

though one of the world's greatest nature-poets, was entirely ignorant of the elements of chemistry and geology. He looked upon the outward loveliness of Nature, caught her divine teachings, and was satisfied. It was the same with Keats; her gleam and her glory and the splendour of her robes were to him a continual delight. He would hear no rude facts concerning her; he would scorn to divest her of that sacred mystery expressed in the voice of the wind and the sob of the sea. But Tennyson was to play the role of a poet versed in science. Already famous before Wordsworth had gone, and deeply influenced by the sensuous beauty of Keats' "Endymion," he looked toward the altars of the great Mother as reverently as either of these poets and with a larger vision. He was hearing "the fairy tales of science." The wonders of the spectroscope were unknown to his predecessors. But Tennyson, engrossed in this new study of earth and sky, did not cease to look on humanity with the sympathetic eye of a poet. He took, therefore, a half-way position, retaining Wordsworth's devotion and stopping far short of the cold analysis and abstraction of Darwin.

Tennyson's view of Evolution is two-fold. He admits Darwin's theory of physical growth, but he holds that conscience, the spiritual part of us, is of divine origin. Love and beauty and heroism have come into the world through no nebular process. "He spiritualized evolution and brought it into poetry," says a recent writer. Tennyson could not be a materialist. Such a harsh belief was thoroughly repugnant to him. Out of the bitterness of his dislike for materialism, voiced in poems like "Despair" and "The Promise of May," where he denounces these "know-nothings," comes his strenuous support of spiritualized evolution. Chiefly in "In Memoriam" and "The Idylls of the King" has he espoused this view of hope and faith.

In "In Memoriam,"—and it is a notable fact that this poem was published before Darwin had moved the world,—while Tennyson shows man's kinship with the brute creation, he does not fail to point him to newer and higher paths. In the saddest of Tennyson's songs there is a note of hope and triumph. Whatever evils exist to plague us, they are working and we are suffering for the good of the race. Implicit reliance should not be placed on the evidence of the senses. The *noumenon* is the true; the *phenomenon* is the false. Rapt above earth,

"And all at once it seemed at last
His living soul was flashed on mine,
And mine in his was wound, and whirled
Above empyreal heights of thought
And came on that which is and caught
The deep pulsations of the world,
Æonian music measuring out
The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance—
The blows of Death"

In such exaltation of soul, wide-eyed, the poet gazes backward over vast tracts of time and reads the law of progress, knowing it for an eternal and all-wise law.

Man closely allied to the brute, and brutal in desire, has power to rise and crush the animal of his nature:—

"Arise and fly
The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;
Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die."

Every generation paves the way, and makes room for a greater. Wisdom grows from more to more. As a young man Tennyson sounded this refrain of "Onward":

"And men through novel spheres of thought
Still moving after truth long sought
Will learn new things when I am not"

We find this sentiment echoed in "In Memoriam." All the talents and faculties of the human mind, typefied as the "maidens," are ever being perfected:

"And still as vaster grew the shore,
And rolled the floods in grander space,
The maidens gathered strength and grace
And presence, lordlier than before."

Dealing with death and the world's agony Tennyson draws a large measure of comfort from the thought of evolution. It signifies to him greater ecstasies of love, a more perfect development of the best in us, in a scale of immortal progress. Nobler minds eclipse noble, and better the deeds of the past. Beauty shows her divine charms to nearer view.

Nature keeps pace with man in evolution:

"There rolls the deep where grew the tree,
O Earth what changes hast thou seen!
There, where the long street roars hath been
The stillness of the central sea"

Even in that sternest of laws, the survival of the fittest, a divine purpose is to be seen. Nature, "red in claw and beak," is kindly cruel. There is no blind fatuity about her methods, no remorseless spirit in her operations. Through death comes fuller life, through sacrifice comes that which works out highest good to the race. In the fulness of time, watchfulness and care of long duration will reach their consummation; out of seeming discord there will proceed the rarest music,—

"Then comes the statelier Eden back to men;
Then reign the world's great bridal, chaste and calm;
Then springs the crowning race of humankind."

None but a poet of evolution could have caught the visionary splendours of this better time, could have closed his noblest work with words like these:

"One God one law one element
And one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves."

Possessed of such a glowing faith in the ultimate perfection of all things it is not surprising that Tennyson engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with materialism. He lavished the peerless strength of his art and the best years of his life in this warfare. "The Idylls of the King" present in allegory this strife of sense with soul. Tear off the guise and Tennyson himself stands forth as the real Arthur. The legendary king of Britain establishes his kingdom, the kingdom of the soul, drives back the heathen hosts and strives to lift his knights and people grossly enthralled by animal appetites and indulgence, to the high plane of his own spirituality. That Arthur fails in the long run goes to prove that Tennyson held evolution was not to be accomplished in a generation, no, not in a thousand years.

So we get the clearest view of his conception of evolution in the "Idylls." Man wallowed in the mire till Arthur came.

"And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came"

The brute was rampant; the spirit lay dormant. But with Arthur in their midst men felt the quickening of the spiritual life. At his coronation, mark the effect produced on those long accustomed to the domination of the beast, so—

"That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost
Some flush'd, and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half blinded at the coming of a light."

Henceforward evolution is rapid and glorious, but at length sense gains the ascendancy once more, and, to the short-sighted, Arthur has wholly failed.

The coming of Arthur is shrouded in mystery. Whether the germ of spiritual life comes by natural birth or whether by divine agency, Tennyson, in this poem, does not choose to discover to us. But it is easily inferred that he favoured the supernatural view. We were loath to believe Arthur "the child of shamefulness." Rather let us walk forth with Bley and Mage Merlin, out from the chamber of the dead King Uther, a moment since loudly wailing for an heir. Out into the black night let us go, down to the sea-shore, breathing an air surcharged with mystery. Behold! a wondrous vision "high upon the dreary deeps,"—

"A ship, the shape thereof
A dragon wing'd, and all from stem to stern
Bright with a shining people on the decks,
And gone as soon as seen."

Eight great waves; then a ninth comes tumbling in upon the shore, a ridge of fire, full of voices, and upon its crest a babe whom Merlin snatches, crying, "The King! Here is an heir for Uther." Forthwith the darkness is dispersed and the sea sleeps under the free sky and stars. Arthur has come into his kingdom. Is this, then, the miraculous entrance of the spiritual into the world?

"Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

But after all his heroic endeavour Arthur is baffled and slain. The materialistic element, never quite eradicated,