

When the preacher has learned to look upon nature with this affectionate study, it becomes an exhaustless source of inspiration and instruction. He becomes less dependent upon books; he enters into closer sympathy with the universe; he draws intellectual and spiritual nourishment from immediate communion with the works of God.

The spirit that pervades the poems of Tennyson fosters a cheerful courage. He is no pessimist. He has confidence in man, and truth, and God. He believes in the ultimate triumph of good over evil. In spite of the evils existing in society, he teaches us that mankind is moving toward a higher goal. Who does not recall the oft-quoted lines:

“ Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.”

His vision has extended far into the future, past many wonders yet to be,

“ Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle flags were furled
In the Parliament of man, the federation of the world.”

At the return of the glad Christmastide he calls upon the wild bells to ring out the false and to ring in the true:

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

No sorrow is able to repress the healthful, hopeful spirit of the poet. The death of his dearest friend weighs upon him for a time. Never was there deeper grief. For a long time the poet gropes in darkness; but at last he triumphantly beholds the light. And he rests in God,

“ 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.”

Listen to the words with which King Arthur comforts the lonely Sir Bedivere, who mourns that “the true old times are dead”:

“ The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.”

The preacher who catches this hopeful spirit and the sublime trust of which it is born will bring a gladder and more helpful message to his people.

But the chief homiletic value of Tennyson lies in the social, moral, and religious truth he teaches. His intellect and his heart were thoroughly sound. Without being professedly didactic he is in a high degree instructive. He lived in close sympathy with our age. He was familiar with its learning. He took an interest in social, moral, and religious questions.