

-THE NATIONAL SPIRIT OF TENNYSON'S POETRY-

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-INTRODUCTION-

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The patriotic poet praises the deeds, past and present of a nation, but the range of his genius is much narrower than that of the national poet, whose life and work is permeated with devotion to the ideals of a nation. The poetry of Tennyson, more than that of any other British poet is devoted to the portrayal of the ideals of his nation. He is not only patriotic, he is national. This character is stamped on all the poems he wrote, all are devoted to the British ideals, such ideals as freedom, moderation, attachment to tradition, reverence for duty, and morality. All his readers and critics have recognized this fact and it is mentioned, although only indirectly, in all the critical writings on Tennyson's work. "The ideals of the state call forth Tennyson's passionate devotion, and often stir his imagination into the creation of fervent beauty" (a)

Great as is the versatility of Tennyson's genius, there is one voice that seems to dominate all others, the obligato, as it were, of his music, and this is an English voice. In a poem, written at the age of nineteen, which he later included in his drama "The Foresters" he struck the keynote of his whole work.

"There is no land like England  
Where'er the light of day be;  
There is no heart like English hearts  
Such hearts of oak as they be.

There is no land like England  
Where'er the light of day be;  
There are no men like Englishmen  
So tall and bold as they be."

(The Foresters-Act II. Sc 1.)

Tennyson was essentially an Englishman with the qualities that England loves, his whole life as well as his character is English, and his verse reflects the characteristics of the man.

(a) L. E. Gates - Studies and Appreciations, p. 63.

I. THE MAN AND HIS TIME.

## (A) Early Influences.

In order to understand the work of any author, it is necessary to know something of his life, character and the conditions of the age in which he lived. There were many influences in Tennyson's life which conspired to make him a national poet. He was born in an Anglican rectory in Lincolnshire, here he spent his childhood, and here he first felt the stirrings of his poetic genius. "There is something typical of the heart of England in his birth and childhood." (a) His clerical father early instilled into his mind a reverence for ancient traditions and a pride in the achievements of his country. "All that is seemly, gracious and refined in the life of the English gentry and the English Church was gathered up in the stock from which he sprung and enfolded in the home of his early years. The same influences were around him at the University, where he lived in an atmosphere of noble memories and of liberal thought, amid a group of kindred spirits with kindred tastes." (b) The influences of his home and the surroundings of his youth, in fact his whole environment, have had an effect on his poetry.

While his preliminary education was conducted for the most part by his father, his university training was received at the very English University of Cambridge, which had at that time a liberal tendency and which was being influenced by modern thought. A group of exceptionally clever young men, banded together as the "Apostles", took a keen interest in the new ideas of liberty and tolerance. Tennyson's association with this group, constituted one of the strongest influences which made him the typical poet of his age, for from them he received his interest in the political problems of the day. Although he gained but little from the formal teaching given at Cambridge, yet his residence there strengthened him and fused his patriotism with his poetry.

## (B) Political Situation.

It is essential in a study of Tennyson to understand the England of his day, the Victorian Age which he so exactly covers and represents. It was during his childhood that England was engaged in the final struggle with Napoleon

(a)-P.H.More - Tennyson - Shelburne Essays p 64.-

(b)-W.W.McCallum - Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Arthurian Story- p 291. -

in which the world despot was overthrown. The close of the reign of George III. and the reigns of the two succeeding kings were troublesome times in England, when the country was seething with suppressed agitation. The early part of the reign of Victoria was occupied with much political excitement, caused by many drastic reforms at home and wars abroad. England herself was engaged in the Crimean War and in the Indian Mutiny, while the nations of Europe were in the throes of dreadful combat with each other. It was a thrilling age everywhere, filled with exciting struggles and important events, and at this time England particularly needed exhortation and counsel. There was need of someone to pour oil on the troubled waters, a man of moderation such as could not be found among the many great political leaders and reformers of the time. Such a man was Tennyson and he spoke from the realm of literature, not that of politics. He became the acknowledged spokesman, the leader of the people, through that long period of transition.

Thus it was but fitting that he should become Poet

Laureate and in this capacity he achieved an unrivalled popularity. He was widely read by all classes of people, perhaps because he expressed the ideas of the majority of Englishmen, and gave a breadth and freshness of outlook upon all political, social and moral questions. He expressed the thoughts and feelings, the moral and intellectual strivings of the age, becoming its chief representative. He became the exponent of the feelings, thoughts, and actions of that period of national life, so that future historians will turn to him for the most complete poetic exposition of this century.

(c) Religious Faith.

On questions of religion, as well as on social and political questions, was Tennyson the spokesman of his age. His home was an English parsonage so that early in life the Church of England with its historical traditions placed its spell on his imagination. "Throughout Tennyson's work there runs a certain Church of England strain. Tennyson was a very intense Englishman and all the better for it. Like many another of her greater sons, it was the Church as an element in the national life bound up with the hearts and homes of long generations, symbolizing man's aspirations after forgiveness, vision and immortality that he loved." (a) While he never allowed himself to be bound down by the

(a)- Chapman English Literature and Religion.

authority of article or creed yet, unlike Browning, he did not become a non-conformist, notwithstanding the unsettled beliefs of his generation. The discoveries of Darwin, coupled with other startling revelations in the field of science, conflicted with the established creeds, under-mining the faith of the people and leaving them to flounder in a sea of doubt. In "In Memoriam" Tennyson established the minimum of faith which is necessary to life, revealing it in the first stanza.

"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;"

He did not separate religion from science, but reconciled the one to the other by his vision of a Father within the law of Evolution, Who controls our apparently indefinite progress, towards that eternal state when there will be compensation for the waste and sacrifice of the present.

He not only expressed the sentiment of his age but rendered a magnificent service, if not in entirely dispelling the doubts, at least in the establishing for the doubter, the basis of a faith by which he can face untroubled, the mysteries of life, death, and an unknown future.

#### (D) Character.

In spite of his wide popularity, and his great influence in national life, Tennyson was one of the most unassuming and modest of men. He took little active part in public life although he gave much thought to it. He preferred the secluded country life of an English gentleman. He exemplifies that love of privacy and that shyness which are typical English traits, living almost his whole life in the "Haunts of ancient peace". (The Palace of Art) Like the average Englishman he looked upon his home as his castle, and it was difficult to lure him from it, even by the delights of foreign countries. Tennyson travelled little, making but one trip to the Continent. His character is made up of essentially English traits. "I find Tennyson peculiarly and completely English in his cast of thought. He is distinguished in the highest degree by what I regard as the dominant English characteristic, reverence for duty as the Supreme law of life; the subordination of all the ideals to the moral law." (a) He was simple and sincere, devoid

(a)- C.W.Moultain, Literary Criticism, p 109.

(5)

of any vanity, always a man of the people. When he was made a baronet his constant fear was of slighting his old friends on account of his short-sightedness, giving the impression of a pride of station or a conceit of wealth.

## II. POET OF ENGLISH LIFE AND SCENES.

Tennyson was pre-eminently an English gentleman with the characteristics that England loves, who wrote poetry filled with the spirit of England. This poetry is replete with pictures of his own environment, of the people, the habits and customs of England. "He belongs to the class of poets who strike their roots deep in their native soil." (a) In comparison with Burns, the poet of the Scottish cottage, he may be called the poet of the English hearth, while if the cosmopolitan sympathies of Browning are lacking, he touches many aspects of English life which his great rival ignored. In Tennyson "The charm is special and unique, it is made up of many parts, the soft domestic landscapes, the evidence on every hand of rich, ordered, long established civilization, the historical and literary associations, what the well attuned observer feels from without, Tennyson the son of the soil feels from within, his poetry is steeped in it and moves in a pure fine atmosphere of beauty, of dignity, of elevated thought, of noble emotion." (b) Thackeray's daughter, a true Englishwoman says of him, "One must be English born, I think, to know how English is the spell which this great enchanter casts over us, the very spirit of the land descends upon us, as the visions he evokes come closing round, whether it is the moated grange he shows us, or Locklesley Hall, that in the distance overlooks the sandy tracts, or Dora standing in the corn, or the sight of the brimming wave that swings through quiet meadows round the mill, it is all home in its sweetest, broadest aspect," (c) But those who have not seen England and are not English born have no difficulty in recognizing the very English spirit of Tennyson from what they have heard or read of England.

### (A) His Landscapes.

His poetry abounds in lovely intimate landscapes, peculiar to his native land, landscapes filled with homes, and dewy pastures, and full foliaged trees. He shows a "Home-like love for a land of wide horizons, and low skies fringed with humble hills such as he saw continually in the fen country, that which had endeared itself to him for years, which, amid a thousand varieties of aspect, had unity of sentiment, the landscape of Lincolnshire, the fens and the meres and the sea; the landscapes of Surrey, Kent, Hampshire and of the Isle of Wight; of the chalk and sandstone - this he did to perfection." (d)

- (a)- E.L. Carey - Tennyson - His Homes, his friends and his work, p  
 (b)- A. MacMechan - Alfred Tennyson- University Magazine, Feb. 1908, pp. 57.  
 (c)- Mrs Ritchie - ,Records of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning, p 26  
 (d)- Stopford A. Brooke - His Art & Relation to Modern Life- Vol II.p 83.



He is most pleasing when he paints his native land but there is a noticeable restraint when he tries to deal with foreign countries. This is particularly striking in his poems "Mariana" and "Mariana in the South" the poem on the English being much superior to the foreign one. In the "Palace of Art" many good pictures of different countries are given, but they are not his best, until he speaks of England the spirit is lacking.

"And on an English home - grey twilight pour's  
On dewy pastures, dewy trees,  
Softer than sleep - all things in order stored,  
A haunt of ancient peace."  
( "Palace of Art" )

The last line is a strikingly felicitous description of an English country home, a home that he loved, and this love inspired him to his best. It is a remarkable fact that, although his foreign landscapes are not good, yet those he invented out of his imagination are very successful.

To a Canadian much of Tennyson's scenery is strange and unfamiliar, as are also the birds and flowers of the English meadows and woods. Here, the note of the cuckoo, the carol of the lark, and the music of the nightingale are never heard, but they were very familiar to Tennyson, whose birthplace was Lincolnshire, often called the aviary of England, because of the great variety of birds found there. Here, no less rare than the birds are such flowers as the daisy, the primrose, and the daffodil, which grow in such profusion in England, even, "The smell of violets hidden in the green" ("A Dream of Fair Women") is foreign to us as our violets have no perfume.

In the same way all the scenes of Tennyson's poetry are peculiarly English " 'Mariana', 'The Dying Swan', and the 'May Queen' , are brimming over with reminiscences of Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire landscape, Lincolnshire skyscape, and Lincolnshire wild flowers." (a) The grange as Tennyson describes it still exists in England -

"Till cold winds wake the gray-eyed morn  
About the lovely moated grange."  
( "Mariana" )

"On either side the river lie  
Long fields of barley and of rye  
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;"  
( "Lady of Shalott" )

"This is a picture of England that will stand after the world has been re-afforested for shall we say a thousand peers? or turned into black country to enrich ten thousand plutocrats or cut up into a million snippets as small holdings for the rest of us who are neither peers nor plutocrats." (b)

- (a) - Rawnsley - Reminiscences of the Tennysons, p 195  
(b) - Rawnsley - Reminiscences of the Tennysons, p 289.

So it came to be that while he grew in fame and greatness until, as the ancient poet said his forehead seemed to touch the stars, his feet were always firmly planted in the meadows of his infancy.

(B) Love of the Sea.

Tennyson was an English poet not only by land but by sea, he is not only the great landscape painter, but also the great sea painter.

"The crest of some slow arching wave  
Heard in dead night along that table shore  
Drops flat; and often the great waters break  
Whitening for half a league, and thin themselves  
Far over sands marbled with moon and cloud  
From less and less to nothing."  
(*"The Last Tournament"*)

This is a faithful picture of the sea coast of England and his poetry is full of similar descriptions. Tennyson loved the sea, because it too is national. England is mistress of the seas, and she owes this position to the bravery and perseverance of her seamen. The sea is part of the British Empire so that his love of country and love of the sea were one.

"Thine the myriad rolling ocean  
Light and shadow illimitable".  
(*Boadicea*)

One of Tennyson's best known and much admired poems tells the story of a fisherman. "Enoch Arden is the type of the able seamen of England nourished in the fishing smack and then passing from land to land, through the wonders of the waves in the merchant vessel; and then when wars arise, the mainstay of our navies - a type which has lasted a thousand years." (a) He has the qualities of the typical English Jack Tar. He is God-fearing; he will sacrifice himself to his duty in deeds for home and country, he is persevering and courageous. As well as giving an English character to his hero, Tennyson has given the atmosphere of an English sea-side hamlet. An unequal description of this atmosphere is given in the vision Enoch has of his native land.

(a)- Stopford A. Brooke - His Art and Relation to Modern Life- Vol. II. p. 148.

Lanes

"The climbing street, the mill, the leafy leaves,  
The peacock-yew tree and the lovely Hall,  
The horse he drove, the boat he sold, the chill  
November fawns, and dewy-gloaming downs  
The gentle shower, the smell of dying leaves,  
And the low moan of leaden-colour'd seas".  
(*"Enoch Arden"*)

To foreigners this poem presents a phase of English life, ~~as~~ different from the inland life of France or Germany. It begins by a sketch of a little sea port on the coast of England with fishing nets, ship-timber and boats scattered about the beach, and follows the homely joys and griefs of a fisherman who renders strict obedience to the English watchword duty.

The poet portrays a very different yet still English character in the passionate ballad *"The Revenge"*. It goes back to the time of Elizabeth, the time of the Spanish Armada and great adventures. Sir Richard Grenville is an example of the old sea captain with their hatred of Spain and their fearlessness in the face of great odds. Tennyson gives to the ship the feelings of a patriot; the horror of being vanquished and the intolerance of foreign authority, so that the ship itself wishes to die when a foreign hand is on the rudder.

"And away she sail'd and longed for her own".  
(*"The Revenge"*)

"The great ocean and the sky feel with the ship- they too are English; no English boat shall belong to Spain - and they bury the Revenge in the fathomless main by the island crags. This is a noble close to a ballad, which while the sea endures, the sea wolves of England will love to hear". (a)

(C) Home and Rural Life.

"It was the heart of England, even more than her imagination that he made his own". (b) In the English Idylls he gives many vivid pictures of English home and country life. He would maintain that the stability and greatness of a nation depend on the home.

(a) - Stopford A. Brooke- Tennyson his Art and Relation to Modern Life- p 149.

(b)- Memoirs - Vol I. p.82.

One of the secrets of his power was his portrayal of the duties and affections of the home. Who can say after reading these simple annals of the cottage that Tennyson's poetry consisted of a stately pageant of interest only to the nobility? With the English poor Tennyson is a great favorite because he writes of the phase of life and of the scenes with which they are familiar. In the "Gardener's Daughter" a faithful picture of an English garden is presented and "There is no poem more English in all the poems of Tennyson than the 'Talking Oak'. We see the park, the chase that Englishmen of all ranks love so well, the roofs of the great houses above the trees, the wild woodland deep in fern, the deer, the mighty trees, the oak which has watched so many English generations, so much of English history - bluff Harry who turns the monks adrift p the roundhead humming his surly hymn - the modish beauties of the court of Anne - the English girl of today who leaves her novel and piano to race singing through the park."(a)

The characters in Tennyson's English Idylls are very English. The nineteenth century was an age of individualism and both Tennyson and Browning made much of the individual, but Tennyson has a far more complete gallery of national portraits. His "Northern Farmer" "Set the fashion in England of drawing character sketches in rough brown verse, that imitates not only the speech, but the accents, of all sorts and conditions of unsophisticated men". ( b). Here for the first time in English literature a great poet writes in the vernacular of the people. Many poets had sung of English country life but none had made the people speak in their own dialect, they were blind to its poetic value. Burns used the Colloquial speech of Scotland and some American Authors had made use of their rural dialects, giving their poetry a national flavour and local association. It was a new departure in the realm of realism and perhaps a bold experiment but such poems as the "Northern Farmer" witness as to its success. In this poem he repeats in broad Lincolnshire dialect some quaint conversations that he had had in his youth with the Farmers of his district.

(a) - Stopford A Brooks - Tennyson - His Art and Relation to Modern Life, Vol I. p.98.

(b)- Sir Alfred Lyall- Tennyson, p. 121.

"Here he pulled up the tubers of the Lincolnshire dialect and let them go into his lines smelling freshly of the soil". (a) He depicts in this poem farmers almost the last of their race, who in their mode of life, manners and speech, differed but little from their forefathers of Norman times. The laborers of the farm are also equally quaint. The revolution in agriculture which took place about this time, the introduction of machinery and the beginning of large farms, all conspired to drive the small farmer into town so that this poem preserves the characteristics of a fast disappearing race.

Many exclusively English customs find a place in Tennyson's poetry. A good example is the practice of ringing church bells every night, for six weeks before Christmas, sending out the message,

"Peace and good will, goodwill and peace,  
Peace and goodwill, to all mankind.  
(In Memoriam. XXVIII.)

He also describes the custom of church decorations at Christmas.

"Yet go, and while the holly boughs  
Entwine the cold baptismal font,  
Make one wreath more for Use and Want,  
That guard the portals of the house;"  
(In Memoriam. XXIX.)

He who would understand Tennyson must travel in the poet's land, beginning with his birthplace, the country of Lincolnshire. As Goethe says -

"Who would the poet understand  
Must travel in the poet's land."

Of local English life Tennyson is the chief poet. Browning ranged Europe and European literature for subjects - Tennyson is content to abide within "The narrow seas and the margins of England and Wales". His outlook has been called narrow because he has no Scotch or Irish poems, but has Burns, the national poet of Scotland, any English subjects? Tennyson is a singer of the land in which he was born and of the one time he knew. This may be considered a weakness by some, but it is also his great excellence, that he wrote only of what he knew.

(a) - E.L. Carey - Tennyson - His Homes, his friends and his Work. p.200.

### III. IDEALS OF NATIONAL IMPORT.

Tennyson, the patriotic, shows an almost touching devotion for his own state, her statesmen, throne and empire. He took a keen interest in political problems. While he had nothing new or startling to exploit, his influence on the political and social questions of the day was an inspiring, if a restraining one. In his patriotic poems which number about thirty, he ministered to the national pride, fired the national courage and brought poetry nearer the national life than it had been since Shakespeare or Milton. Tennyson was not only interested in the present but also took a great pride in the achievements of the past and had a supreme confidence in the greatness of the future.

In his poetry he exhibits the utmost loyalty to English constitutional kings and the English constitution. His pride in the superiority of British government was not, as it is so often supposed, self-complacency; it was a belief founded on the study of other governments, which lead him to form the opinion that his own was the best in the world. In it as nowhere else he found the union of individual freedom with law and order, and it approached more nearly his conception of an ideal government. It is the result of long generations of strenuous but controlled effort for adjustment of social conditions. A great many of his other poems as well as his patriotic poems contain counsel which proved of benefit to the nation not only in his own age, but is of value in the present and will be no less powerful in the future.

#### (A) Freedom.

Tennyson cherishes a great love for freedom. As an artist he may,

"Languish for the Purple seas."  
("You ask me why.")

but as a citizen he wishes to live in England because,

"It is the land that freemen till,  
That sober-suited Freedom chose,  
The land, where girt with friends or foes  
A man may speak the thing he will."  
("You ask me why")

In the same poem he says that though England should become trebly great and marvelously wealthy it would not compensate for the loss of liberty and the loss of individual freedom,

"When single thought is civil crime  
And individual freedom mute."  
("You ask me why")

A condition that may arise under the rule of Unions, as well as under the rule of a despot, for -

"The tyranny of one  
Was prelude to the tyranny of all."

and -

"The tyranny of all  
Led backwards to the tyranny of one."  
("Tiresias")

Thus the same laws are applicable to both ruler and subject.

"He that roars for liberty  
Faster binds a tyrants power  
And the tyrants cruel glee  
Forces on the freer hour."  
("Vision of Sin")

This idea that tyranny is its own worst enemy which, if left to run its own course, will bring on its own destruction, has been exemplified in the present German war. It was ~~an~~ <sup>not an</sup> unlimited liberty which Tennyson praised, but a restrained liberty which ensures equal and just privileges for every citizen.

(B) Law and Order.

His idea of freedom was a very different one from that of Byron and Shelley. Tennyson distrusted sudden and violent revolutions and believed in reforms brought about slowly. In this connection we have his famous lines, so often quoted -

"Freedom slowly broadens down  
From precedent to precedent."  
("You ask me Why" )

In "Of old sat Freedom on the Heights" the history of freedom is given. At first Freedom was a goddess living apart on the heights, when

"But fragments of her mighty voice."  
("Of old sat Freedom on the Heights")

were heard, but gradually she stepped down and revealed to man,

"The Fullness of her face."  
("Ibid")

Freedom made her home in England where she preserves the balance in national life, guarding against,

"The falsehood of extremes."  
("Ibid")

This is a favorite maxim of Tennyson, it is his poetic exposition of the golden mean of politics. His policy was one of moderation, and the tendency of his mind was distinctly conservative. "Order is Heaven's first law, to him order is also earth's best excellence." (a) From first to last in his poetry the idea of law is dominant. The basis of his political creed was the doctrine of an equable progress under the realm of law. In the realm of society there are certain fixed laws, which should regulate all development. To discover these and give them expression is the duty of the politician.

"To live by law  
Acting the law we live by without fear."  
("OEnone")

"The hallow orb of moving circumstance  
Rolled round by one fixed law."  
("The Palace of Art")

As times change the laws have to be altered to suit conditions but always we should have,

"Some reverence for laws ourselves have made  
Some patient force to change them when we will."  
("The Princess")

And so he believed that a reverence for law would promote an order in the state which need never be violently disturbed. The highest praise he can give England is that she is a land of "Settled Government", of justice and an equal law for all.

Such poetry was of great benefit to the nation in the troublesome times of the nineteenth century. Tennyson's patriotism was constructive. He was not a revolutionist, but he believed in the gradual correction of faults, and the increase of rights. His sympathies were with an extension of suffrage, increase of education, and further development along the line of representative government.

(C) Progress.

Tennyson was not opposed to progress but to -

"Raw Haste, half-sister to Decay."  
("Love thou thy land")

(a) - Dawson - Makers of English Poetry- p.214.



he wished to bring about innovations gradually, basing the new on the old.

"Not clinging to some ancient saw;  
Not master'd by some modern term  
Not swift nor slow to change, but firm,  
And in its season bring the law;"  
("Love thou thy Land")

His warning was not against change but against revolution. He knew there were some politicians who would bring forward reforms without due consideration and to them his advice was,

"Statesman be not precipitate in thine act  
of steering."  
("To the Prime Minister")

No one was more alive to the dangers of sloth and decay or more strenuous for rational reform, brought about in a sane, orderly and consistent way.

"Meet is it changes should control  
Our being lest we rust in ease."  
("Love thou thy Land.")

The poem "Love thou thy land" contains most of his ideas on national advancement. He never wished England to see the day when her people will,

"Wink in slothful overtrust."  
("Ode on the Death of the  
Duke of Wellington")

they must be prepared for any emergency for Britain must never be a

"Sinking land  
Some third-rate isle half lost among her seas."  
("To the Queen")

or sink to the level of a

"Little Germanic state."  
("The Third of February")

(D) Democracy.

Many critics have said that Tennyson was not a democrat at all, and perhaps some part of his poems would give this impression, especially when he speaks of the people as -

"Hollow hearts and empty heads."  
("Vision of Sin")

but it is not the rule of the people which he mistrusted but that of brainless mobs. He dreaded and feared the

control of the ignorant passionate crowd that any orator can move,

"Nor feed with crude imaginings  
The herd, wild hearts and feeble wings  
That every sophister can bind." <sup>line</sup>  
( "Love thous thy Land" )

Tennyson himself says "I do not in the least mind if England, when the people are less ignorant, and more experienced in

self-government, eventually becomes a democracy. But violent selfish, unreasoning democracy would bring expensive bureaucracy and the iron rule of a Cromwell." (a) A tyrant was the most hated of beings to him and his advice to monarchs was to,

"Keep the throne unshaken still  
Broad-based upon the people's will."  
( "To the Queen" )

"Tennyson was a believer in true democracy, the Greek idea of which is "public good". His interest in the poor and humble give his poems a genuine democratic flavour." (b)  
He has made the sufferings and privations of the poor a reality to the reading and thinking <sup>people</sup> of England.

His idea of society is that of greater brotherhood, he would put fraternity before liberty and abandon to some extent the idea of equality. He would contend that every man is not born with the same mental and intellectual powers so that it is absurd to think of all men being equal. His poem "The Lord of Burleigh" shows that he believed it to be impossible to do away with class distinction. The essential need of a democracy is a widespread national education. An equal opportunity for education is the right of every man regardless of station, and it would go far towards remedying the social disorders and be more effective than general imprisonment and repression. His idea of fraternity and equality is summed up in the lines where he dreams-

"Of knowledge fusing class with class  
Of civic Hate no more to be  
Of love to leaven all the mass  
Till every soul be free."  
( "Freedom" )

The supreme power cannot be exercised by the mass of the people until their capabilities have been developed by education, then they may be trusted with more authority and may take an intelligent part in representative government.

(E) Leaders.

While he believed that the people should take their share in the government, yet he believed great leaders are necessary. The history of England abounds in great

(a) Tennyson - A Memoir. Vol II. p. 338

(b) W.C.Gordon- The social Ideals of Alfred Tennyson. p185

names and the English have always placed implicit trust in their great men, by whose incorruptibility the state has reached its present degree of greatness. The statesman stands next to the Ruler and Tennyson's poems contain many rules for their character and conduct.

"Not he that breaks the dam but he  
That thro' the channels of the state  
Conveys the people's will is great.  
His name is pure, his name is free."  
( "The Statesman" )

"Oh God for a man with a heart, head, hand,  
Like some of the simple great ones gone  
For ever and ever by  
One still strong man in a blatant land  
Whatever they call him what care I,  
Aristocrat, democrat, autocrat,  
Who can rule and dare not lie."  
( "Maud" )

Tennyson places great emphasis on truth. The "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" perhaps his finest laureate poem, gives a picture of what an ideal statesman should be. The Duke is praised as a statesman and a warrior. He is commended as being moderate, resolute, unselfish, wise, simple and, above all, rich in saving common sense. In paying tribute to this "last great Englishman" he made at the same time an appeal to the loyalty of his countrymen and, by the recital of his mighty deeds, he incited them to greater effort.

"Not once or twice in our rough island story  
The path of duty was the way to glory."  
( "Ode on the Death of the Duke" )

"To the Duke of Argyll" is a shorter poem on the same subject, in which he praises the "Patriot Statesman" who has

"a power to make  
This ever-changing world of circumstances  
In changing clime with never-changing law."  
( "To the Duke of Argyll" )

The best statesman was the one who,

"Knew the seasons when to take  
Occasion by the hand and make  
The bounds of freedom wider yet."  
( "Dedication to the Idylls of the King" )

He must rule his actions in the present by a study of the past, giving due regard to the future. He must look ahead and be prudent enough to see the trend of events and be able to guide public opinion.

(18)

"There be rocks old and new  
There a haven full in view  
Art thou wise? Art thou true?  
Then in change of wind and tide  
List no longer to the crew,  
Captain guide."

("To the Prime Minister")

This confidence which Tennyson places in leaders is a very national characteristic.

Tennyson was not a partisan, he believed that it was the duty of the statesman and of the poet to rise above all party interests and to be supremely a patriot.

"Scorner of the party cry  
That wanders from the public good."  
("Freedom")

They should protest against all kinds of tyrannies and hypocrisies, not only working for immediate reforms, but for the ultimate good of the whole nation. Neither Tennyson nor Milton said "My country right or wrong", they recognized the mistakes and weaknesses of the nation and bent all their energies to correcting them and thus strengthening the Empire. In this work,

"All parties work together."  
("Will Waterproof")

(F) Insularity.

It was not to a narrow insular England that Tennyson gave his devotion, but to a broad Empire of many peoples, which owed a duty, not to itself alone, but to the world. He calls England,

"The eye, the soul of Europe."  
("Ode on the Death of the Duke")

and wishes her to be preserved to -

"Save the one true seed of Freedom sown."  
("Ibid")

because-

"Saving that, ye help mankind  
Till public wrong be crumbled in the dust,  
And drill the raw world for the march of mind  
Till crowds at length be sown and crowns be just."  
("Ode on the Death of the Duke")

In "Hands all Round" he justifies this extreme love of England in that oft-quoted verse,

"The man's best cosmopolite  
Who loves his native country best"

In one or two instances he criticised rather severely the Revolution in France, calling it the

"Blind hysterics of the Celt."  
("In Memoriam" CIX.)

and the

"Red fool-fury of the Seine."  
("Ibid" CXXVII.)

Such phrases as these have condemned Tennyson as insular. Certainly, he regarded France under Napoleon as a serious menace to the peace of Europe, and such bloody outbreaks of the lawless spirit as the French Revolution were an abhorrence to him. Napoleon and the Revolution made France an example of what he considered a state should not be. But in later years he expressed the greatest admiration for the way in which France had emerged from these disturbances. He was not antagonistic to the French nation but to the lack of law and order there, which undermined the foundations of the state.

"But yonder whiff! There comes a sudden heat  
The gravest citizen seems to lose his head,-----  
God bless the narrow sea which keeps her off  
And keeps our Britain whole within herself  
A nation yet the rulers and the ruled  
God bless the narrow seas  
I wish they were a whole Atlantic broad."  
("The Princess")

Tennyson was warmly sympathetic towards the struggle for freedom in Italy and Poland, and in his sonnet "England and America 1872" he justifies the American Revolution as a lesson taught by England herself and he summons his country to exult in the freedom of her children.

He was always interested in the welfare of the colonies and sought to bind them into closer unity with the Empire. His son says, "One of the deepest desires of his life was to help the realization of the ideal of an Empire by the intimate union of every part of our British Empire. He believed that every different member so united would, with

a heightening of individuality to each member, give such strength and greatness and stability to the whole as would make an Empire a faithful and fearless leader throughout the world." (a) Not by any means an insular ambition! When the loyalty of Canada was questioned and the maintenance of this part of the Empire was regarded as useless waste, it was Tennyson who came to the rescue of the "True North". He rebukes such selfishness on the part of the mother country in these lines -

"your love  
Is but a burden, loose the hand and go.  
Is this the tone of Empire? Here the faith  
That made us rulers? "

("To the Queen")

Thus Tennyson was interested alike in all parts of the British Empire and in the cause of right in all countries. He considered that it was the poet's duty to love his native country best, but he should not ignore what is noble and good in other countries.

"Slav, Teuton, Kelt, I count them all,  
My friends and brother souls.  
With all the people great and small  
That wheel between the poles."

("Epilogue")

#### (G) Peace and War.

His sense of brotherhood between the nations makes him wish for the cessation of war and dream of a universal peace, the establishment of which has been the aim of the British nation for many generations.

"I would that war would cease  
I would the globe from end to end  
Might sow and reap in peace."

("Epilogue")

It will be a glorious future when

"The war drums throb no longer  
And the battle flags are furled  
In the parliament of man,  
The federation of the world."

("Locksley Hall")

He especially mentions France in this new order of things showing that he had no such hatred for the French people as is commonly supposed.

"England, France, all men to be  
Will make one people ere man's race be run."  
("Victor Hugo")

Yet he realized the need of battle when a righteous cause was at stake, "When roused by some great deed or fired by hatred of some giant wrong, he has made his verse like the tramp of armies and the sound of many cannon. A lover of peace yet a righteous cause appeals to all that is manly and heroic in his nature." (a)

(H) Effect of his poetry.

Tennyson's patriotism is rather "sober-suited", inclined to be meditative rather than enthusiastic, but at times, in such poems as "The Charge of the Light Brigade", and "Form Riflemen", his verses are filled with contagious enthusiasm, which will last as long as the British nation. The "Charge of the Light Brigade" produced a startling effect when it was published. "In 1854 the "Time's" correspondent from the Crimea made the air electrical and Tennyson's charge drew sparks." (b) He based the poem on the phrase "someone had blundered" which appeared in the "Times", but he says "A blunder it may have been, but one for which England should be grateful, having learned thereby that her soldiers are the bravest under the sun." (c)

Forward the light Brigade  
Was there a man dismay'd  
Not though the soldier knew  
Some one had blundered.  
Theirs not to make reply  
Theirs but to do and die."  
("Charge of the Light Brigade")

Such lines will never fail to fill British soldiers with ardent zeal. "Form Riflemen" is not notable for beauty of poetic conception, but for the clearness with which he voiced popular sentiment, and the effect it produced on the nation. It expressed the general desire of the people to

(a) - G.W.Cooke - Poets and Problems - p.135.

(b) - E.L.Carey - Tennyson his Homes, his Friends and his works- p. 125.

(c)- Walters - Tennyson Poet, Philosopher, Idealist- p. 81.

be prepared for the emergency which seemed to be at hand. It was written at the outbreak of the war in Europe, when some powers were preparing to attack England, who appeared to be indifferent to the threatening danger. Three days after its publication the war office issued an order approving of the formation of volunteer rifle corps.

The deeds of the army and navy were always of great interest to him, fighting as they did for the extension, not the cramping, of liberty. "No one has sung of soldiers' deeds as he, no one has so filled his verse with trumpet tones, the clash of weapons, the clangour of arms, we hear them resound in his ringing lines in the breathless rush of his verse! He should be known as the soldier's poet, as well as the elegist of heroes for he was often at his best when making a martial song like a trumpet call." (a)

"Singing of men that in battle array  
Ready in heart and ready in hand  
March with banner and bugle and fife  
To death for their native land."  
("Maud")

Who can say in the face of such eloquent <sup>and</sup> evidence that his patriotism is tame and belongs to a dead age?

He was not one-sided, but touched all phases of English life; he was patriotic, intensely loyal to the English government; he was eager for reform, and a liberal education for all, a lover of liberty and a dreamer of a happy millenium in world's progress which his verse has surely aided in hastening. Every poem he wrote touches directly or indirectly on these problems.

(a) - Cummings Walters - Tennyson Poet, Philosopher and Idealist.  
p. 206.



#### IV. "THE IDYLLS OF THE KING" AND NATIONAL LIFE.

The "Idylls of the King" is considered to be Tennyson's masterpiece. Much time and thought were given to them throughout his whole life and fifty two years elapsed between the publication of the Arthurian poems. The problem of the Idylls is his greatest theme and illustrates the national spirit of the poet in two ways. In the first place the origin was national, the subject is the greatest hero in the History of British romance, "It is a great national poem unifying the deeds of the great national hero of Britains legendary age." (a) Secondly, through the medium of these poems he performs his most lasting service to Britain, for here he moulded the ideals of the nation from the past. "Here Tennyson extends the charm and consecration of poetry to the organic life of the state. The Idylls constitute the only adequate expression in English poetry of the conception of the state as a living organism with its own law of growth and decay, moral and material splendours, and religious significance. 'Strangely remote' the world of the Idylls but this gives true perspective and makes possible the revelation of the essential truth with power. Tennyson is the intellectual heir of Edmund Burke." (b) He deals with the principles which form the foundation and the stability of the Government and society of the nation.

##### (A) Adaptation of British Legends.

The historic foundations underlying the legends of Arthur are slight. About the fifth century the Britons were engaged in twelve great battles in which they were victorious, under the leadership of their king, Arthur. The story of his achievements is related by Geoffrey of Monmouth, (1139) in his "History of the Britons". Sir Thomas Malory wrote a complete account of the story of Arthur about 1470. His book, "Morte D'Arthur" was one of the first books published by Caxton, after the invention of his printing press in 1485. The translation of the Welsh "Mabinogian" by Lady Guest also furnished material for the Idylls. But the origin of the story is a much disputed question and it is of little real value to know "whether Arthur was a real king who ruled Britain after the departure of the Romans and founded a new order of chivalry and defeated the heathen in bloody battles as Nennius, and other historians have related, or whether he was merely a "solar myth", whether that extremely patriotic Welshman Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote a veracious chronicle, or whether the sources

(a) - B.G. Ambler - Tennyson - p.94.

(b) - L.R.Gibbs - Tennyson's Idylls of the King, Methodist Review, Sept. Oct. '13.

of the story were among the misty mountains of Wales or the castles of Brittany." (a) The important fact is that they were legends which were passed by word of mouth from generation to generation, and which were a constant source of pleasure to our early English ancestors. The Idylls might be compared to Goethe's "Faust", the national drama of Germany. Tennyson did not invent them any more than Goethe invented "Faust". Both authors used the mass of various legends of their native land. The subject matter in both cases is product of many generations of people.

Just before Tennyson's time the Arthurian stories had lost almost all their interest and were of no value in the life of the nation, the old versions being antiquated and the new ones dull and lifeless. Tennyson immortalised these fables, rescuing them from oblivion by clothing them in his vigorous and popular verse, for which the nation owes him a debt of gratitude. While using these old materials he has not hesitated to enlarge on some themes, to cut down and modify others and make them adaptable to his purpose and of value, as well as of interest, to his own age. He has related them to new conditions of thought and language. If this old story, belonging to the age of fable, could contribute to the national ideals in the twelfth and thirteenth century, as proved by Malory, why could they not be used with advantage in the nineteenth and succeeding centuries? Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" does not only portray the life and civilization of Saxon times; it reflects the character of the age of chivalry; in the same way Tennyson makes his version of the story represent the character of his own age. A mediæval civilization does not seem to have much connection with a material and democratic period, but, by maintaining an aloof attitude from the turmoil of politics, he was able to drive his principles home with a force stronger than he could have attained by any other method. The Idylls are "The weaving of ancient fable into modern thought, graceful pictures of heroic days blown by the winds of tradition into the hurly burly age of starchy fact and despotic practicality." (b) "Though the adventures are now regarded from a modern point of view, this point of view is in the same spiritual watch-tower from which the framers of the legend looked: but it is the platform at the top not a loop-hole on the winding stair (c)

- (a) - Henry Van Dyke - The poetry of Tennyson - p.165.
- (b) - Conde Bevoist Fallén - The meaning of the Idylls, p
- (c) - W.W. McCallum - Tennysons Idylls and Arthurian Story - p. 316.

(B) Service to the Nation.

Through the medium of the Idylls he expressed his most advanced theories concerning the state and society. They have a patriotic character stamped on them. "His work was to ennoble the more prosaic conception of authority, discipline and obligation, to reveal the divine origin and nature of government, to trace the evolution of society as subject to moral law, to disclose the causal sequence that connects homely duties with enraptured vision, to bring civic relation within the illuminated circle of poetry." (a) In the successful accomplishment of the purpose he has achieved his most lasting service to the state. The means he used to reach this end was the story of the origin, development, decay and dissolution of a state which he intended to serve as a model in the nation's history. The Round Table is

"A glorious company, the flower of men  
To serve as model for the mighty world  
And be the fair beginning of a time."  
("Guinivere")

At the same time he emphasises the moral and religious needs of the nation. But the main theme is the political struggle to which the moral struggle was complementary.

His age was one of transition, a time when

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new."  
("Coming of Arthur")

and when men were clamoring for the remedy of the corruptions which were undermining the faith of the people in the nation, "Driven by the discords and troubles of the present to the 'eternal landscapes of the past', it was natural that he should take with him the anxieties and uncertainties that beset his heart and seek to deliver his soul in verse." (b) He feels the age to be in need of counsel, of both moral and social lessons, and he tries to give them, through the stories of Arthur. In spite of many doubts and fears he has a vision of an ideal state towards which he believes his own state is progressing. His son says, "My father felt strongly that only under the inspiration of ideals and with his 'sword bathed in Heaven' can a man combat the cynical indifference, the intellectual selfishness, the sloth of will, the utilitarian of a transition age". (c)

(a) - C.W. Moultain - Literary Criticism, p. 109.

(b) - W.W. McCallum - Tennyson's Idylls of the King and Arthurian story . p 315.

(c) - The Memoirs - Vol II. p. 129.

The entire nation, both rulers and the ruled, may learn many lessons from the ideals set forth in this work. It has been called a "Manual for Princes", (a) wherein they may garner instruction for their character, conduct, and rule. He gives here an ideal national hero and an ideal national order.

(A) Ideal national hero.

In the Idylls Tennyson delineates the character of the first national hero, King Arthur. Arthur's personality is what binds them in one united whole and the unifying theme is his attempt to build up an ideal kingdom and the defeat of this attempt by sin. Here he sets forth his idea of the character and duties of a model king, who has not a divine right to rule, but a divine duty to perform for which he is especially qualified. Rulers have -

"Power on this dark land to lighten it,  
And power on this dead world to make it live."  
("Coming of Arthur")

The welfare of his people should occupy a large place in a ruler's heart and he should give them a just government of equal law for all. In this way he will bind the people to himself and ensure their loyalty for,

"A doubtful throne is ice on summer sea."  
("Coming of Arthur")

Arthur recognized the fact that he owed a duty to his people for he said,

"We sit King, to help the wrong'd  
Thro' all our realm."  
("Gareth and Lynette")

The king has not an office of luxurious ease, but has a strenuous work to do and he must not indulge in useless day-dreams.

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

(a) - Dr. A. W. Crawford - lecture notes.

His reward is the honor and love of his people not great wealth and wide authority in the present life but

"Great bards of him will sing  
Hereafter; and dark sayings from of old  
Ranging and ginging through the minds of men  
And echo'd by old folks beside their fires  
For comfort after their wage- work is done  
Speak of the King."

("Coming of Arthur")

Besides being a model ruler, the personal character of the King was also ideal. He was not surrounded by too much pomp and ceremony,

"He neither worn on helm or shield  
The golden symbol of his kinglihood  
But rode a simple knight among his knights."

("Coming of Arthur")

He looked upon the truth as the greatest of all virtues as -

"Man's word is God in man."

("Balin and Balan")

and he was -

"A King who honors his own word  
As if it were his God's."

("Lancelot and Elaine")

Tennyson's aim was to picture

"Ideal manhood closed in real man."

("To the Queen")

"He shaped and refined from perhistoric materials, endowed with chivalry and kingliness a personage whom he named King Arthur. His unspoken ideal being to embody in a single figure at once the Englishman's epic hero and the Englishman's Messiah. To Tennyson's vision there arose a Christ figure transmuted as it were into modern lineaments. The beginning and end of Tennyson's most comprehensive life study: the Christ-like manhood divested of dogmatic and ecclestial pre-suppositions and working its work in a period of History which can be symbolically identified with the English nineteenth century. (a)

(a) - Genung - The Idylls and the Ages, p. 23.

(B) An Ideal National Order.

The establishment of a model government was the work of this model king. Before Arthur came to the throne, the state was in turmoil and confusion.

"The Lords  
Have foughtenlike wild beasts among themselves  
So that the realm has gone to wreck."  
("Coming of Arthur")

After he had settled the internal disorder and united all the quarreling principedoms under his rule. He had to deliver the state from the ravages of external foes, and the heathen who had been pillaging the land. He corrected the wrongs within the state, he -

"Rooted out the slothful officer  
Or guilty who for bribe had winked at wrong  
And in their chairs set up a stronger race  
With hearts and hands, and sent a thousand men  
To till the waste, and moving everywhere  
Cleared the dark places and let in the law  
And broke the bandit holds and clenched the land."  
("Geraint and Enid")

In this poem, as in Tennyson's shorter poems, there is the plea for law, order, and regulated conservatism. After Arthur's reforms and the founding of his kingdom, the people lived in peace and prosperity.

"All about a healthful people stept  
As in the presence of a gracious King."  
("Gareth and Lynette")

Honesty, purity and truth in ruler and court - all work for good but the opposite of these are among the sins of the nation that are deadlier than war.

The co-workers of Arthur and his kingdom were his knights and the members of his court. He charges his knights not to allow themselves to be tempted from their work lest,

"Chance of noble deeds will come and go  
Unchallenged, while ye follow wandering fire  
Lost in the quagmire!"  
("The Holy Grail")

They must not lead a monastic existence, and think only of individual gain but be

"Men

With strength and will to right the wrong'd of power  
To lay the sudden heads of violence flat."  
("The Holy Grail")

Arthur inspires his knights to follow his example, to lead noble and, above all, useful lives, and make

"Their manhood mightier day by day."

Gareth refuses to lead an idle life, he has heard of the wonderful deeds of Arthur's knights.

"Man am I grown, a man's work must I do  
Follow the deer? Follow the Christ, the King,  
Live pure, speak true, right wrong follow the King."  
("Gareth and Lynette")

It is his ambition to,

"Fly discaged to sweep  
In ever-highering eagle-circles up  
To the great sun of glory and thence swoop  
Down on all things base and dash them dead  
A Knight of Arthur working out his will  
To cleanse the world."  
("Gareth and Lynette")

The duty of Arthur's knights was to establish order and justice, losing themselves in the service of the state. This might be taken as Tennyson's protest against the individualism of the nineteenth century. The <sup>act</sup> Arthur requires of his knights is fully defined in the oath of Allegiance which they gave to the King.

"I made them lay their hands in mine and swear  
To reverence the King as if he were  
Their conscience, their conscience as their King,  
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,  
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,  
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,  
To honor his own word as if his God's  
To live sweet lives in purest chastity,  
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,  
And worship her by years of noble deeds  
Until they won her."  
("Guinivere")

This oath sets forth rules for their character and conduct and defines their moral and social obligations. It emphasizes the necessity of purity and truth and above all the influence of the true love of man and woman. This love

has power,

"Not only to keep down the base in man  
But teach high thought and amiable words  
And courtliness, and the desire of fame  
And love of truth and all that makes a man."  
("Guinivere")

Tennyson has placed the foundations of his ideal kingdom on this love. The work of the kingdom is the joint task of man and woman. In the "Idylls" the failure of this love brings destruction to Arthur's realm. The sin which caused this ruin was not the king's, the guilty one was she who should have been his greatest helper.

(C) The fall of the Kingdom.

The theme throughout is the ruin of a great and noble ideal by the broad and deep influences of one sin which lays its blight on the whole community. "The Coming of Arthur" relates the founding of Arthur's kingdom and his marriage with Guinivere. In this very first Idyll the beginning of the sin which caused the destruction of the realm is apparent. Guinivere does not love her husband, she loves Lancelot. In "Gareth and Lynette" and in the two Idylls on Geraint and Enid, Arthur, although not first in interest, may be seen to work for the good of his kingdom and of the people. "Arthur appears here as a great constructive statesman rather than a warrior. He is building his state on the broad foundations of justice and mercy and is adopting as his watchwords - help for the helpless and rescue for the oppressed." (a) There is no evil in the court in "Gareth and Lynette" and so the men are brave and the women are gracious and virtuous. But in "Geraint and Enid" the shadow of sin falls on the Round Table. The trouble of these two people may be traced to it. Because of the rumour of the unfaithfulness of the queen Geraint distrusts his wife, who is altogether true.

The deterioration of the Order now becomes very rapid, and in the two succeeding Idylls the forces of evil are clearly seen at work. Rumour becomes scandal and gossip holds ~~saw~~ sway in the court. The faithless love of the queen causes the death of the two brothers, Balin and Balan. Vivien with all her evil influences takes up her abode at the court. In "Lancelot and Elaine" passion reaches its full maturity and its effect is seen, not only in the characters of Lancelot and Guinivere, but in the half hearted efforts to carry on the true work of the Court. Lancelot had always

(a) - G.W. French - MacMillan Edition of the Idylls- p.339.



been looked up to as a model of all a knight should be but he proved to be unworthy. The knights now abandon work all together and set out in search of the Holy Grail, they committed the error of,

"Leaving human wrongs to right themselves,"  
("The Holy Grail")

and sought only their own individual benefit. Arthur does not approve of this desire to leave the work of the world and retire into a monastery but his knights heed him not. In "Guinivere" disappointment and failure reign. The fruition of sin is apparent and its consequences press heavily upon the king and Queen. The Kingdom is toppling to ruin. Faithfulness and obedience have been swept from the realm and lawlessness holds sway. The result is given in "The Passing of Arthur" where the King faces the defeat of his plans and the overthrow of the order which he had spent his life in raising.

The "Idylls of the King" are the poet's statement of the high ideals which every nation should cherish. They show that when a government fails, it is not always because of some attack from without but because of some moral evil within, that destroys the foundations of the state. Tennyson had a loyal affection for Queen Victoria and often praised her many good qualities but his greatest tributes were that,

"Her Court was pure."  
("To the Queen")

and that

"She wrought her people lasting good."  
("Ibid")

The epilogue to the Idylls consists of a poem entitled "To the Queen" and in a similar poem he dedicates his whole work to her. The high regard which he had for King Albert is shown by the fact that he dedicated the Idylls to his memory, comparing him to Arthur, his ideal sovereign. It may be easily seen what an influence the work of Tennyson has had in strengthening the loyalty of the people to the throne.

The value of the Idylls may be summed up in Gladstone's words, - "The Arthurian Romance" has every recommendation that should win its way to the homage of a great poet in the largest and deepest sense, and therefore, though highly national, it is universal, for it rests upon those depths

and breadths of our nature to which all the truly great developments in all nations are related."

V. DRAMAS.

In his dramas as well as in all his other poetry Tennyson exhibits a national spirit. His most important dramas constitute a Historical Trilogy. Here Tennyson shows his patriotism in his reverence for the past. He attempts to portray great periods of history in dramatic form. His dramatic Trilogy deals with three great periods or three great crises in national life, thus picturing the development of England. Up to his time no poet since Shakespeare had taken their plots or characters from history. Each drama has a national interest. Tennyson takes prominent men and women, outstanding figures of a time and makes them represent conflicting forces in national life. The great elements of society, political, religious and race elements, are shown in their struggle for supremacy. "They are historical tragedies which involve not only individual but political parties and warring classes of society. The subject is to trace the fate of nations, to exhibit the conflict of opposing characters, not for themselves alone, but as the exponents of those great popular forces which play beneath the surface. To throw the vivid colours of life into black and white on the screen of history and show that the figures are not mere shadows but human beings of like passions with ourselves." (a)

## "Queen Mary."

"The heroine of the play is England herself, struggling and bleeding in the grasp of the Roman wolf. It is nobly imagined and we feel the poet to be full of a retro-active as well as a present patriotism." (b) The problem involves both the spiritual and temporal life of England. The question is whether England is going to be guided in matters of the Church by the decrees of Rome, a foreign power, or, as in civil affairs, follow her own counsel and work out her own destiny. Each drama marks the beginning of a new era and in "Queen Mary" the sway of Roman Catholicism comes to an end and England faces the dawning of a new age.

The fact that Queen Mary has drawn on herself, perhaps undeservedly the hate of England, aroused the sympathies of Tennyson and induced him to seek to put her

(a) - Henry Van Dyke - The Poetry of Tennyson- p. 226.

(b) - H. James - Views and Reviews.

character in a fairer light by painting it as he understood it. Mary succeeded to the throne at a difficult time. The nation was in a ferment owing to the doubtful succession to the throne, fear of a foreign marriage and religious unrest. France and Spain were at war. Scotland and England were pitted against each other because of the marriage of Mary Tudor to Philip of Spain and the marriage of Mary Stuart to the Dauphin of France. One reason that induced Mary to marry Philip was the fact that,

"Mary of Scotland married to your Dauphin  
Would make our England France.  
Mary of England joining hands with Spain  
Would be too strong for France.  
( "Act. 1. Sc.5" )

Tennyson sketches the characters in a masterly way, comparable to the skill of Shakespeare in Henry VIII. Sir Ralph Bagenhall, Lord William Howard, and Thomas Wyatt are typical of the stirdy Englishman of the time. An acquaintance is made also with the common peoplen their manners and speech are introduced directly into the play. All are men of courage and spirit, as was necessary in this Reign of Terror. A vivid description is given of the religious persecutions which Mary instituted. The executions of Cranmer and Latimer take place in the play while the execution of Ridley and Lady Jane Gray and others are described. The people are struggling for religious liberty,

"It will never be a merry world in England  
Till all men have theit Bible, rich and poor.  
(Act 5. Sc 5.)

In this long and bloody struggle the people were finally triumphant and religious tolerance was established. At the close of the play, when Elizabeth comes to the throne, England asserts her independence and the hated influence of Spain no longer troubles the nation.

### "Becket"

The conflict waged between church and crown, which shook England for so many years, is depicted here. It is a struggle for supreme authority in temporal affairs. In the character of Henry and Thomas a Becket we may reach an understanding of the conditions of this century. Becket was one of the first English leaders in the struggle for liberty, and this made him an attractive subject to Tennyson. He is one of the mysteries of history, but this play does much towards

clearing up the mystery surrounding his character. When he is in the King's service, he is eager to carry out every wish of the King but when he is the defender of the church he is ready to sacrifice everything for her welfare. He feels that the condition of the people depends on the church which is their,

" Tower of strength  
Their bulwark against throne and baronage."  
(Act 2. Sc 1.)

As soldier and as chancellor Becket had been loyal to the king and, thinking he would have in him one who would carry out his plans unquestioned, Henry appointed him Archbishop of Canterbury. But Becket then believed that he had become the champion of the cause of God and of the people, and to better serve the Church, he renounced the vanities of the world. When Becket wished to reform some evil amongst the clergy Becket refused to sanction them on the ground that matters of the Church were outside the jurisdiction of the throne. The differences between these two men caused their former friendship to be replaced by hate. Finally Becket was murdered at the supposed wish of the King. The story of Henry's unfaithfulness to his wife and his love for Rosamund adds interest to the play and is based on historical fact. The value of this drama is testified to, by J.R. Green who says that all his researches into the annals of the twelfth century had not given him so vivid a conception of the character of Henry II and his court as was embodied in Tennyson's "Becket".

#### "Harold"

The tragedy set forth in this play marked a crisis in English History when the bitterness of defeat proves to be the beginning of the greatness of the British nation. Here we see "The close of that fierce triangular dual between the Saxons, the Danes and the Normans which resulted in the binding of England, still Saxon at heart, to the civilization of the Continent." (a) Harold the last Saxon King is one of the most interesting as well as pathetic figures in history. Tennyson adds interest to this heroic figure. He depicts him as a warrior and accentuates his moral character, making him hold to the ideals of duty, nobleness and patriotism. The simplicity of his character may be contrasted with the subtlety of the character of William. The temptation of Harold, his yielding to it and his consequent remorse, and finally his punishment, furnished material for this play.

In the beginning a glimpse is given of the character of Edward the Confessor and of his reign. On his deathbed he wills his crown to Harold and exacts the promise from him that he will never marry Edith, as he has promised that she will enter the holy life. Harold tries to forget his sorrow over the loss of Edith in devoting himself to the kingdom.  
(a) - Henry Van Dyke - The poetry of Tennyson. p. 227.

He has to stamp out a rebellion of the Danes and scarcely has he accomplished this than he hears of the landing of William with the Norman army to demand the throne which Harold swore he would give to him. The Battle of Hastings follows, a description of which is given in the conversation of Edith and the Bishop watching from a distance. The craft of William finally triumphs. After the battle William announces his policy in the following lines,

"Make them again one people - Norman English  
And English Norman; we shall have a hand  
To grasp the world with and a foot to stamp it  
Flat. Praise the Saints it is over. No more blood.  
I am King of England, so they thwart me not  
And I will rule according to their laws."  
(Act 5. Sc II.)

### "The Foresters"

Tennyson says, "I have sketched the people in another great transition period of the making of England, when the barons sided with the people and eventually won for them the Magna Charta." ("Memoirs" Vol II. p. 173.) But this is of minor interest beside his making use of old traditions and making us ultimately acquainted with one of the great figures of English legends. It is "an English woodland piece, though slight in texture possesses the true Tennysonian charm. There breathes through it the poet's love of England and English traditions and English folk." (a) The story of Robin Hood is peculiarly fitted to English drama, the subject being so perfectly in harmony with English sentiment and taste.

The play tells how Robin Hood came to leave his earldom and take up his life as leader of a band of robbers in the forest. The story of how he took from the undeserving rich and gave to the poor, is well known, he never considered self-aggrandizement at all.

"Now your great man your Robin, all  
England's Robin fights not for himself but  
for the people of England."  
(Act I. Sc. II.)

Robin Hood is in love with Marian but they are prevented from marrying. Marian and her father are finally forced to leave their home because of debt and because of Prince John's treachery. Their misfortunes come to an end with the return of King Richard from his crusade. He restores Robin to his earldom and consents to his marriage with Marian.

In these dramas Tennyson never deviates from the fact of history yet, while he follows the sequence of

(a) W.M. Dixon - A Primer of Tennyson p 117.

events, he puts new life into them and makes old historical characters living and breathing personalities, whose actions it is a pleasure to follow. The reading of Tennyson's plays fixes the character of the time and of its people more firmly in the mind than the study of any history text. His three other dramas are not historical and are not of importance in this connection. Hallam Tennyson says he had in mind another play "Simon de Montford" describing the England of the thirteenth century. Tennyson takes sections of English History and secures them from oblivion by giving them a form in which the interest never flags. Although his plays may not have perfect dramatic form and may not be successful on the stage, yet they are full of interest, especially to the British nation which finds in them so many national events and national characters and so much of national life.

CONCLUSION.

In all the poetry Tennyson wrote, in his epics, lyrics and dramas he is distinctly national. The spirit of the British nation shines throughout all his work. "Tennyson is so perfect a representative of English thought, so closely identified with English ideals as to be looked upon as the natural voice of the nation's noblest spiritual and intellectual life." (a) He had a threefold love for the nation, a reverence for the past as seen especially in his dramas; an interest in the present shown in his patriotic and indeed in all his shorter poetry, and a strong faith in a glorious future. A national poet is devoted to the ideals of the nation but this alone did not satisfy Tennyson. He aimed at making his poetry of service to the state and he accomplished much in raising and strengthening the national ideals. He contributed to form the national mind far more powerfully than is commonly supposed. His aim may be best summed up in his own lines,-

"The singer for his art  
Not all in vain may plead.  
'The song that nerves a nation's heart  
Is in itself a deed.' "

The subjects of Tennyson's poetry are almost without exception English subjects. And not only the content of the poems but also the style in which they are written proclaim him English. In composing his poetry he exhibits an Anglo Saxon steadiness, and the elaborate recasts he made shows that there was nothing excitable about his habits of mind. His poems abound in similes "drawn from every day sounds and sights, and so vital with observations of common English life and things that they seem to illuminate the page with England." (b)

The characteristics of an Englishman are everywhere apparent in his poetry. "To those few of us who were born under his star, and were contemporaries of his own prime, he was literally the poet par excellence and of right divine. And surely he was our one great English poet, living so English, thinking so English, and dying so English. To speak only of his immediate predecessors, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, Scott and Byron, greatest of the great though they were, they were not the first and last national poets. Nor was, save in one great lyric,

(a) - W.M. Dixon - A Primer of Tennyson - p. 127.

(b) - Stopford A Brooke - Tennyson his Art and Relation to Modern Life, Vol II. p 104.



his great co-rival Robert Browning. But Tennyson has set England before our eyes, he was the interpreter of our feelings, if not of our creed, of our faith." (a) His poetry is a memorial of all that is noblest in the life of the British Isles. Among other nations it arouses interest in the poet's country and the people. Many a study of verse leads to mutual knowledge, the more perfect understanding which promotes harmony in the world. Thus Tennyson's verse accomplished in some degree his own dream for the future.

(a) - Rawnsley - Reminiscences of the Tennysons, p. 289.

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