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"THERE LIVES MORE FAITH IN HONEST DOUBT..."

TENNYSON'S *IN MEMORIAM*: FAITH AND

DOUBT IN THE VICTORIAN AGE

By

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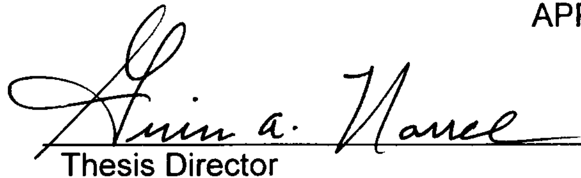

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INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Age was an era characterized by the oxymoron. It was typified by great progress in a stagnating society. Hope abounded in the midst of despair. There was great optimism in days full of pessimism, and there was faith in the face of overwhelming doubt. Alfred, Lord Tennyson in his poetry, and in particular in his masterpiece *In Memoriam,* conveys the sense of emotional, spiritual, and intellectual vacillation of an individual in these trying times. In the process of doing so, he also sets forth a microcosm of the spirit and struggle of the age in which he lived. As Tennyson says concerning *In Memoriam*: "'I' is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking through him" (*Memoir I* 305). Tennyson clearly understands that society is reflected in his own intellectual and emotional struggles. *In Memoriam* particularly focuses on the conflict between doubt and faith in Tennyson and, by implication, in the society of his day.

Tennyson's attitudes toward faith were affected at least to some extent by the circumstances of his childhood. His father, George, was an Anglican preacher, not truly by choice but at his father's insistence. He rejected the creed of the church, the Athanasian Creed, and denied the existence of eternal punishment (Mattes 3-4). He fought depression, and in reaction to this despondency, he began to drink heavily. Eventually he alienated his wife and children with his excessive drinking.

In contrast to his father, Tennyson's mother, Elizabeth Fytche Tennyson, the daughter of a preacher and the niece of a bishop (Mattes 4), is described as having a "simple, evangelical piety" (Mattes 8). It seems that his mother could well have fit the pattern of the woman of simple faith found in *In Memoriam:*

> Leave thou thy sister when she prays,
> Her early heaven, her happy views;
> Nor thou with shadow'd hint confuse
> A life that leads melodious days.
>
> Her faith thro' 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 countest reason ripe
> In holding by the law within,
> Thou fail not in a world of sin,
> And ev'n for want of such a type. (XXXIII, 5-16)

The simple religious woman depicted here displays a faith that is neither based on reason nor dependant on "natural law." Her faith is predicated on prayer that is accompanied by good works. Tennyson may not have developed the same

type of uncomplicated religion in his life that his mother practiced, but he holds her simple faith in high regard.

A third religious view that Tennyson encountered in his childhood came from his aunt. Mary Bourne was his father's sister and a strict Calvinist (Mattes 4). She is quoted as saying about herself, "Has He not damned most of my friends? But me, me He has picked out for eternal salvation, me who am no better than my neighbours." She is also reported to have said to her nephew, "Alfred, Alfred, when I look at you, I think of the words of Holy Scripture, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire'" (Tennyson *Memoir I* 15). His relationship with his aunt led him to disdain extreme Calvinism. From these childhood influences, Tennyson was made aware of the divergence of views that was held concerning religion. As is evident in *In Memoriam*, he came to despise the fights over creeds and man-made religious views or humanly devised systems of any kind. In the Prologue to *In Memoriam* he refers to these systems that are of human origin:

> 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. (17-20)

Later in the poem he gives a clear indictment of creeds: "There lives more faith in honest doubt,/Believe me, than in half the creeds" (XCVI, 11-12). It may very well

be that his attitude toward these creeds, and the organized religions that they represent, began with the religiosity of those who influenced him as a child.

Tennyson's parents and aunt provided strong early influences in his life. In 1828 he entered Trinity College in Cambridge, and his experiences there would have a lasting influence on him. Not only would these experiences affect his personal life, but they would also influence his intellectual development and future thinking. His time at Cambridge especially helped to shape his attitudes toward faith and doubt. The course of study at Cambridge emphasized math and did not tend to provide "stimulus to speculation or independent religious thinking" (Matte 8). Neither Tennyson nor his friend Arthur Hallam had a strong interest in math or in the study of the classics (Van Dyke 106). They did not enjoy the memorization of the mundane facts and dates that were needed to pass the examinations, so this could have been a mentally stagnant time for Tennyson; however, his association with the "Apostles" provided mental and intellectual stimulation that influenced him the rest of his life. The official name of the group was "The Cambridge Conversazione Society." The nickname "The Apostles" was at first given to the group derisively, but it became a proud name to its members. The Society was

> formed by a group of undergraduates who deplored the University's indifference to contemporary literature, philosophy, and theology, and who proposed to study these neglected subjects independently and to discuss them among themselves [. . .]. They supported the

> Parliamentary Reform movement in England. They sympathized with the various revolutionary movements on the Continent, and especially with the attempt to overthrow the monarchy in Spain [. . .]. They admired Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats at a time when Byron was the vogue. And in a university dedicated to the study of mathematics, they regarded philosophy and religion as their most serious concerns. (Matte 27-28)

The Apostles debated the origin of evil, prayer, the source of the sense of morality, and the personality of God (Matte 28). They rejected the idea of what was called "rational supernaturalism" (Matte 28), as Tennyson reflected when he voted "no" to the question: "Is an Intelligible First Cause deducible from the Phenomena of the Universe?" (Willey 169). This rejection of rationalistic explanations for the existence of God reinforced by the Apostles of Cambridge helped lead to the more existential-like concepts expressed in *In Memoriam,* in which Tennyson rejects belief in God as based on any type of external evidence.

Beyond religion, Tennyson's convictions concerning the seriousness and importance of the role of a poet, which could lead him to write a very personal poem that is representative of society as a whole, very likely began with his association with the Apostles. The Apostles followed the teachings of Wordsworth and Shelley that the poet was an "oracular organ of Truth" (Houghton 152). They held that poetry should not be written for purely artistic reasons and that to do so was to neglect the poet's prophetic role and was "a

betrayal of his gift" (Mattes 29). This view of the poet's role would help shape Tennyson's perspective as he later was appointed Poet Laureate of England. He took his responsibility as a poet serving England as a sacred trust and believed that poetry was not just self-serving and entertaining but educational and healing as well.

Tennyson's memories of the Apostles as mentioned in Section LXXXVII of *In Memoriam* reflect the significance and influence of the Apostles in his life. He records a dream of returning to Trinity College, and in the dream he remembers with great affection the Apostles' debates "on mind and art, / And labour, and the changing mart" (22-23). In the last three stanzas of this section, he uses the imagery of archery, comparing the spirited discussions of the Apostles to an archery contest. In their discussions individuals would often "miss the mark," or sometimes hit the outer edge of the target, the truth on a subject. Once in a while one of them would hit in the inner circle of the target. There was one, however, whom Tennyson viewed as the "master-bowman." He felt that Arthur Hallam consistently "hit the mark." Hallam, according to Tennyson, was always on target "with power and grace" (33) and argued beautifully, logically and accurately. Tennyson describes seeing "The God within him light his face" (36) when Hallam drew his conclusions. In Tennyson's view, Hallam was able to come closer to the truth than anyone else he knew and to find the answers to their discussions as if God were shining through him in his knowledge and ability.

Of all the Apostles, it was Hallam who had the greatest impact on Tennyson's life. They became the very best of friends almost immediately. The Eversley edition of *The Works of Tennyson,* published in 1907-08 includes a sonnet with the incomplete title of "To -----" (Matte 24). In this sonnet Tennyson writes about his meeting with Hallam for the very first time:

> So, friend, when first I look'd upon your face,
>
> Our thought gave answer each to each, so true--
>
> Opposed mirrors each reflecting each--
>
> That tho' I knew not in what time or place,
>
> Methought that I had often met with you,
>
> And either lived in either's heart and speech. (Mattes 24)

Although in this poem Tennyson describes himself and Hallam as "opposed mirrors each reflecting each," they were actually very different in personality, for Hallam was much more gregarious and outspoken than Tennyson. While both Tennyson and Hallam were outstanding members of the Apostles, it appears that most who knew Hallam thought that he would be the greatest of their Society. He was a natural leader (Van Dyke 106). Gladstone, who was at Eton and Cambridge with Hallam, wrote concerning him:

> Among his contemporaries at Eton [. . .] he stood supreme [. . .] and the long life through which I have since wound my way, and which has brought me into contact with so many man of rich endowments, leaves him where he then stood so far as my

> estimation is concerned. [. . .] It is the simple truth that Arthur Henry Hallam was a spirit so exceptional that everything with which he was brought into relation [. . .] came to be, through this contact, glorified by a touch of the ideal. (Bradley 5)

Although the words of Gladstone and Tennyson tend to idealize Hallam, it is evident that those who knew him believed him to be an exceptionally outstanding and astute person who was headed for greatness. Hallam Tennyson records the fact that his father believed Hallam to be as near to perfection as any mortal man could be (Ross 12). Tennyson himself states in *In Memoriam* that Hallam is "The man I held as half-divine," a phrase that, as Ross points out, is unintentionally close to blasphemy (Ross 12).

Tennyson's and Hallam's friendship lasted almost five years, as Section XXII of *In Memoriam* emphasizes. Tennyson indicates that their friendship had begun its fifth year when Hallam met with "the Shadow fear'd of man," death. As Tennyson and Hallam shared a deep and meaningful relationship, they had in-depth studies on many different subjects and traveled together at home and abroad. Hallam often visited in the home of the Tennysons and eventually became engaged to Tennyson's sister, Emily. Yet this valuable friendship was brought to a swift and unexpected end in 1833.

Sir Charles Tennyson gives a detailed account of the events of 1833 (143-146). Near the end of July, Hallam and Tennyson parted company, Tennyson going to Scotland and Hallam remaining in Somersby. In early August they met

again as Hallam was leaving with his father to take a tour of the Continent. A party was given that lasted until 4 o'clock in the morning. Later that day Tennyson saw his friend off as Hallam and his father headed for Vienna. Hallam wrote a letter to Tennyson dated September 6, 1833. It was a cheerful letter in which Hallam spoke of enjoying the picture galleries in Vienna. Then on September 15, 1833, Arthur Hallam was found dead by his father in their room at The Golden Birn hotel in Vienna. Hallam was 23 years old. His uncle, Henry Elton, wrote a letter to inform Tennyson of Hallam's death. The letter did not get to England until October 1st. Tennyson's seventeen-year-old sister, Matilda, picked the letter up on her way home from a dance lesson. She brought the letter to Tennyson, who was sitting at the table in their dining room. He opened it, read it, and then he simply left his chair and the room. In a few minutes he called for Emily and broke the news to her. In his book *Alfred Tennyson,* Charles Tennyson notes:

> To both Alfred and Emily the blow was overwhelming. On Arthur's betrothed it fell at a moment when, after years of trial and disappointment, there seemed good prospect that their hopes would at last be crowned with marriage. For Alfred, a sudden and brutal stroke had annihilated in a moment a love "passing the love of women." The prop, round which his own growth had twined itself for four fruitful years, was suddenly removed. A lifelong prospect,

> founded in his own friendship and Emily's hoped-for union with his friend, was blotted out instantly and forever. (145)

This sudden and terrible blow propelled the writing of a series of poems not originally intended to be combined in one volume. Over the next seventeen years, Tennyson wrote of his struggles with grief, with the questions of immortality, and with the powerful questions of doubt and faith. In 1850 *In Memoriam* was published, at first anonymously with the title *The Elegies*, and later with full credit, and the title changed at the suggestion of his fiancée, Emily Sellwood. *In Memoriam* helped to propel Tennyson into the position of Poet Laureate of England.

The poem deals with Tennyson's grief, evolutionary thought and with deep questions of philosophy, immortality, and religion. However, as Van Dyke accurately states, "It has, therefore, a twofold character; it is a glorious monument to the memory of a friend, and it is the great English classic on the love of immortality and the immortality of love" (105). *In Memoriam* is the collection of the emotions and thoughts that are brought about by the death of a dear friend, and it is the record of the search for faith that is found through the means of honest doubt.

CHAPTER ONE

In Memoriam: The Journey from Despair to Faith

In Memoriam records the journey of one man from despair and then through "honest doubt" to a form of faith that met his individual needs. Along the journey toward faith, Tennyson had to overcome the overwhelming blow that he received at the loss of his friend, Hallam. He also had to sail through the stormy waters of scientific theory and philosophy. He could not ignore science, but, rather, he had to navigate through it in a manner that allowed him to return to faith. His personal struggle to find his way to a sense of faith is one that reflects the spiritual dilemma of the society in which he lived.

The tension between science and religion has a long history, and at times the discoveries made in science, and particularly the various theories set forth by the scientific community, have posed challenges to religious faith. This tension was particularly true in the Victorian Age in which Tennyson wrote because many scientific concepts were being codified for the first time. Certainly science had also challenged religious orthodoxy in previous centuries. For example, Copernicus disproved the idea held by the religious authorities of his day that the earth was the center of the universe. His theory, of course, caused considerable conflict and controversy. In this ideological conflict between science and religion,

the middle of the nineteenth century would become the focal point of the battle. Basil Willey presents two probable reasons for this tension:

> First, because, to the older idea of immutable law operating throughout the physical universe in the inorganic sphere, there was now added the idea of inexorable development proceeding with the organic world, moulding and modifying living species. Secondly, because this great idea, arriving upon the scene in a century of cheap printing and a vastly augmented reading public, soon advanced outside the studies of philosophers and noblemen--to which "advanced" thought had hitherto been largely confined--and reached the average man, the sort of man who had generally been in possession of a simple conventional faith. (Willey 155)

Tennyson presents this battle between faith and doubt in *In Memoriam* as he personally struggles with the questions raised by science.

Tennyson was an ardent student of the sciences. Thomas Henry Huxley spoke of him as "the first poet since Lucretius who has understood the drift of science" (Ross 95). This often-quoted affirmation is generally considered to be an overstatement, but it is based on the reality of Tennyson's attitude toward science. Ross notes that:

> His expertise was rather that of the thoughtful, well-informed layman. But the general "drift" of science--its premises, assumptions, modes of arguing, implications--these things he

> surely understood and, what is more important for a poet, felt; the tenets, hypotheses, and assumptions of the new science became a fixed part of Tennyson's intellectual equipment and profoundly permeated his poetic consciousness. (Ross 95)

Tennyson probably had a better grasp of science than other poets of his age, and he was certainly more concerned than most with the implications that grew out of scientific theory. In another often-quoted statement, A.C. Bradley comments that, with the possible partial exception of Shelley,

> Tennyson is the only one of our great poets whose attitude towards the sciences of Nature was what a modern poet's attitude ought to be . . . the only one to whose habitual way of seeing, imagining, or thinking it makes any real difference that Laplace, or for that matter Copernicus ever lived. (Ross 95)

It is interesting that religious contemporaries of Tennyson look at his efforts in *In Memoriam* in very favorable ways and view the poem, very often, as taking a step in the direction of bringing science and religion together. At the same time, leading scientists such as Herschel, Owen, Sedgwick and Tyndall look on Tennyson as a champion of science. They "cheered him with words of genuine admiration for his love of Nature, for the eagerness with which he welcomed all the latest scientific discoveries" (Tennyson *Memoir I* 298). Tennyson, at least beginning with the days of his involvement with the Apostles at Cambridge, if not before, concentrated on scientific theories and every new discovery, a respect

which allowed him to incorporate scientific concepts into his poetry. Wordsworth had predicted, in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, that eventually poetry would be able to absorb and carry the results of science alive in the heart (Willey 155). It appears that Tennyson was able to make this prediction come true, even before the death of Wordsworth.

In Memoriam records Tennyson's admiration for science, but also his efforts to overcome the doubt that scientific theories raised in relation to faith. He clung to two predominant factors of faith with undying dedication: the belief in a providential God and the idea of human immortality. Basically, he viewed these ideas as separate issues that superseded any scientific theory. Because of his determination that these concepts took precedence over scientific theory, he would eventually develop an existential-like view that faith and the understanding of God and immortality come from within the individual and are not based on external evidence. *In Memoriam* starts with a question similar to that posed in Milton's *Lycidas:* "How can we maintain belief in God's providence when he blots out a young life of signal virtue and promise?" (Bush 120). Milton, however, wrote from a religious and philosophical standpoint that allowed him to answer with complete assurance that he could trust God and that heaven was ultimately equitable in its actions. As Tennyson wrote, he did not hold such absolute conviction, and in *In Memoriam* he searches for a certainty in matters of faith. His search would bring him to the conclusion that the only path to faith and religious certainty is through the means of "honest doubt." For Tennyson, honest

doubt is legitimate and sincere questioning, not only of religious concepts but also of every phase of existence. Tennyson takes a journey of questioning and soulful searching and records that journey in the poems that are brought together to form *In Memoriam.*

In Memoriam Section III: Depths of Despair

The beginning point of Tennyson's journey in *In Memoriam* is the deep despair that he feels at the loss of his dear friend and companion, Hallam. This sense of loss is reflected in Section III where Tennyson begins to grasp the reality that his close friend is dead and to experience the agony and despair born of sorrow:

O Sorrow, cruel fellowship,
O Priestess in the vaults of Death,
O sweet and bitter in a breath,
What whispers from thy lying lip? (1-4)

In this section he anthropomorphizes Sorrow, which he describes in female terms such as "priestess," as a companion to death. He speaks ironically of Sorrow with the terms "cruel fellowship" and "sweet and bitter in a breath." He recognizes that there is a certain fellowship with Sorrow, as if she embraces the mourner and provides a cruel but intimate relationship that comes in the presence of death. While she is cruel and bitter, she also is the natural companion of the person who is dealing with death. Recognizing an ironic

comfort in Sorrow, Tennyson also understands that she attempts to deceive the mourner who is lost and wandering in the depths of despair:

> "The stars," she whispers, "blindly run;
>
> A web is wov'n across the sky;
>
> From out waste places comes a cry,
>
> And murmurs from the dying sun [. . .]." (5-8)

The falsehood of Sorrow is found in her attempt to convince him that there is no order in the universe--that the universe is nothing but chaos. This form of despair is normal and reasonable for any person no matter how strong that individual's faith or how strong his or her sense of certainty. The death of a loved one, and particularly of an individual who is young, brings this type of questioning to the minds of the mourners. Tennyson's faith in a providential God is being shaken by his deep sorrow.

That faltering faith is linked not only with sorrow but also with allusions to scientific concepts. "And murmurs from the dying sun" is a reference to the nebular theory proposed by Leplace in 1796. This theory taught that the sun is a dying star which will eventually burn itself out and become just an inactive cinder (Ross 5). One of Tennyson's early scientific interests was the study of astronomy. In this section of *In Memoriam,* Sorrow magnifies the scientific concepts and makes an argument for scientific determinism. This theory held that "Nature, contrary to the Romantic view, is neither sentient nor benign; and that life is controlled by mechanical laws of necessity which preclude both free

will in man and cosmic control by God" (Ross 6). The blindly running stars, the web "wov'n across the sky," and the "murmurs from the dying sun" are all arguments which Sorrow makes against divine design in the universe in an attempt to convince Tennyson to succumb to despair. She moves from cosmic meaninglessness to Nature's emptiness:

> "And all the phantom, Nature, stands –
>
> With all the music in her tone,
>
> A hollow echo of my own –
>
> A hollow form with empty hands." (9-12)

Nature offers no more comfort for Tennyson as he struggles with despair than Sorrow offers. Sorrow views Nature as a "phantom," a ghost with nothing to provide hope and comfort. Nature has music of its own but no real substance. It is just as hollow as Sorrow itself. Its "hands" provide absolutely nothing to help overcome the despair that Sorrow brings.

Even in the depths of his despair Tennyson is still battling to keep control. He resists the seductive appeal of Sorrow:

> And shall I take a thing so blind,
>
> Embrace her as my natural good:
>
> Or crush her, like a vice of blood,
>
> Upon the threshold of the mind? (13-16)

If Sorrow is allowed past the threshold and into his mind, it has taken the advantageous position, so it has to be violently fought off, "crushed" before it gets

a foothold. His vivid description of the crushing of Sorrow, the fierceness of the words, indicate his wish to fight against the influences of Sorrow and never to give up on his convictions concerning God and human immortality. From this beginning point of despair he will launch into the journey toward faith that is recorded in *In Memoriam*.

In Memoriam Sections LIV - LVI: Faith Nearly Lost

As Tennyson's journey moves from the despair over Hallam's death, he faces doubt that is amplified by scientific theories and discoveries, especially in the field of geology. Sections LIV-LVI show these doubts nearly overwhelming Tennyson. In section LIV Tennyson struggles to find a reason to believe that good will ultimately come despite the apparent evil in nature and humanity. His faith is barely surviving. In the opening stanza, for example, the "somehow" undercuts his sense of ultimate good:

> Oh yet we trust that somehow good
>
> Will be the final goal of ill,
>
> To pangs of nature, sins of will,
>
> Defects of doubt, and taints of blood [. . .]. (1-4)

Tennyson's use of the term "trust" in this passage is connotatively weak, for it lacks substance and suggests an unsubstantiated and weak hope, a feeble attempt to believe, although later in *In Memoriam* he uses the term "trust" as an expression of faith (Sections CXVIII and CXX). The phrase "somehow good / Will

be the final goal of ill" is reminiscent of the biblical phrase "All things work together for good . . ." (Romans 8:28, KJV). Thus, this passage of the poem expresses Tennyson's desire to be able to have the conviction that such a concept of ultimate good is true. In order for that final good to be realized, certain "ills" will have to be overcome. He lists four of them in this first stanza of Section LIV. "The pangs of nature" are the "evils," as he perceives them, that are present within nature. "Sins of will" represent the willful acts of humanity that are contrary to the good of society and of individuals within it. He uses the expression "defects of doubt" to indicate that doubt keeps humankind from hope and causes evil results in the lives of men and women. Finally, he speaks of "taints of blood," suggesting blood shed among humans and blood shed in nature, a point he extends in Section LVI. All of these evils he sees as senseless if there is no overriding plan.

The desire to believe leads Tennyson to hope that there is a purpose and end for everything that walks upon the earth. He hopes:

> That nothing walks with aimless feet;
>
> That not one life shall be destroy'd,
>
> Or cast as rubbish to the void,
>
> When God hath made the pile complete [. . .]. (5-8)

Tennyson goes on to represent the grave as a "pile" of death as bodies of the dead gather in the earth. If that is the final end of existence, then there is no

hope. If God is not involved in the universe with His providential guidance, then Tennyson cannot find purpose and hope in the course of nature.

The providential care of God, on the other hand, would ensure that all of existence has meaning:

> That not a worm is cloven in vain;
>
> That not a moth with vain desire
>
> Is shrivell'd in a fruitless fire,
>
> Or but subserves another's gain.
>
> Behold, we know not anything;
>
> I can but trust that good shall fall
>
> At last--far off--at last, to all,
>
> And every winter change to spring. (9-16)

Tennyson yearns to find assurance in God's providence, which would make all existence valuable and meaningful, but the conviction for which Tennyson is searching eludes him as he writes. He feels that we do not know anything absolutely; we do not have certainty about any of the questions with which he is grappling. Because of the lack of assurance he must depend on his trust--again with very little conviction to uphold it--that good will eventually come. His sense of despair and doubt is expressed as he states that it will be "far off" before the evils of the world will be brought to a good conclusion. He feels that he is frozen in a psychological

winter--a winter of distress, grief, and the struggle to believe. He faintly trusts that spring, the time of rebirth, hope, and life renewed, will follow this winter, and he yearns for a spring of hope.

Having expressed this faint hope, Tennyson then undercuts his "trust that good shall fall" by equating it with an insubstantial dream:

> So runs my dream: but what am I?
>
> An infant crying in the night:
>
> An infant crying for the light:
>
> And with no language but a cry. (17-20)

This dream is not a finite goal for which he can strive; instead, the dream here is the unsubstantiated product of the mind over which the dreamer has no control. Such a dream may very well never be realized. In the face of death, nature, science, and the great metaphysical question of immortality, he views himself as insignificant. He sees himself as a frightened child lost in the darkness of night, searching for the light, yet having no other form for communicating his wish but a cry. Despair, a sense of abandonment, and a lack of hope are all characteristics that he shares with the child in the darkness. As he writes this section he feels only the despair of a child who does not know its way. However, the imagery of a child has its roots in the Victorian concept of continual improvement. Even in the midst of his despair there is still the underlying hope to find upward growth.

The theme of hopelessness and faltering faith continues in Section LV, where one of the central themes of Tennyson's journey toward faith, the question

of immortality, runs directly into a confrontation with science. He wants assurance that living beings will not simply cease to exist as he poses this question in the first stanza of Section LV:

> The wish, that of the living whole
>
> No life may fail beyond the grave,
>
> Derives it not from what we have
>
> The likest God within the soul? (1-4)

There is, once again, no sense of strong conviction in his use of the term "wish." Tennyson's argument that we do, after all, have the desire for immortality because of the Godlike in us is less an argument than a desperate question. He would like the question to be rhetorical, but it comes at a point of weakened faith and becomes instead a plea for reassurance.

The desperation and weakness of faith that Tennyson is experiencing is partially fueled by the scientific theories that were being formed during his lifetime. Against the backdrop of such theories he questions the relationship between God and nature in the second and third stanzas of Section LV:

> Are God and Nature then at strife,
>
> That nature lends such evil dreams?
>
> So careful of the type she seems,
>
> So careless of the single life,
>
> That I, considering everywhere

Her secret meaning in her deeds,

And finding that of fifty seeds

She often brings but one to bear [. . .]. (5-12)

Ross notes that in Tennyson's wondering if God and nature are "at strife," the poet is asking, "does the evidence of nature not seem to deny the existence of immortality and to contradict the concept that love is the ultimate law of creation?" (Ross 34). Hallam had drawn the conclusion that love is the predominate concept of the universe and that God is the expression of ultimate love. This idea was familiar to Tennyson and was a common conception throughout the Victorian Age. The Victorians' definition of "love" precluded evil and harshness, even in nature. As science, and particularly the fossil evidence from geology, increasingly highlighted the demonstrable harshness of nature, there was natural conflict between the Victorians' conception of a God of ultimate love and the cruelty of nature. Tennyson's studies of nature brought him to the realization that even if there is a carefulness of "type" or species there is no preservation of the individual in nature, a lack of care which questions God's personal providential care, for the hope of immortality relies on care from God. If nature is so harsh, and love does not ultimately rule, then upon what basis is hope to be founded? This is the dilemma that Tennyson faced.

The second and third stanzas of Section LV are generally understood to introduce the concept of evolutionary theory, even though *In Memoriam* was published nine years before Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. Yet, as Douglas

Bush notes, there was a current of ideas concerning biological development that predated Darwin:

> The general idea of development and the special idea of natural selection were familiar to various Greeks and Romans, such as Empodocles, Aristotle, and Lucretius [. . .]. In a broad sense, the modern doctrine was a logical extension to both the celestial and the biological worlds of the historical concept and method which had been preoccupied with the progress of civilization.
>
> (Bush 113)

There were also those who held to portions of the evolutionary theory before Charles Darwin, including Herbert Spencer and even Darwin's grandfather. While Tennyson does anticipate Darwinism, he does not appear to hold the "central Darwinian doctrine of mutation of the species" (Bush 126). It is not unusual that Tennyson would reflect at least a portion of the theory that was now moving to the forefront of thought. These evolutionary ideas provided an additional source of doubt, especially concerning the lack of care for the individual.

The absence of concern in nature for the individual is significant in Tennyson's attempts to find faith. As the discoveries of science reveal more facts about nature, it is as if the secret meaning of the events of nature has been uncovered. Tennyson views nature and comments that the individual seed is not important just as the individual is unimportant in

nature. The secrets of nature are revealed, delivering facts that cause a great deal of hypothesizing to be done. Often the combination of facts and hypotheses works together to erode faith and to sow the seeds of doubt.

The evidence that not all seeds germinate and come to life has helped to foster doubt in Tennyson, and he begins to falter in his steps. He says:

> I falter where I firmly trod,
>
> And falling with my weight of cares
>
> Upon the great world's altar-stairs
>
> That slope thro' darkness up to God,
>
> I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
>
> And gather dust and chaff, and call
>
> To what I feel is Lord of all,
>
> And faintly trust the larger hope. (13-20)

Tennyson had at one time walked with confidence that immortality is true because it is God implanted. Now, under the influence of science as represented in the seed that has not germinated, his equilibrium has been upset by the onslaught of facts, theories, and, of course, grief. All of these combine to become a weight that causes him to be unable to stand firmly. He desperately desires to come into the presence of God, but he views the approach to God as an uphill trip through the darkness. He is at the lowest point in his faith and is

almost overwhelmed by doubt. In his attempt to find God he speaks of the lame hands with which he reaches for God. "Lame" implies that the figurative hands are not only weak but deformed and crippled as is his faith, represented by the lame hands. He does not have the power in his hands to grasp God or the answers to his questions. As he gropes, blinded by the darkness mentioned in the preceding stanza, he is only able to gather dust and chaff, things that are of no value and no real substance. Dust is a nuisance to be cleaned up, and chaff is the useless remains that are discarded after sifting the grain. He has nothing on which he can base his faith that has any substance. So he calls upon "what I feel is Lord of all." At this point Tennyson's use of the term "feel" represents a weakened faith and faint trust in immortality and God's providence. As Tennyson continues to travel toward a personal resolution of faith, he comes to the view that what he "feels" is the affirmation of his faith, that belief is not based on external things but instead comes from within. In the process, he forms his concept that honest doubt is the means to finding true faith. As he writes this section, however, his faith is nearly extinguished.

In Section LVI Tennyson continues to struggle with an extremely weakened faith and is led to the questions that, as Bush suggests,

> turn on the immensity of the celestial system, the timeless process of geological change, the wasteful productivity and destructiveness of nature, and the struggle for existence, as these grim facts bear

> upon the doubtful place and destiny of man and the whole problem of faith. (Bush 126)

In the study of geology Tennyson faced his greatest scientific source of doubt and questioning. It seems certain that he was heavily influenced, especially at the time that he wrote this section, by his reading of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*. He spent several months of 1837 studying Lyell's book. Lyell's major premise was that the earth's crust has come to its present state by the continuous actions of natural forces that are still working today, such as erosion, gradual earth movement, sedimentation, and various other forces of nature (Willey 156). The tremendous amount of time required for these processes to act was in conflict with the commonly held religious views of an earth that is only about 4,000 years old. Willey notes of Lyell's theory:

> It presupposed for the earth a vastly greater age than was allowed for in the accepted biblical chronology, and thrust far back, if not out of the picture altogether, the notion of divine creation and superintendence. First cooling gases, then aeons of erosion: what, then, of the Seven Days' creation, Adam and Eve, and the flood? (Willey 156-157)

Lyell went further and asserted that as these changes slowly took place, one species after another had become extinct because of not being able to adapt to the changing conditions (Willey 157). Interestingly, Lyell was not anti-religious. He wrote in his conclusion to *Principles of Geology:* "But in whatever direction we

pursue our researches, whether in time or space, we discover everywhere the clear proofs of a Creative Intelligence, and of His foresight, wisdom and power" (Mattes 57). Furthermore, Lyell was opposed to the growing number of evolutionary theorists (Bush 117). Lyell actually worked to conceal the full religious implications of his theories: "He found that most churchmen were willing to accept almost any description of the *manner* of God's activity in the universe, so long as the *fact* of such divine activity was affirmed" (Mattes 57). Despite these attempts to reconcile his theories with religion, the fact remains that if his teaching was true, then every species is subject to extinction, including mankind. Lyell's postulations were not optimistic for humanity on the earth and offered no hope beyond the earth.

With this very pessimistic outlook gleaned at least partially from reading Lyell's book, Tennyson writes Section LVI in which he anthropomorphizes Nature as an uncaring female and expresses the despair that he feels for all of humanity. In the first stanza, prompted by his reading of Lyell, Tennyson retracts the statement of Section LV that nature is "so careful of type":

> "So careful of the type?" but no.
> From scarped cliff and quarried stone
> She cries, "A thousand types are gone:
> I care for nothing, all shall go.
>
> "Thou makest thine appeal to me:

I bring to life, I bring to death:

The spirit does but mean the breath:

I know no more." (1-8)

The implications of the statements made by nature are profound in terms of signifying an afterlife. If the spirit is nothing more than the breath, then when breath ends so does life. Immortality is meaningless.

The sense of futility that this view of nature brings Tennyson is reflected throughout this section:

[. . .] And he, shall he,

Man, her last work, who seem'd so fair,

Such splendid purpose in his eyes,

Who roll'd the psalm to wintry skies,

Who brought him fanes of fruitless prayer,

Who trusted God was love indeed

And love Creation's final law—

Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw

With ravine, shriek'd against his creed--

Who loved, who suffer'd countless ills,

Who battled for the True, the Just,

Be blown about the desert dust,

Or seal'd within the iron hills? (8-20)

Tennyson expresses futility as he speaks of man, the last work of nature, who has "seem'd" to be fair, who had been guided by a sense of purpose and hope involving not just the accomplishing of earthly tasks but, in the context of this section, the attaining of immortality, an end which is pointless if there is no hope for any species, including man. The "psalm to wintry skies" (11) is the praise man offers to the Source of divine providential design, equally useless if nature really can destroy every species, because, from Tennyson's point of view, God would then cease to be beneficent. His trust in God is shaken as his despair and doubt are increased by the conclusions that he draws from Lyell's theories. Although Victorians viewed God as a God of love, geology as represented by Lyell's theories showed the cruelty of nature, its fierceness described in the famous phrase, "red in tooth and claw." (15) Nature, as Tennyson describes it, does not simply argue or speak against the creed that God is love and love the ultimate law of the universe; he says that it "shrieks" against it, loudly and vociferously declaring the creed to be untrue. Where does this place humankind if that denial is true? Tennyson basically asks that same question in the next two stanzas. The iron hills provide the fossils and other geological data that are the source of much of the theories of Lyell and other geologists. Is man destined to become just another part of the fossil record to be studied by future generations?

Again, this question involves the central issue of *In Memoriam*, immortality, and the contrasting tension of the finality of death.

Tennyson notes in the next stanza that if there is no hope of immortality and man's ultimate destination is the grave, then humans are in a worse condition than the animals:

No more? A monster then, a dream,

A discord. Dragons of the prime,

That tare each other in their slime,

Were mellow music match'd with him. (21-24)

Tennyson finds only discord in a humanity with no hope. At least the beasts were not deceived into believing that there was more beyond this life as humans had been. There is nothing but a futility left for humankind if these theories, as carried to their seemingly logical conclusion, are true.

The feelings of futility bring to mind the frailty of life, which is still painfully represented in Tennyson's mind by the death of Hallam:

O life is futile, then, as frail!

O for thy voice to soothe and bless!

What hope of answer, or redress?

Behind the veil, behind the veil. (25-28)

As his mind reflects on the questions of immortality, he longs for the voice of the one who often had the answers for the Apostles. Since Hallam cannot speak, Tennyson feels that there is no hope of an answer or response to the doubts that

he faces. Those answers, in his mind, lie "behind the veil." This phrase carries two connotations. The primary meaning is that Hallam has the answers with him behind the veil of death, beyond Tennyson's grasp. The second connotation is that the answers cannot be found until he himself steps behind the veil of death. In this phrase is the sign of a remnant of hope concerning immortality for Hallam, for himself, and for all of mankind. It is weak and uncertain, a glimmer of hope found by his "weak hands" groping for answers (LV). Mattes comments on this tiny glimmer of hope:

> Tennyson could not, however, accept such a dismal conception of man as a transient phenomenon on the earth's surface, who vainly believes in an immortality and a God of love that ruthless nature belies. So he closed this disturbing section 56 by asserting that the questions raised by Lyell's findings must remain unanswered until he could penetrate "behind the veil."
>
> (Mattes 60)

In Sections LIV-LVI Tennyson's journey as depicted through *In Memoriam* has reached the point most distant from his ultimate goal of faith.

In Memoriam Sections CXVIII-CXX: Restoration of Faith

A journey to faith is never totally complete, but by the time that Tennyson writes Sections CXVIII-CXX his journey has moved him away from the depths of despair and doubt and much closer to the realization of a faith that can sustain

him. Although Tennyson has not totally rejected Lyell's theories at the time he writes these sections, it is apparent that he has been influenced by other sources that are much more optimistic with regard to science and religion. Among the books that Tennyson read were *A Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy* by J.F.W. Herschel and *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* by Robert Chambers.

Herschel's book emphasizes "development" as an aspect of progress (Mattes 77). Herschel did not believe that the findings and theories of geology made man's immortality any less certain. Consequently, he wrote with great confidence concerning immortality:

> Is it wonderful that a being so constituted should first encourage a hope, and by degrees acknowledge an assurance that his intellectual existence will not terminate with the dissolution of his corporeal frame but rather that, in a future state of being [. . .] endowed with acuter senses, and higher faculties, he shall drink deep at the fountain of beneficent wisdom for which the slight taste obtained on earth has given him so keen a relish?
>
> (Mattes 77)

Herschel sees the development of humanity as a source of optimism that includes the concept of future development even after death. Mattes comments on his hopeful view:

> For Herschel denied emphatically that the study of science leads men "to doubt the immortality of the soul," insisting that instead it leaves the mind "open and free to every impression of a higher nature which it is susceptible of receiving, [. . .] encouraging, rather than suppressing, every thing that can offer a prospect or a hope beyond the present obscure and unsatisfactory state." (Mattes 78)

Herschel's book offered a hope that helped to offset the pessimism Tennyson developed by reading Lyell's work; it also aided him toward finding a resolution of the issue of science versus faith in his own mind.

Robert Chambers's book was another aid to Tennyson as he struggled with the impact of science on faith. Chambers argued that God set the creation in order and caused it to evolve through the use of natural law (Bush 119). He taught that advancement went in minute stages and that "all organic forms, from the humblest lichen to the highest mammal, had a fundamental unity" (Bush 119). Many saw Chambers's conclusions as irreligious, but for Tennyson they were logical and encouraging. He saw in them reassurances about orderly development. Chambers's book unified the theories of science with the belief in the existence of the overruling providence of God for Tennyson. Chambers "suggested a meaning and purpose underlying the seemingly ruthless sweep of development, which were not to be found in Lyell's presentation" (Mattes 79).

The much more optimistic views of Herschel and Chambers concerning the implications of science are reflected in Section CXVIII. Tennyson begins the

section by leading the reader to look at science with optimism rather than the pessimism that he had presented in Section LVI:

> Contemplate all this work of Time,
>
> The giant labouring in his youth;
>
> Nor dream of human love and truth,
>
> As dying Nature's earth and lime [...]. (1-4)

The "work of Time" refers to the processes of geology and evolution that required eons to accomplish. In the earlier section, Tennyson could not see any reason for hope if Lyell's theories were accurate; with the influence of Herschel and Chambers, however, he found that basis for hope. In this passage, he uses several expressions that echo similar ones in Section LVI. He refers to humanity's existence as a "dream," having no real substance, in Section LVI. He also speaks of the futility of loving and of battling for "the True and Just." Recognition of the geological processes of nature is no longer a stumbling block for Tennyson in his attempt to find faith, and especially his effort to strengthen his conviction of immortality.

The belief in immortality is clearly stated in the second stanza of Section CXVIII:

> But trust that those we call the dead
>
> Are breathers of an ampler day
>
> For ever nobler ends. They say
>
> The solid earth whereon we tread

In tracts of fluent heat began,

And grew to seeming-random forms,

The seeming prey of cyclic storms,

Till at the last arose the man [...]. (5-12)

Again his attitude here contrasts with Section LVI. There he had pictured the despair if man were to become as the dust that is blown about the desert or were simply to be sealed in the iron hills. In this section, buoyed by the encouragement offered by the ideas of Chambers and Herschel, Tennyson expresses confidence that the dead are actually partakers of an "ampler day" and are intended for nobler ends or purposes than they were guided by here on earth. Not only, according to Tennyson, do the dead live on, but they live a superior life after leaving this earth. He then begins to discuss the nature of the earth and mankind's advancements, which he believes continue beyond the grave, starting with Laplace's theory of the earth coming from heated gases and going through "cyclic storms" of development until man finally emerges. Tennyson does not accept the notion that the processes of nature were accidental and without a guiding mind, as is clear from the reference to this process as "seeming-random." The results of nature's activity have the appearance of making a "prey" of the world and mankind; again, the implication is that the world and mankind are planned and part of an overriding providence.

Here once more are the two major religious concepts which Tennyson relentlessly held: immortality and God's providential oversight.

Tennyson continues with the theories that man has come to existence over time through the natural processes. Humanity is the species

Who throve and branch'd from clime to clime,

The herald of a higher race,

And of himself in higher place,

If so he type this work of time

Within himself, from more to more[. . .]. (13-17)

It is probable that the phrase "the herald of a higher race" implies that humanity will continue to improve and increase. That improvement is not only in the earthly existence, but also a continuing upward movement after death. Man can bring himself to a higher place if he copies the way in which the work of time accomplishes its effort. The word "type" as used here means to emulate that which time does in its work. There are "archetypes" in nature which should be copied to make humans the "type" of natural activities. In essence, humankind must continue to work for "the pattern of progressive development" (Ross 79) that is found in nature.

According to stanza five, Tennyson believes that the emulation of nature within man will make him go from "more to more," gradually improving:

Or, crown'd with attributes of woe

Like glories, move his course, and show
That life is not as idle ore,

But iron dug from central gloom,
And heated hot with burning fears,
And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
And batter'd with the shocks of doom

To shape and use. Arise and fly
The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;
Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die. (18-28)

As Tennyson has learned over time, the "attributes of woe," such as the grief at the loss of one that is loved, are a crown and a glory that help to move the individual along his course to better things. The ore of life is refined for use, as Tennyson makes clear. This metaphor of refining that ore is a recognition of the fact that what seems to be evil, such as the loss of a loved one, actually accomplishes good.

As Tennyson concludes this section he sees the need for advancement and realizes that the progression of the individual is dependant on his own determination to advance. Tennyson ends section CXVIII with a plea for humans to leave behind the sensual part of their nature, represented in the "Faun," a

beast that is part man and part animal. The faun illustrates the joining of the sensual with that which is superior in mankind, that which is from God, his soul. Tennyson states that humans need to move upward from the sensual to the spiritual, and urges a move through the proper moral activity to a higher form of humanity, an evolution that will not end at death.

Section CXIX does not deal directly with the question of science and faith, except that it expresses the hope and optimism that Tennyson now feels as a consequence of the processes of thoughts just expressed. This next passage finds Tennyson at Hallam's house, as he was in the scene of Section VII. The difference in attitude is striking: now Tennyson approaches the house, again in the early morning. feeling blessed by the sights and sounds around him and in a mood of fond remembrance:

> Doors, where my heart was used to beat
>   So quickly, not as one that weeps
>   I come once more; the city sleeps;
> I smell the meadow in the street;
>
> I hear the chirp of birds; I see
>   Betwixt the black fronts long-withdrawn
>   A light-blue lane of early dawn,
> And think of early days and thee [...]. (1-8)

In Section VII he uses the same expression "where my heart was used to beat," but there he qualifies it with "waiting for a hand." It was a place of mourning then; now it is a place of pleasant memories. The contrast between this visit and the one of Section VII is obvious and striking. The "long unlovely street," the "noise of life" that is "ghastly thro' the drizzling rain," and the "bald street" are replaced by the "chirp of birds" on a "light-blue lane." When he visited earlier, he could only think that Hallam was not there. This time he thinks of the early days and Hallam and of the pleasure that they shared. Tennyson can now come to Hallam's house without tears and with "scarce a sigh":

> And bless thee, for thy lips are bland,
>
> And bright the friendship of thine eye;
>
> And in my thoughts with scarce a sigh
>
> I take the pressure of thy hand. (9-12)

Certainly the passage of time has helped make it possible for Tennyson to approach Hallam's home with good memories instead of mourning. However, it seems reasonable to assert that his conclusions just stated in the previous section concerning the continuation of humanity past the grave help him feel this optimism. Tennyson's faith in immortality is subtly stated in the line, "I take the presence of thy hand." This is in stark contrast to the statement in Section VII, "A hand that can be clasp'd no more." The implication that Hallam is alive shows that Tennyson has come to a solid conviction in immortality that has been found through the refining fire of doubt.

Blind faith in science can be the source of religious doubt, and in Section CXX Tennyson opposes that type of unquestioning acceptance of science. He attacks scientific materialism and sees man as more than just a machine:

> I trust I have not wasted breath,
>
> I think we are not wholly brain,
>
> Magnetic mockeries; not in vain
>
> Like Paul with beasts, I fought with Death [. . .]. (1-4)

Tennyson uses the word "trust" with much more force here than earlier in the poem. Men are not "magnetic mockeries," and the brain here represents the autonomic operation of the body, not the soul and spirit. There is more to man, according to Tennyson, than the physical operations commanded by the brain. In the process of making this point, Tennyson shows disdain for the machines that were coming into existence as a result of scientific advances. He then refers to I Corinthians 15:32, in which passage Paul says that he has wasted his time fighting with "beasts" in Ephesus, meaning various people that opposed him and threatened to kill him, if there is no resurrection from the dead. Immortality is the key issue in I Corinthians 15, as it is for Tennyson in his fight with "Death."

Tennyson adamantly expresses the fact that he is not going to give up his belief in immortality in the second stanza of CXX:

> Not only cunning casts in clay:
>
> Let Science prove we are, and then
>
> What matter Science unto men,

At least to me? I would not stay. (5-8)

The whole process of mourning for his friend and all the effort made to overcome the grief is of no value if human beings are only "cunning casts in clay"---in other words, if man is only physical and has nothing eternal about him. Tennyson challenges science to prove that we are nothing more than the material nature. Questioning through the process that he would call "honest doubt," he has examined science and has concluded that it cannot prove that there is no immortality. Even if science were to offer evidence against immortality, he has come to believe that the concept of immortality is superior to anything that science might offer.

He concludes the section with a statement concerning scientific materialism:

Let him, the wiser man who springs
Hereafter, up from childhood shape
His action like the greater ape,
But I was born to other things. (9-12)

He sarcastically refers to the one who blindly accepts scientific materialism as "the wiser man," and thinks that an individual who accepts the idea that man is totally physical is merely acting like "the greater ape." He assures, however, that he is born to other, better things—the spiritual. Most commentators feel that he is not attacking the concepts of evolution in this statement, per se, but rather the idea of "mere materialism" (Ross 80). The journey through the honest doubt

prompted by science has brought Tennyson to the conclusion that he cannot blindly accept science and that his faith is based not in the physical part of man, but in the spiritual.

In Memoriam The Epilogue (117-144): A Journey Completed

Having made a long journey from the depths of despairing doubt to an assurance of faith, Tennyson expresses his optimism in the Epilogue as he writes about the marriage of his younger sister, Cecilia, to Edmund Lushington, his friend. In writing concerning their marriage, he "anticipated the arrival of their child, thus bringing the memorial poems from their early preoccupation with death to the expectation of birth" (Mattes 83). As he writes of conception and birth, Tennyson draws heavily on ideas that come from Chambers's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation.*

Tennyson calls on the moon to rise and to gently shade the bridal room and wedding bed with a "tender gloom" and with a splendor on "happy shores" as a child is conceived:

> And, star and system rolling past,
>
> A soul shall draw from out the vast
>
> And strike his being into bounds [. . .]. (123-126)

He pictures a soul that comes "from out the vast" as the child conceived on the wedding night. The "star and system rolling past" represent the fact that the wedding bed is the continuation of the natural order.

In the next stanza, Tennyson demonstrates a belief in fetal development, the concept that "the brains of the foetus passed through all the previous phases of evolution, recapitulating in brief the whole history of the species" (Willey 156). The child is conceived:

> And, moved thro' life of lower phase,
>
> Result in man, be born and think,
>
> And act and love, a closer link
>
> Betwixt us and the crowning race [...]. (125-128)

Certainly his ideas concerning fetal development were very likely reinforced by Chambers's book, but he had held to this concept for many years. While Tennyson was still at Cambridge, he had stated his belief that "the development of the human body might possibly be traced from the radiated, vermicular, molluscous and verterbrate organisms" (Willey 156). This concept was taken from embryology, then a newly developed science. The 1832 version of Tennyson's poem "The Palace of Art" specifically refers to this theory (Mattes 84), and the following two stanzas from that poem clearly express the concepts of fetal development:

> "From shape to shape at first within the womb
>
> The brain is moulded," she began.
>
> "And thro all phases of all thought I come
>
> Unto the perfect man.

All nature widens upward. Evermore

The simple essence lower lies,

More complex is more perfect, owning more

Discourse, more widely wise." (117-124)

Tennyson had long held the concept of man not only revisiting the phases of evolution in the womb, but also of the continual upward movement of humanity to near perfection, the "crowning race." In lines 129-132 of the Epilogue to *In Memoriam,* he further describes the "crowning race":

Of those that, eye to eye, shall look

On knowledge; under whose command

Is Earth and Earth's, and in their hand

Is Nature like an open book [. . .].

There is a constant movement toward perfection. Lyell's work had disturbed Tennyson's optimistic view of this evolution toward perfection. In Chambers's theories, however, he was assured that evolutionary progress continued even after death.

Tennyson strongly affirms his belief in the continued progress of humanity in lines 133-136:

No longer half-akin to brute,

For all we thought and loved and did,

And hoped, and suffer'd, is but a seed

Of what in them is flower and fruit [. . .].

It can be argued that the superior state alluded to in these lines also refers to the continuing movement to perfection after death that provided earlier hope and a basis for faith in Tennyson. To be no longer "half-akin" to the animal can mean the soul separated from the fleshly body. Those who have died, if they are still alive somewhere, are partakers of the culmination of all that those who are left alive think, love, do, hope, and suffer. All of these earthly experiences are the seed for the flower and fruit that the dead are experiencing, as well as what those who live after us will experience.

In lines 137-140 Tennyson moves away from the future of humanity as a whole and focuses on Hallam:

> Whereof the man, that with me trod
>
> This planet, was a noble type
>
> Appearing ere the time were ripe,
>
> That friend of mine who lives with God [. . .].

Tennyson speaks with confidence that Hallam, the noble friend that he lost before his time, is now with God. It has been a long journey since the despair of Section III. That despair has now dissipated and been replaced by hope.

In the final stanza of *In Memoriam,* Tennyson makes a statement of great assurance concerning the existence of God and inherently of His providential care:

> That God, which ever lives and loves,
>
> One God, one law, one element,

And one far-off divine event,

To which the whole creation moves. (141-144)

Tennyson expresses confidence in "that God" whom he describes as ever living and ever loving. There is, he concludes, one God, and it is His divine law that provides certainty and order in the universe. All of creation, and humanity in particular, is moving toward a perfection that is the result of the providential care of God and is brought about by the order that His laws in the universe have set in motion. Since that is so, then scientific discoveries are simply the revelation of God's "law," and all of this movement leads toward that "one far-off divine event" of ultimate perfection.

Ironically, science was a source of both doubt and faith for Tennyson. Ultimately, he found a means to faith through an interpretation of science that provided a hope concerning Hallam, himself, and humanity as a whole. It was an excruciating and exciting, painful and powerful, woeful and wonderful journey from despair through honest doubt to faith and hope.

CHAPTER TWO

"I Have Felt": Finding God in *In Memoriam*

Tennyson's search for faith and for the hope of immortality is both based on and dependent upon the truth of the existence of God. Although Tennyson expresses the weakness of his attempt to reach out for God in view of the scientific theories he faced (LV), he never gives up on the concept of "that God, which ever lives and loves" (Epilogue 141). By the time that *In Memoriam* concludes, he has established a firm conviction of God's existence. The avenue that he takes to arrive at his assurance is an existential type of faith that places the burden of finding God within the person without external "evidences." This concept is not new. In the seventeenth century Blaise Pascal wrote, "this then is faith, God known in heart, not proved by the reason" (Willey 169). Later, such nineteenth-century thinkers as Coleridge and Carlyle rejected rationality as a basis for faith. There is, however, a striking similarity between Tennyson's concept of finding faith through honest doubt and the existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard. Pascal had reacted against the rationalistic dogmatism of Descartes in the eighteenth century. In the next century, Kierkegaard opposed the claims of Hegel that he could rationally explain the universe, humanity, history, and religion.

Kierkegaard, a Danish contemporary of Tennyson, was born in Copenhagen in 1813 and died in 1855, five years after *In Memoriam* was published. It is not likely, however, that the two men had contact with each other. Kiekegaard's writings were not widely read in English until the twentieth century. While there is no evidence that Kierkegaard and Tennyson had any influence on each other, certain ideas expressed by both are in apposition. Apparently no causal relationship exists between them, but there is certainly a relationship of common ideas. The spirit of the nineteenth century is reflected in the similarities between Tennyson and Kierkegaard as they both searched for faith. The established creeds and dogmas of the mainstream religious organizations had begun to come under serious fire and questioning. German higher criticism that began in the late 1700s grew in popularity as the nineteenth century unfolded. This textual criticism heavily influenced the schools of higher learning, including the seminaries and religious colleges of the day, and had an impact on the view of the Bible held by many religious people, helping to generate a great deal of skepticism in the Victorian Age. The growth of scientific discoveries and theories worked together with the uncertainty of religion to aid in the undermining of traditional views of faith, God, and religion in general--not only in England, but in all of Europe. In the midst of these changing views there was a search for meaning in life and a renewed desire to find God.

In his search to find God and meaning, Kierkegaard develops a philosophy in which he carefully avoids a systematic recording of his ideas. He

uses a wide variety of literary forms to express his views, including essays, parables, and fictional letters. Quite often he writes using pseudonyms. A "system" is the very thing that he opposes. His work *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* utilizes the term "unscientific" in the title to mean that it is not intended to set up a systematic theology. In Kierkegaard's view, it is improper to speak of his "arguments" and "conclusions." He does have a philosophy, and certain elements of that philosophy can be ascertained by studying his various works, but he studiously avoids writing in such a way as to set up a "system." Tennyson expresses a similar concept in the Prologue to *In Memoriam:*

> 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. (17-20)

The "little systems" include "our humanly conceived theological, metaphysical, and scientific systems, or modes of perceiving reality" (Ross 3). Tennyson, like Kierkegaard, rejects systematic theories as inadequate and unable to bring men to a full realization of self and of God.

Kierkegaard refers to his philosophy as "existential." In most cases when existentialism is being discussed there is no clear definition given of the term. It involves the fulfillment of the individual in his or her own life. Existentialism ranges from the theistic existentialism of Kierkegaard to the "God-is-dead" existentialism of Nietzsche, while in between lies a wide variety of philosophies.

This variation makes a precise definition of the term virtually impossible. There are, however, some basic themes that commonly run through all the various versions of existentialism. At the center of these philosophies is the firm belief in individual existence. Existentialists insist that the sense of being and true fulfillment of existence must come from within the individual. In his introduction to Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety,* Reidar Thomte notes:

> Thus every human being possesses, or is within himself, a complete expression of humanness, whose essential meaning cannot be gained from scientific studies. That is, neither rational speculation nor natural science will disclose to the existing individual his essential nature and purpose. Self-knowledge is coordinate with the actualizing of one's potentiality to become oneself. (xv)

Understanding one's own selfhood cannot come from any outside source but is an inner process. By necessity, then, this philosophy is highly subjective.

The faith that Tennyson develops in the course of *In Memoriam*, and which meets his individual need for assurance, is a subjective faith, as is Kierkegaard's. This subjectiveness of Tennyson's faith has caused commentators untold difficulties as they examine *In Memoriam.* Some see Tennyson's masterpiece as a statement of doubt. Some conclude that it is a declaration of faith. Some think of it as a Christian account. Others view it as having very little to do with Christianity. The irony is that all these views are

correct to some degree. Subjective thought is not static and unchanging. It does not stand in one place very long because it is not based on objective reality. This subjective faith is based on "feeling." In Section CXXIV Tennyson says, "And like a man in wrath the heart / Stood up and answer'd 'I have felt'"(15-16). The faith of Tennyson in *In Memoriam* is formed from inward feelings and is not easily understood. The point, however, is that despite the vacillations of subjectivism, Tennyson did find a faith that for him was personally fulfilling. That is the goal of the religious existentialism of Kierkegaard: self-actualization and self-fulfillment with a Christian faith in which one finds his or her true self. One of the distinctions of Kierkegaardian existentialism is its dependence on God and Christianity. He believes that "only Christianity provides an example of the absolute unity of the eternal and the personal" (Malantshuk 80). Kierkegaard spoke of the "God-relationship" and often writes in such a manner as to indicate that no one can have true self-actualization without coming through the existential sphere to a faith in God. Both Kierkegaard and Tennyson are Christian in their philosophy, albeit not traditional in their Christianity. Of course, their philosophies are not identical. For example, Tennyson holds a very different view of morality than that expressed by Kirkegaard in *Either/Or* and other of his writings. However, their philosophies do bear enough similarities to conclude that Tennyson's faith was analogous to Kierkegaard's philosophy—it was an existential-like faith.

Individuality, Choice, And Free Will

At the heart of existential philosophy is the concept of the individual. Instead of looking to the ethical good that is best for everyone, as philosophers since the days of Plato have done, existentialism is concerned with concrete individual existence. Kierkegaard wrote, "One must learn himself before knowing anything else (γνωθι σεαυτον)" (Malantschuk 12). The Greek term literally means knowing one's self. Coming to an understanding of self, according to Kierkegaard, is essential to knowing truth, because truth is the subjective experience of actualization of self. Kierkegaard believed that

> Individuality is the true period in the development of creation. As everyone knows, a period is written when the meaning is completed, which can also be expressed (looking backwards) by saying that the meaning is there. Thus not until individuality is given is the meaning completed or is there meaning in creation, and in this way we see the possibility of reducing all philosophy to one single proposition. (Malantschuk 12)

Being able to come to individuality is the key to all of philosophy, as far as Kierkegaard is concerned. Kierkegaard recognizes that there are universal laws of existence that apply in "their abstract generality," but that each individual has the responsibility to interpret his own personal existence "in light of these universal truths" (Malantschuk 215). For the existentialist, the attempt to form a system by which all people are to be guided is an abdication of the responsibility

of free will and individual choice. He believes that individuals form their own natures by the choices that they make, and that those choices and natures can only be judged subjectively. Unlike most existentialists, Kierkegaard views Christianity as the only true explanation of the world. This fact places Christianity in a unique situation:

> Consequently, only Christianity brings unity and meaning to existence, but the same Christianity also places every single individual before the qualitative choice and gives him a task for eternity; therefore existence cannot be understood as finalized.
>
> (Malantshuk 361)

The process of finding individuality is one that continues forever, and it is based on the choices made by each individual, according to religious existential philosophy.

The formation of individuality is the basis for one of Tennyson's arguments for immortality. In Section XLV Tennyson argues that humans grow for the purpose of learning and establishing who they are and that this life is wasted if they cannot remember their established self after death. He describes a newborn baby as beginning life lacking a sense of self but slowly becoming aware of individuality :

> The baby new to earth and sky,
>
> What time his tender palm is prest
>
> Against the circle of the breast,

Has never thought that "this is I";

But as he grows he gathers much,

And learns the use of "I," and "me,"

And finds "I am not what I see,

And other than the things I touch." (1-8)

In the process of self-identification and self-awareness, the child comes to realize that he is seeing the world outside of himself and that he is separate and distinct from it. This process, of course, does not end at the conclusion of babyhood but continues throughout puberty and adolescence. One of the great struggles of life is to find and become comfortable with one's individuality—to accommodate what Tennyson calls "separate mind":

So rounds he to a separate mind

From whence clear memory may begin,

As thro' the frame that binds him in

His isolation grows defined. (9-12)

The term "isolation" most often carries a negative connotation to it. However, in this case, Tennyson uses it as a synonym for individuality. The purpose of childhood and of all existence on this earth is to come to the recognition of being an individual.

Tennyson concludes this section by arguing for memory after death based on the principle that life is centered around the recognition of individuality:

> This use may lie in blood and breath,
>
> Which else were fruitless of their due,
>
> Had man to learn himself anew
>
> Beyond the second birth of Death. (13-16)

Establishing distinctiveness is the purpose of being "in blood and breath"—in life in the mortal body. All of this experience and recognition of individuality is wasted effort if the memory of individuality does not continue after death. If the dead have to start all over after death, then life on earth is pointless. On the other hand, continued remembrance of individuality gives meaning to "the second birth of Death." This phrase is a strong affirmation of immortality as it pictures death as a birth into eternal existence. Tennyson concludes, by inference, that there must be memory after death because this life is the process of preparing each person to recognize his own individuality, and that surely will not end with death. Tennyson consistently speaks of Hallam's increased awareness and knowledge after death as he continues toward perfection. The "task for eternity" of which Kierkegaard speaks is that continual growth of individuality that is experienced even after death.

Tennyson goes further and denies that each person is absorbed into the "general Soul" which would mean that individuality ends at death (Section XLVII). Kierkegaard makes a similar comment:

> According to Christian doctrine man is not to merge with God through a pantheistic fading away or in the divine ocean through

> the blotting out of all individual characteristics, but in an intensified consciousness "a person must render account for every careless word he has uttered," and even if grace blots out sin, the union with God still takes place in the personality clarified through the whole process. (Malantschuk 98)

Both Tennyson and Kierkegaard contend for the continuation of individuality and for the fact that there is always the need for personal choice. Tennyson recognizes the demands that having free will places on the individual:

> Yet none could better know than I,
>
> How much of act at human hands,
>
> The sense of human will demands
>
> By which we dare to live or die. (LXXXV 37-40)

Free will demands that we make choices, according to Tennyson. In the previous stanza of Section LXXXV he has spoken of Hallam's exalted existence, referring to him as "O solemn ghost, O crowned soul!" (36). He believes that Hallam is exalted because he has chosen to fulfill his existence. Choice is also one of the predominant aspects of existential philosophy. Animals are set in their nature, but human beings, in the existential view, have to make choices that will determine their nature. In *In Memoriam* Tennyson calls for leaving behind the level of the beasts and the emulating of the processes of evolution in each individual human's life in order to achieve the higher self in a higher race heading for a higher place (Section CXVIII). He hopes that Hallam will help him build up

the desire to continue choosing to grow (Section XLII). Tennyson develops a faith that involves the free will choice to improve as an individual, a concept also found in Kierkegaardian existentialism.

Anxiety and Honest Doubt

The path to self-actualization, and to God, requires the individual to go through doubt, according to Kierkegaard; it is not "a doubt about this or that, but about all" (Thulstrip 300). In other words, the doubt, also called anxiety or dread, is ultimately a fear of coming into nothingness. Kierkegaard views this anxiety as the only way to find God:

> I contemplate the order of nature in the hope of finding God, and I see omnipotence and wisdom; but I also see much else that disturbs my mind and excites anxiety. The sum of all this is an objective uncertainty. But it is for this very reason that the inwardness becomes as intense as it is, for it embraces this objective uncertainty with the entire passion of the infinite.
>
> (Buckley 125)

Kierkegaard believes that the "objective uncertainty," or doubt, should be a part of what he calls the "appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness" (Buckley 125). He is convinced that this doubt brings about the inner truth and that the existing individual cannot obtain any higher truth than that found through this doubt. Buckley notes, "such truth is apparently close to the faith that lives in

'honest doubt,' doubt that the physical order can in itself provide spiritual certainty" (Buckley 125). Kierkegaard maintains that this type of doubt is not simply intellectual, but instead it is, by his definition, existential (Thulstrup 309). It is a part of existence and a portion of the process of finding self and God.

"Honest doubt" is a major principle of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. This doubt is similar to the doubt or anxiety of Kierkegaard's philosophy. In Section XCVI Tennyson deals specifically with honest doubt. He begins in the first stanza of the section by describing a simple woman of faith who objects to the concept of doubt:

> You say, but with no touch of scorn,
>
> Sweet-hearted, you, whose light blue eyes
>
> Are tender over drowning flies,
>
> You tell me, doubt is Devil-born. (1-4)

Some have conjectured that the woman of this section is Emily Sellwood, who would eventually marry Tennyson. Whether that is the case or not, even such a kind soul questions the concept of honest doubt, viewing any move from absolute unquestioning faith as demonic. Tennyson contrasts this attitude in the next stanza by describing a man who has wrestled with doubt, his good friend Hallam:

> I know not: one indeed I knew
>
> In many a subtle question versed,
>
> Who touch'd a jarring lyre at first,
>
> But ever strove to make it true [...]. (5-8)

Hallam's search for faith is described in terms of one who is trying to learn to play the lyre. At first he does not play well: the sound is jarring. But he continually strives to play it as the lyre ought to be played, in other words to develop a strong faith. Tennyson continues to speak of Hallam's growth in faith:

> Perplext in faith, but pure in deeds,
>
> At last he beat his music out.
>
> There lives more faith in honest doubt,
>
> Believe me, than in half the creeds. (9-12)

Even though Hallam at one time struggled with faith, he was always one who acted appropriately, who was "pure in deeds." Finally, however, he is able to find the music of his faith and becomes an expert player of the lyre, figuratively speaking.

Tennyson, like Kierkegaard, views doubt rather than the absolute creeds of the various religious organizations as the means to finding truth. Hallam fought with the doubts and won:

> He fought his doubts and gather'd strength,
>
> He would not make his judgment blind,
>
> He faced the spectres of his 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 [...]. (13-20)

In Tennyson's view, the doubts serve as an agent that purifies and strengthens. Hallam was not going to rush blindly into a judgment in matters of faith without questioning the basis for his faith. He found that basis by facing the "spectres of his mind." Again this is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's philosophy. Hallam overcame the spectres of doubt, laid them to rest, and came at last to the faith that Tennyson describes.

Hallam's journey through doubt brings him to a "stronger faith," a faith that is his own. Through the avenue of honest doubt, he comes to a relationship with God in which He abides with him even in the midst of darkness. God can turn the darkness into light, and, therefore, He is with Hallam even in the dark, and not only in the light of day (16-20). Tennyson compares the relationship that Hallam had with God to Moses when he communed with God on Mount Sinai, finding comfort even in the darkness on the mountain because of his closeness to God, while at the same time the Israelites below made gods of gold. He compares the faith of Hallam found through honest doubt to Moses' coming into the presence of God; the creeds of the established religions he compares to the gods of gold made while Moses was in God's presence. Hallam Tennyson confirms the accuracy of this conclusion:

> The stronger faith of Moses—found in the darkness of the cloud through commune with the Power therein dwelling—is of a higher

> order than the creeds of those who walk by sight rather than insight. (Ross 62)

Walking by "insight" is very much in line with the existential philosophy of self-actualization and coming to God through anxiety or doubt. Buckley notes:

> True self-awareness, as *The Sickness unto Death* tells us, is born, paradoxically, of man's despair, the possibility of which is his "advantage over the beast," since in the deepest despair the soul faces its fear of imminent annihilation, "struggle with death" but comes to know the agonizing life-in-death, the torment of "not to be able to die" or prelude to acceptance of its indestructible obligation. Having also "fought with Death" and reached the level of total or metaphysical anxiety, the poet likewise finds his acute self-consciousness an essential element in his final self-realization. (126)

The "honest doubt" of Tennyson is essential to true knowledge of self and of God, as is anxiety, despair, and doubt to Kierkegaard. In both cases, doubt is an avenue to faith and to God, not based on empirical and cognitive means but, rather, on the subjective realization from within the individual.

Subjectivism and The Leap of Faith

Tennyson and Kierkegaard both come to the conclusion that truth is found only by subjective means. "I feel" is superior to "I know." Kierkegaard taught that

subjectivity is truth (Malantshak 12). By Kierkegaard's definition, Tennyson is "the subjective thinker." Kierkegaard means by this phrase "one who 'seeks to understand the abstract determination of being human in terms of this particular existing human being'" (Buckley 126-127). It is "through passionate feeling and not by logical processes, the individual man may unify his life and achieve the dignity of selfhood" (Buckley 126). Subjectivity is the key to realizing the true self and the key to finding God for both Tennyson and Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard does not believe that truth can be objective because of the absurdity and paradoxical nature of existence. A human being is a paradox of an eternal soul abiding in a finite body. Christ as infinite Deity in an earthly mortal body is an absurdity. By "absurdity" he does not mean impossibility of existence, but rather the impossibility of being rationally explained and understood. When Tennyson looked at "nature red in tooth and claw," he saw in that brutality a conflict between nature's reality and a loving God. Kierkegaard would simply admit the conflict as part of the absurdity of life and view it as having no relationship to faith in general or to God's existence in particular. Tennyson's struggles with faith came when he tried to find God through nature and to reconcile nature with God. When he left behind the attempt to find God through rationality he was able to come to a satisfying faith. He says concerning his faith:

> God is love, transcendent, all-pervading! We do not get this faith from nature or the world. If we look to nature alone, full of perfection and imperfection, she tells us that God is disease,

> murder and rapine. We get this faith from ourselves, from what is highest within us. (*Memoirs I* 314)

He notes the paradoxical character of nature and states that God cannot be found through nature. The subjective is the avenue to faith and to God. That which is highest within the individual overcomes the absurdities of the universe.

In Section CXXIV Tennyson clearly enunciates the subjective faith in God. He begins by pointing out that, whether in doubt or faith, there is a recognition of the eternal:

> That which we dare invoke to bless;
>   Our dearest faith; our ghastliest doubt;
>   He, They, One, All; within, without;
> The Power in darkness who we guess,
>
> I found Him not in world or sun
>   Or eagle's wings, or insect's eyes;
>   Nor thro' the questions men may try,
> The petty cobwebs we have spun. (1-8)

In searching for God, the "Power in darkness," Tennyson speaks of coming to a belief in God as finding the one whom "we guess." No matter where he is in the journey from the depths of despair and doubt to the heights of faith, he never lets go of the realization of the Eternal Spirit that surrounded him within and without. Yet he denies the concept of finding God by rationality and "proofs": He

specifically rejects the argument from design as a means to finding God. He looks at the world and sun and the intricacies of nature and finds conflict, contradiction, or in Kierkegaard's terminology, absurdity. He also does not accept the rationalistic systems that attempt to find God by cognition and logic. He refers to these efforts as "petty cobwebs." It seems that he believes we catch only ourselves in these cobwebs, without coming any closer to the realization of God.

In the next two stanzas, he speaks of how he overcomes the vacillations of faith:

> If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep,
>
> I heard a voice "believe no more"
>
> And heard an ever-breaking shore
>
> That tumbled in the Godless deep,
>
> A warmth within the breast would melt
>
> The freezing reason's colder part,
>
> And like a man in wrath the heart
>
> Stood up and answer'd "I have felt." (9-16)

The physical world and the materialism that it represents attempt to keep Tennyson from believing. His faith could weaken and he would be called to disbelief by what he could see in nature. He continues, however, with how he overcomes these attempts of the world to weaken his faith. The warmth within

his breast is that which is highest in his nature. This subjective feeling can overcome reason, which he describes as "freezing." Reason for Tennyson could only lead to disbelief. Only through subjectivity could he warm up and know God. His heart answers, and does so with the vengeance and heat of a man who is angry. His heart's response is "I have felt." Hence all spiritual reality, including self-actualization and coming to God, is the result of the heart's control from within the individual, not only separate from but in opposition to reason.

He describes in the next few lines being lost in doubt and fear, yet not being too far from God:

> No, like a child in doubt and fear:
>
> But that blind clamour made me wise;
>
> Then was I as a child that cries,
>
> But, crying, knows his father near [. . .]. (17-20)

Tennyson's state of doubt and fear is much like Kierkegaard's anxiety. The one good thing that the "clamour" of the physical world accomplishes for him is that it makes him wise. It helps him to understand that he cannot find God through cognition and the realities of this world. This knowledge moves him nearer to understanding, although not totally away from fear and doubt. It does move him to a subjective realization that God is near, even in his times of doubt.

This subjective discovery leads him to self-realization, as the next stanza records:

> And what I am beheld again

What is, and no man understands;

And out of darkness came the hands

That reaches thro' nature, moulding men. (21-24)

Tennyson comes again to realize who he is, and this realization is an existential type of recognition of self. Kierkegaard speaks of a "leap of faith" by which men jump from the reality of the world to the ideal and actuality of faith. He believes that this qualitative leap is the only way to find the faith that overcomes doubt. This leap of faith brings one to God and provides the means for self-actualization. It also takes the individual beyond what he can know and brings him to that which is unknowable yet real. While Tennyson does not speak specifically of a leap, he does perceive the need to go beyond what men can understand. He describes this movement to the unknown in terms of God's hands reaching through nature to mold the individual. Again, Tennyson and Kierkegaard are very similar in their views on subjectivity and its importance to the fulfillment of the individual.

Tennyson develops a faith that allows him to grasp the belief in God in spite of the questions that nature and science have brought him. It is an existential-like faith. It would be inaccurate to say that Tennyson is an existentialist, since Kierkegaard was just developing this concept as Tennyson wrote *In Memoriam.* However, it does seem fair to surmise that Tennyson would be very comfortable with many of the principles of Kierkegaard. Likewise, Kierkegaard would very likely have expressed approval of several of the

concepts that are presented by Tennyson in *In Memoriam,* not the least of which would have been his salute to subjectivism: “I have felt.”

CHAPTER THREE

"Is This The End?" - - The Question of Immortality

While Tennyson's search for faith took him through several stages, it was ultimately a progressive journey. His struggle to maintain his conviction concerning human immortality was more of a vacillation between questioning and assurance. At the lowest ebb of his faith he desperately held onto the idea of immortality. His conviction was severely shaken and bruised at times, but it was never completely shattered. In his times of strongest certainty he still had questions that he wished he could have answered about life beyond the grave. *In Memoriam* records Tennyson's search to strengthen one of his major religious tenets. He viewed immortality, along with the idea of a providential God, as concepts that were superior to any other philosophy or scientific principle. It is important to note that for Tennyson immortality is not simply an existence beyond the grave but, rather, it is the continual existence of a cognitive individual who is capable both of memory and of growth after death.

He is called upon to test his conviction as he comes face to face with the question of immortality at Hallam's death. In Section XII Tennyson is imagining that the ship carrying Hallam's body is nearing England. In spirit he takes flight as a dove flies and approaches the ship. He states his feelings as he looks on the ship:

And saying; "Comes he thus, my friend?

Is this the end of all my care?"

And circle moaning in the air:

"Is this the end? Is this the end?" (13-16)

Through the imagery of the dove he pictures his feeling of loss. The dove here is a symbol of the helplessness and vulnerability that Tennyson feels. He asks the question that permeates *In Memoriam:* Is this the end?

In Tennyson's view, if death is "the end," then there is no reason for life on this earth. It is this futility that he expresses in Section XXXIV. Tennyson first states that life itself teaches immortality; then he concludes that if it does not, then life in this world is a waste:

My own dim life should teach me this,

That life shall live for evermore,

Else earth is darkness at the core,

And dust and ashes all that is;

This round of green, this orb of flame,

Fantastic beauty; such as lurks

In some wild Poet, when he works

Without a conscience or an aim. (1-8)

If having life within him does not teach him that life will never end, then this world has no light and the grave is all that humanity can look forward to as its final

destination. All the beauty of the earth and the sun are nothing more substantive than the imaginings of a wild poet. If there is no eternity, then there is no providential guidance; the universe of man is guided "without a conscience or an aim." He continues his thought in the next two stanzas as he comments that if there is no immortality there is little reason to live:

> What then were God to such as I?
>
> Twere hardly worth my while to choose
>
> Of things all mortal, or to use
>
> A little patience ere I die;
>
> T'were best at once to sink in peace,
>
> Like birds the charming serpent draws,
>
> To drop head-foremost in the jaws
>
> Of vacant darkness and to cease. (9-16)

"God" is an empty term rather than a providential Creator if there is nothing beyond the grave. Why even bother with making choices in life if all that exists is mortality? Why wait for death to come, why patiently endure until the grave if there is no hope beyond this world? He pictures death as a "charming serpent" with jaws of "vacant darkness," the emptiness and darkness that fills the grave. In Christian theology death entered the world because Satan appeared as a serpent who charmed Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. Like Satan, death has a deceiving appeal, especially in times of distress and despair. If there is no

immortality, Tennyson argues, then it is best for humans to act like the bird that is charmed by the snake. Instead of patiently living life and enduring its troubles, the individual would be better off simply to drop into death's jaws and cease to exist. For Tennyson the concept of human immortality is so crucial that life is not worth living if it is not true. As he deals with Hallam's death, and with the various philosophies and scientific theories with which he comes into contact, immortality remains the ultimate focus and central theme of his struggle to deal with life and with death.

AFFIRMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY

As Tennyson wrestles with the issues of life and death in writing the poems that make up *In Memoriam,* he composes many passages that are affirmations of his concept of immortality. As early as Section IX Tennyson makes a passing reference to the hope of immortality:

> My Arthur, whom I shall not see
> Till all my widow'd race be run;
> Dear as the mother to the son,
> More than my brothers are to me. (17-20)

Having lost his beloved companion, Tennyson looks on his life as a "widow'd race." He will not see Hallam, whom he held so dear, and who helped to fulfill him, until this life ends. The inference is that he believes he will see him and know him after death, an inherent reference to immortality.

In Sections XLI-XLVII Tennyson further argues that he will see Hallam and that memory exists beyond the grave. He begins by presenting his fear that Hallam will no longer know him at death in Section XLI. In the first stanza of this section, he speaks of Hallam's continued growth while he was alive:

Thy spirit ere our fatal loss

Did ever rise from high to higher;

As mounts the heavenward altar-fire,

As flies the lighter to the gross. (1-4)

Tennyson is convinced that Hallam was among the very best of all humanity and still moving upward toward perfection, as the fire and smoke from an altar drift upward into heaven. He felt that Hallam's spirit, knowledge, and wisdom were growing fuller as he lived his life but in later sections of the poem it becomes obvious that Tennyson believes that the upward movement continues after death.

Part of Tennyson's distress over the separation from Hallam is that he cannot know if his friend is continuing to grow:

But thou art turn'd to something strange,

And I have lost the links that bound

Thy changes; here upon the ground,

No more partaker of thy change. (5-8)

Death has removed Hallam from his physical form and has changed him into a form which Tennyson calls "strange." While Hallam was alive, Tennyson could

watch and even participate in the changes in Hallam's life. That joint participation ended at Hallam's death, as the links of earthly friendship and fellowship were broken by death. In the next stanza Tennyson expresses the futility of wishing to be with his friend:

> Deep folly! Yet that this could be –
>
> That I could wing my will with might
>
> To leap the grades of life and light,
>
> And flash at once, my friend, to thee! (9-12)

While he recognizes the uselessness of his desire to go to Hallam, he still feels the urge to overcome the gulf between them and simply to will himself into the presence of his friend, immediately if it were possible.

At the same time that Tennyson desires to will himself into the presence of his beloved companion, he also experiences certain fears of death:

> For tho' my nature rarely yields
>
> To that vague fear implied in death;
>
> Nor shudders at the gulfs beneath,
>
> The howlings from forgotten fields [. . .]. (13-16)

He is not accustomed to being afraid of death. He does not usually fear death or feel concern about those that are dead. Ross notes, concerning those "howlings":

> Hallam Tennyson refers the reader to the Trimmers in Dante's *Inferno*, those spirits who, never having made a commitment either

> to good or evil while alive, are denied entrance either to heaven or hell after death. They 'lived without blame, and without praise. They are mixed with that caitiff choir of the angels, who were not rebellious, nor were faithful to God; but were for themselves. Heaven chased them forth to keep its beauty from impair; and deep Hell receives them not, for the wicked would have some glory over them' (*Inferno* III,35-42).
>
> (Ross 28)

Tennyson does not normally dwell in worry about these souls and the others that have already died or about death itself. Following Hallam's death, however, death is a concern to him as he fears that his relationship with Hallam will never be renewed:

> 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,
>
> Tho' following with an upward mind
> The wonders that have come to thee,
> Thro' all the secular to-be,
> But evermore a life behind. (17-24)

He does not express fear over the prospect of facing death, but rather at the possibility of dying and never knowing Hallam again. Like a ghost coming across the moor with the setting of the sun, doubts concerning his future relationship with Hallam enter his mind. This doubt is not about immortality, but is, rather, the fear that he will no longer be found as a friend to his former earthly companion. Tennyson feels as if he has been left behind forever as in his mind he is imagining the wonders of the eternity into which he believes Hallam has gone. He believes that Hallam will experience these wonders while life continues on the earth. Tennyson fears, however, that in death all of this life is totally left behind, which would mean that Hallam would have no memory of him or future relationship with him. For Tennyson, memory and recognition are crucial facets of immortality.

In Section XLII the fears begin to ease for Tennyson. He expresses the hope that he will learn from Hallam in the future, inherently implying the immortality of Hallam and of Tennyson as well. In the first stanza of this section, he reiterates his feelings of inferiority to Hallam even while he lived on the earth:

> I vex my heart with fancies dim:
>
> He still outstript me in the race;
>
> It was but unity of place
>
> That made me dream I ranked with him. (1-4)

The worries concerning his relationship to Hallam after death, the sense that "I shall be thy mate no more" (XLI, 20) and that Hallam has surpassed him in

experience, are disturbing Tennyson. He calls them "fancies dim" and realizes that he should not be concerned with being equal with Hallam now because he was never his equal while Hallam lived. Their unity was not one of equality but of "place," the dramatic idea of sharing the same locale or scene.

Tennyson expresses his hope that he can at least be close once again to Hallam, in another "unity of place," where he can learn from his friend:

> And so may Place retain us still,
>
> And he the much-beloved again,
>
> A lord of large experience, train
>
> To riper growth the mind and will [...]. (5-8)

Tennyson's hope is that he will once again share a close proximity to Hallam, a shared "Place," after death. In that reunited state Hallam would once again be his beloved companion. Tennyson views his friend as having been superior to himself while they shared the earthly life and believes that Hallam has now further increased his superior knowledge. Tennyson's wish is that he can be taught by the greater experience and wisdom of Hallam how to continue to grow. He expects growth of "mind" or intellect and feels that Hallam can direct him to greater knowledge. Beyond that, he wants his friend to help him to develop a stronger will, the determination to continue to improve and grow onward toward perfection. Tennyson believes that continual growth is dependant on the free-will choice of the individual, and here he envisions that Hallam will not only help him

with knowledge, but also with the desire for continual learning. The next stanza expresses the joy that this learning experience would bring:

> And what delights can equal those
>
> That stir the spirit's inner deeps,
>
> When one that loves but knows not, reaps
>
> A truth from one that loves and knows? (9-12)

There could be no greater delight, in Tennyson's view, than to be taught new and exciting truths. He again expresses the superiority of Hallam. He describes himself as "one that loves but knows not" and describes Hallam as "one that loves and knows." The expression "reaps a truth" indicates that Tennyson will be able to harvest the truths that have been brought to full spiritual maturity by the natural intellect of Hallam as a result of his experiences following death. This section affirms Tennyson's belief in immortality and his hope that he would again be joined with Hallam after death.

Tennyson's view of the immortality of cognitive individuals prompts him to examine and to respond to various theories concerning immortality. In Section XLIII he considers the theory that the dead are for a time unconscious. He uses the motif of a garden and flowers to illustrate his concepts of eternity:

> If sleep and Death be truly one,
>
> And every spirit's folded bloom
>
> Thro' all its intervital gloom
>
> In some long trance should slumber on;

> Unconscious at the sliding hour,
>
> Bare of body, might it last
>
> And silent traces of the past
>
> Be all the colour of the flower:
>
> So there were nothing lost to man;
>
> So that still garden of the souls
>
> In many a figured leaf enrolls
>
> The total world since life began [. . .]. (1-12)

Tennyson is not stating that he believes the dead are unconscious. Were that so, however, the fact will not prevent an eventual reunion with Hallam. If sleep and death are the same, perhaps when one passes through death into eternity, described by the phrase "intervital gloom," he or she simply folds up consciousness like a flower folds in its blooms. Death would then be like sleeping through a long trance. If death is a form of bloom-like sleep, and the dead simply fold up their "blooms," then the memories of the past will still exist, though not consciously. Tennyson paints a picture of a vast and "still" garden full of souls like flowers, and within the folded leaves and blooms are all the memories that each individual has experienced. As a whole this garden contains all the memories and knowledge of all human existence from the time the world

began. Thus, he argues that in death there is the preservation of, rather than the loss of, the legacy of human experience.

As he continues, he takes this general hypothesis and makes application to one individual--Hallam:

> And love will last as pure and whole
>
> As when he loved me here in Time,
>
> And at the spiritual prime
>
> Rewaken with the dawning soul. (13-16)

If all human memory and experience is still present after death, then Hallam would still feel the love for Tennyson that he did on earth. As the life of the spirit would come forth to a new dawn of consciousness—the "spiritual prime"—then the love would simply continue unimpeded by the change of circumstances. Even if death is unconscious sleep at the start, Tennyson believes that there will be the time of what he refers to as the reawakening "with the dawning soul." He is convinced that there will be consciousness in the course of immortality. A garden is a place of rebirth and growth, and in this section that is how Tennyson envisions immortality.

Tennyson continues to examine the concept of knowledge after death in Section XLIV. Yet whereas in XLIII he considered the hypothesis that there is a period of unconsciousness, in section XLIV Tennyson discusses the unconsciousness of, or forgetfulness of, the early days of earthly life. In the first

stanza as he speaks of how humans forget their early existence on earth, he asks,

> How fares it with the happy dead?
>
> For here the man is more and more;
>
> But he forgets the days before
>
> God shut the doorways of his head [. . .]. (1-4)

The possible parallel to death disturbs Tennyson for he knows in the midst of continual growth in life, there are those things which are forgotten, as if "God shut the doorways" of our minds. Tennyson himself makes these comments on the phrase "God shut the doorways of his head":

> Closing of the skull after babyhood. The dead after this life may have no remembrance of life, like the living babe who forgets the time before the sutures of the skull are closed, yet the living babe grows in knowledge, and though the remembrance of his earliest days has vanished, yet with his increasing knowledge there comes a dreamy vision of what has been. (Ross 19)

The fact that humans forget the earliest moments of their lives does not keep them from growing in knowledge. Since this is true, Tennyson concludes that the same could very well be true of the dead, even if they do not remember their earthly existence; yet he does not abandon hope:

> The days have vanish'd, tone and tint,
>
> And yet perhaps the hoarding sense

Gives out at times (he know not whence)

A little flash, a mystic hint;

And in the long harmonious years

(If Death so taste Lethean springs),

May some dim touch of earthly things

Surprise thee ranging with thy peers. (9-12)

It is possible for the living to have a flash of memory that seems to come from nowhere and mystifies the one who remembers, flashes of memory that for Tennyson could have implications concerning the dead. It may be that even if a deceased person cannot recall the terrestrial life, distant memory might occasionally flash through his or her being and cause that spirit to wonder at the hint of something known before.

Tennyson is, thus, not willing to concede that the dead do not remember their earthly journey. He hopes that they at least have the opportunity for snippets of those memories to come to them. Even if death functions like the waters of Lethe, the mystical river that caused those who drank of it to forget all that had happened in their past, Tennyson still is convinced that they can somehow feel the weak touch of earthly memory. He envisions Hallam walking with others that have died and being suddenly surprised as something causes him to remember, albeit only slightly, some earthly thing. Tennyson believes that

Hallam can know and remember, as he emphasizes in the last stanza of this section:

> If such a dreamy touch should fall,
>
> O turn thee round, resolve the doubt;
>
> My guardian angel will speak out
>
> In that high place, and tell thee all. (13-16)

Even if memory fails at death, Tennyson contends Hallam can remember. It is unusual to think of a guardian angel acting as an agent to the dead, as Tennyson presents it here. As is clear here and in other parts of *In Memoriam,* not only is it important to Tennyson to believe that immortality exists, but also that beyond the grave Hallam remembers him and that they will be reunited. In the previous section he has dealt with the concept of death/sleep and still concluded that memory would exist in eternity. In this section he also deals with the idea that the dead have no memory of earth and still finds the means for them to remember through flashes of memory and even angelic intervention. His conviction is growing stronger, and he is carefully answering every argument that would attempt to weaken his belief in the immortality of the fully aware individual.

Section XLV begins Tennyson's strong affirmation of memory after death. In this section he argues that humans grow for the purpose of learning and establishing who they are, and that this life is wasted if they cannot remember their established self after death. His Kierkegaardian type of emphasis on individuality is clearly seen in this passage. The individual child has

to learn "the use of 'I,' and 'me'" (6-7) as he grows toward the development of "a separate mind" (9)--the recognition of his individuality. This individuality is significant in the life on earth, but it is "fruitless" (14) if man has to learn his individuality once again after death. Tennyson's concept of immortality is that of an individual who is aware of his own distinctive existence even after having passed through "the second birth of Death" (16).

Tennyson goes even further in Section XLVI to contend that after death memory will not only continue, but it will be better. He begins with a recognition of the failure of human memory as time in this life goes by, but not after death:

> We ranging down this lower track,
>
> The path we came by, thorn and flower,
>
> Is shadow'd by the growing hour,
>
> Lest life should fail on looking back.
>
> So be it: there is no shade can last
>
> In that deep dawn behind the tomb,
>
> But clear from marge to marge shall bloom
>
> The eternal landscape of the past [. . .]. (1-8)

Tennyson's choice of words indicates his conviction that life is not over at death, but that death is the "dawn" of a new life that exists beyond the tomb. In this new existence there will be the reopening of the memories of life—from "marge to marge"—from beginning to end. Tennyson appears to be saying that all the

events of the past will become clear after death with the blooming of "the eternal landscape of the past." Not only will there be memory after death, but it will be superior to what humans can have while on the earth. He believes that he will remember after death:

> A lifelong tract of time reveal'd;
>
> The fruitful hours of still increase;
>
> Days order'd in a wealthy peace,
>
> And those five years its richest field. (9-12)

Tennyson is convinced that he will be able to recall the entirety of his life. While he will remember everything, which inherently would involve remembering the bad and unhappy parts of his life, in this stanza he concentrates on the good memories and the good times. Ultimately, however, and of significance in the context of *In Memoriam*, he believes that he will remember the five years spent in friendship with Hallam as the greatest and fullest of the times. The major force behind the memories, according to the final stanza of this section, is love:

> O Love, thy province were not large,
>
> A bounded field, nor stretching far;
>
> Look also, Love, a brooding star,
>
> A rosy warmth from marge to marge. (13-16)

Love's province is within the lives of humans, and it is the guiding force in life in Tennyson's view. It provides the "warmth" of life that will be the impetus for remembering after death. Love was not limited to just the five years with Hallam

in Tennyson's life, but instead it reached from the beginning of life throughout his life. Love is a guide like the "brooding star." Love will abide beyond the grave and will continue to guide those that have died throughout eternity and help them to remember perfectly the life that they have lived on earth and their own individuality.

Tennyson reaches back to the subject of individuality found in section XLV as he writes section XLVII. In this section, he opposes the idea that at death individuals are merged into a universal Soul, possibly simply becoming a facet of the Godhead. The first stanza states the hypothesis of merging into one Soul as the notion:

> 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 [. . .]. (1-4)

The hypothesis that at death all will be fused into the "general Soul" would again leave humans without any individuality. As Tennyson argues in section XLV, he believes that the purpose of life is to form one's own individuality and that immortality without individual identity is senseless. This life is of no value if there is no memory in the single person of his or her own life. Tennyson rejects the notion of merging into one general Soul forcefully in the second stanza of section XLVII, saying that it

> 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 [...]. (5-8)

He confidently declares that he will know Hallam when he meets him: all of the discussion concerning immortality boils down to this one affirmation. It is of the utmost priority to Tennyson to be assured and to assert confidently that he will know Hallam and that Hallam will know him after death. He continues in the next stanzas to discuss the relationship between himself and Hallam after death:

And we shall sit at endless feast,

Enjoying each the other's good:

What vaster dream can hit the mood

Of Love on earth? He seeks at least

Upon the last and sharpest height,

Before the spirits fade away,

Some landing-place, to clasp and say,

"Farewell! We lose ourselves in light." (9-16)

They will know each other and will enjoy each other's company just as they had done on earth, but in a more complete and satisfying way. In this eternal companionship, they will have reached the fulfillment of the love that they had shared on the earth. As he has done with several other theories of what happens after death, Tennyson rejects the theory of the universal Soul. But, as

he has done in each case, he comments on what would happen if the theory were true. In this instance he says that even if all individuals merge into one that Love would provide them the opportunity to say goodbye to one another. Tennyson is never willing to give in to any concept that would cause him to believe that he would never see or recognize Hallam again. The sections from XLI-XLVII solidly affirm Tennyson's conviction concerning immortality and further clarify it to show that he believes he will know Hallam and will enjoy eternal fellowship with him.

The last two sections written for *In Memoriam* were the "Epilogue" and the "Prologue." In both of these, Tennyson solemnly and clearly confirms his belief that Hallam has moved on to immortality. In lines 137-140 of the "Epilogue" he says:

> Whereof the man that with me trod
>
> This planet was a noble type
>
> Appearing ere the times were ripe,
>
> That friend of mine who lives in God [. . .].

Having gone through all of the struggles with faith and hope, Tennyson is able in the end to affirm that Hallam is not simply dead and in the grave. He is convinced that this very important concept of immortality to which he has always clung is true and that Hallam is waiting for him to join him in the presence of God.

In view of his conviction that he will be with Hallam in eternity, Tennyson apologizes for his grieving so deeply over Hallam's death in the "Prologue," lines 37-40:

> Forgive my grief for one removed,
>
> Thy creature, whom I found so fair.
>
> I trust he lives in thee, and there
>
> I find him worthier to be loved.

Here the word "trust" conveys a sense of confidence and certainty. He is totally convinced that Hallam lives with God, and that conviction carries with it all the implications of immortality and the future reconciliation that are at the center of Tennyson's search in *In Memoriam.*

QUESTIONS CONCERNING IMMORTALITY

As Tennyson contemplates immortality there are various questions, beyond just the basic question of the reality of immortality, which are brought to his mind. Section XXXI uses the biblical account of the raising of Lazarus to ask the question of why there is not more revealed to us about what is beyond the grave. In the biblical record, found in John 11, Jesus is aware of the sickness and death of his friend Lazarus but intentionally waits to go to his home until he has been in the grave for four days. Jesus did this so that when he raised him from the dead it would be an obvious miracle. Lazarus had been in the grave long enough that, when Jesus told them to open it, Martha, Lazarus' sister, said,

"Lord, by this time he stinketh for he hath been dead four days" (John 11:39). It is interesting that the shortest verse in the English Bible, found in John 11:35, conveys a powerful picture: "Jesus wept." Even though Jesus, according to the Bible, knew he would raise Lazarus from the dead, he still mourned that Lazarus had been through the process of dying and mourned at the hurt that Lazarus' sisters, Mary and Martha, were experiencing. This realization of Jesus's grief would seem to be a comforting thought for Tennyson as he mourned the loss of his friend Hallam. In Section XXXI, however, he is wondering why Lazarus does not reveal more about what happens in death. In the first stanza of the section, Tennyson speaks of Lazarus's coming home following his resurrection from his grave, which was in a cave with a stone rolled over the mouth:

> When Lazarus left his charnel-cave,
>
> And home to Mary's house return'd,
>
> Was this demanded—if he yearn'd
>
> To hear her weeping by his grave? (1-4)

As Tennyson thinks about the account of Lazarus, he wonders, first of all, whether Mary asked him if he grieved at hearing her crying beside the grave, and if he could hear her as she cried. This question is one that Tennyson wishes to ask Hallam. In Section XXXVIII he poses the question of whether Hallam can hear what he says or does on this earth. He speaks of moving around with weary steps, having lost his hope for life, of singing songs that he loves to sing

and finding only a small comfort in them. Then, in lines 9-12 he wonders if Hallam hears him:

> If any care for what is here
>
> Survive in spirits render'd free,
>
> Then are these songs I sing of thee
>
> Not all ungrateful to thine ears.

Is there any connection that allows the dead to hear the living? This question involves the entire issue of exactly where one is after death. It would be comforting if it could only be known if the dead can hear those who are still alive. Tennyson wonders if this question was ever asked, and why it was not answered in the account of Lazurus's resurrection in the Bible.

Beyond the question of the dead hearing those who are still alive, Tennyson wonders in the second stanza of Section XXXI if Lazurus's sister asked him where he was while his body was in the grave:

> "Where wert thou, brother, those four days?"
>
> There lives no record of reply,
>
> Which telling what it is to die
>
> Had surely added praise to praise. (5-8)

Mary had the opportunity to ask Lazarus the questions that Tennyson longs to have answered: "What does happen after death?" "Where do humans go at death?" Tennyson notes that there is no record of an answer to these questions. He does not know if they were ever asked, whether they were asked and never

answered, or whether both the question and answers are simply not recorded. Tennyson marvels that no record of Lazarus's telling about his experience is recorded. Surely, in Tennyson's view, that would have brought even greater praise to Lazarus and particularly to Jesus.

In the last two stanzas of the section, Tennyson continues to marvel that nothing is recorded about what happened to Lazarus while he was dead:

From every house the neighbours meet
The streets were fill'd with joyful sound,
A solemn gladness even crown'd
The purple brow of Olivet.

Behold a man raised up by Christ!
The rest remaineth unreveal'd;
He told it not; or something sealed
The lips of that Evangelist. (9-16)

In the midst of all of the excitement that surrounded the resurrection of Lazarus and throughout the celebrating that took place, all that was really known was that Jesus raised a man from the dead. Again, Tennyson does not know if Lazarus did not tell what his experiences were, or if something kept John from writing the things that Lazarus said. Tennyson's frustration at not being told what happened to Lazarus at death is a microcosm of the frustrations that are met in every

attempt to come to an understanding of immortality. There are always many more questions than answers.

The question of memory beyond death is an integral part of immortality and one of the major concerns that Tennyson has in *In Memoriam.* This is evidenced by the further inquiry that is presented by Tennyson: does Hallam remember him beyond the grave? In Section LXIV he deals with this question. He compares Hallam to a man that has started out with lowly beginnings but who grows to political power. The implication is that the earthly life Hallam lived was the modest start and that he has moved on from that humble origin. Tennyson makes this point by describing a man who comes from "low estate" in a small village (1-4). He tells of his ability to break the bonds of a modest beginning and grab hold of the "skirts of happy chance." He overcomes those obstacles that would keep him from success as he wrestles with his "evil star" (5-8). By the force of his personality he makes his abilities known to the world and assumes power in the government, even to the point of influencing the king as he makes decisions (9-12). He climbs higher and higher until he stands at the pinnacle of fortune, where he becomes the hope of both the people of his land and the whole world (13-16). In the last three stanzas Tennyson questions whether such a man would remember his childhood friend. He describes the memory of the childhood friend as a dream in the fifth stanza:

> Yet feels, as in a pensive dream,
>
> When all his active powers are still,

A distant dearness in the hill,

A secret sweetness in the stream,

The limit of his narrower fate,

While yet beside its vocal springs

He play'd at counselors and kings,

With one that was his earliest mate;

Who ploughs with pain his native lea

And reaps the labour of his hands,

Or in the furrow musing stands;

"Does my old friend remember me?" (17-28)

It must be remembered that Tennyson is comparing Hallam to this man, and the questions he is asking are by inference applicable to Hallam, who has moved on beyond the place of his earthly life. The man can have memories of the days when he and his friend played counselors and kings beside the springs of his homeland. Now the man has become a counselor to kings far removed from his childhood playmate. Again, Tennyson is picturing the days of joy that he and Hallam had spent together in the "childhood" of this earthly life. Tennyson feels that he has been left behind, compelled to continue the difficulties and troubles of this world, while his friend has moved on to a better life. This entire section rests

on that one final inquiry—one that comes from the heart of the poet who is missing his friend: "Does he remember me?"

Tennyson offers a hopeful answer to the question of whether or not Hallam remembers him in Section LXV. He says that love will not be lost:

> Sweet soul, do with me as thou wilt;
>
> I lull a fancy trouble-tost
>
> With "Love's too precious to be lost,
>
> A little grain shall not be spilt."
>
> And in that solace can I sing,
>
> Till out of painful phrases wrought
>
> There flutters up a happy thought,
>
> Self-balanced on the lightsome wing [. . .]. (1-8)

Tennyson refers to the poems that he is writing as the "painful phrases." In his loneliness he writes the poetry, but occasionally a happy thought will come in that provides a counterbalance against the pain. Those thoughts are based on the belief in the superiority of love. He ends the section with words that he finds particularly comforting:

> Since we deserved the name of friends,
>
> And thine effect so lives in me,
>
> A part of mine may live in thee
>
> And move thee on to noble ends. (9-12)

Tennyson believes that because of the love they had shared on earth, they had earned the right to be called friends. He knows that Hallam is still having an impact on his life. Hallam was the driving force behind these poems that would be brought together in *In Memoriam*. Tennyson asserts that surely if Hallam still lives in his heart, then he also must live in Hallam's. As Hallam helped to guide him to better goals in his life, he hopes that Hallam's memories of him are helping to propel him in the direction of higher and nobler purposes in eternity. He believes that Hallam remembers him and takes great comfort in that thought.

The higher and nobler purposes which Tennyson hopes that Hallam will attain bring to mind another of the poet's questions concerning immortality: Is there continual improvement or evolution beyond the grave? The idea that humans are always improving was a basic concept during much of the Victorian age. It has already been noted that Tennyson was influenced by evolutionary theory and the scientific writings of his day. The theory of continual improvement of humans on the earth led very naturally into the hypothesis that men continued to improve as they moved past death and through immortality. The possibility of continued improvement after death is mentioned throughout *In Memoriam*. The "muse" in section LVIII says to the one who mourns, "Abide a little longer here, / And thou shalt take a nobler leave" (11-12). Death is the doorway into a nobler life according to the muse. Tennyson believes that Hallam is living a life that "bears immortal fruit" and that he is "In those offices that suit / The full-grown energies of heaven" (XL, 18-20). He did not stop bearing fruit because of death,

but, instead, he is now bearing immortal fruit that is worthy of his position in heaven. Hallam is in a "second state sublime" (LXI, 1), according to Tennyson. While Hallam may be forgotten on the earth and the things that might have been done are unknown, Tennyson says:

> So here shall silence guard thy fame;
>
> But somewhere, out of human view,
>
> Whate'er thy hands are set to do
>
> Is wrought with tumult of acclaim. (LXXV, 17-20)

He believes, as is often stated in the poem, that Hallam is far superior to him as he has moved into a better realm.

Section LXXXII is representative of the passages that speak of continued upward movement after death. In the previous section, Tennyson has begun to accept the death of Hallam. He begins this section by saying he has no feud with death, that death simply brings about changes:

> I wage not any feud with Death
>
> For changes wrought on form and face;
>
> No lower life that earth's embrace
>
> May breed with him, can fright my faith. (1-4)

Tennyson is not fighting with death because he realizes that the changes that death brings are simply changes of "form and face." The death of anything on earth is not going to change his belief. This is a strong answer to the arguments that occur in Sections LVI–LVII that the deaths of individuals and types are

proofs against immortality. In the second stanza Tennyson elaborates on the process of growth that is a part of that eternal state:

> Eternal process moving on,
>
> From state to state the spirit walks;
>
> And these are but the shatter'd stalks,
>
> Or ruin'd chrysalis of one. (5-8)

Life, death, and immortality are all part of the "eternal process." The spirit evolves from one state to the next. The body that is left behind at death is nothing more than stalks that have been torn apart by the harvesting of the fruit. This body is like the cocoon or "chrysalis" that is left behind as a caterpillar evolves into a butterfly. The spirit moves on from one stage to another, always improving and heading onward in the direction of perfection.

Not only is the human body just a wasted shell left behind by the soul that moves on, but the virtue and worth of each human being will continue after death:

> Nor blame I Death, because he bare
>
> The use of virtue out of earth:
>
> I know transplanted human worth
>
> Will bloom to profit, otherwhere. (9-12)

As is often the case in this poem, Tennyson uses the garden motif to draw the picture of continued growth. Like a flower, the individual will bloom and grow even more beautiful in his or her virtues after death. It is a continuous growth

and evolution to a higher form. Having said all of this, Tennyson concludes this section by voicing his only complaint against death:

> For this alone on Death I wreak
>
> The wrath that garners in my heart;
>
> He put our lives so far apart
>
> We cannot hear each other speak. (13-16)

In this one grievance against death, there is a great deal implied about his view of immortality. His anger is not predicated on the belief that Hallam is forever gone with no hope of immortality. He does not have a problem with death due to being convinced that death has wiped out all memory of him in Hallam's heart. There is no disagreement with death on the basis that he is afraid that he will not be able to see and be with Hallam anymore. None of those matters worry him. He has come to grips with his belief in immortality and now stands firmly on the principle of everlasting life. The Tennyson of section LXXXII would answer the question of the Tennyson of section XII, "Is the end? Is this the end?" with an emphatic "No, the best is yet to come!"

CONCLUSION

It seems only fitting that this study end with an oxymoron: let us conclude with the beginning. The "Prologue," written last, is actually the final piece of the puzzle that fits together to become *In Memoriam.* In it Tennyson summarizes and concludes *In Memoriam*, even though he places it at the beginning of his work. It would be difficult to find a better summation of the study of faith and doubt in *In Memoriam* than the "Prologue" provides. A brief examination of it will help to bring together many of the different elements that make up Tennyson's masterpiece.

In the first stanza of the "Prologue," Tennyson evinces the faith through which he has come to confidence in Christ and in God:

> 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 [. . .]. (1-4)

This faith is the existential-like faith that Tennyson says will take us beyond what we can know or prove. It is a Kierkegaardian type of leap into faith. This faith views Jesus as Deity, both full of strength and the epitome of love. Deity, represented in Jesus, is presented as the Creator:

> Thine are those orbs of light and shade;

Thou madest Life in man and brute;

Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot

Is on the skull which thou has made. (5-8)

In Section LVI Tennyson had ascribed the power of bringing life and death to nature. That was at the low point in his faith. In the "Prologue" he recognizes God as the source of life and death. He still does not understand how God and nature can exist in conflict, but now he does not base his faith on God's work through nature.

While he does ascribe death to God, His "foot on the skull" of humans, he sees God as the source of immortality, and this is the subject of the next stanza:

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. (9-12)

Even though God is the source of death as well as life, He will not allow death to be the end for men. Humanity does not know why God made them, but they hope for immortality. The faith separate from reason allows Tennyson to conclude that ultimately God is just.

God in His justice has allowed humankind to have freedom of choice. That freedom of choice is not only a privilege for humans, but it also enjoins responsibility upon them:

Thou seemest human and divine,

The highest, holiest manhood thou.

Our wills are ours, we know not how;

Our wills are ours, to make them thine. (13-16)

Christ incarnate was both deity and man, and in His greatness He has allowed humans to have free will. Like Kierkegaard, Tennyson believes that the highest act of free will is to search out God, and to come to what Kierkegaard would term an existential realization of God's will for the individual, and to submit to it. This insight is accomplished without the aid of human creeds and systems:

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. (17-20)

All the creeds and other human "systems" of thought may in some small way, according to Tennyson, reflect something of God, but God is superior to them. God is found through faith and not through "systems":

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. (21-24)

Faith is in opposition to knowing. Faith is subjective to Tennyson, not formed from objective schemes. If something cannot be seen, then it cannot be known. But there is the "trust" that brings faith. "Trust" is a significant word in *In*

Memoriam. It evolves just as Tennyson's faith does. It goes from a weak "maybe" to a strong conviction. Faith given from God shines like a "beam in darkness," and Tennyson prays that it might grow even stronger.

Not only does he wish for faith to grow, but he also desires that knowledge will also 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. (25-32)

Tennyson wants to see scientific knowledge grow and become even stronger. However, he wishes to see that knowledge tempered by reverence for God. He hopes that the "mind," the intellect and reason in the realm where reason operates, will act in a musical accord with the "soul," the seat of that subjective faith that answers doubt, as in centuries gone by, except he wants both knowledge and faith to be even greater than before. He recognizes the need for greater knowledge and particularly greater faith. Mankind "mocks" God when they do not have the proper reverence for God. He asks God to help humanity to

be able to keep faith in view of the scientific discoveries and growth of knowledge. As has been seen, this balance is accomplished, in Tennyson's view, when the two are placed in separate categories—science in the intellect and faith in the soul.

In the final three stanzas of the Prologue, Tennyson leaves the discussion of faith through honest doubt and turns to the impetus for his writing, the loss of Hallam. While the search for faith, immortality, and God is an integral element in *In Memoriam,* it is important to remember that the center of it all is Tennyson's dealing with Hallam's death. The poem is a masterpiece not only in its discussion of faith and doubt, but also as a powerful and poignant expression of the process of mourning. The reader can feel the frustration, vacillation, and pain in Tennyson that is a natural part of the grieving process. Anyone who has lost someone close to them can identify with Tennyson's feelings as he deals with the death, and can see how masterfully he paints the picture of mourning. In these last three stanzas, he worries about the efficacy of his efforts to mourn. He begins by asking God to forgive him for his apparent sin:

> Forgive what seem'd my sin in me;
>
> What seem'd my worth since I began;
>
> For merit lives from man to man,
>
> And not from man, O Lord, to thee. (33-36)

Tennyson recognizes his personal inadequacies. He recognizes that human merits are understood between men and that the relationship to God is not based

on merit. He has written of Hallam's merits, the merits that are seen by men and that deal with Hallam's relationship with men. He knows that mourning is a very human experience. He goes on in the next section to speak specifically of his mourning for Hallam:

> Forgive my grief for one removed,
>
> Thy creature, whom I found so fair.
>
> I trust he lives in thee, and there
>
> I find him worthier to be loved. (37-40)

His belief that Hallam is continuing to grow better is reflected in the concept that Tennyson finds him "worthier to be loved." In Tennyson's view concerning Hallam he expresses his hope for humanity–immortality with the opportunity of continued growth upward toward ultimate perfection.

Tennyson concludes the Prologue, and *In Memoriam*, with a final request for God to forgive:

> Forgive these wild and wandering cries,
>
> Confusions of a wasted youth;
>
> Forgive them where they fail in truth,
>
> And in thy wisdom make me wise. (41-44)

Throughout *In Memoriam* Tennyson decries his inability to put into words his feelings about Hallam or to honor Hallam adequately in his poetry. He recognizes that the poems have been "wild and wandering." For Tennyson, as for all who mourn, the grieving process causes thoughts to run in many different

directions and through many different emotions and emotional states. He fears that he has wasted his youth in his mourning. Obviously, this was not the case. *In Memoriam*, written out of his grief, not only helped to propel him into the office of Poet Laureate of England, but is also still being studied more than a century and a half after it was published. Tennyson continues in this final stanza of the "Prologue," and the final stanza of the work, to ask God to forgive any part of *In Memoriam* that fails to present the truth. Finally, he asks God to make him wise based on God's own wisdom.

Ultimately *In Memoriam* is a search for wisdom. Tennyson searches for the wisdom to be able to accept and even find comfort in the death of Hallam. He also is trying to find the wisdom to be able to understand science, which he respects, and to have faith, which he desires. Tennyson's solution is to dichotomize the two, as if saying to faith, "You stay out of the realm of science," and to science, "Faith supercedes you; you cannot determine faith, nor prevent it." For Tennyson, personally, it is a conclusion that is individually satisfying.

However, Tennyson does not write searching for wisdom only for himself. He believes in the significance and power of the poet. He seeks wisdom for an age in which there is an abundance of confusion. As he deals with his intensely personal struggles and thoughts, he also opens the windows of the minds of his people–the people of England–to see the struggles that they share and to search for the wisdom of the ages for the age in which they lived.

It could be said that Tennyson is the ultimate spokesman for the Victorian Age. He struggles and searches. He cries and he laughs. He is profound at one point and seems totally lost at another. So is the era in which he lives. *In Memoriam* stands not only as a glorious monument in memory for Arthur Hallam, but also for Tennyson and for the Victorian Age. *In Memoriam* will touch a chord in any sincere reader who has ever mourned, or been overwhelmed with doubt, or fought to find something to grasp for meaning in life. The poem may not provide the answers, but it most certainly lets us know that we are not alone in the struggles that we face. It powerfully presents Tennyson's personal battles and enlightens us about the era in which he lived.

Above all, *In Memoriam* reflects life: the everyday struggles to understand, to discover, to find faith in the face of doubt; to come to an agreement within ourselves about our place in the universe; and to recognize the significance of love. While Tennyson demonstrates the truth that: "Tis better to have loved and lost, than to have never loved at all," in the end he concludes that love is never actually "lost" despite the temporary separation of loved ones because of death. Love continues as the most significant part of existence. Tennyson's view could very well be expressed by this recasting of a biblical passage, "Now abides Doubt, Faith and Love, these three; but the greatest of these is Love!"

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