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VOL. 30.—NO. 119

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Tennyson—  
A PAPER READ BEFORE THE EPWORTH LEAGUE  
BY MR. HENRY SMITH, JR.

A few days ago all that was mortal of the immortal Tennyson was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, that burial place of England's kings, and warriors, and poets. There now like a king in state he lies, with Spencer, and Milton, and Rure Ben Johnson, and all the glorious company of the poets that occupy the "Poets Corner" in the grand old abbey. The tribute paid by Tennyson to England's greatest warrior, may now, with peculiar appropriateness, be applied to the poet himself:

"On God, and God-like men we build our trust.  
Hush, the Dead March wails in the people's ears:  
The dark crowd moves, and there are sobs and tears:  
The black earth yawns; the mortal disappears:  
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.  
He is gone who seemed so great—  
Gone; but nothing can deprive him  
Of the force he made his own  
Being here, and we believe him  
Something far advanced in State,  
And that he wears a truer crown  
Than any wreath that man can weave him."

Tennyson is dead, but he has left to the English-speaking people of all lands a rich legacy; the works "of him that uttered nothing base." Those, therefore, who wish to form an acquaintance with this truly great man may do so by studying the poems he has thus bequeathed to them.

Tennyson began his career in 1829, when as an undergraduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, he won the Chancellor's medal for a poem on Timbuctoo. When his first volume appeared, in 1830, the critics of the day set up a cry of affection, and scarcely one of them seemed willing to recognize in him a poet. Two years later he published a second volume, which contained, in addition to corrected reprints of some former poems, a number of new ones, showing a marked improvement both in style and thought. This, too, met with only an indifferent reception. He then waited ten years before he published another volume, and by that time England had learned to fully appreciate his genius, pathos and power. In 1833, just as the poet had begun his life's work, a great sorrow befell him. The companion of his youth and best friend at college, one whom he loved dear as his life, died suddenly at Vienna. Tennyson long refused to be comforted. Seventeen years after the death of his friend he published that beautiful group of poems—133 in all—which go to make up "In Memoriam"—a tribute to the memory of his dear dead friend. Here in those chaotic and pathetic stanzas he gives to the reader the poet's feelings of sorrow, which had for so many years saddened his life. Even at that late date he says:

"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.  
But for the unquiet heart and brain  
A use in measured language lies;  
The sad mechanic exercise  
Like dull narcotics numbing pain.  
In words like weeds I'll wrap me o'er,  
Like coarsest clothes against the cold;  
But that large grief which these enfold,  
Is given in outline and no more."

"In Memoriam" taken as a whole may be said to be one of Tennyson's greatest works—if not his greatest. Here with loving touch he draws a beautiful picture of his friend. It is a picture without a blemish, but it is a true one nevertheless, for he presents to the world the idea he has in his own mind of what that friend was. In his college days Tennyson met and mingled with many of the best young men of England, many of whom no doubt possessed rare talents in their respective spheres, but he saw no qualities in any of them equal to those possessed by his friend. His opinion of that friend, in comparison with his college mates, is fully brought out in the verses where he says:

"I passed beside the reverend walls  
In which of old I wore the gown;  
I roved at random through the town  
And saw the tumult of the halls;  
Where once we held debate, a band  
Of youthful friends, on mind and art,  
And labor, and the changing mart,  
And all the framework of the land.  
When one would aim an arrow fair,  
But send it slacking from the string,  
And one would pierce an outer ring  
And one an inner here and there;  
And last the master-horsemanship,  
Would cleave the mark, a willing ear  
We lent him. Who but hung to hear  
The rapt oration flowing free  
From point to point with power and grace  
And music in the bounds of law,  
To those conclusions when we saw  
The God within him light his face,  
And seem to lift the form, and glow  
In azure orbits heavenly-wise;  
And over those ethereal eyes  
The bar of Michael Angelo.

This poem is not a mere obituary of the death of Arthur Hallam, Tennyson's friend. In it we find food for thought and reflection, and an incentive to assist us in many of the perplexing problems of life. The introduction to "In Memoriam" is one of the finest hymns in the English language. In it we find the grandest thoughts expressed in simple Anglo-Saxon words, but so arranged as to make this prayer—for it is a prayer—the very poetry of poetry. It touches upon some of the great questions which affect the present and future of our lives—such as the Eucharist of God, the divinity of Christ, the immortality of the soul, the free agency of man; and, above all, it shows a simple trust in the providence of

God. The whole poem sounds like the strain of a noble anthem:

"Strong Son of God, immortal Love  
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,  
By faith, and faith alone, embrace  
Believing where we cannot prove.  
Thine are these orbs of light and shade;  
Thou madest Life in man and brute;  
Thou madest Death; and I to, thy foot  
Is on the skull which thou hast made.

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust;  
Thou madest man, he knows not why;  
He thinks he was not made to die;  
And thou hast made him; thou art just.  
Thou seemest human and divine,  
Thou closest holiest manhood know;  
Our wills are ours, we know not how;  
Our wills are ours, to make them thine.

Our little systems have their day;  
They have their day and cease to be;  
They are but broken lights of thee,  
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

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

Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
But more of reverence in us dwell;  
That mind and soul according well,  
May make one music as before,

But vaster—We are fools and slight;  
We mock thee when we do not fear;  
But help thy foolish ones to bear;  
Help thy vain worlds to bear thy light.  
Forgive what seemed my sin in me;  
What seemed my worth since I began;  
For merit lives from man to man,  
And not from man, O Lord, to thee."

All through "In Memoriam" we find many of the great religious truths discussed, which occupy the attention and stir the energies of so many of the thinkers of the present day.

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

Here the poet teaches that we may, through our mistakes, inconsistencies and weaknesses, become better men and women than we would have been had we never known such failings, nor experienced such weaknesses. That is to say, that although mistakes are made, and failures experienced, in trying to set our part in the sphere in which we are found, the lesson taught and the information obtained are valuable, and we have made more advancement than if we had done nothing and made no mistakes. Or, it may be said, the mistakes we make in our belief. We may have wrong views or erroneous opinions, which we honestly hold, but who will not say we are better men and women if we live our opinions in our lives rather than hide them because they are not popular. The apostle Paul was a nobler man and a grander character, because as Saul of Tarsus he lived an earnest, faithful life with the light he had. How often we find men honestly trying to find the light, who are looked upon as sceptics and unbelievers because they cannot see just as the majority do. One of the best men that it was my privilege to know, whose society was always a real pleasure and whose conversation was often an inspiration, was, in the truest sense of the word, an honest doubter. He lived an almost blameless life, earnestly seeking to know the truth, and striving with all his noble manhood to live the views he held.

"You tell me doubt is Devil born.  
I know not, no indeed I know  
In many a subtle question versed,  
Who touched a jarring lyre at first,  
But ever strove to make it true;

Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,  
At last he beat his music out.  
There lies more faith, in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.  
He fought his doubts and gathered strength,  
He would not make his judgement blind;  
He faced the spectres of the mind,  
And laid them; thus he came at length  
To find a stronger faith his own;  
And Power was with him in the night  
Which makes the darkness and the light,  
And dwells not in the light alone,  
But in the darkness and the cloud,  
As o'er Sinai's peaks of old,  
Where Israel's gods of gold,  
Although the trumpet blew so loud.

It must not, however, be understood from these selections that Tennyson does not recognize or appreciate the simple faith of the humblest Christian. In this whole poem, which may be taken as a mental history of seventeen years of the poet's own life, Tennyson shows that he is by no means narrow or bigoted. While he appreciates the views of the more advanced thinkers, and may permit the thought "that only good will be the final goal of ill," he can see good in a religion which is one of unquestioned obedience to form. He believes that such obedience is better than doubt, and that whether the belief be shrouded in mystery or be of the simplest form, if the heart be pure and the life be right, that religion is worthy of respect. He has no sympathy with those who feel so self-sufficient in their own opinions that they have no regard for the opinions of others. Like all great men he treats with respect and even reverence, a true and honest life no matter in how humble a form it may manifest itself. How beautifully this idea is brought out where he says:

O thou that after toil and storm  
May'st seem to have reached a purer air,  
Whose faith has centre everywhere  
Nor cares to fix itself to form,  
Leave thou thy sister when she prays,  
Her early heaven, her happy views;  
Nor thou with shadowed hid confuses  
A life that leads melodious days.  
Her faith through form is pure as thine,  
Her hands are quicker unto good,

O sacred be the flesh and blood  
To which she links a truth divine!

See thou, that outmost reason ripe  
In hiding by a law within  
Thou fail not in a world of sin,  
And even want for such a type.

This whole poem is full of modern scientific thought, and like most of Tennyson's other poems the ideas are expressed in simple but beautifully musical language.

I have taken up "In Memoriam" as one of the best of Tennyson's longer poems. I can only mention some of the others. "Idylls of the King" is one of his greatest efforts, and if he had written nothing else it would have placed him among the first poets of his time. It includes the Dedication, The Coming of Arthur, The Round Table and The Passing of Arthur. The story is beautifully told, although the ending is somewhat sad. King Arthur, deprived of his knights, forsaken by his wife, and wounded himself, slowly answers from the barge:

"The old order changeth yielding place to new  
And God fulfils Himself in many ways  
Least one good custom should corrupt the world.  
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?  
I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
May be within myself make pure; but thou  
If thou should'st see my face again,  
Pray for my soul.  
More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice  
Rise for me like a fountain night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain  
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those who call  
Them friend?  
For so the whole round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

Among Tennyson's earlier productions "Enoch Arden" and "Locksley Hall" are, perhaps, his best, although "The Palace of Art" and "Maud" are both poems of a very high order, and may be read and studied with pleasure and profit.

Unlike many great men, Tennyson's poetic genius was not confined to any particular period of his life. "Locksley Hall" and "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," in themselves sufficiently illustrate this fact. These two poems, taken together and studied as one, will give a large insight into the poet's own life. In the first "Locksley Hall" the young man looks forward to life as a boy when first he leaves his father's field:

And his spirit leaps within him to be gone  
Before him then,  
Underneath the light he looks at in among the  
throats of men.  
In the second, "Locksley Hall," the old man looks back upon life and, as he reviews the hopes and aspirations of his youth, he sees that life anticipated, and life lived differ very widely from each other. While the second "Locksley Hall" may lack some of the fire and passion of the first, it certainly excels in mature thought and more sublime language. I will quote two of the closing stanzas:—

Follow you the Star that lights a desert path—  
Way, yours and mine, together  
Forward till you see the highest Haman-  
nature is divine;  
Follow Light and do the Right for man can  
half control his doom—  
Till you find the deathless Angel seated in the  
vacant tomb.  
When it is remembered that these poems were written with an interval of sixty years between, all must admit that they are wonderful productions.

Like the patriarch of old, Tennyson stands on Parnassus' top, his prophetic eye is not dimmed nor his poetic force abated.  
I may now mention a few of the poet's shorter poems. Of these "Ulysses" written in the early part of Tennyson's life, is, in many ways, his best, and is the poem that won for him the office of Poet Laureate to the Queen "Lady Clara Vere de Vere"—also one of his earlier productions—is a contradiction to the charge often brought against Tennyson that he paid respect to rank at the cost of truth, and that his poetry is not in sympathy with the spirit of the age. Among his more recent poems "Rizpah," "The Defence of Luconow" and "Emmy in the Children's Hospital" may be mentioned as those of most merit. The poem on "Sleep," for which Tennyson received at the rate of \$10 a word, is a very pretty fragment, although some critics thought the price rather high. The poem is as follows:—

To sleep! to sleep! the long, bright day is  
done  
And darkness rises from the fallen sun.  
To sleep! to sleep!  
To sleep! to sleep!  
What'er thy joys they vanish with the day;  
What'er thy griefs in sleep they fade away.  
To sleep! to sleep!  
Sleep troubled soul and let the past be past;  
Sleep happy heart, all life shall sleep at last.  
To sleep! to sleep!

As poet laureate Tennyson has written a number of patriotic poems. Of these "The Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" is by far the best, and is one of the finest of the kind written in the present century. I will close with an extract from it:—  
Not once or twice in our rough island story  
The path of duty was the way to glory.  
He that walks it only thirsting  
For the right, and learns to deaden  
Love of self, before his journey closes  
He shall find the stubborn thistle bursting  
Into glossy purple, which outdressed  
All voluptuous garden roses.

Not once or twice in our fair island story  
The path of duty was the way to glory.  
He that ever following her commands  
On with toil of heart, and knees, and hands,  
Through the long gorge to the far light has  
won  
His path upward and prevailed,  
Shall find the lapping crags of Duty soiled,  
Are close upon the shining tablelands,  
To which our God Himself is moon and sun.



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