

An Analysis of

In Memoriam
57

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Rhythm is inherent in the human breast, and the universe is filled with it.

The voices of nature greet us everywhere and their music is sweet. Be it rhythm in nature or in language, there is no power which appeals more strongly to the emotions.

"Music", says one, "is almost divine", and there is music in poetry. It is those who have sung to the world the sweetest songs, who are remembered longest.

Of these, there have been many, each great in his day, but above all for sweetness of song, and tender pathos, stands the name of Alfred Tennyson, whose life began at Lincolnshire England 1809.

As with all great poets, his genius was inherited. Without attempting any review of his life or preparation for his calling, we go at once to his works of which there are many. Perhaps no other writer has contributed as much to literature as did this one of England's greatest poets.

His field is broad and varied. He has entered the fields of science, art and

philosophy; gone back into the world of myth and superstition; searched out the beauties of ancient tongues, thus enriching and widening our world of thought.

As a writer of lyrics, he was eminently successful. The beauty and simplicity of language and thought so characteristic of his productions is especially true of his narrative writings. But his elegy,

the finest in all the language, is best known of all his works. This poem is long and full of thought, the expressions of his deepest feelings, his hopes, doubts and sorrows.

His meaning is sometimes obscure and requires careful thought; so that an extensive analysis of "In Memoriam" is impossible in limited space. An attempt only is made to tell the story, in fewer words but no claim is made for original thought except as an interpreter of the meaning of his ideas.

The poem is continuous and connected, but for the purpose of analysis it may be divided into parts.

At the opening of the poem, he recalls a creed which taught that out of the troubles of life men may rise to better things.

Lowell beautifully expresses the same thought in these words: "'Tis sorrow builds the shining ladder up, whose golden rounds are our calamities." Where our feet, firm planting nearer God, The spirit climbs and hath its eyes unsealed."

The poet now finds it hard to believe that the great sorrow which has come into his life, in the death of his much loved friend, Arthur Hallam, is for the best.

The old creed does not bring him comfort. Every hope seems crushed but at times he wonders if coming years will find him attaining to "higher things", because this sorrow has come to him. "Where" he asks, "shall I find the interest of tears." But death cannot end all. Love cannot die. It is better that he suffer thus than to forget his friend. It is difficult to return again to his former self. He compares his present life to a Yew tree, which sends its roots deep into the soil, and though Spring returns

for the whole of nature, the tree looks always gloomy. So his life seems linked with that of the departed; sorrow is always with him — the Springtime brings its blossoms for all alike, but sorrow sees only the winter gloom of the foliage.

"O sorrow cruel fellowship" — from life it takes all joy and sunshine. Is it then a blessing? or shall I drive it from me — forget the past and sweet memories of their early friendship? In sleep we lose control of will and grief is forgotten; but

"With the morning wakes the will and cries,
Thou shalt not be part of loss."

Words cannot express the deepest emotions of the soul. Words seem useless, — he hesitates to express his grief, for they cannot tell what he feels. But he must cry out — it is his only comfort — though it be only the shadow of what he feels. At times this does not bring any comfort, he gives up to sorrow, nurtures it by the actual sight of the places where he and his friend had met, — to Hallam's home he wanders, and here the loneliness of it all breaks upon him with greater force.

But why weep; all must some sorrow know, for
"Never morning wore to evening but
some heart did break".

The thought of sorrow being common to all,
makes not his more easy to bear.

Standing thus amid the familiar
scenes, he compares himself to a lover who
has arrived at the home of his love to find
her gone. He is sad, — the place has lost
its charm now that she is gone. The
lover wandering by the gate of the deserted
garden, may find some withered flower
which his lady love had dropped and he keeps
it as a token of the fact. As the poet
takes some flower which Arthur had loved
and places it upon his tomb.

He pictures his sister as she adorns herself
for the return of her lover, who comes not
again, for just as she is standing before
her mirror thinking: "this will please him" —
he is dying; but she feels and knows it not.

During the walk amid the old familiar
scenes, he turns his thoughts to the home coming
of the ship, which is to bring Arthur's body
back to England. He pictures its course of

passage and watches for the first glimpse of the white sails.

"Tenderly Oh, ship, bear him home to those who mourn;"

"May no cruel winds beat upon thy way." He would have the voyage calm and beautiful,—symbolic of him who slept.

But the thought again is forced upon him: that "only as a memory" does he come, yet sometimes he thinks he must ^{see} him in life again, when the ship arrives. As yet, death seems only a dream, but so soon to be made real.

Suddenly a storm arises; he fears for the safety of the vessel; he sends up a prayer for its safe return, and at last, upon a calm beautiful day, the ship enters harbor with its precious freight.

The burial is over. "He rests beneath the clover sod," a thought more beautiful than to know that:

"Hands so often clasped in mine,
Should trees with tangles and with shells."

He now realizes that Arthur is not more, but, no, he is not dead, "he sleeps or wears the mask of sleep."—he must still live, somewhere he shall see him again.

He would that he might impart to him the
"life that almost dies in me", — yet he lingers
but to bring me pain. Perhaps life would
be sweet to him, — perhaps he would have
made of it something more noble than
I can make. When he was with me, I
loved him much, but now that he is gone,
his greatness widens. Five years, they had
been friends. Life then was joy. Now, all
is darkness, — but yet, he wishes to live
that he may prove his love true and lasting.
In this he finds consolation:

"Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all."

Perhaps it is the sorrow of the present which
illuminates the past. As the earth, viewed
from another planet, appears as a bright star,
so time adds brightness to past joys.

Doubts and fears arise, but the stronger
faith is greatest. With this, the first division
of the poem ends. The next gives a view of
the life which lies before, and which he
is determined to live as best he can.

Another Christmas tide has come. One long year has passed since Hallam's death.

There is now a vacant chair in their home circle.

"How dare we keep a Christmas eve, which brings no more a welcome guest."

He had been the life of their social gatherings in years gone by. With sadness they now join in the usual festivities of the season.

Religious questionings arise at this time. Lazarus arose from the dead, but of his absence in the unseen world, we know nothing. How is it then, is there a future life? Even tho death ends all else, we have love with us now, let us cherish that. Yet, he says:

"My now dim life should teach me this,

That life shall live forever more."

If this life ends all, why live at all, for it is full of sorrow, and without a purpose.

"'Twere best at once to sink to peace."

He dreads not death, but fears lest he may not overtake his friend; he will have grown to be so much his superior, while he ever more remains a life behind."

His life is lingering in darkness, while Arthur is advancing. Growth then continues after death he thinks. But again he tries to banish the foreboding thoughts. "I vex my heart with fancies dim," for when we meet again the old love will return. They cannot forget the past.

Yet he cannot see into the dim future, but when the "mists have rolled away they will know as they are known, for there

"No shade can be lost
In that deep dawn behind the tomb,
But clear from marge to marge shall bloom

The eternal landscape of the past."

The poet cries to his friend to be near him, while passing through the shadow of doubt and to lead him on to the realm of eternal day. Yet, do we really want

the dead with us? If he were to meet Arthur, would he not detect imperfections and love him less because of them? But,

"Greater wisdom have the dead, they would see with eyes divine and forget our faults"

There is much in nature that is perishable. The life of early ages has become extinct. Then, he questions, may not man "who seemed so fair," also perish?

It is all a mystery; man cannot comprehend.

In this state of doubt he leaves us and turns again into a more cheerful strain.

"Peace come away, He do him wrong
to sing so wildly."

Why mourn for him longer. He is "richly shrouded" but what of I? "I shall pass my work shall fail" he says.

At this time it is thought that a period of rest follows, for the spirit of the poem changes to a more hopeful view.

He would not that there be no sorrow for the dead, but he has resolved it shall wear a more cheerful face. It shall be to him a gentle spirit, leading him on to a beautiful life, and the world shall not know that he mourns. He forgets not the past, but becomes more resigned to his loss.

"Sweet soul do with me as thou wilt"
but of love not a "little grain" shall be spilt. He rejoices in the thought,

that since his own life has been made nobler for having been with his friend, may it not be so with Arthur: for:

"If thine effect so lives in me
A part of mine may live in thee".

Perhaps the world may wonder at his apparent forgetfulness, but grief has only made him kind and sympathetic towards his fellow man, so he cannot forget for his "inner day can never die".

The poet dreams of Hallam, — walks with him as of old, but awakes, Alas! to find it only a vision.

"So many worlds, so much to do,
So little done, such things to be".

Since there was so much to be done, he reasons, perhaps Hallam may have been needed elsewhere to carry out the divine purpose. However, he exists somewhere and his work wherever it may be is "wrought with tumult of acclaim".

The fourth division of the poem opens with the return of another Christmas Eve, not so cheerless as the last, but yet over all a "quiet sense of something lost" could time

have healed their wounds so quickly? he asks.

No, but with long use "grief's tears are dry."

A life time is too short for such love, but perhaps it was best that they should be parted. He begins to believe that the Divine ruler must do all things for the best.

He welcomes the glad New Year, and longs for the Spring time to bring new life and cheer. Again on the wings of fancy he is borne and pictures a future, as it may have been had Arthur lived.

Such visions are vain; the past calls again and he wanders back to childhood and the old school days. Things have changed, the old faces are gone. Bright visions of home, evenings with his friends, and how "by night we lingered on the lawn".

He cannot lose sight of the thought of Hallam's superiority. He compares it to "two partners of married life" one of who is intellectually greater than the other.

"Her life is lone, he sits apart." The man becomes so absorbed in his work that he seems cold and indifferent in his home. But she loves him yet, and treasures the

memories of their early devotion. So the poet looks up to his friend, whom he thinks so much above him, yet he says:

"I cannot understand; I love"

Soon the poet is to leave his old home. He gazes on the old familiar scenes, and meditates. Unseen and unloved the flowers will bloom, the rippling brook sing on unheard. Strangers will soon take his place, and the sacredness of the old associations will be unknown to them.

Again the Christmas bells are rung, and with the new year he finds himself in a strange land. The holly now stands ungathered. The old customs have been dropped. The season is kept with reverence. He welcomes the glad New Year, and hopes it will bring with it much of good.

"Ring out wild bells to the wild sky,
Ring out the false, ring in the true."
With the new year comes new hope to the poet.

The last division of the poem, we have made begins with Hallam's birth-day anniversary. Joyously they will keep the day, and "sing the songs he loved to hear."

He now makes a final resolution to cease this vain bewailment of his loss, and instead, gather wisdom from his sorrow. The many virtues of Arthur, are often upon his lips.

Once more he revisits Arthur's home, this time in a more hopeful state of mind, for he has reached the higher, deeper faith, but yet he does not understand.

The earth has undergone many wonderful changes. Where once a city stood, now sweeps the mighty ocean.

The "hills melt like shadows, flow from form to form". Though all things may change, he will still hold on to his faith, for it is not farewell; I am sure we shall meet again."

The closing poems are full of hope. She feels and knows a higher power and sees ever in the works of nature manifestations of it. With a last touching tribute to Arthur, the poem closes.

From weakness, he has grown to strength. With a supreme trust he calmly waits until his work shall be finished, knowing that tho "Far off thou art ever nigh; I have thee still,

and I rejoice; I shall not lose thee
tho I die."

The fame of this elegy is world wide. If it had been the authors only contribution to literature, he would be remembered as great. Milton, Shelley and Arnold each have written elegies, but as an original and scholarly production

"In Memoriam" is beyond all others.

His style is natural, language simple, and imagery beautiful, and true to nature

One writer says of the production: "The grave majestic hymnal measure swells like the peal of an organ, yet acts as a brake upon undue spasmodic outbursts of discordant grief." It is a "serene and truthful panorama of refined experiences; filled with pictures of gentle, scholastic life, and of English scenery thro all the changes of a rolling year; expressing, moreover, the thoughts engendered by these changes." Among the authors productions it is the most valued by professional readers and men of fame, and from it many beautiful quotations are taken.

Though written over half a century ago,
civilization has not advanced beyond its power.

The great mind of the poet, read far into
the future, and saw the same great world
with its strife and unrest, that today
humanity is struggling with, and the
lessons given to the world through
the expressions of Alfred Tennyson's
noble soul, and sympathizing heart, shall
continue to touch and inspire man to
a nobler, higher life as long as time
shall last.