failed him, or life itself would have failed."<sup>2</sup> It is true, however, that at many times, his faith faltered, and for help during such periods of despair he prayed to his dead friend:

Be near me when my faith is dry,  
And men the flies of later spring,  
And lay their eggs, and sting and sing  
And weave their petty cells and die.

Be near me when I fade away  
To print the term of human strife,  
And on the low dark verge of life  
The twilight of eternal day.<sup>3</sup>

Tennyson's desire for his friend's spiritual presence in the hours of pain, doubt, or death sprang from his belief that Hallam, dead, could bring a serene sympathy and allowance for mortal ignorance, weakness, and imperfection.<sup>4</sup> His longing for Hallam intensified his feeling of loss and made him cry out in desperation:

O Sorrow, wilt thou live with me  
No casual mistress, but a wife,  
My bosom friend and half of life;  
And I confess it needs must be?<sup>5</sup>

At this point the poet turned to the thought of the strange difference between the wisdom and the purity of the blessed

<sup>1</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., I, 314.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>3</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>4</sup>Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>5</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 176.





at the "blessed goal":

And He that died in Holy Land  
Would reach us out the shining hand,  
And take us as a single soul.<sup>1</sup>

Since this wish had not been granted, the poet tried to find some comfort in re-reading the letters which Hallam had written him. Again doubts which he called "Devil-born" began to crowd upon him, but this time in his doubting there issued from his soul a note of optimism as he wrote in Lyric XCVI:

Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,  
At last he beats his music out.  
There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.<sup>2</sup>

Unlike Arthur High Clough and Mathew Arnold, poets also of doubt, Tennyson was able in the midst of death to sing a triumphant song.<sup>3</sup> His "Ring out the old, ring in the new" was the language of hope and progress. He held out for humanity this hope by cherishing an ideal for the future which was not realized in his own life, but which he believed would be realized in after generations. He sincerely believed that the following lines were prophetic:

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.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>Arthur Turnbull, Life and Writings of Alfred Lord Tennyson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 96.

<sup>4</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 190.

"In Memoriam" was a dead-march, but it was a march into immortality.<sup>1</sup> Toward the end of the poem Tennyson established his faith in eternal life by such affirmations as these: "sorrow makes us wise," "all is well through faith," "Thou canst not die," "I shall not lose thee tho' I die," "Regret is dead," "Truths that never can be proved," and "we lose ourselves in light." Even when the poet saw the personal loves of earth fade and die, he was convinced that they were taken up into higher and wider loves beyond the grave and were expanded to fit perfectly into the love of both man and God in this Holy Region. Thus he ended "In Memoriam" with the reiteration of the victory of man over pain and doubt, over death and the grave, as he lived through eternity in the fullness of God's love. All that Tennyson believed in, loved, and hoped for he entrusted to the hands of Him who is Immortal Love.<sup>2</sup> The closing lines of "In Memoriam" were a fitting tribute to Hallam, "who lives in God":

That God, who ever lives and loves,  
 One God, one law, one element,  
 And one far-off divine event,  
 To which the whole creation moves.<sup>3</sup>

The elegy had ended, and with its publication Tennyson gave the world his own journal of sorrow in the death of Hallam. For a world bound together by common ties

<sup>1</sup>Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 228.

<sup>3</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 198.

of grief, "In Memoriam" has become less individual and more universal as the years have passed since 1850. The poet's private sorrow has opened out into a hundred aspects of pain and mystery shared by men and women of every age. The progress of the poem was the path Tennyson walked from death to doubt to faith. In making this walk he finally arrived at the ultimate end of all walks, the entrance to Eternal Life after Death, which he once told Bishop Lightfoot was "the cardinal point of Christianity."<sup>1</sup>

Hallam Tennyson wrote in his Memoir that he could not end the chapter on "In Memoriam" more fitly than by quoting Henry Hallam's letter which his father received in 1850. Mr. Hallam had received from the poet the poem which the old gentleman called the "precious book."<sup>2</sup> This letter seems to be the logical conclusion, too, for this study of "In Memoriam," and from Mr. Hallam's letter the following lines are quoted:

"I know not how to express what I have felt. My first sentiment was surprise, for though I now find that you had mentioned the intention to my daughter, Julia, she had never told me of the poems. I do not speak as another would to praise or admire; few, indeed, have I as yet been capable of reading, the grief they express is too much akin to that they revive. It is better than any monument which could be raised to the memory of my beloved son; it is a more lively and enduring testimony to his great virtues and talents that the world should know the friendship which existed between you, that posterity should associate his name with that of Alfred Tennyson."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., I, 321.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 327.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

CHAPTER III  
DRAMATIC TREATMENT OF DEATH AS A  
UNIVERSAL EXPERIENCE IN LIFE

It was significant of Tennyson throughout his long poetic career that he could publish among poems newly written others dating from years back without any contrast between the two being obvious. Most authors have outgrown the verse of their seventeenth year at twenty-five and of their twenty-fifth year at fifty. With him no such dynamic process was ever noticeable; some poems in the last volume might well have appeared in Poems Chiefly Lyrical.<sup>1</sup> At the end of his life he had not outgrown the musical morbidity of his early years back at Somersby. Life still disposed him toward a pleasing melancholy, into which he skillfully wove his familiar patterns of life, death, and immortality. In 1859 Tennyson received a letter from W. M. Thackeray, who addressed him as "My dear old Alfred" and who asked him this question, "How can you at fifty be writing things as well as at thirty-five?"<sup>2</sup> The answer to Mr. Thackeray's question may lie in the fact that Tennyson never strove to climb Parnassus and its lofty summit but rather chose to make his poetic home on one of its pleasant middle ridges, where

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<sup>1</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., I, 445.

destiny and temperament had placed him. Here he gained, according to one source, eternal fame because he chose to write on subjects near the heart of man. An article expressing this opinion, written only a few months after Tennyson's death, in part, says:

Tennyson wrote of the everlasting facts of life and death, of love and loss, and rendered unsurpassable accounts of these elemental passions of joy and sorrow, of hope and fear and longing. The body of Tennyson's poetry must needs be eternal with their eternity.<sup>1</sup>

The poet occasionally took up the role of William Cowper to lecture his countrymen on their social shortcomings, especially when their imperfections brought death to their associates.<sup>2</sup> In "Aylmer's Field" he has assumed the manner of the author of The Task, with the opening lines of the poem unfolding its moral:

Dust are our frames; and, gilded dust our pride  
Looks only for a moment whole and sound,  
Like that long buried body of the king,  
Found lying with his urns and ornaments,  
Which at a touch of light, an air of heaven,  
Slipt into ashes, and was found no more.<sup>3</sup>

The remaining lines of the poem described the Nemesis which fell upon Sir Aylmer Aylmer in his pride of wealth. Concerning this pride, the poet's son wrote:

My father always felt a prophetic righteous wrath against this form of selfishness; and no one can read his terrible denunciations of such pride trampling

<sup>1</sup>H. D. Traill, "Aspects of Tennyson's Poetry," The Nineteenth Century, XXXII (Dec., 1892), 966.

<sup>2</sup>Turnbull, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>3</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 241.

on holy human love, without being aware that the poet's heart burnt within him while he was at work on this tale of wrong.<sup>1</sup>

As Sir Aylmer and his wife restricted Edith's activities, they, unconscious of anything except the preservation of their wealth and proud old name, pulled the cordon "close and closer to her death." When the broken-hearted girl died, calling her lover's name in her last breath, Tennyson, who believed that one could be touched through the finer forms of matter,<sup>2</sup> had the cry reach Leolin in his London home, and he knew that she was gone:

Star to star vibrates light; may soul to soul  
Strike thro' a finer element of her own?<sup>3</sup>

So spoke the poet, marking the very question which scientific men in the Psychical Society ask themselves.<sup>4</sup>

"Aylmer's Field" from the point of Edith's and Leolin's deaths took on a dark and somber tone, which the Rector made more pronounced by his repetition of "Your house is left unto you desolate." There was no comfort for the wilful parents in the words spoken at their daughter's funeral. In one short month the childless mother went "to seek her child" in the misty region just beyond the grave. For the father, death was not so considerate. It delayed

<sup>1</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., II, 9.

<sup>2</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 462.

<sup>3</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 248.

<sup>4</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 463.

its coming two years to drive Sir Aylmer mad as he realized how wicked he had been and how much sorrow he had caused. For him life lived these two years was but an existence of shame, for "dead two years before his death" was he. And with his death ended one of Tennyson's "most strongly didactic poems, a triumph in verse, and one very popular in Germany."<sup>1</sup>

The lecture in "Alymer's Field" to his countrymen became in "Despair" a denunciation of the "know-nothings," as Tennyson called them, as well as of the liars who proclaimed eternal damnation as the end of man.<sup>2</sup> The poem was a plea, powerful and personal, for belief in the immortality of the soul-immortality, the gift eternal from a God of Love, who, Tennyson believed, could never send a soul to everlasting death or to everlasting Hell. In open revolt against the teachings of the "know-nothing" sect, a man and his wife, having lost faith in God and hope of life after death, and being utterly miserable in this life, resolved to end themselves by drowning. The wife was drowned, but her husband was rescued by a minister of the sect he had rejected. The old man's bitterness against the one who had saved him found expression in the following stinging words:

Ah, God, should we find Him, perhaps, perhaps,  
   if we died, if we died;  
 We never had found Him on earth, this earth  
   is a fatherless hell--

<sup>1</sup>Turnbull, op. cit., p. 159.

<sup>2</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 497.

"Dear love, forever and ever, for ever  
and ever farewell!"<sup>1</sup>

The old man's honest doubt and distrust of the creeds of his Church were, in reality, Tennyson's. It is a curious fact that such doubting was usually accompanied by a brooding over the immensities of Time and Space, for when "Space was explored by the Soul, she could discover, in the telescope, no god in the universe."<sup>2</sup> The third stanza contained the poet's personal utterance on the vastness of this universe:

And the suns of the limitless universe  
                    sparkled and shone in the sky,  
Flashing with fires as of God, but we knew  
                    that their light was a lie--  
Bright as with deathless hope--but, how-  
                    ever they sparkled and shone,  
The dark little worlds running round them  
                    were worlds of woe like our own--  
No soul in the heaven above, no soul on  
                    the earth below,  
A fiery scroll written over with lamentation  
                    and woe.<sup>3</sup>

And because the rescued man was "frighted at life, not death," and because he could not trust in that Infinite Love which the Church taught "foreknew us" and "foredoomed us", he planned to escape the minister and to try to end his life again. His final words to the minister were words of bitter denunciation:

Hence! she is gone! can I stay? can I  
                    breathe divorced from the past?  
You needs must have good lynx-eyes if I  
                    do not escape you at last  
Our orthodox coroner doubtless will find it  
                    a felo-de-se,

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 496.

<sup>2</sup>Turnbull, op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>3</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 495.



And the stake and the cross-road, fool, if  
you will, does it matter to me?<sup>1</sup>

Again in the poem "Happy" Tennyson gave his readers a portrait of the love of a man for his wife. Despite the title, there were death and the promise of "living-death" in the story of the leper's bride who wanted to join her husband in the leper colony. With a love stronger than "this living death," faithful to her marriage vows, she begged her husband to permit her to join him. Like the man in "Despair," she blamed God for her husband's miserable condition, especially since he had been a warrior of the Holy Cross when he contracted the dread disease. With God she lodged this complaint:

O God, I could blaspheme, for he fought  
Thy fight for Thee,  
And Thou hast made him leper to compass  
him with scorn--

Hast spared the flesh of thousand, the  
coward and the base,  
And set a crueller mark than Cain's on  
him, the good and brave!<sup>2</sup>

Again in "The Sisters" Tennyson expressed the same bitter reaction toward death in the story of Evelyn and Edith, who loved the same man. The poem was partly founded on a story, known to Tennyson, of a girl who consented to be bridesmaid to her sister, although she secretly loved the bridegroom. Death was among the wedding guests, for Edith died as she prayed before the very altar where her sister had been married. Her secret, which she meant to take to

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 497.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 543.

to her grave, was soon whispered to Evelyn by her mother. Evelyn's death following the birth of her second daughter made her husband's life seem more a bad dream than a reality. This sense of living in a dream he uttered in the following complaint:

. . . . . My God, I would not  
live  
Save that I think this gross hard-seeming  
world  
Is our misshaping vision of the Powers  
Behind the world, that make our griefs our  
gains.<sup>1</sup>

These lines from "The Sisters" Tennyson often quoted as his own belief.<sup>2</sup>

Among those who desired death because of unhappiness in life was the mother in "Rizpah," a "noble tragedy because of its dreadful pathos and because of its infinite motherhood."<sup>3</sup> The poem was founded on an incident which Tennyson "saw related in some penny magazine called Old Brighton, lent him by his friend, Mrs. Brotherton."<sup>4</sup> Van Dyke, however, said of the poem:

The poem of "Rizpah" which was first published in the volume of Ballads in 1880 is an illustration of dramatic paraphrase from the Bible. The story of the Hebrew mother watching beside the dead bodies of her sons whom the Gibeonites had hanged upon the hill and defending them day and night for six months from the wild beasts and birds of prey, is transformed into the

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 464.

<sup>2</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., II, 233.

<sup>3</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 446.

<sup>4</sup>Hallam Tennyson, II, 249.



brother's murderer and with Maud herself dying because she dared not live to face this double pain. For her lover there remained flight from the scene of his crime, and morbidity merging into madness, just a short step, really, from his troubled state of mind before the duel. Even then the drawn shades at her house carried a presentiment of evil to him:

The death-white curtain drawn;  
Felt a horror over me creep,  
Prickle my skin and catch my breath,  
Knew that the death-white curtains meant but sleep,  
Yet I shudder'd and thought like a fool of the sleep of death.<sup>1</sup>

The second part of "Maud" is the morbid record of the lover and the madness which possessed him after the death of his sweetheart. His restoration to sanity and a life of usefulness came about by his surrendering himself to the thoughts of his lost love and by giving himself to the task of working for mankind and its good instead of just railing against its ills. Never did he lose his longing for Maud, though, and in a passage, which Tennyson told his son was one of his favorites,<sup>2</sup> the lover voiced this ever-present desire:

A shadow flits before me,  
Not thou, but like to thee.  
Ah, Christ, that it were possible  
For one short hour to see  
The souls we loved, that they might tell  
us  
What and where they be!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>2</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., I, 398.

<sup>3</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 214.

Tennyson not only wrote about people who because of personal griefs sought death, but he also gave vivid accounts of those who faced death willingly for the sake of defending their country or for the sake of ideals for which they were willing to lay down their lives. Though she was spared her life, Lady Godiva was willing to die to save the children in her husband's realm from starvation. Not so fortunate was Sir John Oldcastle, known in his time as the good Lord Cobham. An ardent follower of Wyclif, he took part in the presentation of a remonstrance to Parliament on the corruption of the church. In the reign of Henry V he was accused of heresy and tried, but he made his escape from The Tower, where he had been imprisoned. After four years of hiding in Wales, he was captured, branded a traitor as well as a heretic, and sentenced to death by hanging and burning. This man's faith in the principles for which he died appealed to Tennyson, who said he took him for the hero in "'Sir John Oldcastle', Lord Cobham, because he was a fine historical figure."<sup>1</sup> On Christmas Day, 1417, Sir John was burned alive as he denounced the "dead pillars of the Church" with these words:

So, caught, I burn.  
 Burn? heathen men have borne as much  
       as this  
 For freedom, or the sake of those they  
       loved,  
 Or some less cause, some cause far less  
       than mine;  
 For every other cause is less than mine.  
 The moth will singe her wings, and singed  
       return,

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<sup>1</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., II, 254.

Her love of light quenching her fear of pain--  
 How now, my soul, we do not heed the  
     fire?  
 Faint-hearted? tut!--faint stomach'd!  
 God willing, I will burn for Him.<sup>1</sup>

To Sir John Franklin, Tennyson also gave his homage in verse, for here was a man who gave his life to explore for his country the vast unknown of the Arctic Regions. Men with such courage and utter disregard of their own safety have always advanced the progress of science and civilization. To Sir John, Tennyson penned these four lines:

Not here! the white North has thy bones;  
     and thou,  
     Heroic soul,  
 Art passing on thine happier voyage now  
     Towards no earthly pole.<sup>2</sup>

The Victorians were serenely convinced that patriotism was all-sufficient, that "to give one's life was the highest civic virtue"<sup>3</sup>; and this conviction flourished in the poetry of their Laureate. His sense of England--of her achievements, of her brave men willing to die for her glory, and of her responsibilities--was in the main magnificent. In this splendid passage from the classical poem "Tiresias," Tennyson, according to Nicolson, was voicing his admiration for England's men who faced death for her:<sup>4</sup>

No sound is breathed so potent to coerce,  
 And to conciliate, as their names who dare  
 For that sweet motherland which gave them birth

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 475.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 487.

<sup>3</sup>Nicolson, op. cit., p. 258.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 258.

Nobly to do, nobly to die, Their names,  
Graven on memorial columns, are a song  
Heard in the future.<sup>1</sup>

"The Revenge," that ringing and high-angered ballad, is one of Tennyson's most successful poems in the high patriotic vein, one "that had evoked from Carlyle a gruff applause."<sup>2</sup> The soul of the Elizabethan Age, its hatred of Spain, its bold sea captains who laughed at death are in its verses. The ship itself seemed alive; with its crew, it did not desire to live if Spanish domination were to be the price of life. Of the battle the poet's son gave this account:

Sir Richard Grenville, after his desperate fight of his one ship against the Spanish Fleet, commanded the master gunner, whom he knew to be a resolute man, to split and to sink the ship, that thereby nothing might remain of glory to the Spaniards, seeing in so many hours they were not able to take her, having had fifteen hours time, fifteen thousand men, and fifty-three soil of men of war to perform it withal.<sup>3</sup>

When the sailors yielded temporarily to the foe and when on the Spanish flag-ship Sir Richard lay dying, he cried out:

I have fought for Queen and Faith like  
a valiant man and true;  
I have only done my duty as a man  
is bound to do.  
With a joyful spirit I Sir Richard Gren-  
ville die!<sup>4</sup>

The Revenge was then manned by a swarthy alien crew which

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<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 490.

<sup>2</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. 252.

<sup>3</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., II, 252.

<sup>4</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 461.

went to its death as the proud old English ship buried itself during a storm in the fathomless main by the "island crags."

According to Stopford Brooke, "The Revenge" and "The Defense of Lucknow" were two of the finest poems which Tennyson wrote on patriotism.<sup>1</sup> Turnbull said that in the seige piece, "The Defense of Lucknow," Tennyson rivaled Homer as a painter of battles and vivid descriptions of all the horrors of war.<sup>2</sup> The poem will always stir English hearts as they read the poet's account of the men who were ordered "to die at their posts" and to hold Lucknow fifteen days at the least. What English heart would not thrill to their brave deeds in the face of certain death, to their devotion to England, and to their resolve to die for her defence? In the midst of cholera, scurvy, and death, there is a fine touch of the tenderer side of the defenders' love for England as one of them turned his mind back across the seas and remembered the coolness of the "breezes of May blowing over an English field." British loyalty and courage held the fort eighty-seven days and nights, a time to test man's valor and to try his soul. With the arrival of General Havelock, those who survived rejoiced that the banner of old England still blew over Lucknow. In the Memoir the Laureate's son gives an interesting incident about this banner:

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 436.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., p. 182.



The old flag, used during the defence of the residency was hoisted on the Lucknow flagstaff by General Wilson, and the soldiers who still survived from the seige were all mustered on parade in honor of this poem when my son, Lionel, visited Lucknow. It was a tribute overwhelmingly touching.<sup>1</sup>

In The Times on December 2, 1854, Tennyson read of another group of Englishmen who had died gallantly even though their deaths came because "some one had blundered." This phrase was the origin of the meter of his poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," which he wrote a few minutes after reading the story in the paper.<sup>2</sup> Those who read his poem forgot the petulant mistake that all but annihilated the Brigade and thrilled to the glory of those who rode so steadily to all but certain death. Steady obedience and cool self-sacrifice such as theirs, courage that rises higher the nearer death is at hand, these are the things which have made England. Tennyson's poem was a salute to the troopers and their glory, not to the leaders. Tennyson liked to read aloud the second stanza of this poem,<sup>3</sup> a poem to set English hearts aflame with patriotism with these living words:

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"  
Was there a man dismay'd?  
Not tho' the soldier knew  
    Someone had blundered.  
Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die.

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<sup>1</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., II, 254.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., I, 381.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.<sup>1</sup>

No one can read the preceding lines without feeling Tennyson's deep respect for those men who faced Death for England. He was a patriot, but in his later years he embraced a large cosmopolitan program of a federation of governments, a universal peace promoted by the union of Christian nations in a civilized world.<sup>2</sup> This ideal which he cherished and hoped would become a reality is today still an ideal devoutly wished for. In Tennyson's early days he had written "There is no land like England" and "Who fears to die, who fears to die?" both national war songs of 1830. In 1885 "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade" and its "Epilogue" expressed both his patriotism and cosmopolitanism. His admiration for the gallant three hundred was secondary only to the hope that soon England would not have to fight, that soon the world would learn to live peacefully, that soon bloody death on the battlefields would be but a memory. It was in the "Epilogue" that Tennyson proclaimed this hope:

Slav, Teuton, Kelt, I count them all  
My friends and brother souls,  
With all the peoples great and small,  
That wheel between the poles.  
But since our mortal shadow, Ill,  
To waste this earth began  
Perchance from some abuse of Will  
In worlds before the man  
Involving ours--he needs must fight  
To make true peace his own.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>2</sup>Turnbull, op. cit., p. 235.

<sup>3</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 510.

In paying his tribute to men who had served the nation in time of war, Tennyson wrote one of his finest poems, "The Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington."<sup>1</sup> Tennyson believed the Duke was a great man as well as a great soldier, for the poet told his son:

I am afraid real patriotism is very rare. The love of country which makes a man defend his land, that we all have; but the patriotism that declines to link itself with the small fry of the passing hour for political advantage--that is rare, I say.

The Duke of Wellington had both kinds of patriotism.<sup>2</sup> Tennyson issued his Ode on the day of Wellington's burial. It was a song of musical pomp in which the poet voiced his personal admiration for the "sworn foe of brainless mobs" and strutting Napoleons. To the Laureate, the Duke was the sublime servant of England, a servant who had scaled the "topping crags of Duty" both in peace and in war.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps in all commemorative odes there is nothing finer "than his imagination of Nelson walking from his grave in St. Paul's and wondering who was coming,"<sup>4</sup> with this national mourning, to lie beside him:

Who is he that cometh, like an honoured guest,  
With banners and with music, with soldiers and priests,  
With a nation weeping, and breaking on my rest?<sup>5</sup>

The prayer which closed the Ode, "God accept him, Christ

<sup>1</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., II, 349.

<sup>3</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>4</sup>Brooke, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>5</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 223.

receive him," is an appropriate one to say at the grave of anyone who gives his life for his country.

In addition to writing about death sought by persons unhappy in life and death faced and accepted by men during the stress of battle, Tennyson also recorded the part death played in the lives of ordinary men and women and the emotions they felt in their everyday lives as they experienced both joys and sorrows, and as they learned to accept birth and death. These men and women, the lowly of the earth, are the most actual in Tennyson's poems. Who is likely to forget "Dora," "Sea Dreams," "Enoch Arden," "The Brook," "The Grand-mother," and a host of others?

"Dora" is a poem, half dramatic and half idyllic, quite close to common life. Allan, the old farmer, wished to see his son William marry Dora and live long enough to see their children playing about his knees. His fondness for Dora sprang, at least in part, from his desire to atone for his harsh words to her father, who died before Allan could recall his bitter words. As is often the case, William disregarded his father's wishes and married Mary, whom he loved and who bore him a son. With William's death to add to the unhappiness already in his heart, Allan turned to his grandson and to Dora, who remained true to her love for William until her death. It is a simple story but "really not as simple as 'Michael,'" according to Stopford Brooke.<sup>1</sup> The author of "Michael," however, gave the poem high praise:

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<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 394.

On one of the occasions of their meeting, Wordsworth said to my father, "Mr. Tennyson, I have been endeavouring all my life to write a pastoral like your 'Dora' and have not succeeded." That was great praise from one who honestly weighed his words and was by no means lavish of his praise.<sup>1</sup>

"Sea Dreams" is a narrative of a single day in the life of a man and his wife, and of a crisis in their souls, a crisis which death helped them to solve. The man, a city clerk, had been cheated of all his savings by a hypocrite, a church member who took advantage of his position to rob widows and poor clerks. To escape his despair, the cheated man took his wife and infant son to the seashore, where all day the wife pleaded for her husband to forgive the hypocrite. At night her dreams revealed to her the principles of Christ's love and forgiveness. When she awoke, she again asked her husband to forgive the injurer. When her husband asked her why, she told him that the hypocrite was dead. The clerk found that it was difficult to hate the dead. To his wife he gave this answer:

His deeds yet live, the worst is yet to come.  
Yet let your sleep for this one night be sound;  
I do forgive him.<sup>2</sup>

Having forgiven, he, too, slept well.

Tennyson loved the sea as much as any sailor, and he knew its moods on the shore or in mid-ocean. He loved it for its own sake and for its part in making England great. It was characteristic, then, of him to chose his hero in

<sup>1</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., I, 265.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 257.

"Enoch Arden" from the working classes of the sea rather than of the land. Death and the sea seem very close, and throughout the poem both are always present. One of the deeds which endeared the sailor to friends was his saving three men from death by drowning. When he left his home to seek fortune for his wife and children, Annie seemed to hear "her own death-scaffold arising." Her unhappy thoughts gave way to the reality of Death, who came to claim her youngest child. Any mother who has ever watched her baby die can appreciate the last line of the following verses:

--Ere she was aware--  
Like the caged bird escaping suddenly,  
The little innocent soul flitted away.<sup>1</sup>

How accurately the poet painted the days that followed the burial of her baby, days when she "cared not to look on any human face"!

As the years passed and Enoch did not return to her, Annie seemed to be dying from the endless days of watchful waiting. Believing at last that her husband must surely be dead, Annie married Phillip and began a new life on the ashes of the old one with Enoch. But Enoch was not dead; he appeared in his home town, a "dead man come to life," and learned the history of his family from Miriam Lane. For the sake of those he loved, Enoch sacrificed himself, leaving tenderness and happiness behind him when at last he heard

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 231.

his call from the sea. Tennyson described Enoch's death in these lines:

There came so loud a calling of the sea  
That all the houses in the haven rang.  
He woke, he rose, he spread his arms abroad,  
Crying with a loud voice, "A Sail! a sail!  
I am saved;" and so fell back and spoke  
no more.<sup>1</sup>

As a piece of versification "Enoch Arden" is one of Tennyson's triumphs in blank verse.<sup>2</sup> As a tribute to the ideal poor man it is also a triumph in presenting the highest self-sacrifice that it is possible for a man to make. At the time that it was published, however, Tennyson's enemies charged that the poem was immoral and that it was a glorification of concubinage. In a German Periodical, Gartenlaube, an article appeared which narrated an imaginary meeting between Queen Victoria and Tennyson. Nicolson has given the following translation of their meeting:

"Tell me, Mr. Tennyson, what have you to reply to all the accusations against 'Enoch Arden' which I mentioned?"

"Very little, Your Majesty."

"What?"

"I should be sorry, Your Majesty, if the little girl yonder had to bear the stain of illegitimate descent."

"And what has that little girl to do with your poem?"

"A great deal."

"You do not mean to say, Mr. Tennyson, that on our little island here an event such as you have related has really happened?"

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>2</sup>Turnbull, op. cit., p. 159.

"Your Majesty, there occur among the lowly and pure many traits of heroism."

It was then that Victoria walked across the lawn to a tombstone and laid her hand on its moss-grown edge. She stood there for a long time in silence. At length, she drew herself up, and, turning to go home, she said, "God bless him! He did right after all."<sup>1</sup>

Many people look upon death as a guide to a better world where they hope to see their loved ones from whom they have been separated a long time. In "The Grandmother" little Annie found it difficult to understand her sick grandmother's lack of tears when the news of Willy's death reached them. Patiently the old lady tried to explain that once she had wept for her baby born dead but that now she had no tears to shed for Willy as her own death, very near, would bring her, her babe, her husband, and Willy together once more. To Annie the grandmother spoke these words of faith:

To be sure the preacher says, our sins  
     should make us sad;  
 But mine is a time of peace, and there  
     is Grace to be had;  
 And God, not man, is the Judge of us all  
     when life shall cease;  
 And in this Book, little Annie, the message  
     is one of peace.

In sharp contrast to the calm and peace in the soul of the grandmother were the despair and remorse in the young wife's heart in "The First Quarrel." This poem was founded on an Isle of Wight story told to Dr. Dabbs.<sup>3</sup> A poor woman had quarrelled with her husband one stormy night just before

<sup>1</sup>Op. cit., p. 191.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 260.

<sup>3</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., II, 249.



he started for Jersey to work for her and the child she was to bear. All her remaining days she regretted her angry words, for she never had the chance to say kind ones to take away the hurt of those spoken in their first quarrel. In the last stanza of the poem is her heartbroken cry:

An' the wind began to rise, an' I thought  
                     of him out at sea,  
 An' I felt I had been to blame; he was al-  
                     ways kind to me.  
 "Wait a little, my lass, I am sure it 'ill all  
                     come right"--  
 An' the boat went down that night--the  
                     boat went down that night.<sup>1</sup>

"The Brook" tells of the return of Sir Lawrence Aylmer to the scenes of his early youth and his association with Edmond, who had died at Florence. As Lawrence wished "O had he lived," he remembered others whom he had loved and lost to death. The poem is proof enough that Tennyson "understood the common life better than any other famous English poet of his time."<sup>2</sup>

"In the Children's Hospital" Tennyson presented a gloomy picture of conditions in England's hospitals. The poem was a true story told to the Laureate by Mary Gladstone. The two children in this dramatic story are the only characters described from actual life, and at the end of the poem one of them is dead. About her death the nurse said:

. . . . We believed her asleep again--  
 Her dear, long, lean, little arms lying out  
                     on the counterpane--

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 454.

<sup>2</sup>Eidson, op. cit., p. 96.

Say that His day is done! Ah, why should  
   we care what they say?  
 The Lord of the children had heard her,  
   and Emmie had past away.<sup>1</sup>

For the last poem to be considered in this chapter, the writer of this thesis has purposely chosen "The Sailor Boy." It is a poem full of the music of the sea with its two voices of attraction and repulsion mingling in one great call which beckons men to the dangers of the ocean depths and to death. The friends of the boy in this poem tried to tell him of these things, but the young sailor answered them in the following words of universal truth:

"Fool," he answer'd, "death is sure,  
   To those that stay and to those that roam,  
 But I will nevermore endure  
   To sit with empty hands at home.

God help me! save I take my part  
   Of danger on the roaring sea,  
 A devil rises in my heart,  
   Far worse than any death to me.<sup>2</sup>

For everyone--those unhappy in love, those who face death in battle, those who embrace high ideals and those who live quiet and simple lives--for all these, "the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life." This is the truth Tennyson teaches on higher authority than his own, and the rest, as Hamlet says, is silence.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 468.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>3</sup>Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 210.

CHAPTER IV  
DEVELOPMENT OF A PHILOSOPHY  
REGARDING DEATH

The Victorian Age was an age of doubting, an age of striving to attain new values of life, and an age of searching for faith to sustain that life in the face of industrialism and science. Loss of the old faith in man's importance in the universe, in immortality of the soul, and in God Himself forced the bewildered Victorian in the scientific nineteenth century to seek a substitute for the old philosophy of life and death. In Tennyson's poetry one hears, amid his doubts and fears in grasping after realities, a triumphant note based on faith within any real conviction of reason, a faith which he acquired "by effort and by a reiteration of an ideal or belief to compensate for the lack of conviction by evidence."<sup>1</sup> In his fervent desire to believe in immortality, how often he repeated these lines:

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust;  
Thou madest man, he knows not why,  
He thinks he was not made to die;  
And thou madest him: thou art just.<sup>2</sup>

But what slender convictions of faith these words carried!  
Yet faith it was--faith that sustained Tennyson in moments

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<sup>1</sup>P. M. Buck, Jr., The World's Great Age: The Story of a Century's Search for a Philosophy of Life (Boston: The Macmillan Co., 1936), p. 309.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 163.

of overwhelming doubts. It was not, of course, the old assurance that could maintain itself against mountains but a new faith which the soul of Tennyson willed itself to embrace. It was as if the poet had said in his own heart, "Credo quia impossibile est."<sup>1</sup> As has been stated before, the Laureate's faith sprang from what was highest within him,<sup>2</sup> and who can prove that this source of believing was wrong? William James, who wrote much concerning man's will to believe, said such belief could not be proved false:

If a man chooses to turn his back altogether on God and hope of immortality, no one can prevent him. If a man thinks otherwise and acts as he thinks, I do not see how anyone can prove that he is mistaken. Each must act as he thinks best. We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snows and blinding mists, through which we get glimpses now and then of paths that may be deceptive. If we stand still we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know if there is any right one. What must we do? Act for the best--hope for the best--and take what comes. If death ends all, we cannot meet death better.<sup>3</sup>

And so it was that though many of Tennyson's poems were hymns to death, they rose into anthems of hope in their closing lines as he passed with perfect ease "from the wail of somber pessimism to the heights of exaltation in the soul's immortality."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Buck, op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>2</sup>Supra, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>William James, The Will to Believe (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1912), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>W. J. Dawson, The Makers of English Poetry (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1906), p. 182.

It is hardly to be expected of a poet that he should be required to define his philosophy or to state in definite words his creed. Tennyson's early life at Somersby, his environment at Cambridge and his association with the Apostles, his social status, Hallam's death, and above all the teachings of his inner-self--all these and a thousand other causes contributed to the shaping of his thought and the consequent attitude of his mind toward life, death, and immortality. And though the poet had no definite intention of drawing up a philosophical interpretation of death, he usually succeeded in doing so.<sup>1</sup> He could not help himself, for his poetry held his answers to the great problems of life and death which pressed upon him with dreadful insistence and demanded solution or reconciliation. In his poetry he could not help comparing things as they were with things as he would have had them. When at last the finished work of Tennyson lay completed, there were unity and sharpness of outline in his thoughts about death. A hint there, a phrase here, a verse yonder, and with them all, "Tennyson had become a prophet--a witness for God and immortality."<sup>2</sup>

Death became the medium through which all defeats and renunciations of his life became victories in the unmeasured and immeasurable spaces of Time and the Future. In his personal poetry from 1850 to 1892 Tennyson's vision was not always clear; his hope was not always strong; and his

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>2</sup>Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 213.

faith often seemed to suffer in the dark night with death near him. In such hours, though his voice was mournful, he never failed to see far off the promise of immortality. In the poem "On A Mourner," he again asserted his reliance on faith in his hour of sorrow:

And when no mortal motion jars  
           The blackness round the tumbing sod,  
 Thro' silence and the trembling stars  
           Comes Faith from tracts no feet have trod.<sup>1</sup>

All through his poetry Tennyson grappled with themes of deepest gloom, themes that held the mysteries of sorrow, suffering, and death. He expressed "his philosophy of death in words of tenderness and yearning unknown before in literature."<sup>2</sup> The dull sense of loss, the agonizing regrets felt over an open grave, the wild rebellion against the fact that man must die, and the tormenting doubts about what actually lay beyond death, all these preyed upon the mind of Tennyson, for whom "death waited at the end of every way."<sup>3</sup> In twelve short poems, written between the years 1864-1888, the very essence of the poet's philosophy of death may be found in words of hope and beauty. From "Requiescat" one may gain hope from the belief of the poet that the young girl who died "too soon" had gone to "some more perfect peace." This search for peace he again mentioned in the last lines of his sonnet "To the Nineteenth Century":

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>A. H. Strong, The Great Poets and Their Theology (Boston: The Griffith and Rowland Press, 1897), p. 473.

<sup>3</sup>Supra, pp. 1, 9.

. . . . . to seek  
 If any golden harbor be for men  
 In seas of Death and sunless gulfs of Doubt.<sup>1</sup>

Of his own friends he asked that no idle tears be shed over his grave, which was but a door through which the soul passed on its way to rest. In "In Memoriam, W. G. Ward," "To Mary Boyle," "To the Rev. W. H. Brookfield," "Epitaph on Caxton," "To E. Fitzgerald," "Epitaph on General Gordon," "To the Queen," "Epitaph on Lord Stratford De Redcliffe," and "Far-Far-Away" the underlying theme was the triumph of faith in "some fair dawn beyond the doors of death"<sup>2</sup> where Tennyson believed the soul waited "till Shadows vanished in the Light of Light."<sup>3</sup>

The development of Tennyson's philosophy had its focal point in Arthur Hallam's death; and for the remainder of the poet's life, the quick sense of personal loss through death always caused his faith to waver temporarily. The recovery of his faith was invariably a rediscovery of the "Divine Love that pervaded the universe and his own soul."<sup>4</sup> It was this consistent "death and rebirth of faith" in his poetry that brought Tennyson some of his most severe criticism in America. One reviewer gave the following curative formula for reading his poems on death:

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 484.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 555.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 515.

<sup>4</sup>Strong, op. cit., p. 465.

The monotony which superficially meets the reader vanishes as he gets into the wailing mood. If, in that mood, he reads calmly and quietly, he will receive comfort and the monotony will soon disappear.<sup>1</sup>

The later Tennyson was as sincere as the young mystic at Somersby. The poetry of his own personal griefs always had the power to call up sympathy in the hearts of his readers. His later poetry seemed to come from a man who had determined in his heart to write under different titles the poetry of his youth.<sup>2</sup> Many of his verses of the later years were tales of friends who were far away; for death, the last twenty years of his life, was always close beside him: "his world being dark with griefs and graves."<sup>3</sup> Thirty-one years after Hallam's death Tennyson visited Caunteretz, a beautiful valley in the French Pyrenees, which he had once visited with his departed friend. A careful reading of "In the Valley of Caunteretz" will disclose the same philosophy regarding immortality found in "In Memoriam." Here in the vale, Tennyson felt the presence of Hallam:

All along the valley, the stream that flashest  
white,  
Deepening thy voice with the deepening of  
the night,  
All along the valley, where thy waters  
flow,  
I walked with one I loved two and thirty  
years ago.

<sup>1</sup>Anonymous, "Death Verses: A Stroll through the Valley of Death with Tennyson," American Whig Review, XIII (June, 1851), 536.

<sup>2</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. 269.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 276.



All along the valley, while I walk'd today,  
 The two and thirty years were a mist that  
     rolls away;  
 For all along the valley, down thy rocky  
     bed,  
 Thy living voice to me was as the voice of  
     the dead,  
 And all along the valley, by rock and cave  
     and tree,  
 The voice of the dead was a living voice to  
     me.<sup>1</sup>

Tennyson might almost be called an ecclesiastical poet, for his poetry was rich in references to the sanctities of the Church--the fount, the altar, the clock measuring out the lives of man, the silent graveyard whose trees sent down their roots to embrace the bones of the dead, and the Eucharist, in which the little hamlet drank from the Chalice of God. He became the perfect symbol of the philosophic and religious dreamer,<sup>2</sup> and according to his own words:

A kind of waking trance I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has generally come upon me through repeating my own name two or three times to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, the individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this is not a confused state, but the clearest of the clearest, the weirdest of the weirdest, utterly beyond words where death was an almost laughable impossibility, the loss of personality seeming no extinction but the only true life.<sup>3</sup>

This experience of Tennyson was more common to men of the East than of the West, but it proved to him that the spirit of man will last for "aeons and aeons." Especially in "The

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>2</sup>Dawson, op. cit., p. 242.

<sup>3</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., I, 320.

Ancient Sage" did the poet advance this belief in the reality of the unseen-world:

And more, my son! for more than once  
                   when I  
 Sat all alone, revolving in myself  
 The word that is the symbol of myself,  
 The mortal limit of the Self was loosed,  
 And passed into the nameless, as a cloud  
 Melts into heaven. I touched my limbs,  
                   the limbs  
 Were strange, not mine--and yet no shade  
                   of doubt,  
 But utter clearness, and thro' loss of self  
 The gain of such large life as match'd with  
                   ours  
 Were seen to spark--unshadowable in  
                   words,  
 Themselves but shadows of a shadow-  
                   world.<sup>1</sup>

And from this steadfast trust in the immortality of the spirit and from the assurance, born within his own soul, of the eternity of personal life beyond the grave, all that is noblest and serenest in the poetry of Tennyson has arisen.<sup>2</sup>

Though his poems painted the darkness of death on the earth, he taught faith in "The Epilogue":

Too many a voice may cry  
 That man can have no after-morn,  
   Not yet of those am I.  
 The man remains, and whatsoe'er  
   He wrought of good or brave  
 Will mould him thro' the cycle-year  
   That downs behind the grave.<sup>3</sup>

He had led his readers through the darkness of the valley, but at last he showed them the other side of the grave, where trumpets pealed forth the coming of morning, a time

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 500.

<sup>2</sup>Dawson, op. cit., p. 242.

<sup>3</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 511.

when man will "stand on the heights of his life with a glimpse of a height that is higher."<sup>1</sup> Then the glory of the immortal soul will cause the griefs of "many a hearth on our dark globe" sighing after "many a vanish'd face" to seem nothing; then the soul will know peace; then the statement from "Vastness" that the "dead are not dead but alive" will become a fact, not just a statement of faith.

In April, 1886, Lionel Tennyson, who was returning from India, died. To his father, again Death in a distant realm brought grief "deep as life or thought."<sup>2</sup> The vision of his son's lonely moonlight burial in the Red Sea, with all the waste of manhood it implied, and the unuttered farewells of a father's love, haunted the dreams of Tennyson, who was now too old for prolonged agony, though the thought of Lionel's death "tore him to pieces."<sup>3</sup> His sorrow seemed to make him more patient and to make him long for death, which would return his son to him once more. In "To the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava," published in 1889, he wrote of that reunion:

. . . . .  
 Not there to bid my boy farewell,  
 When That within the coffin fell,  
 Fell-and flash'd into the Red Sea,

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 554.

<sup>2</sup>Fausset, op. cit., p. 276.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Beneath a hard Arabian moon  
 And alien stars. To question why  
 The sons before the fathers die,  
 Not mine! And I may meet him soon.<sup>1</sup>

Published also in 1889 was the poem, "Merlin and the Gleam." Stopford Brooke said of this poem:

It speaks to all poetic hearts in England; it tells them of his coming death. We see through its verse clear into the inmost chamber of his heart. In it is his undying longing and search after the ideal light, the Mother passion of all the supreme artists of the world. I know of no poem of Tennyson's which more takes my heart with magic and beauty.<sup>2</sup>

Following the gleam was to Tennyson not a pastime but the supreme passion of his life. Verse by verse the poet revealed his own life as he drew nearer and nearer the goal of perfection. To die in pursuit of "the gleam" was joy, for beyond death lay the glorious realization of all his hopes, the answers to life's mysteries, and the happy reunion with all those dear to him in the land to which he now was ready to set sail. The philosophy of death which Tennyson had developed found a noble expression in this poem when, on the verge of his own death, he gave to the young a last message to follow, as he had done, the gleam that had never failed to lead him onward. Who could deny the faith of a man who could so live that his last impulse in poetry was to send a message of hope in the soul's immortality to his countrymen?<sup>3</sup> One would do well, even today, to listen to his words:

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 526.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., p. 506.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 508.

Not of the sunlight,  
 Not of the moonlight,  
 Not of the starlight!  
 O young Mariner,  
 Down to the haven,  
 Call your companions,  
 Launch your vessel  
 And crowd your canvas,  
 And, ere it vanishes  
 Over the margin,  
 After it, follow it,  
 Follow the Gleam.<sup>1</sup>

Following the light which never failed him, Tennyson was fortunate almost beyond any poet in his life; he was equally fortunate in his death. The finest elements of his poetic powers remained with him to the last; his intellectual force was never abated. He gratefully received the homage of the entire world on his eightieth birthday, and in Great Britain his popularity had grown at this time to an extent unparalleled in the whole annals of English poetry.<sup>2</sup> The year 1889 found him writing "Crossing the Bar," the "noblest and what is probably destined to be the most famous of all his hymns of Faith."<sup>3</sup> Concerning the poem the Laureate's son gave this account:

"Crossing the Bar" was written in my father's eighty-first year, on a day in October when we came from Alford to Farringford. Before reaching Farringford he had the moaning of the Bar already in his mind, and after dinner he showed me the poem written out.

I said, "That is the crown of your work."

He answered, "It came in a moment." He explained that the Pilot was "That Divine and Unseen Who is always guiding us."

<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 551.

<sup>2</sup>"Alfred Tennyson," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., XXVI, 633.

<sup>3</sup>Dawson, op. cit., p. 272.

A few days before my father's death he said to me,  
 "Mind you always put 'Crossing the Bar' at the end of  
 all editions of my poems."<sup>1</sup>

In this poem Van Dyke said one finds the best in Tennyson's poetry, poetry simple even to the verge of austerity, yet rich with all the suggestions of wide oceans, waning lights of the evening, and vesper bells.<sup>2</sup> It is a poem easy to understand, full of music, and abounding in hope. It is a consolation to sorrowing hearts, a song for mortal ears, and a prelude to the larger music of immortality. Nothing that Tennyson has ever written is "more beautiful in body and soul"<sup>3</sup> than the following verses:

Sunset and evening star  
 And one clear call for me!  
 And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
 When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep  
 Too full for sound and foam,  
 When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
 Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
 And after that the dark!  
 And may there be no sadness of farewell  
 When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
 The flood may bear me far,  
 I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
 When I have crost the bar.<sup>4</sup>

On the sixth of October, 1892, Tennyson heard the vesper bells ring for him and sailed to meet, as he hoped,

<sup>1</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., II, 367.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., p. 231.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 753.

his Pilot face to face. His philosophy of death and immortality sustained him as he calmly waited to follow "the gleam" to its final haven. In his last hours the faith, which had lifted him above hopeless despair in the death of Hallam and which had appeared in his "death verses" throughout his long career, filled his soul and made his going serene and majestic.<sup>1</sup> "In Memoriam" brought his family, at this time, solace. Hallam wrote:

My father had been talking about death and about what a shadow this life is. On being told a story about an old dying man's request to his wife to "come soon", my father murmured, "True Faith."

Suddenly he gathered himself up and spoke one word about himself to the doctor, "Death?" When Dr. Dabbs bowed his head, my father said, "That's well."

We felt thankful for the love and the utter peace of it all; and his own lines of comfort from "In Memoriam" were strongly borne in upon us. He was quite restful, holding my wife's hand, and as he was passing away, I spoke over him his own prayer, "God accept him! Christ receive him!" because I knew that he would have wished it.<sup>2</sup>

As Tennyson wove his philosophy regarding death into his poetry, he employed many devices by which he taught the victory of faith over doubt and death. Christ taught through parables the lessons he wanted men to learn; Tennyson taught through allegories in The Idylls of the King the truths he wanted England to remember. "In Memoriam" was Tennyson's "Paradise Regained"; The Idylls of the King was his "Paradise

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<sup>1</sup>Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>2</sup>Hallam Tennyson, op. cit., II, 428.

Lost."<sup>1</sup> The order in which the works were produced differed from that of Milton, but for Tennyson, there was an advantage in that reverse order. Only after Tennyson had proved to the satisfaction of his own soul that a Divine and Immortal Being reigned over all, could he hopefully undertake the story of the world's downfall and shame.<sup>2</sup> As Tennyson wrote the Idylls from 1859 to 1889 he made them more than a retelling of the Arthurian legend; they became the allegorical interpretation of his philosophy regarding the problems of life and the promises of immortality.

"Gareth and Lynette" is the Idyll which relates the severe struggles of man against all the foes of truth in this life. No finer or nobler conception of victory over fear and death occurs in the poetry of Tennyson than the account of Gareth's riding forth to battle the King of Terrors, the spectral form of man's last enemy.<sup>3</sup> As Gareth met his ghastly foe, the allegory ended with the following words of hope:

And Death's war-horse bounded forward with him.  
Then those that did not blink the terror saw,  
Saw that Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.  
But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.  
Half fell to right and half to left and lay.  
Then with stronger buffet he clove the helm  
As thoroughly as the skull; and out from this  
Issued the bright face of a blooming boy  
Fresh as a flower new-born.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Strong, op. cit., p. 476.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Dawson, op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>4</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 332.



Thus Tennyson used the Arthurian story to symbolize his own spiritual principles of the unconquerable and immortal soul struggling against the material elements of life and death. And though the cloud rolled down upon the earth and bore Arthur on a dusky barge to a land afar, there was no thought of personal failure in Tennyson's heart.<sup>1</sup> His spirit could still trample Death itself into the dust, and the last line of the Idylls sprang from his eternal trust in the future, "and the new sun rose bringing the new year."<sup>2</sup>

The Death of OEnone and Other Poems came out immediately after Tennyson's death. It is significant that the first and last poems of his entire works concerned death: the first of Claribel, the last of OEnone. In the last volume the following short poems, "The Making of Man," "Doubt and Prayer," "Faith," "The Silent Voices," and "God and the Universe" gave the poet's final utterance of his faith in the deathless existence of the soul. From "God and the Universe" the following lines unfold the hope that lay deepest within him:

Spirit, nearing you dark portal at the limit  
   of thy human state,  
 Fear not thou the hidden purpose of that Power  
   which alone is great,  
 Nor the myriad worlds, His Shadow, nor the  
   Silent Opener of the Gate.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>F. S. Boaz, "Idylls of the King in 1921," Nineteenth Century, XC (1921), 819.

<sup>2</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 450.

<sup>3</sup>Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 233.

In conclusion, let it be stated again that Tennyson was not a conscious philosopher or theologian.<sup>1</sup> He was deeply impressed by the problems of life, death, and immortality; and his very sensitiveness to every form of doubt and fear has made him the confidant and guide to many who, but for Tennyson, would never have caught a glimpse of "the Glean."

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<sup>1</sup>Strong, op. cit., p. 523.

CHAPTER V  
DEATH AS AN ARTISTIC MOTIF

Tennyson is one of the great melodious minds of the nineteenth century, and through his poetry he gave voice to the inner fears, longings, doubts, and hopes of his soul, which seemed to glimpse the happier side of life only through tear-dimmed eyes. Among all the English poets Tennyson was, perhaps, the most artistic.<sup>1</sup> In his verses the form and thought are blended harmoniously, with Death as the aesthetic motif in more than one-third of his non-dramatic poetry. Death's omnipresence always filled him with deep, serious questionings which left him melancholy but "magestic in his sadness." His many references to death in his poetry and his aesthetic treatment of his theme of immortality led the writer of this thesis to compile some of the more significant artistic devices for the reader's careful consideration. The words and phrases Tennyson used in presenting Death to his readers speak for themselves, revealing more of the poet's philosophy than he ever intended they should. The following tables echo the sorrows, doubts, fears, and hopes of a soul who had walked through the valley of the shadow of death into the sunshine of eternal day.

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<sup>1</sup>Turnbull, op. cit., p. 198.

TABLE I  
PERSONIFICATION OF DEATH

Quotation	Source
"Death is calling." . . . . .	"All Things Will Die"
"Death walking all alone." . . . . .	"Love and Death"
"Death quivered at the victim's throat." . . . . .	"A Dream of Fair Women"
"Love can vanquish Death." . . . . .	"A Dream of Fair Women"
"Once through my own doors Death did pass." . . . . .	"To J. S."
"Death came betwixt thy embrace and mine." . . . . .	"Love and Duty"
"Let us not hob-and-nob with Death." . . . . .	"The Vision of Sin"
"I give thee to Death." . . . . .	"The Princess"
"If Death so taste the Lethean springs." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Death made his darkness beautiful with thee." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Death returns an answer." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"I wage not any feud with Death." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"I fought with Death." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"And Death drew nigh and beat the doors of Life." . . . . .	"The Lover's Tale"
"Death was cast to the ground." . . . . .	"Gareth and Lynette"
"Death and Silence hold their own." . . . . .	"Locksley Hall Sixty Years After"
"Too early blinded by the kiss of Death." . . . . .	"Romney's Remorse"

TABLE II  
METAPHORS OF DEATH

Quotation	Source
"Death is the end of life." . . . . .	"Choric Song"
"Death is confusion." . . . . .	"Choris Song"
"Death is the end of a downward slope." . . . . .	"A Dream of Fair Women"
"Death is an ordinance of God." . . . . .	"To J. S."
"Death is a flower that bears Blossoms." . . . . .	"Love Thou Thy Land"
"Death is king." . . . . .	"The Vision of Sin"
"Death is the creation of God." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Death is a dancer." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Death is a vault." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Death is a mute shadow watching all." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Death is a second birth." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Death, Sleep's twin-brother." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Doubt and Death are ill brethren." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"

TABLE III  
SIMILES OF DEATH

Quotation	Source
"Death is like a bitter accusation." . . . . .	"The Golden Year"
"Mellow Death, like some late guest." . . . . .	"Will Waterproof's Lyrical Monologue"
"Her countenance was pale as death." . . . . .	"The Lord of Burleigh"
"Blank as death." . . . . .	"Gareth and Lynette"
"Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field.".	"Lancelot and Elaine"
"Confusion worse than death." . . . . .	"In Memoriam"

TABLE IV

## DEATH, THE GREAT MODIFIER IN NATURE

Phrase	Source
"Dead earth" . . . . .	"Guinevere"
"Dead night" . . . . .	"Guinevere"
"Death-white mist" . . . . .	"The Passing of Arthur"
"Dead winter-dawn" . . . . .	"The Passing of Arthur"
"Dead wood" . . . . .	"Sir John Oldcastle"
"Dead volcano" . . . . .	"Locksley Hall Sixty Years After"
"Death-day" . . . . .	"The Ring"
"Dead stones" . . . . .	"A Character"
"Dead air". . . . .	"A Dream of Fair Women"
"Dead lake" . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Dead leaf" . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Dead leaf" . . . . .	"Enoch Arden"
"Dead claps of thunder" . . . . .	"Sea Dreams"
"Dead spring". . . . .	"The Lover's Tale"
"Dead wolves". . . . .	"Gareth and Lynette"
"Dead lion" . . . . .	"Merlin and Vivien"
"Dead nestling" . . . . .	"The Last Tournament"
"Dead tree" . . . . .	"The Last Tournament"
"Dead night" . . . . .	"The Last Tournament"
"Death-dumb autumn". . . . .	"Guinevere"

TABLE V  
TYPES OF DEATH ACCORDING TO MOOD

Type	Source
Despair	
"Weary death" . . . . .	"Supposed Confessions"
"Dark death" . . . . .	"A Dream of Fair Women"
"Sullen-seeming death" . . . . .	"Maud"
"Helpless death" . . . . .	"The Lover's Tale"
"Bitter death". . . . .	"Lancelot and Elaine"
"Everlasting death" . . . . .	"The Last Tournament"
"Flaming death" . . . . .	"Guinevere"
"Traitorous death" . . . . .	"The Defence of Lucknow"
"Barren death". . . . .	"Locksley Hall Sixty Years After"
Hope	
"Gentle death". . . . .	"To ----"
"Bright death". . . . .	"A Dream of Fair Women"
"Happier dead". . . . .	"Tithonus"
"Melow death" . . . . .	"Will Waterproofs Lyrical Monologue"
"Happy death" . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Holy death" . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Fair death" . . . . .	"Geraint and Enid"
"Sweet death" . . . . .	"Lancelot and Elaine"
"Beautiful death" . . . . .	"Locksley Hall Sixty Years After"



TABLE VI  
SYMBOLS OF DEATH

Symbol	Source
"Dark deserted house" . . . . .	"The Deserted House"
"The shadow of a tree". . . . .	"Love and Death"
"Dusky barge", . . . . .	"Morte D'Arthur"
"Winter sea, mist-white" . . . . .	"Morte D'Arthur"
"This dull chrysalis" . . . . .	"St. Simeon Stylites"
"A dreamless sleep". . . . .	"L'Envois"
"The Sabbath of Eternity". . . . .	"Saint Agnes' Eve"
"Rays of setting sun on sails" . . . . .	"The Princess"
"Ship that strikes by night a craggy shelf". . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Mask of sleep" . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Shadow feared of man". . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Death-white curtain drawn" . . . . .	"Maud"
"A shadow". . . . .	"Maud"
"Dreary phantom far in the North" . . . . .	"Ode on the Death of the Duke of Well- ington"

TABLE VI--CONTINUED

Symbol	Source
"Before his journey closes" . . . . .	"Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington"
"A sail! A sail!" . . . . .	"Enoch Arden"
"Gone from this room into the next" . . . . .	"The Grandmother"
"Long frost and longest night" . . . . .	"A Dedication"
"The great deep". . . . .	"The Coming of Arthur"
"The fourth, armed in black, named Night" . . . . .	"Gareth and Lynette"
"My long voyage". . . . .	"Lancelot and Elaine"
"A long silence". . . . .	"Pelleas and Ettarre"
"The last tournament" . . . . .	"The Last Tournament"
"To where beyond these voices there is peace" . . . . .	"Guinevere"
"The chill of the death-white mist" . . . . .	"The Passing of Arthur"
"The island valley of Avilion" . . . . .	"The Passing of Arthur"
"That battle in the West". . . . .	"To the Queen"
"Happier voyage". . . . .	"Sir John Franklin"
"He was out of the storm". . . . .	"The Wreck"
"Eternal sleep" . . . . .	"Despair"

TABLE VI--CONTINUED

Symbol	Source
"The sacred passion of the Second Life". . . . .	"Locksley Hall Sixty Years After"
"Dim gate" . . . . .	"To Mary Boyle"
"The darker hour" . . . . .	"The Progress of Spring"
"Sea Voyage". . . . .	"Crossing the Bar"

TABLE VII  
MISCELLANEOUS MOTIFS OF DEATH

Phrase	Source
"Dead-blue eyes" . . . . .	"A Character"
"Dead lips". . . . .	"A Dream of Fair Women"
"Dead hands" . . . . .	"In Memoriam"
"Dead face". . . . .	"Enoch Arden"
"Dead flesh" . . . . .	"Lucretius"
"Death-drowsing eyes" . . . . .	"Merlin and Vivien"
"Dead finger" . . . . .	"The Ring"
"Dead son" . . . . .	"The Letters"
"Death-hymn" . . . . .	"The May Queen"
"Death song" . . . . .	"The Ancient Sage"
"Death songster" . . . . .	"Poets and Their Bibliographies"
"Death-watch beat" . . . . .	"The May Queen"
"Death-bed desire" . . . . .	"Maud"
"Death-bed wail" . . . . .	"The Passing of Arthur"
"Death-like swoon" . . . . .	"The Passing of Arthur"
"Death-bed angel". . . . .	"Romeny's Remorse"
"Dead perfection" . . . . .	"Maud"
"Dead innocence" . . . . .	"The Last Tournament"
"Death march" . . . . .	"Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington"

TABLE VII--CONTINUED

Phrase	Source
"Death blow" . . . . .	"Lucretius"
"Death pole" . . . . .	"Launcelot and Elaine"
"Death watch". . . . .	"Forlorn"
"Death scaffold". . . . .	"Enoch Arden"
"Deathless vow" . . . . .	"Locksley Hall Sixty Years After"
"Deathless love". . . . .	"The Coming of Arthur"

Aesthetically Tennyson revealed his philosophy of death as clearly and as surely as he proclaimed the divine order of God's plan for man both on this earth and in the realm that waited for him beyond the grave. In the words of symbolic beauty found in these tables, Tennyson best explained man's advent into the unknown as the soul embarked on its last long journey, which carried it to eternity. And what better climax could man wish for his sojourn here than a swift passage over the sea? For most people Tennyson has expressed, in his own artistic way, their desire for peaceful death for themselves and their loved ones in these immortal words:

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning<sup>1</sup> of the bar,  
When I put out to sea.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A. Tennyson, op. cit., p. 753.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

There is something almost sublime in Tennyson's poetry which reveals his philosophy of death and the immortality of the human soul in an existence which he always insisted would be "aeons and aeons" long. In his poems there is invariably spiritual courage that overcomes doubts and darkness through following the light of inward hope that always gleamed dauntless under the very shadow of death itself. Tennyson's faith--faith distinguished from cold dogmatism and the blind acceptance of traditional creeds which he could not believe--never ignored the mysteries and fears centering around man's last moments on this earth. Instead, Tennyson's faith in the soul's immortality grew out of these doubts and triumphed over them as he looked into the future and saw the unknown seas of eternity whither the gleam ever beckoned him. Even on the eve of his own voyage on that sea, Tennyson wrote of the same hopes which had lifted him above despair in his early life and which had sustained him during the emotional crisis in his life following the death of his beloved Hallam.

Though his treatment of death often made his verses seem melancholy, no one can deny their teaching spiritual immortality, their setting to music all the melodies of an

everlasting life, and their prophesying a new tomorrow brilliant in the light of lights, the splendor of God's Love. In his poetry are all the importunate questions of human life and destiny which thronged upon his troubled soul. Tennyson dared to write of these personal doubts and fears, of his inmost thoughts on the worth of life itself, of the significance of suffering and death in testing man's faith, of the small inner voice that often urged him to suicide, and, finally, of the mysteries of the Now and the Hereafter.

As one looks over his poems dealing with death-- death sought because of unhappiness or unrequited love, death faced by those defending their country or dying for ideals, death self-inflicted, or death met in life's ordinary circumstances--he becomes aware of Tennyson's infinite sympathy for suffering humanity which cries out in the presence of death for something or someone to ease the hurt and pain caused by the open grave. To these unhappy souls, Tennyson's "In Memoriam," as well as his later poems, "Merlin and the Gleam," "Vastness," "The Ancient Sage," "Gareth and Lynette," and "Crossing the Bar," are songs of victory and eternal life rising out of defeat and death. The poems are promises of peace gained in spite of doubts and fears which battle to claim a gloomy empire in his mind. These poems are the records of sorrows becoming joys as the deathless fire that God has kindled in his breast burns toward that heaven, which is its source and home, and points the way to



Immortal Love, which alone can solve the mystery of the grave. Thus it is that Tennyson feels after God and finds immortality through paths of emotion and faith. This continuous victorious fight for spiritual freedom from fear of death has brought consolation to countless numbers of unhappy people in every station of life from royalty to the lowliest peasants.

Even though Tennyson always insisted he had no set creed or philosophy of life or death, "Supposed Confessions," written early in his poetic career, contains Tennyson's later philosophy, if it can be so named. The conflicts, which had in early childhood arisen within him over the problems of life, death, and immortality, are the same conflicts which, more acutely but not with any essential difference, disturbed and puzzled him all his life. He found the same disturbing factors in life that are expressed in Job and Ecclesiastes; but, out of his own inward experiences, he worked out his own theory of his mission as a poet, and he never abandoned, betrayed, or enfeebled his conception of the message he had to present through his verses. In the face of life's bitter realities and death's dark Stygian shore, Tennyson wrote into his poetry his mystic insight into the great plan of God for the good of all men. Through listening to the best within his own being, the poet proclaimed that God's revelation had assured him that death is, in reality, just the flashing of a soul out of a life in which all reality is distorted, into the luminous eternal

life from which it came: the passing from illusion to reality. Thus a study of death in the non-dramatic poetry of Tennyson reveals the Victorian Laureate as a prophet--a witness for God and for immortality of the soul triumphant over death and the grave.

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