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Doubt and Faith in Tennyson's Poetry

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"DOUBT" AND "FAITH" IN TENNYSON'S POETRY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Martha Belle Wright

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"DOUBT" AND "FAITH" IN TENNYSON'S POETRY

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Nearly forty years ago, as a student at Auburn High School, I became interested in the poetry of Alfred Tennyson. And six years ago, as a senior at Western Kentucky University, I became interested in the poet, as well as his poetry.

To the teacher of that class six years ago, I owe a deep debt of gratitude. For without his knowledge and his inspiration that directed the class of "Tennyson and Browning," I would not have desired to do a thorough study of the British poet laureate whose poetry ranges from superior to mediocre.

To the teacher, Dr. Willson E. Wood, I express my appreciation. And I am especially grateful for his kindness, understanding, and helpfulness rendered as chairman of my Thesis Committee.

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INTRODUCTION

Alfred Tennyson, the nineteenth century poetic giant of Victorian England, who served as poet laureate for forty-two years, is best known for his elegy, In Memoriam, The Idylls of the King, and such short poems as "Ulysses," "The Lotos Eaters," "Flower in the Crannied Wall," and "Crossing the Bar." But few readers of his poetry are aware of the frequent use of the words "doubt" and "faith" in these poems, as well as in a number of his other poems.

A realization of the extensive use of these words presented the challenge for a study to determine how frequently these words are used, why the poet used them, and what their use reveals about the poet himself. A preliminary study indicated that a number of poems have been recognized as "Doubt and Faith" poems. They are the following: "The Ancient Sage," "By an Evolutionist," "Crossing the Bar," "De Profundis," "Flower in the Crannied Wall," "The Higher Pantheism," "Locksley Hall," In Memoriam, "Supposed Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive Mind," "The Two Voices," and "Vastness."

In addition to these eleven poems, a few others have been examined for clues as to what kind of doubts plagued the poet, what steps he took in his search for an abiding faith, and

what conclusions he eventually reached. Also, E. A. Arthur's Concordance to the Poetical and Dramatic Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson¹ has been used to aid in the location of all lines of poetry that contain the words "doubt" or "faith." Available periodicals, books, and dissertations have been studied to learn the findings and opinions of others. And biographies have been studied to learn, if possible, the extent to which Tennyson's poetry is expressive of his own personal beliefs.

These studies have revealed that a prevailing doubt shaped much of this poet's thinking concerning religious dogma, as seen in "Despair" and in certain other poems. And the oft-quoted lines from In Memoriam, "There lives more faith in honest doubt,/ Believe me, than in half the creeds," are probably the nearest that Tennyson ever came in his search for an answer concerning this doubt.

A more obvious doubt, however, concerned the reality of immortality. For this seemed an obsession with him, especially after the death of his friend Arthur Hallam, and various lines of different poems seem to be a self-expression of his grasping for a belief in life after death. A rather conclusive statement concerning this doubt has been expressed in In Memoriam:

I trust I have not wasted breath:
I think we are not wholly brain,

¹(New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1966).

Magnetic mockeries; not in vain,
Like Paul with beasts, I fought with death;
(cxx. 1-4).

Another doubt that plagued Tennyson was why mankind must endure mental and physical suffering. Different poems reveal, however, that he realized certain questions had no answers. Thus he eventually seemed to conclude that suffering for individual man, as well as for mankind, is necessary. Two lines from "The Ancient Sage," a highly subjective poem, could be considered the poet's conclusion for this question, as well as other questions that produced doubt in his mind: "For nothing worthy proving can be proven,/ Nor yet disproven. . . ."

In fact, these lines of poetry, as well as the entire poem, are indicative of a more mature, less troubled individual who was expressing his own beliefs in a more conclusive manner. But the conclusive manner probably was a result of Tennyson's stoic acceptance of prevailing conditions, or his resignation that was a result of a long, courageous life of seeking answers to age-old questions and to questions posed because of the scientific period in which he lived. This Poet Laureate did not gain the abiding faith he struggled for throughout his lifetime, as certain critics mistakenly claim. If he had, his swan song "Crossing the Bar" would not contain such uncertain words as "may" and "hope."

Tennyson did, nevertheless, serve his purpose well as Poet Laureate and offered a tremendous service to his

countrymen who were groping for a faith to supplant their own doubts. For even though his own failure to gain a faith that would overcome all doubts did result in a lack of a synthesis in much of his poetry, he probably offered answers that were reasonably applicable for that particular period.

I. DIVIDED OPINIONS

Most critics and scholars have failed to realize the deep significance of Alfred Tennyson's frequent use of "doubt" and "faith" in his poetry, but there have been a number of statements made that reveal an awareness of the poet's own doubts that caused him to struggle for an unwavering faith. Some feel that he overcame his doubts, while others feel that he spent a lifetime in a struggle that never completely ended until he died on October 6, 1892.

Whichever view is taken, however, concerning Tennyson's progress from doubt to faith, there is obvious agreement that he was a reflection of his own age. This has been well expressed by Charles F. G. Masterson:

And so . . . he [Tennyson] reflects the mind of his age; an age, in its later developments, doubting, yet struggling with doubt, chaotic, discouraged, uncertain of the present, distrustful of the future.¹

Determining Masterson's view concerning Tennyson's progress is rather difficult, however, since certain of his statements are contradictory; for example, he speaks of the poet's maintaining "steadfast faith through the darkest days of the struggle"² and of his faith as burning "brighter as the

¹Tennyson as a Religious Teacher (Boston: Knight and Millet, 1900), p. 239.

²Ibid., p. 232.

shadows fall."³ Yet he had previously stated that Tennyson's poetry contains few notes of triumph and that "until the end, sadness and hope, doubt and faith alternately reveal themselves in his writings."⁴

A critic, however, who felt that Tennyson gained an unwavering faith after a struggle with doubt was William Emory Smyser, who called the age in which Tennyson wrote "an age of deep-seated uncertainty in matters of faith."⁵ Smyser criticized the Church of England for its coldness and formalism, and he apparently felt that it was only natural for thinkers like Tennyson to question and to doubt the prevailing religious customs and creeds. Thus he maintained that because of the religious and the scientific controversy the poet had "to fight to hold the faith he had so hardly won in his battle with doubt."⁶ He felt, however, that Tennyson was victorious and gained "the faith that lives in honest doubt" and, as a result, became "for his generation the single voice to express in undying song the story of a common struggle. . . ."⁷

Henry Van Dyke shared a similar view with Smyser:

There is a spiritual courage in his [Tennyson's] work, a force of faith which conquers doubt and darkness, a light of inward hope which burns dauntless under the shadow of death. Tennyson is

³Ibid., p. 248. ⁴Ibid., p. 238.

⁵Modern Poets and Christian Teaching (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1906), p. 9.

⁶Ibid., p. 77. ⁷Ibid., p. 11.

the poet of faith; faith as distinguished from cold dogmatism and the acceptance of traditional creeds; faith which does not ignore doubt and mystery, but triumphs over them and faces the unknown with fearless heart.⁸

Smyser's and Van Dyke's views concerning Tennyson's progress in his spiritual struggle are in opposition to the poet's son Hallam's view and to those expressed by more modern critics and scholars. Hallam said of his father, "His faith, even to the last, was still at times dashed with doubt, for, with the 'universality of his mind,' he could not help seeing many sides of a question."⁹

Dr. Willson Wood expresses this same view in his dissertation, for he sees Tennyson as possessing a lifetime tendency to question and to doubt, but as having a determination to gain faith.¹⁰ And he says, "Apparently by nature a 'seeker,' he [Tennyson] could never give up the struggle for more light, though he was determined to accept a few fundamentals on faith."¹¹

And Basil Willey expresses this view when he speaks of Tennyson as "a representative sage caught between

⁸The Poetry of Tennyson (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1891), p. 274.

⁹Hallam, Lord Tennyson, ed., Tennyson and His Friends (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911), p. 116. (Hereinafter referred to as Friends.)

¹⁰Willson Emery Wood, "Alfred Tennyson and His Riddle of the Universe," (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1954.)

¹¹Ibid., p. 112.

religion and science, faith and doubt; . . . disturbed by them but ending virtually in a 'Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.'"12

It is evident that Dr. Wood's and Willey's statements are indicative of the truth, as revealed by Tennyson's poetry and by various statements that will be presented in a later chapter. And even though Willey was probably being facetious in choosing the statement "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief," he evidently could not have chosen a more applicable one. For Tennyson no doubt felt the necessity for faith just as much as the man who took his son to Jesus for healing and who, upon learning that his son's healing was dependent upon his own faith, cried, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."13

¹²More Nineteenth Century Studies: A Group of Honest Doubters (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), p. 53.

¹³Mark 17:24.

II. WHAT DID TENNYSON BELIEVE?

What Tennyson believed is much more important than what others said about his beliefs and about whether or not he ever gained an unwavering faith. Seemingly valid statements made concerning his beliefs may prove helpful, however, and may provide a better understanding of his poetry. For as D. James Martineau, a fellow member of Tennyson's in the Metaphysical Society, once said of the poet laureate's poetry, "It lay bare the history of his own spirit, its conflicts and aspirations, its alternate eclipse of doubt and glow of faith."¹

What Tennyson believed, therefore, about prayer, God, Christianity, immortality, and human suffering is important.

An unfinished prayer written in the child Alfred's own boyish hand is evidence that a belief in prayer existed at an early age, as well as belief in a Sovereign God:

O Lord God Almighty, . . . Omniscient and
Omnipresent, Whose lifetime is eternity . . .
Thou givest and Thou takest life, Thou des-
troyest and Thou renewest. Blessed be Thy name
for ever and ever.²

An incident recorded by Tennyson's son Hallam also shows an early belief in prayer: The young Alfred, having

¹Hallam Tennyson, Alfred, Lord Tennyson. A Memoir, Vol. II (2 vols., New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. 172. (Hereinafter referred to as Memoir.)

²Ibid., I, 15.

witnessed a period of depression his father was undergoing [and evidently being in a depressed mood himself] lay on a grave in the churchyard in the blackness of night and prayed for his own death.³ It is evident, therefore, that the youth believed not only in a God whom he could praise but also in a God to whom he could turn in his hours of despair.

Tennyson, however, shows little evidence in his poetry or in any of his later personal writings that he considered prayer to be effectual, even though he did speak of it as "the highest aspiration of the soul."⁴ But there are a number of indications that he continued to believe in God, a God of love instead of a God of wrath.

In fact, Tennyson is said to have quoted often Frederick Maurice's statement concerning hell as "the absence of God from the human soul."⁵ And James Knowles said that he had heard Tennyson in anger make the following statement:

If there be a God that has made the earth and put hope and passion into us, it must fore-shadow the truth. If it be not true, then no God, but a mocking fiend, created us, and I'd shake my fist in his almighty face, and tell him that I cursed him! I'd sink my head tonight in a chloroformed handkerchief and have done with it all.⁶

Thus it seems that Tennyson did not believe in a literal hell and could not conceive of a God who would not love His own creation.

³Ibid. ⁴Ibid., p. 324. ⁵Ibid., p. 431.

⁶"Aspects of Tennyson; A Personal Reminiscence, The Nineteenth Century, XXXIII (January, 1893), 169.

Neither could he conceive of there not being a God. On one occasion he said, "It is hard . . . to believe in God; but it is harder not to believe, I believe in God, not from what I see in nature, but from what I see in man."⁷ But Masterson says that no "direct certainty" of God's presence can be discovered in Tennyson's poetry, and he attributes this to the fact that God was to Tennyson "a secondary deduction from phenomena around him, not a direct personal experience of the soul."⁸

Regardless of how Tennyson reached the conclusion of the reality of God, it is evident that this greatly influenced his poetry, just as did his views concerning Christianity. But his concept of Christ is not so evident as is his concept of God, which is epitomized in his statement: "The love of God is the true basis of duty, truth, reverence, loyalty, love, virtue, and work."⁹ And he also said, "I believe that God reveals Himself in every individual soul, and my idea of heaven is the perpetual ministry of one soul to another."¹⁰

Thus it is evident that Tennyson's views concerning heaven, as well as hell, are contradictory to orthodox Christian beliefs. And his views of Christ, as will be

⁷Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, II, 374.

⁸Masterson, pp. 169-170.

⁹Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, I, 318.

¹⁰Ibid., II, 421.

expressed later in a discussion of In Memoriam, are evidently unorthodox. Hoxie Neale Fairchild has, however, expressed Tennyson's attitude to Christianity concisely in a quotation he selected: "Tennyson loves the spirit of Christianity, but hates many of the dogmas."¹¹

But it seems that Tennyson hated most and attacked most vehemently that which Jerome Hamilton Buckley calls "literal-minded evangelical piety,"¹² because the poet felt that it represented intolerance and self-righteousness.

Another aspect of the Christian religion that Tennyson disliked was the different sects, but his son said that he respected all "Christian Creeds," while thinking that they "should sink their differences and pull together for the good of mankind."¹³ For if a religion were not benefiting the believer, Tennyson felt that it was worthless.

Although this poet did not accept Christianity as absolute truth, he did accept it "with the reservation that he had the right to interpret it to suit himself," according to Fairchild.¹⁴ In fact, Tennyson felt that "no system of philosophy embraced the whole truth of experience;"¹⁵

¹¹Religious Trends in English Poetry: 1830-1880 (New York: Morningside Heights; Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 378, citing William Allingham, A Diary, p. 149.

¹²Tennyson: the Growth of a Poet (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 137.

¹³Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, II, 169.

¹⁴Fairchild, p. 120. ¹⁵Buckley, p. 169.

therefore, he chose only that part of Christianity that he felt was purposeful for his own life and for mankind.

For this reason Tennyson was labeled an agnostic, and if he had openly expressed his religious creed he might have been even less popular with the fundamentalists. He wisely chose not to formulate a creed because he realized that "people would not understand him if he did, . . ."16 He was, nevertheless, deeply concerned about the lack of faith of his own time, but he felt that creeds were of little importance, as the following statement verifies:

It is impossible . . . to imagine that the Almighty will ask you, when you come before Him in the next life what your particular form of creed was: but the question will rather be, 'Have you been true to yourself, and given in My Name a cup of cold water to one of these little ones?'17

R. H. Hutton recognized the agnosticism of Tennyson and attributed it to the fact that "he finds no authoritative last word such as many Christians find in ecclesiastical authority." But Hutton felt that Tennyson's "generally faltering voice . . . touches the heart of this doubting and questioning age, as no more confident expression of belief could have touched it."18

Thus Tennyson was true to himself and gave, because of his agnosticism, "a cup of cold water" to many more "little ones" than he could have done if he had supported

16Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, I, 308. 17Ibid., p. 309.

18Willey, p. 104, citing Aspects of Religious and Scientific Thought, 1901, p. 406f.

Christianity wholeheartedly. And it has been aptly said of this poet that "by his strong majestic attitude he saved the faith of thousands who else would have been overwhelmed."¹⁹ For unlike others who "retained their faith" by ignoring new scientific knowledge,²⁰ Tennyson faced the truths that he felt could not be ignored.

Some of his most perplexing questions and doubts probably ensued because of his facing new scientific knowledge, but his belief that "the finite can by no means grasp the Infinite"²¹ evidently helped him to accept what he could not understand. And there were definitely a number of things that he could not find answers for; for example, Tennyson could see no meaning in life if it ended in death, yet he found difficulties explaining how consciousness can survive "the decay of the body."²²

Smyser said, however, that Tennyson's belief in a future life "became the sure ground of his faith in the days when the evolutionary philosophy was apparently establishing its denial of the faith so dear to the race."²³ And Hallam said that his father considered the after-life to be "the cardinal part of Christ's teaching."²⁴ In fact, it has been said that Tennyson's reason for favoring

¹⁹Hallam Tennyson, Friends, p. 283. ²⁰Ibid., p. 282.

²¹Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, I, 316.

²²Masterson, p. 85. ²³Smyser, p. 94.

²⁴Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, II, 377.

Christianity over any other world religion was that it advocated immortality.²⁵

Apparently the belief in immortality did mean as much to the poet as a belief in the existence of God. And his faith in God was in part dependent on his belief that "the nobler nature does not pass from its individuality when it passes out of this one life,"²⁶ as he himself stated once in a letter of condolence to a friend whose wife had died. In a conversation with Queen Victoria, on an occasion when they were discussing immortality, he and the queen agreed that if there were "no other world, no immortality, . . . God, who is Love, would be far more cruel than any human being."²⁷

In another letter of condolence to a friend (this friend had lost his son), Tennyson made a statement similar to his and the queen's agreement: ". . . a separation for an hour, not an eternal farewell. If it were not so, that which made us would seem too cruel a Power to be worshipped, and could not be loved."²⁸ Thus it becomes evident that, since Tennyson considered love as the chief attribute of God, a God who did not provide for the eternal existence of the soul was not a God worthy of man's adoration.

Masterson says that, regardless of Tennyson's periods of doubt and despondency, "he never passed through a stage

²⁵Masterson, p. 81. ²⁶Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, II, 155.

²⁷Ibid., p. 457. ²⁸Ibid.

when he actually disbelieved in Immortality."²⁹ Evidently this is true because the conditions that produced the poet's doubts, especially the loss of his beloved friend Arthur Hallam and the loss of his son Lionel, were conditions that required a belief in life after death if the sensitive Tennyson were to find any meaning or purpose in life. The conclusion that he ultimately reached, therefore, can best be expressed in his own words: "There's a Something that watches over us; and our individuality endures: That's my faith, and that's ALL my Faith."³⁰

²⁹Masterson, p. 80.

³⁰Knowles, p. 169.

III. "DOUBT" AND "FAITH" POEMS

What Tennyson meant by "ALL my Faith" may be determined by considering chronologically the "Doubt and Faith" poems. Published in 1830 but suppressed until 1884, "The Supposed Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive Mind,"¹ is easily identified as a poem expressive of the innermost doubts of a skeptic, presumably the poet himself.

Dr. Wood sees this poem and its expression of doubt as

the result of a natural inclination toward skepticism and pessimistic moods, further doubts raised by metaphysical speculation during the Cambridge days, and a sense of guilt resulting from the weakening of the faith taught him [Tennyson] by an extremely pious mother.²

All of this is evidently true, since the confessor is easily recognized as one suffering the agony of despair because he cannot believe the religious teachings he has heard all his life. He prays to a God he has often been told about, for he feels that is where his hope lies:

"And what is left to me but Thou,/ And faith in Thee?"

There are a number of reasons the confessor does not have this faith, however. The first reason mentioned is

¹The Complete Poetical Works of Tennyson, ed. by W. J. Rolfe, Cambridge Ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1898), p. 4. (All poems used are from this text unless otherwise stated.)

²Wood, p. 54.

his rejection of Christ's vicarious death, for if he believed that, it would mean the subjugation of his own pride and self-will. The second probable reason for the poet's disbelief is his realization that the "Christians with happy countenances" shun him and forget that if the angel's message of peace and good-will were true, they would see him as a brother "in Christ."

Then the confessor seems suddenly to realize "How sweet to have a common faith!" And his first reference to immortality in the poem is made, for he continues to think that if such faith were possible, the fear and agony of death would become, instead, "hopeful grief."

Before other reasons for disbelief are mentioned, the poet experiences a nostalgic mood in his desire for a return to childhood innocence, for he considers this trusting state that man passes through as being God's gift "to fortify from doubt." Then he thinks of his mother's early teachings and her prayers for him as he grew older, and he begins a period of questioning that states his third reason for his skepticism.

He speaks of his mother as having known "The beauty and repose of faith" and as having been "Great in faith, and strong." But her prayers were not answered. These thoughts, and the unanswered questions concerning the failure of God to answer such earnest prayers, cause the poet to express his deep doubts:

Why pray
To one who heeds not, who can save
But will not?

(ll. 88-90)

And as the poet continues to reminisce about his mother's steadfast faith and how she might still be watching over him, and as he considers his own empty, meaningless life, he seems suddenly to reach a decision:

Why not believe then? Why not yet
Anchor thy frailty there, where man
Hath moor'd and rested?

But he realized that he is unlike others and, even though the pride that once hindered his believing is now gone, he is so "Moved from beneath with doubt and fear" that he is unable to believe.

Then the confessor remembers a profound statement made when he began his youthful "quest for truth":

'It is man's privilege to doubt,
If so be that from doubt at length
Truth may stand forth unmoved of change,
(ll. 142-144)

And he engages in a speculation concerning the ox and the lamb and their lives of comparative ease and fearlessness. But when the poet remembers that they will die without immortality, then he concludes that life is better if one can dream and hope for immortality, even though he has not enjoyed a tranquil life.

Then the poet returns to the note of fatalism that he implied earlier in the poem in his comments about his inability to believe as others. This time his Calvinistic

teachings are evident, however, when he ends with an apparent sigh his speculation of man's nature to question:

Ay me! I fear
All may not doubt, but everywhere
Some must clasp idols.
(ll. 177-79)

The confessor is completely aware that he is a doubter, and now he concludes there may not be the perfect creed for which he has been searching. But since he realizes nothing has become his idol, the poet turns again to earnest prayer, as he was engaged in when the poem opened. This time, however, the prayer is for knowledge, whereas the opening prayer was for mercy and salvation.

But the poem ends with the same desolation and extreme hopelessness with which it began. And one thinks of Tennyson as a twenty-one-year old lad who has already experienced such deep doubts that he is able to imagine how empty and meaningless life can be without an abiding faith. Thus this poem has a deeper meaning than Valerie Pitt assigns to it, for she defines its doubt as "the intellectual questioning of dogmas of the Christian faith."³

Three years later Tennyson was still questioning religious dogmas and searching for faith when he wrote "The Two Voices" during a depressed mood that followed his sister's death.⁴ Though similar to "Supposed Confessions"

³Tennyson Laureate (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1962), p. 57.

⁴Rolfe, p. 30.

in a number of ways, "The Two Voices" contains a note of optimism never seen in the former. This is possible because in the latter the inner conflict is dissolved. This may seem a little strange in view of the fact that the word "faith" does not appear in the poem, but the word "doubt" appears five times.

It is evident from the opening lines of "The Two Voices" that the poet is in the same mood as in "Supposed Confessions." In fact, his state is so hopeless that he is contemplating suicide, and the theme "To be or not to be," as Willey calls it,⁵ is introduced in the first stanza:

A still small voice spake unto me,
'Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be?'

And later the tempter's voice repeats this in a more emphatic manner:

'Thou art so steep'd in misery,
Surely 'twere better not to be.
(ll. 47-48)

Soon it becomes apparent that the "still small voice" has a more convincing argument than that of the "I" of the poem. The "I" is Brashear's "second voice" that he calls "the Socratic or intellectual voice" because it offers objective, "optimistic arguments" in refutation of the first voice's argument. Also, he labels the first

⁵Willey, p. 67.

voice as "the voice of conscious fact, of Dionysus with his wisdom of Silenus."⁶

Brashear may be justified in distinguishing between the voices as he does, and in saying there is a third voice of hope,⁷ but Tennyson did not entitle his poem "The Three Voices." Instead, the "I" of the poem reports what the other two voices say. This narrator does answer the first voice; in fact, there is much dialogue between the two. But Tennyson evidently refers to the "two voices" as the "still small voice," the voice of skepticism that urges the narrator to commit suicide, and the voice of hope that emerges near the end of the poem.

Assigning names to the first voice, to the narrator, and to the second voice may simplify the poem and clarify the poet's deep meaning: Respectively the three will be called "Doubt," "Faith," and "Hope."

Early in the poem, after Doubt proposes suicide, Faith comments upon the worth of man, and Doubt begins his skeptical comments, containing so much truth that Faith is almost convinced at times. Doubt reminds him in relation to this first argument that he is infinitely minute in comparison with the infinitude of creation, and he attributes Faith's feeling of worth to his own pride.

⁶"Tennyson's Third Voice," Victorian Poetry, Vol. II (December, 1964), 283.

⁷Ibid.

Evidently this has its effects upon Faith because Doubt, after suggesting suicide for the second time, reminds Faith that he is unable to sleep or to think clearly. But Faith begins to talk about the inevitable progress of man and Doubt answers him with various arguments, the most caustic being the retort that Faith is a man of indecision because of his cowardice.

Faith is undaunted by this remark, however, for he begins to recount his dreams that include the right to doubt:

'As far as might be, to carve out
Free space for every human doubt,
That the whole mind might orb about--
(ll. 136-38)

But this only leads Doubt to the rebuttal that such ambitions are the result of idealistic youth, since man is merely a "blind" and "deaf" dreamer who can not learn the mysteries of life, regardless of his efforts, and whose own end is death.

Faith is now gaining ground, however, for Doubt's scornful remark about his opponent's idea of man as being "a little lower/ Than angels," and his third attempt to convince Faith that suicide is the only answer, have little effect. Instead, Faith realizes that Doubt has told partial truth and has also twisted the truth. Then Faith begins to admit the truths of parts of Doubt's arguments, the most important perhaps being that the more he learns the more mysteries he discovers.

Doubt now shifts his argument to the finality of death and again is answered by Faith:

'These things are wrapt in doubt and dread,
Nor canst thou show the dead are dead.
(ll. 266-67)

Faith has seen the evidence of death and has heard about it since early childhood, but he is unconvinced concerning the finality of death. Therefore, he says:

'Who forged that other influence,
That heat of inward evidence,
By which he doubts against the sense?
(ll. 282-285)

After a period of reasoning that there must be a Supreme Being and a life after death or man would not have conceived of such ideas, Faith says concerning the unanswerable questions of man:

'Ah! Sure within him and without,
Could his dark wisdom find it out,
There must be answer to his doubt,
(ll. 307-09)

Faith seems almost victorious as he makes a typical Tennysonian statement:

'The doubt would rest, I dare not solve.
In the same circle we resolve,
Assurance only breeds resolve.'
(ll. 313-15)

But Doubt makes a last forceful attempt by uttering presumably his mightiest proclamation:

'A life of nothings, nothing-worth,
From that first nothing ere his birth
To that last nothing under earth!'
(ll. 331-33)

Faith reasons in retort, however, that merely because he cannot remember a pre-natal existence, its possibility

is not ruled out. In fact, during his speculations concerning the possibility of reincarnation, Faith speaks of unexplainable familiarities of places and events.

After Doubt speaks again, calls Faith a dreamer, and reminds him of his own misery and despair, Faith makes a profound statement that leaves him in a forlorn state:

No life that breathes with human breath
Has ever truly longed for death.

Oh life, not death, for which we pant;
More life, and fuller, that I want.'
(ll. 395-96; 398-99)

In answer, Doubt scornfully reminds Faith that "it is the Sabbath." And Faith arises from his dormant position, looks out the window and sees a man, his wife, and their daughter going to church; he immediately forgets about himself while thinking of their happiness, even to the extent of offering a blessing on them.

Thus self assertion has finally driven Doubt away. And, for the first time, Hope speaks. In fact, it is no more than a whisper, but that is enough.

In the closing stanzas of this poem, one can imagine the poet himself wandering through the woods and musing about the mysteries of God and of life and death. He is feeling that God's spirit surrounds him because of the victory he has just won over his own doubts and fears and because of the beauty and the serenity of nature.

But this was only a temporary victory, as revealed in later poems, for this attitude toward nature was not

typical of Tennyson. He usually saw it in conflict with man instead of in unity, as symbolized evidently by the family of three on their way to church (the father probably represented God, the mother represented nature, and the child was man.)

If Tennyson could have continued to see this unity, his later poems might not have reflected so many doubts and so little faith. But just as the voice of hope was never more than a whisper in "The Two Voices," Tennyson's faith was never more than a questioning or a hopeful faith.

A hopeful faith is the type seen in "Locksley Hall," a poem recognized as a "Doubt and Faith" poem. Supposedly written four years after "The Two Voices" and published in the same edition,⁸ "Locksley Hall" is not autobiographical, as is "The Two Voices," and it was not written when the poet was in a mood of despair.⁹ In fact, the word "doubt" is used only once in the poem, and it expresses a positive view rather than a negative: "Yet I doubt not thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs."

Charles Kingsley made a statement that expresses well the importance of "Locksley Hall" to Victorian England:

"Locksley Hall" has deservedly had so great an influence over the minds of the young. It is

⁸Selections from Tennyson, ed. by William Clyde DeVane and Mabel Phillips DeVane (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1940), p. 430.

⁹Masterson, p. 221.

a man . . . conquering his selfish sorrow . . . by faith and hope--faith in the progress of science and civilization, hope in the final triumph of good.¹⁰

Thus this poem is a "faith" poem, even though the word never appears in it.

In sharp contrast, In Memoriam shows both doubt and faith and speculates on views stated in "Supposed Confessions" and "The Two Voices." Called Tennyson's "spiritual autobiography," In Memoriam is, however, more than an autobiography, as verified by the poet's own statements:

It is a poem, not an actual biography It was meant to be a kind of Divina Commedia ending with happiness. . . . It is my conviction that fear, doubts, and suffering will find answer and relief only through Faith in a God of Love.¹¹

Tennyson also said, "'I' [of the poem] is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking thro' him."¹² This gives the work such universal appeal that the reader searching for solace and faith can identify and can probably find more faith than the poet himself felt. This is what happened during the nineteenth century, for Buckley says that the work was warmly received by a large number of readers and by most reviewers as "a quite adequate and deeply moving testimony of one man's triumph over the doubts that beset their whole culture."¹³

¹⁰Ibid. ¹¹Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, I, 304-05.

¹²Ibid. ¹³Buckley, p. 127.

Carlisle Moore states that, even though In Memoriam was considered for a while a poem of faith, it eventually was recognized by some as "an expression of anguish and doubt" in which Tennyson "had fought a good fight for faith . . . but had remained a good doubter."¹⁴ Moore sees this elegy, however, as an "attempt to reconcile opposing tendencies . . . an effort to save religion from science." He says "it is neither a poem wholly of faith nor wholly of doubt. Its faith admits an ignorance of the whole truth and leaves room for doubt. . . ."15

Moore attributes this "ignorance of the whole truth" to the lack of a "dramatic conversion" on the part of Tennyson himself, but he does see the pattern of conversion in In Memoriam. He does not see a "sense of sin"; however, he says the work shows the unbearable state of mind experienced by one who feels deep concern for his own spiritual welfare or that of "society or the cosmos." And he sees, as the second step in conversion, "a climactic experience during which a power greater than oneself is felt to be taking control and directing one towards a solution."¹⁶

Willey seems to share a similar view, as revealed in the following statement:

¹⁴"Faith, Doubt, and Mystical Experience in In Memoriam," Victorian Studies, VII, No. 2 (1963), 157.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 168. ¹⁶Ibid., pp. 159-60.

In Memoriam is not a distinctively Christian poem. The doubts, misgivings, discouragements, probings, and conjectures . . . could not have existed in a mind equipped with the Christian solutions. . . . It goes behind Christianity, or passes it by, confronting the preliminary question which besets the natural man, the question whether there can be any religious interpretation of life at all.¹⁷

In discussing the introduction, Willey says that "it was written to show the Christian world (and Emily Sellwood in particular) how far Tennyson could, with perfect sincerity, go in the direction of Christianity."¹⁸

The introduction does, indeed, bear the mark of a sincere, humble Christian. One must remember, however, that an elegy requires a sincere supplication to a higher Power; therefore, Tennyson could be following the convention.

A thorough study of the introduction will reveal that even though faith is expressed, doubt is implied. The opening stanza is truly Tennysonian in that it speaks of God as "Love" and faith as being dependent upon "Believing where we cannot prove." And the second stanza admits God's power as the creator of "man and brute" and as having control over Death. But the third stanza contains a note of uncertainty:

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
 Thou madest man, he knows not why,
 He thinks he was not made to die;
 And thou hast made him: thou art just.

¹⁷Willey, p. 81. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 104.

No expression of certainty in Tennyson's belief in immortality is evident. Instead, this stanza and the next are more an acceptance of God as a controlling Power. But the sixth stanza is the key stanza:

We have but faith: we cannot know;
For knowledge is of things we see;
And yet we trust it comes from thee,
A beam in darkness: let it grow.
(ll. 21-24)

Nevertheless, these lines might be considered the ultimate expression of the poet's faith. For a "beam in darkness" may not be large in comparison with the area of darkness, but it has the ability to penetrate and to spread. Thus the supplication shows that faith may not be great but that it may become bigger and bigger. This stanza is also important because it not only ends the portion that praises God but also it begins the supplication that continues through the next five stanzas, the remainder of the Prologue.

In this section Tennyson expresses his belief that to serve God, man must serve his fellow man. But more important to this study is the line referring to Hallam: "I trust he lives in thee, . . ." for this statement contains a note of confidence. But the supplication ends with a note of uncertainty:

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

Then the poet begins to express his deep sorrow and utter helplessness. This continues throughout the first division, which includes sections I-XXVII.¹⁹ But it is first clearly evident in section III, for the line "A web is woven across the sky" shows the depth of doubt that the poet is experiencing, and "the web" signifies that he is unable to communicate with God.

The mood of sorrow and doubt continues until it develops into a mood of despair in section XI. But this is an unusual kind of despair: it is "a calm despair," for the poet is anticipating the return of Hallam's body. And this leads him to begin questioning about immortality in section XII:

Is this the end of all my care?¹
 And circle moaning of the air:
 'Is this the end? Is this the end?
 (xii. 13-15)

These lines express much hopelessness, and this continues into section XV, in which the poet is in a mood of "wild unrest" that becomes mingled with "calm despair." This latter phrase, used for the second time, darkens the deep doubts engulfing the poet. The despair and the restlessness continue, but finally in section XXVI resignation becomes evident as the poet speaks of "that Shadow," a previously used reference to death, which may be waiting for him also.

¹⁹DeVane, p. 439. (All divisions are used as shown on this page.)

Section XXVII emphasizes this state of resignation and acceptance of the sorrows of life. This is seen especially in these lines:

I envy not the beast that takes
 His license in the field of time,
 Unfetter'd by the sense of crime,
 To whom a conscience never wakes;
 (11. 6-8)

Perhaps the poet has reached this stage because of the memories he has of the one he "loved and lost," for these memories are a great consolation, it seems, or he would not have ended this section with these lines:

I hold it true, whate'er befall;
 I feel it, when I sorrow most;
 'Tis better to have loved and lost
 Than never to have loved at all.

Then Part II opens with little resignation, but much sorrow, as the poet comments upon the hidden moon, the still night, and the ringing of the Christmas bells. For this is his first Christmas since Hallam's death, and as he thinks upon his own misery and despair, he remembers that he had desired his own death.

But the bells seem to affect the mood of the poet, and he begins again to wonder about immortality. Then he begins reminiscing of the previous Christmas that he and Hallam had celebrated together, and this leads him into a temporarily hopeful mood that is expressed in his prayer that asks for a "happy" and "cheerful" Christmas day.

When in this hopeful mood, the poet expresses a deeper faith in immortality than previously stated. This is evident in his discussion of Lazarus, especially in these lines:

Behold a man raised up by Christ!
 The rest remaineth unreveal'd;
 (xxxi. 13-14)

For this evidently implies that immortality is a fact, even though it is unexplainable.

Now the poet begins to show and to talk about faith, for in the next section he mentions Mary Magdelene (although he does not call her name, it is evident whom he is talking about):

She bows, she bathes the Saviour's feet
 With costly spikenard and with tears.
 (xxxii. 11-12)

Pitt sees Mary as "a type of unquestioning faith" that was present in Tennyson's mother and his sister, as well as in any "devout Victorian lady." And she says, "the antitype is the restless sceptic with his mind obsessed by geological doubt."²⁰

Pitt probably is correct in her surmise, for after showing, by use of his biblical allusions to Mary, that happiness can come through humble and loving service to others, Tennyson begins talking to himself. He reveals that Mary's faith was unquestioning, but his own is like the skeptic's:

O thou that after toil and storm
 Mayst seem to have reach'd a purer air,
 Whose faith has centre everywhere,
 Nor cares to fix itself to form.
 (xxxiii. 1-4)

²⁰Pitt, p. 95.

The next stanza is a kind of self warning against disturbing those who are happy and have peace of mind because they have a faith that is based on Christian dogmas. For the poet mentions his own sister, "thy sister," and praises her after he has reminded himself not to "confuse" her:

Her faith through form is pure as thine,
 Her hands are quicker unto good;
 (xxxiii. 9-10)

Then the poet does more speculating concerning immortality. This time he begins by expressing the epitome of his belief concerning this all important idea for him:

My own dim life should teach me this,
 That life shall live forevermore.
 Else earth is darkness at the core,
 And dust and ashes all that is:
 (xxxiv. 1-4)

There is little faith shown in these lines; there is, instead, the poet's groping for an assurance that immortality is a reality. And this groping continues throughout several sections, as the poet continues to express his philosophical doubts with such phrases as "a doubtful gleam" and "doubtful joys." Also, he comments upon the spring that brings no comfort, and he pictures it as only a false spring, evidently symbolizing that the hope of immortality may also be false.

Eventually the poet discusses the possibility of reunion with Hallam, and during this discussion he considers the Indian mystic's idea of Nirvana, after which he says:

Is faith as vague as all unsweet:
 Eternal form shall still divide
 The eternal soul from all beside;
 And I shall know him when we meet:
 (xlvii. 5-8)

Section XLVII ends this period of speculation concerning immortality, and the poet begins to consider what a failure his lyrics have been toward finding answers for his questions and ending his "grave doubts." Then he comments about "Sorrow," which was responsible for his "brief lays," and he says of it:

She takes, when harsher moods remit,
 What slender shade of doubt may flit,
 And makes it vassal unto love:
 (xlviii. 5-7)

From "Sorrow" the poet turns to a supplication that contains the noteworthy line "Be near me when my faith is dry." And finally he seems to find an answer:

I wrong the grave with fears untrue:
 Shall love be blamed for want of faith?
 There must be wisdom with great Death:
 The dead shall look me thro' and thro'.
 (li. 9-12)

As usual the answer was short-lived, however, for Tennyson speaks of "defects of doubt," "aimless feet," and "fruitless fire" in the first stanzas of section LIV. And the last two stanzas reveal first the dream of the poet and last his pathetic state of mind:

Behold, we know not anything;
 I can but trust that good shall fall
 At last--far off--at last, to all,
 And every winter change to spring.

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

Hallam once said of his father that "he seemed always to be feeling" the words uttered in this last stanza, and that his attitude denoted reverence at all times.²¹ And Tennyson was, no doubt, an apparently reverent person because he was a sincere human being searching diligently for an abiding faith. And perhaps no poetry of his so clearly reveals this as do the following two stanzas that show apparently his lowest ebb of faith:

I falter where I firmly trod,
 And falling with my weight of cares
 Upon the great world's altar-stairs
 That slope through darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
 And gather dust and chaff, and call
 To what I feel is Lord of all,
 And faintly trust the larger hope.
 (lv. 13-20)

Overwhelming doubt is still evident in the next section, which Martin J. Svaglic has recognized as expressing such "cruel doubts" that he feels they are about to destroy "the poet's faltering trust."²² The poet is, nevertheless, able finally to enter a stage of resignation that continues throughout the remainder of Part II.

E. D. H. Johnson calls this "stoic resignation," which he considers as "a prelude to the recovery of hope in the third part of the poem."²³ A different mood is definitely

²¹Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, II, 513.

²²"A Framework for Tennyson's In Memoriam," JEGP, LVI (July, 1962), 816.

²³"'In Memoriam; The Way of the Poet,'" Victorian Studies, II (December, 1958), 143.

seen in the first stanza of Part III, for it is Christmas 1834 and this time there seems to be peace of mind, whereas the previous Christmas had been one of sorrow and bitterness. These lines reveal that Johnson is correct and that the poet has become resigned to fate:

O last regret, regret can die!
No--mixt with all this mystic frame,
Her deep relations are the same,
But with long use her tears are dry.
(lxxviii. 17-20)

In section LXXXI more than resignation is evident, however, for the terms "mellowed," "mature," "sudden frost," and "ripeness" denote maturity and progress in the search for faith. And in the next section the poet is overly confident in stating that Death and his counterparts cannot "fright my faith."

But this certainty is soon shaken, for only two sections later the poet begins to lose this confident air as he broods over the unfulfilled dreams, resulting from Hallam's death. The last stanza, however, reveals that the poet realizes his "backward fancy" is foolish and must end if the battle for faith is to be won.

In section LXXXVI victory seems nearer, for the poet shows in his prayer for continued hope, his awareness of the terror of doubt by linking it with death: "Doubt and Death,/ Ill brethern." He does, nevertheless, return to reminiscing, and eventually he begins to speculate concerning communion with the dead.

Tennyson is, of course, aware that the physical return of the dead would be impractical, as well as impossible, and he wonders if he would even recognize a spiritual return of Hallam. For he feels that any vision of Hallam, or any prophecy that Hallam might give, would be discounted by him as recollections or as "spiritual presentiments." This leads to the conclusion: "I shall not see thee."

After the poet has seemingly accepted this as a fact, he ponders concerning spiritual communion with his dead friend. But he feels that perfection would be necessary on his part. Also, he feels that he cannot say "My spirit is at peace with all" because doubt is everpresent:

But when the heart is full of din,
 And doubt beside the portal waits,
 They can but listen at the gates,
 And hear the household jar within.
 (xciv. 13-16)

In addition, the poet feels that his own misgivings will prevent the spiritual communion, and the spirit of Hallam "can but listen at the gates."

He is not content, however, to relinquish his thoughts concerning a spiritual reunion, for in section XCV a deep longing for Hallam possesses Tennyson in his loneliness after a party one evening. Apparently because of this yearning and his recollections of the past, the poet experiences a trance that momentarily allows him a spiritual reunion with Hallam. And he seems to attribute this to

The faith, the vigour, bold to swell
 On doubts that drive the coward back,
 And keen thro' wordy snares to track
 Suggestion to her inmost cell.
 (xcv. 29-32)

On the other hand, he blames doubt for the brief
 duration of the trance:

At length my trance
 Was cancell'd stricken thro' with doubt.
 (xcv. 43-44)

This section is considered by Svaglic the "climactic
 poem" of the elegy, for he says "the poet's attention will
 now turn toward the future with renewed faith."²⁴ This
 is foreshadowed in the last stanza:

And East and West, without a breath,
 Mixt their dim lights, like life and death,
 To broaden into boundless day.
 (xcv. 62-64)

In the next section Tennyson seems to be saying that
 just as darkness precedes the dawn, doubt precedes faith,
 a faith that has no limits. The first stanza is addressed
 to someone, probably the poet's mother, who felt that
 "doubt is Devil-born." The poet, however, questions the
 validity of this statement and attempts to defend doubt
 and to show that it produces a "stronger faith."

By using "doubt" and "faith" equally in the twenty-
 four lines of this section, Tennyson seems also to be
 saying that one is no stronger than the other and that if
 one overpowers the other it is a result of man's struggle--
 or his failure to struggle. To develop this idea, the

²⁴Svaglic, p. 820.

poet refers to Hallam's own search for faith and evidently blends in his own diligent search to make his strongest defense for doubt:

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

Sir Alfred Lyall saw in the last two lines "an anthithesis, a kind of paradox" that he felt typified the minds that were perplexed as a result of scientific developments, and remained perplexed "until they obtained repose in the conclusion that essential truths lie somewhere beyond."²⁵ A somewhat similar interpretation is expressed by Buckley, who sees "honest doubt" as akin to Kierkegaardian thought. He says of Tennyson:

His faith . . . rests on the premise of feeling . . . in its development, it is frequently not far removed from Kierkegaardian 'existentialism,' which similarly balances the demands of the inner life against the claims of the nineteenth-century 'knowledge.'²⁶

In simpler terms Thomas Glen Burton says of Tennyson's oft-quoted lines in defense of doubt:

The poet may be saying . . . that whereas God is with those in the clouds of honest doubt, the creeds have allowed the people to worship the gods of materialism . . . the creeds have led or allowed the people to go abruptly from one extreme to the other, from religious fervor to materialism.²⁷

²⁵English Men of Letters: Tennyson, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907), p. 71.

²⁶Buckley, p. 125.

²⁷"Tennyson's Use of Biblical Allusions" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1966), pp. 83-84.

Exactly what Tennyson meant is uncertain. But it is certain that he felt man had the right to question and would profit by it, as these lines reveal:

He fought his doubts and gather'd strength,
 He would not make his judgment blind,
 He faced the spectres of the mind
 And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;
 (xcvi. 13-17)

In these lines Tennyson is describing his friend Hallam; nevertheless, it is an entirely subjective description and quite likely indicated what Tennyson also thought of himself. Also, he evidently is saying that man must struggle with his doubts, but man is not alone in his struggle. For in the concluding lines of this section, the poet speaks of "the Power" that created both "the darkness and the light" and is present in both. And he refers to the Israelites' making "their gods of gold" even though God's presence was hovering over Mount Sinai, where Moses was receiving the Commandments.

Burton sees Tennyson's use of this particular biblical allusion as showing "that God was with the poet's friend when he was perplexed in faith, as well as when he found 'a stronger faith.'"²⁸ Tennyson could, therefore, be saying that God's spirit is available to man and has always been available, but man is unaware of this.

Since Tennyson's faith was based largely upon a God of love, and there was the strong bond of love between

²⁸Ibid., p. 82.

Hallam and the poet, it is difficult to distinguish between God's spirit and Hallam's spirit at times. The next section shows love personified as the basis for faith, and a happily married couple is used as a parallel for the bond that exists between Hallam's spirit and the poet's spirit.

It is evident that the poet does not understand the mystery, as shown in the last line, "'I cannot understand: I love.'" But he seems to be saying that somehow there has been a fusion of Hallam's spirit and of God's spirit. And because of his own spiritual communion with Hallam during his trance, the poet's faith is now much stronger than his doubt. Such terms as "early faith," "faith is fixed and cannot move," and "faithful eyes" imply this.

After much speculating and reminiscing throughout the remaining sections of Part III, Part IV opens with the same lines that open Part II:

The time draws near the birth of Christ;
 The moon is hid, the night is still;
 (xxviii. 1-2; civ. 1-2)

This third Christmas Eve is different, however, from the first one that followed Hallam's death. Whereas there were four churches that heralded that first Christmas with the pealing of bells, there is only one this time. Also, the poet's mood is different, for this time no deep grief and bitterness is in evidence as it was that first Christmas. Instead, the mood is one of nostalgia, for the poet no longer lives at Somersby, where his father was buried and where he was living when Hallam died.

In the nostalgic mood is a calmness and an acceptance, unlike the mood of grief and bitterness. This year there will be no music, dancing, drinking, and playing of games. These are not needed to assuage the poet's grief, because he has accepted the loss of his friend. And there is a serenity and a feeling of hope that is expressed in these lines:

Long sleeps the summer in the seed;
Run out your measured arcs, and lead
The closing cycle rich in good.
(cv. 26-29)

And hope is distinctly evident in the next section, for the poet seems almost gay as he talks of the New Year that is about to be acclaimed with the ringing of bells. This hope is emphasized by the beginning of each of the twelve stanzas, except the last, with the clause, "Ring out." And the last stanza opens with "Ring in," showing the hope that after all the undesirable has ended, it will be replaced with the desirable. And the last line commands, "Ring in the Christ that is to be."

The mood is more solemn in the next stanza. It is the birthday of Hallam, and it will be celebrated as if he were bodily present. There is now an obvious blending of Hallam and Christ, for this section contains a number of metaphors identifiable with Christ: "purple," "thorns," "wood," "wine," and "the banquet" (that probably refers to the sacrament of Communion).

This mood is present in section CVIII, the next section, also. But the poet seems suddenly to realize

that his "yearning" is futile, for he says "What profit lies in barren faith?" And this seems to awaken in him a renewed desire for "wisdom," especially wisdom concerning life after death.

But the more the poet speculates concerning wisdom, the broader his speculations become. At first he seems to desire wisdom that will free him of all his doubts, as seen in these lines:

Seraphic intellect and force
 To seize and throw the doubts of man;
(cix. 5-6)

As the search for wisdom continues, the poet realizes more and more the limitations of wisdom; for example, he is aware that Hallam had much wisdom, but it did not prevent his death:

For can I doubt, who knew thee keen
 In intellect, with force and skill
 To strive, to fashion, to fulfill--
 I doubt not what thou wouldst have been:
(cxiii. 5-8)

No doubt Tennyson was thinking what might have been, had Hallam lived, as he wrote these lines and as he enumerated some of his friend's achievements. And these thoughts probably troubled him. But a few stanzas later he begins comparing wisdom and knowledge, and he makes some rather caustic comments about knowledge:

Half-grown as yet, a child, and vain--
 She cannot fight the fear of death,
 What is she, cut from love and faith,
 But some wild Pallas from the brain

Of Demons?

(cxiv. 9-13)

Then the poet speaks of knowledge as "earthly" and wisdom as "heavenly of the soul." And there seems to be resignation with, perhaps, a faint hope that the world would gain wisdom along with knowledge. This resignation continues throughout the sections of speculation concerning nature and evolution.

But in section CXXII the poet voices his conclusions of nature and evolution, and there is more than resignation. Although the words "doubt" and "faith" are used equally in the six stanzas, faith is triumphant. But it is not a confident faith that the poet gained from his observation of nature; neither is it a faith that the poet has attained through logical thinking. Instead, it is a faith based upon his own feelings and his trance-like experience.

These six stanzas are more revealing about Tennyson's true beliefs than, perhaps, any other stanzas of In Memoriam, and Masterson was evidently correct in considering them a summation of the "fundamental principle of Tennyson's teaching." For he sees the poet's belief in "the existence of an all-perfect God, the reality of the self, . . . the immortality of each individual personality."²⁹

The first stanza definitely reveals belief in an omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent God, but one whom the poet does not understand:

That which we dare invoke to bless;
Our dearest faith; our ghastliest doubt;

²⁹Masterson, p. 46.

He, They, One, All; within, without;
The Power in darkness whom we guess;

And the next stanza recounts the poet's searching for God in nature and through philosophy, but he found no proof. The third and the fourth stanzas, however, contain his ultimate conclusion that there is a God and that man can believe in Him:

If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep,
I heard a voice, 'Believe no more'
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep;

A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answer'd, 'I have felt.'

To emphasize the extent of his doubts, the poet again uses the image of a frightened, weeping child. Night is not mentioned, but "blind clamour" shows the extent of groping and confusion. But this time the child finds comfort because his groping has made him realize the nearness of his father. Thus Tennyson is saying that his questioning and doubting gave him the wisdom to know that God is with man even when he doubts and searches the most. And the last stanza contains the confident note and faith is now dominant:

And what I am beheld again
What is, and no man understands;
And out of darkness came the hands
That reach thro' nature, moulding man.

The poet is not saying that he found God in nature; in fact, he again admits that he does not understand God, but

he has gained faith in a God who "thro' nature," possibly by the means of evolution, has shaped and continues to shape man.

The concluding sections show "faith" as being in control, although prevailing conditions do present problems:

And all is well, tho' faith and form
 Be sunder'd in the night of fear;
 (cxxxvii. 13-14)

These two lines, though evidently referring to the French Revolution as "the night of fear," seem to imply that God is in His heavens and all is right with the world, regardless of whether or not man is aware of His presence. For man's faith may be destroyed, but this will not alter the reality of God's existence, the poet seems to be saying.

Thus faith is, for Tennyson, a quality dependent upon circumstances. And the following stanza shows that faith is dependent upon love:

The love that rose on stronger wings,
 Unpalsied when he met with Death,
 Is comrade of the lesser faith
 That sees the course of human things.
 (cxxxviii. 1-4)

Just as the prologue to In Memoriam contains a supplication, so does the last section (cxxxix). But this last supplication states that man's will is necessary for the attainment of faith in a God who will work with man. This is especially true in the line, "With faith that comes of self-control," that Burton explains as "the will, which rises in the spiritual self, [and which] permits one to

trust with a faith that is produced by itself . . . by the deeds being purified by the individual will. . . ."30

It is evident that Tennyson has not found answers to all his questions, but he has accepted the fact that truths exist "that never can be proved." And he does believe in the merging of the individual soul with God and with other souls. This he sums up in the final stanza of the elegy:

That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off event,
To which the whole creation moves.

Dr. Wood says that this "faith in human betterment through a continuing process of evolution and the mystical union of body and soul is representative of Tennyson's position as expressed in his optimistic moods throughout his life."31 This is obvious in "The Higher Pantheism," an eighteen-line lyric that the poet evidently wrote when in an optimistic mood.

Fairchild says that the lesson of "The Higher Pantheism"

is that if we could see and hear with our souls instead of with our eyes and ears, to behold the physical universe would be to behold God. In the light of this truth, evolution is transformed into a system of moral and spiritual progress.32

Fairchild felt, however, that Tennyson's "wishful heart" was the basis of this "optimistic view of evolution."33 Whether Tennyson based this view on his limited

30Burton, p. 97. 31Wood, p. 151.

32Fairchild, p. 126. 33Ibid.

knowledge of science or whether it was the result of wishful thinking makes little difference, however. For, according to his son, the poet seemed undisturbed about the theory of evolution, even though he did say that "No evolutionist is able to explain the mind of man or how any physiological change of tissue can produce conscious thought."³⁴

Buckley sees "The Higher Pantheism" as "a witness that at the end of a decade of great material success Tennyson could assert the insubstantiality of the whole phenomenal world and the single reality of the spirit."³⁵ The poem is indeed an expression of the poet's faith and an acknowledgment of the limitations of "empirical knowledge."

Addressing his soul, the speaker attempts to explain God. Perhaps the realization of such an impossibility causes him to speak of the physical world as a "Vision" of God and physical man as evidence of that "division from Him."

Then the speaker attempts to explain that man's separation from God is responsible for his unhappiness and confusion. For God's presence, "Glory," is everywhere but man cannot realize it. Instead, man has a distorted view of God and knows no happiness, as the following stanza reveals:

Glory about thee, without thee; and thou
fulfillest thy doom,
Making Him broken gleams and a stifled
splendor and gloom.

³⁴Hallam Tennyson, Memoir, I, 323. ³⁵Buckley, p. 170.

Then the soul is admonished to pray so that "Spirit with Spirit can meet--" and this is possible because of God's encompassing power.

After this the speaker relates opinions of others concerning God: "God is law," "Law is God," and "the Fool" says, "No God at all." To explain the diversity of opinions, the speaker says, "For all we have power to see is a straight staff bent in a pool."

Thus Tennyson seems to be saying that because man is finite he cannot understand the infinite. For this reason people have their individual concepts of God, and God is probably all of these because man would not have the vision, or the idea, if there were not the reality. Tennyson does not mean, however, that the statement, "There is no God," is true. Instead, he probably means that the fool says this because he lacks wisdom and the ability to develop any kind of idea.

The concluding stanza contains the lesson that Fairchild sees in this poem:

And the ear of man cannot hear, and the
 eye of man cannot see;
 But if we could see and hear, this Vision--
 were it not He?

Bernard D. N. Grebanier considers this a religious poem that is "a confession of faith in the supremacy of God."³⁶ Others might consider it Platonic, and still

³⁶Alfred Tennyson, "The Essentials of English Literature" (2 vols.; Woodbury, New York: Baron's Educational Series, Inc., 1948), p. 554.

others, pantheistic. In whichever class it is placed, it is definitely a poem of faith and not of doubt. The faith, however, is a questioning faith and not an unwavering faith, such as many of Tennyson's readers thought he had found in the earlier In Memoriam.

Grebanier also considers "Flower in the Crannied Wall" a religious poem. But it is religious only in the sense that it implies belief in God and "expresses a favorite doctrine of Tennyson's, the immediate inter-relation of all things in the universe."³⁷ There is, of course, no doubt expressed in the brief lines that show a speculation concerning nature, God, and man:

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower--but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

The key to the poem evidently is the clause, "if I could understand." For it shows the poet still seeking answers to questions that have troubled this sincere seeker of knowledge..

Evident also in "De Profundis" is a seeking for knowledge. In addition, there is evidence of the inter-relationship of God, man, and the universe. Ranked first among Tennyson's speculative poems, this four-stanza lyric was written August 11, 1852, the day the poet's

³⁷DeVane, p. 467.

first son, Hallam, was born. But the work was not published for twenty-eight years.³⁸

"Out of the deep," a recurring phrase within the poem, helps to emphasize the profundity of thinking and of searching for answers. Tennyson, however, explained this phrase to Wilfred Ward as representing "birth and death as the coming from and returning to the spirit-world and God Himself."³⁹

The first stanza, spoken to the new-born child, reveals deep thought concerning the pre-existence of the soul:

Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep,
Where all that was to be, in all that was,
Whirl'd for a million aeons thro' the vast
Waste dawn of multitudinous-eddying light--

These opening lines introduce this idea of pre-existence. Then the second stanza continues this line of thinking, and it explains "the deep" as having been "before our world begins." And the third stanza mentions "suns and moons," that Tennyson thought of as "shadows of the spirit-world and of God Himself."⁴⁰

This stanza shows the poet's faith perhaps even more than the first two, because of the first three lines:

For in the world which is not ours They said
'Let us make man,' and that which should be man,
From that one light no man can look upon,

³⁸Rolfe, p. 483.

³⁹Hallam Tennyson, Friends, p. 479. ⁴⁰Ibid.

For these lines show God in creation and man as a part of God.

Then the poet uses such opposites as "divisible-indivisible," "numerable-innumerable," and "finite-infinite" to emphasize the dualism and unexplainable mysteries. And he closes the poem by showing that even greater than all of the miracles is the miracle of the individual soul--his new son--who has free-will to pattern his own life and to become an integral part of the physical world.

Thus this poem is a poem of "faith," not dogmatic faith but faith in a pre-existent God who is the creator of individual man "out of His whole World-self." And it is about faith in man and his ultimate unity with God from whom he came.

Another "faith" poem is "The Ancient Sage," published five years later than "De Profundis," and similar in tone but dissimilar because of the various references to doubt. In fact, the doubt expressed makes the work similar to "The Two Voices." Buckley says, however, that "the sage, unlike the troubled ego that fifty years before fenced desperately with the bitter voice, is not for a moment to be shaken by the poet's doubt. . . ."41

Like "De Profundis," "The Ancient Sage" is largely directed to some one called "son." But unlike "De Profundis" this "son" is not the poet's own son; instead,

⁴¹Buckley, p. 236.

it is a term that is typically used by the aged and the wise when giving advice. Thus the sage employs its use to express his words of wisdom concerning God and man and to give advice that will profit man.

Lyall sees "The Ancient Sage" as an attack on Oriental mysticism and an affirmation in "a Divine Presence which sustains the whole system of being."⁴² There definitely is an avowal of belief in a Divine Presence, and that is why faith is predominant in this work. And Wilfred Ward sees a pleading for "steadfast trust" in this Presence, "as we would trust a known and intimate friend in the face of ominous suspicions."⁴³

When reading this poem, one can almost hear the poet himself speaking, for he admitted that "the whole poem is very personal."⁴⁴ Smyser sees the sage in the poem as "almost the personification of the thought and faith of Tennyson at seventy-six, an expression of his most intimate and personal views in matters of faith."⁴⁵ Also, Smyser says that in this "colloquy between faith and doubt . . . faith speaks with the voice of authority and the calm assurance of one who knows the truth of that which he believes."⁴⁶

There is assurance and confidence in the poem that is evident in few of Tennyson's works, but there is still

⁴²Lyall, p. 143. ⁴³Hallam Tennyson, Friends, p. 237.

⁴⁴Hallam Tennyson, Memoirs, II, 319.

⁴⁵Smyser, p. 124. ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 119.

the questioning and the speculation that is typical of his poetry. And perhaps more important is the acknowledgment that a number of things cannot be proven because they cannot be understood, but they are accepted with the belief that eventually man will see "the whole" and will fully understand God, man, and the universe.

Early in the poem doubt is introduced as the sage reads from the scroll:

'And yet what sign of aught that lies
 Behind the green and blue?
 But man today is fancy's fool.
 As man hath ever been.
 The nameless Power, or Powers, that rule
 Were never heard or seen.'

The sage immediately attempts to inform his listener concerning the reality of "the Nameless." But he admits that one cannot know, "For knowledge is the swallow on the lake." Instead, he asserts that one can have spiritual understanding and insight to the extent that he can see "the Nameless of the hundred names." Furthermore, he assures his listener that "if the Nameless should withdraw from all," nothing would be left.

But he has not convinced his companion, for the listener retorts that "the Nameless" has never appeared nor spoken with man. And immediately the sage admits that the following cannot be proven: God ("the Nameless"); the existence of the world; that man has a physical body only, a spiritual body only, or a combination of the two; immortality; mortality; personal identity. And he concludes his list with these words:

For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
 Nor yet disproven: wherefore be thou wise,
 Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
 And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith!
 (ll. 66-69)

Then the sage enumerates the attributes of Faith:

She reels not in the storm of warring words,
 She brightens at the clash of 'Yes' and 'No,'
 She sees the Best that glimmers thro' the Worst,
 She feels the Sun is hid but for the night,
 She spies the summer thro' the winter bud,
 She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,
 She hears the lark within the songless egg,
 She finds the fountain where they wail'd 'Mirage'!
 (ll. 70-77)

As the dialogue continues the sage combats each of his companion's words of doubt with an optimistic statement; for example, his companion recounts the miseries associated with disease, old age, the loss of mental powers, and death. And he concludes this line of thinking with these words:

"In vain you tell me 'Earth is fair'
 When all is dark as night."
 (ll. 169-70)

The sage admits that much grief and death is present, and he offers this as his wise retort on this occasion:

Who knows but that the darkness is in man?
 The doors of Night may be the gates of Light;
 (ll. 173-74)

Then he explains that if one experienced no sorrow he would know no joy, and he adds that man will eventually understand all the mysteries. But his companion only answers that all is in vain and all will end, so why not "eat, drink, and be merry" and try to forget "The darkness of the pall."

The sage seems impatient with his companion's pessimistic thinking and shows his disgust by talking about traditional funeral customs and the traditional black used. He feels that gay songs should replace the mournful songs and white should replace the black, since death is only a stepping stone to a higher plane.

His companion is unconvinced, however, for he answers:

"O worm and maggots of to-day
Without their hope of wings!"
(ll. 210-11)

But the sage's faith is undaunted, and he asserts the preeminence of "the silent Word" over his companion's words. The answer is merely a taunt, however, for the sage has not convinced his listener that communion between man's spirit and God's spirit is a reality.

The sage then recounts a mystical experience of his that occurred during boyhood, for he seems determined to win the argument. This time his companion does admit that "idle gleams will come and go," but he feels they are profitless because the problems ("the clouds") are still a reality.

Confidently the sage replies: "The clouds themselves are children of the Sun." And when his listener, still unconvinced, makes his last comment, the sage attempts once more to convince this doubter that without the bad there would be no good. And he now seems in command, for he says, "get thee back."

With an air of finality and determination, the sage begins to offer parting words of advice to the skeptic who has negated every statement made by him. But he has not shaken the faith of the sage. Otherwise, the sage would not end with such words of faith:

Look higher, then--perchance--thou mayest--beyond
A hundred ever-rising mountain lines,
And past the range of Night and Shadow--see
The high-heaven dawn of more than mortal day
Strike on the Mount of Vision!

Since this is a subjective poem, containing Tennyson's own ideas of both doubt and faith, and since the mystical experiences evidently were in part responsible for his faith, it is possible that this poem is an expression of the aging poet's desire to experience once again the trances he felt he would never again encounter. If so, there is an even deeper meaning in the advice given to the skeptic, especially this advice: "--think well! Do-well will follow thought." And the line referring to "the Mount of Vision" would mean, in addition to belief in the "one far-off divine event" spoken of in In Memoriam, that transcendent thinking might produce a longed-for trance.

Regardless of the poet's deepest meaning, however, faith does supersede doubt in "The Ancient Sage" and does imply that the poet has grown into a more steadfast faith that can banish any fleeting doubts that may enter his mind. But "Vastness," a meditative poem printed the same year as "The Ancient Sage, reveals that the poet has not gained the steadfast faith he desires.

Probably written during a depressed state, "Vastness" expresses such a somber mood, and the speaker seems in such depths of despair, that the optimistic ending is unconvincing. For it seems that the "I" of the poem is so despondent that he is groping for any ray of hope in immortality, and he has based that hope on the feeling that since love for his friend has remained alive and steadfast through the years, the loved one must be alive.

Smyser considers this poem one of Tennyson's "latest utterances upon . . . the struggle between faith and doubt." He bases the idea of a struggle upon such a phrase as "faith lost in the gloom," and he sees the poet "in strong compulsion of doubt," asking the question: "What is all of it worth?"⁴⁷

"Vastness" reveals a person disillusioned because of "raving politics," "truthless violence," extreme materialism, licentious living, and rash injustice. Tennyson does admit, however, that some marriages are based on true love and fidelity and that some people are selfless. Whether life is good or bad does not matter, however, if all ends with the grave, the poet asserts, as these lines show:

What is it all, if we all of us end but in
 being our own corpse-coffins at last?
 Swallow'd in Vastness, lost in Silence,
 drowned in the deeps of a meaning-
 less Past?

(xvii)

⁴⁷Smyser, pp. 94-95.

Then the despairing answer is given:

What but a murmur of gnats in the gloom,
or a moment's anger of bees in their
hive?--

Since the poet has faith in a God of love, he has at times expressed his disbelief that life will end with death. No mention is made in this poem, however, of any belief in God; instead, it is an expression of man's minuteness and apparent worthlessness in comparison with spatial vastness. But because of the poet's own ability to love one who has long been dead, he concludes that death must not have destroyed the spirit of that one. For that reason he asserts that "the dead are not dead but alive."

In contrast to the evident despair of "Vastness" is the stoic acceptance in "By An Evolutionist," a short poem that was published four years later than "Vastness." Grebanier classes this meditation concerning evolution as a religious poem that shows Tennyson's reaction to evolution and his belief in "a higher being than man."⁴⁸

The first stanza recognizes the "higher being" by stating, "The Lord let the house of a brute to the soul of a man." This is an affirmation of God's creative power, even though it is an acceptance of the evolutionary theory that man is a higher development of the lower animals. This stanza also recognizes that man has the

⁴⁸Grebanier, p. 554.

ability to make of his life what he chooses, with the expectation of still progressing to a "better" stage.

Then the second stanza contains doubt, as seen in these lines:

If my body come from brutes, my soul
uncertain or a fable,
Why not bask amid the senses while the
sun of morning shines,
(ll. 5-6)

This doubt continues in the next stanza as the speaker addresses "Old Age" and expresses the wish that death had come while he possessed youthful hopes.

The answer given by "Old Age" implies that the speaker has progressed during his "eighty years" and that the next step will be less difficult. There is weak faith present in this stanza, however, for "the ladder-of-heaven that hangs on a star" evidently implies that in the far, far distance there is a glimmer of hope that he may step-by-step climb higher.

The next stanza begins with a repeated clause, "If my body come from brutes." This apparently reveals a doubt that man may not have evolved from the lower animals, but if he did he is superior because of his "Human Soul."

And the last stanza reveals a calm acceptance of old age, with its memories of the struggles of the past. Now there is no struggle for "the Man is quiet at least" as he contemplates a still higher level of existence.

Also showing an apparently calm acceptance of old age, "Crossing the Bar" has probably caused more conflicting views than any of Tennyson's other poems of "Doubt and Faith." For certain modern critics and scholars have become aware of the tones of doubt within the poem that evidently were overlooked for generations.

Laurence Perrine, however, considers the poem one expressing a confident faith. And he feels that readers have not been mistaken in finding an "assured faith" that brings comfort in the time of bereavement. Therefore he expresses the following with confidence:

. . . Tennyson intended the poem to be taken as his readers have taken it. All his life Tennyson felt a need to believe in immortality, and for most of his life he believed that he did believe in it. His request that 'Crossing the Bar' be placed last in all volumes of his poetry is a clear indication of the significance he gave to the poem.⁴⁹

Perrine feels that the interpretation of the "hope" in "I hope to see my Pilot face to face" determines how one sees the meaning implied. Since Perrine sees the images as "images of calm and beauty," he sees a tone that reveals serenity, and he sees "hope" as "confident expectation." To verify this view he explains that Tennyson's contradictory imagery of "his soul" is responsible for a note of "characteristically Tennysonian

⁴⁹"When Does Hope Mean Doubt? The Tone of 'Crossing the Bar,'" Victorian Poetry, IV (December, 1966), 127.

uncertainty, . . . not as to the fact but as to the mode of immortality."⁵⁰

Perrine explains the first imagery as denoting pantheistic belief and the second as denoting anthropomorphic belief. The first, expressed in "that which drew from out the boundless deep," is explained in terms of the soul as being "a droplet of water which at birth is separated from the ocean of boundless spirit and which at death returns to it, merging its separate identity in the divine whole." The second, expressed in the line, "I hope to see my Pilot face to face," symbolizes a soul that "retains its separate identity after death and greets its Maker 'face to face.'" Perrine explains that "God, in this reference, is not an ocean but a person--a Pilot with a face."⁵¹

Although Perrine does not feel that this contradiction is indicative of doubt on Tennyson's part, this does reveal that doubt was present, at least concerning the kind of immortality the poet hoped to have. But Perrine may be wrong in saying that "Tennyson wanted it both ways."⁵² Instead, the poet probably could not reach a definite conclusion because of the conflict between doubt and faith that had existed during his lifetime.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 129-30. ⁵¹Perrine, p. 130.

⁵²Ibid., p. 131.

Realizing this conflict between doubt and faith and recognizing "Crossing the Bar" as an expression of subtle doubt, James R. Kincaid calls this work "A Poem of Frustration" and sees the tone as "frustration-doubt." And he discusses the egocentricity of the poem by beginning with the following statement:

At the very center of the poem is the poet, I, but this I is surrounded by destructive forces, the ugliest of which is doubt which forces the strained and pathetic surface affirmation of the poem's last two lines.⁵³

Kincaid obviously exaggerates in his evaluation of the poem, even though Tennyson's "hope" does appear weak. For the poet evidently intended that his sixteen-line lyric express his confidence and hope in immortality. And his choice of words may have been the result of a sickness he had just experienced, or it may have been due to old age. For he definitely did not see death and his chance of immortality so despairingly as Kincaid asserts that he did, since the first stanza of the poem shows little, if any, doubt:

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

The third stanza is a parallel of the first, with variation only in the second lines. Here the poet

⁵³Tennyson's 'Crossing the Bar': A Poem of Frustration," Victorian Poetry, III (December, 1965), p. 57.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 61.

seemingly made an unwise choice when he said:

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!

For the second line could mean that death ended everything. It does not, however, as the last two lines of the poem affirm:

I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

These lines indicate that Tennyson did not feel that he was launching out into the deep without any help. He obviously felt that some kind of help and guidance was available for anyone who was able to contact it. One must note, however, that certain assurance is still lacking.

It is understandable that different interpretations would result, but one must admit that faith is implied in the poem. Although it is not a confident faith of assurance in immortality, nor an assertion of the attributes of God, it is a faith based upon hope that the departing spirit will be guided by some unexplainable Power. Tennyson's salutatory poem, therefore, is typical of his other poems of "Doubt and Faith." For it contains faith, with underlying doubt clouding the desired steadfast faith, as implied by the use of "may" in each stanza (with the exception of the second), the use of "hope" in the last stanza, and the use of contradictory metaphors.

IV. MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

The eleven poems already labeled "Doubt and Faith Poems" are not the only works that reveal Tennyson's lifetime struggle for an unwavering faith. Beginning with the early poem "Armageddon" and ending with "Doubt and Prayer," which was published the year of the poet's death, the struggle between doubt and faith continued. To understand more fully this struggle, one needs to consider these two poems, The Idylls of the King, and a few lesser known poems.

Although "Armageddon" was written when Tennyson was approximately fifteen years of age,¹ it reveals much about the lad's mystical experiences that played a major role in his faith. In addition, much is revealed concerning his early concept of God and his belief in immortality. The following lines, spoken by a white-winged "young seraph" to the narrator, show the youth's awareness of man's limited knowledge:

Thy sense is clogg'd with dull mortality
Thy spirit fettered with the bond of clay.²

¹Alfred Tennyson, "Unpublished Early Poems," The Devil and the Lady and Unpublished Early Poems, ed. by Charles Tennyson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 15.

²Ibid., p. 11. (Since lines are not numbered, page reference for poems from this text hereinafter will be given in parentheses at end of quotation.)

As the speaker relates his vision, he foreshadows Tennyson's beliefs which are evident in his "Doubt and Faith Poems":

I seemed to stand
Upon the outward verge and bound alone
Of God's omniscience (p. 11).

I was a part of the Unchangeable,
A scintillation of Eternal Mind (p. 12).

'O Everlasting God and thou not less
The Everlasting Man (since that great spirit
Which permeates and informs thine inward
sense
Though limited in action, capable
Of the extreme of knowledge, whether join'd
Unto thee in conception or confin'd
From former wanderings in other shapes
I know not--deathless as its God's own life,
(p. 13).

Even though this early poem shows faith, it also shows a recognition of evil. Faith is triumphant, however, for the angel (previously called "young seraph") predicts fierce fightings, but he ends the prophecy with this statement: "THE DAY of the Lord God!" Also, the poem ends with a foreshadowing of "one far-off divine event".

As if the great soul of the Universe
Heav'd with tumultuous throbbings on the
vast
Suspense of some grand issue. . . .

The young poet, however, does not possess the faith shown in "Armageddon" or he would not have written such a pessimistic poem as "Peridi Diem" only a short time later. This fragment is as filled with doubt as

"Armageddon" is filled with faith, and it reveals the depth of despair to which the youth could sink, as first seen in these lines:

I never liv'd a day, but daily die,
 I have no real breath;
 My being is a vacant worthlessness,
 A carcase in the coffin of this flesh,
 Pierc'd thro' with loathly worms of
 utter Death (p. 35).

As the speaker of this work continues his negative thinking, he uses such terms as "darkness," "solid gloom," "unutterable tomb," "night-bats," "night-owls," "torment," "fruitless discontent," "malignant light," "misty," "chill discomfort." And he closes the first stanza with the line, "What is the death of life if this be not to die?"

The second stanza is a speculation concerning the relationship of God, man, and the universe. The speaker states in the first line, "You tell me that to me a Power is given," and he attempts to show in a skeptical, bitter tone the linking of everything in the universe as "circle below circle" makes up the "inconceivable cone." To add to the feeling of utter hopelessness and despair, this depressed speaker mentions "the shuddering stairs which climb / The throne."

The only positive note of "Perdidi Diem" that would denote even a weak, groping faith is the line, "As God himself in kind, a spirit-guiding light." Even the last two lines of this unfinished work reveal a finality that is a strong expression of doubt:

Our planets, slumbering in their swift-
ness, hear
The last beat of the thunder of God's
heart. . . .

Unlike this poem of despair, The Idylls of the King contains implications of strong faith and reveals Tennyson's belief in God and in immortality. Also, it reveals typical Tennysonian doubt concerning questions that cannot be answered. Although the words "faith" and "doubt" are used equally--fifteen times--in the twelve books that the poet spent the greater part of his life composing, faith is more evident. Especially is this true of "The Holy Grail," the work that Hallam felt best expressed his father's "highest self."³

In addition, "The Holy Grail" seems to express more of Tennyson's personal views than any of the other poems of this epic. In fact, one can imagine the poet speaking through the mouth of Sir Percivale as he relates various experiences during the search for the Holy Grail. And just as Tennyson began his quest of life with high hopes, so did Percivale begin his quest for the Grail. As he described Percivale's feelings, as he and Galahad and the other knights rode forth from the king's presence, Tennyson was probably thinking of some high moment of faith in his own life:

and never yet
Has heaven appear'd so blue, nor earth so
green,

³Hallam Tennyson, Friends, p. 92.

For all my blood danced in me, and I knew
 That I should light upon the Holy Grail.
 (ll. 364-67)

Just as Tennyson experienced doubt at times, so did Percivale begin to doubt his success as he thought of the king's warning "That most of us would follow wandering fires." Because Percivale's own feelings of unworthiness were largely responsible for his doubts, he kept remembering these words and the king's words spoken directly to him. "This quest is not for thee."

As Percivale relates his experiences to the monk Ambrosius, his doubt becomes more intense:

'And lifting up mine eyes, I found myself
 Alone, and in a land of sand and thorns,
 And I was thirsty even unto death;
 And I, too, cried, "This quest is not for
 thee."'

Nothing emphasizes this doubt, however, as do the illusions and the repetition of the phrase "This quest is not for thee."

After being tormented by an increasing thirst, loneliness, and weariness, Percivale recounts that he finally reached a high city with towering pinnacles. Continuing to climb, the knight eventually reached a deserted city whose only occupant was an aged man who feebly called out with his faltering voice: "Whence and what art thou?"

This last illusion almost defeated Percivale, especially when he saw the old man become dust. Immediately he mused:

"Lo, if I find the Holy Grail itself
 And touch it, it will crumble into dust."
 (ll. 438-39)

Tennyson, no doubt, had personal experiences in mind when he so vividly pictured the knight, possessed with innumerable doubts, almost succumbing to his loneliness and his failure to find personal identity. Obviously he used the old man to symbolize a dying faith, for Percivale's spirits dropped even lower as he left the spot where he had encountered the weak, dying voice that only muttered unanswerable questions. For Percivale tells the monk:

"And thence I dropt into a lowly vale,
 Low as the hill was high, and where the vale
 Was lowest, found a chapel,
 (ll. 440-42)

Evidently the poet is saying that one can be on the mountain top of faith, or where faith has been strong, then drop to the lowest ebb of doubt. Through Sir Percivale he is also saying that if one attains the spiritual goal, he must first be humble. This is what the hermit near the chapel told Percivale; also, he explained the incarnation of Christ as the epitome of humility. Then he rebuked Percivale by saying, "Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself. As Galahad."

Just as Tennyson seems to use Percivale as a personification of himself, so does he seem to use Galahad to personify his friend Hallam. This connection is most obvious in the encounter with Galahad and the

lasting influence it had upon Percivale. Having lost a desire to continue the quest, Percivale was tempted to marry and to rule the young lady's people. Finally remembering the vow, the knight fled, however, and apparently wandered until he met Sir Galahad, who promised him that upon the event of his own death, Percivale would see the vision of the Grail as he had seen it.

Then Percivale relates to the monk Galahad's power over him:

'While thus he [Galahad] spake, his eye, dwelling
on mine,
Drew me with power upon me, till I grew
One with him, to believe as he believed.'
(ll. 485-87)

How similar this is to the influence Hallam had over Tennyson! Also, Percivale's statement about Galahad-- as he was relating the flight from the woman he loved-- reminds one of the effect Tennyson's vision of Hallam had upon him:

'But wail'd and wept, and hated mine own self,
And ev'n the Holy Quest, and all but her;
Then after I was join'd with Galahad
Cared not for her, nor anything on earth.'
(ll. 608-11)

After Percivale's vision, he returned briefly to the king's court where he heard Lancelot relate his experiences and repeat the words spoken to him by an unseen voice:

'Doubt not, go forward; if thou doubt, the beasts
Will tear thee piecemeal
(ll. 821-22)

The similarity between Tennyson and Percivale ends with the knight's return to the court, because one cannot imagine the poet ending his life as a monk in an abbey, as did Percivale. Instead, near the end of this poem the poet seems, through the words of King Arthur, to be condemning Percivale:

'Another hath beheld it [the Grail] afar off,
And leaving human wrongs to right themselves,
Cares but to pass into the silent life.'
(ll. 893-95)

In addition to "The Holy Grail," each of the idylls expresses a number of Tennyson's beliefs. In fact, the poet once said to his son about the entire work:

My meaning is spiritual. I only took the legendary stories of the Round Table as illustrations. Arthur was allegorical to me. I intended him to represent the Ideal in the Soul of Man coming in contact with the warring element of the flesh.⁴

This ideal, of course, is Christ and the twelve knights are the twelve apostles, with Modred being easily recognized as Judas Iscariot, the traitor. The most obvious parallels between Arthur and Christ are their mysterious births and their expected returns. Also, both are kings: Arthur is king of Camelot and Christ is the spiritual king. In addition, the "blameless" Arthur has such attributes of Christ as love, purity, justice, concern for his followers, and forgiveness.

⁴Hallam Tennyson, Friends, p. 499.

Especially is forgiveness seen in the words spoken by the king to his unfaithful, yet repentant, wife who had fled to an abbey, "Lo, I forgive thee, as Eternal God / Forgives." Love also is seen in this same encounter between Arthur and Guinevere, for the king still loves his wife, even though he must not live with her again because of her sin.

In the last idyll, "The Passing of Arthur," there is little parallelism between the king and Christ. At times Tennyson seems to be expressing his own beliefs through the mouth of the defeated king; for example, Bedivere overhears Arthur in his tent as he moans:

'I found Him in the shining of the stars,
I marked Him in the flowering of His fields,
But in His ways with men I find Him not.
I waged His wars, and now I pass and die.
O me! for why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world,
But had not force to shape it as he would,
Till the High God behold it from beyond,
And enter it, and make it beautiful?'
(ll. 8-16)

After this moment of doubt, the king expresses the Tennysonian idea that man cannot understand because he has "not power to see it to the close." Then the king again expresses doubt when he says:

O Bedivere, for on my heart hath fallen
Confusion till I know not what I am,
Nor whence I am, nor whether I be king;
(ll. 143-45)

Later Tennysonian hope is evident when Arthur speaks from the barge:

'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
 And God fulfills himself in many ways,
 (ll. 407-08)

Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by
 prayer
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy
 voice
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
 For what are men better than sheep and goats
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
 Both for themselves and those who call them
 friends?
 For so the whole round earth is every way
 Bound by gold chains about the fest of God.
 (ll. 415-23)

Not only faith in God is seen in these lines but
 also faith in prayer for oneself and for others. But
 just as Tennyson's own faith was frequently clouded with
 doubt, Arthur's faith also weakened:

But now farewell. I am going a long way
 With these [three queens] thou seest--if
 indeed I go--
 For all my mind is clouded with a doubt--
 (ll. 424-26)

As Bedivere stands watching the departing barge that
 carried his king, he remembers the familiar rhyme (a line
 often used by Tennyson), "From the great deep to the
 great deep he goes." At this point the poet seems to
 imply that Bedivere momentarily gains faith, for he
 climbs "The last hard footstep of that iron crag."
 Again doubt overwhelms the grieving knight, however,
 because he says:

'He passes to be king among the dead,
 And after healing of his grievous wound
 He comes again; but--if he come no more--
 (ll. 449-51)

Remembering that Tennyson used Arthur as the soul, one can see implied doubt concerning immortality of the soul. Also, considering Arthur as the Christ-figure, one can see implied doubt concerning the second coming of Christ. Nevertheless, doubt is short-lived because the poet ends his epic on an optimistic note by having Bedivere climb to the highest peak and see the vanishing barge disappear "into light."

"And the new sun rose bringing the new year," the closing line, probably means that Christ, the Son, brought new hope to the world. If the poet did have this in mind, The Idylls of the King may be considered the most Christian work of Tennyson's.

"Rizpah," a much lesser known work, may be considered a poem of both "doubt and faith," although neither of the words appears in this dramatic monologue. Faith is evident because the speaker expresses belief in a God of love, whereas doubt is merely implied.

Rizpah, an elderly, grief-stricken, dying woman reveals her thoughts to an unnamed visitor. The visitor is "a lady" who represents the church and who is concerned about the soul of the mother. This mother had become mentally ill after her son was hanged as a thief, and his body was left hanging for all to see and for the birds to eat his flesh.

As the mother tells of her agony through the years, following the hanging of her son, she reveals her undying

love for the wayward son. Also, she tells the visitor that she stole her son's bones and buried them "by the churchyard wall;" this evidently signifies that the church had something to offer. Then she cautions the lady not to tell, because "They would scratch him up-- they would hang him again on the cursed tree."

The allusion to "the cursed tree" is, of course, to the cross on which Christ was crucified. This shows the intensity of the mother's suffering, in addition to the fact that somehow the poet seems to use the death of the son as a parallel to Christ's vicarious death for sinners. The mother's next remarks strengthen this idea:

Sin? O, yes, we are sinners, I know--let
 all that be,
 And read me a Bible verse of the Lord's
 goodwill toward men--
 'Full of compassion and mercy, the Lord'
 --let me hear it again;
 'Full of compassion and mercy--long-
 suffering.' Yes, O, yes!
 (ll. 60-62)

In relation to this, the origin of the name "Rizpah" is noteworthy: The poet chose the name that one of King Saul's concubines bore, for that mother had lost two sons at the hands of hangmen. Her sons, however, were not convicted for any act of wrong; instead, they and five of their cousins were hanged that God's anger might be appeased and the three-year famine might end.⁵

⁵II Sam. 21:1-11.

This story, no doubt, troubled Tennyson, since he did not believe in a God who would require that innocent lives be taken in such a manner. Therefore he probably is speaking through the mother to express his belief in a merciful, loving God, not a God who would require that the innocent suffer for the salvation of others. According to his concept of God, this would not be needed, anyhow, as he stresses in his repetition of "Full of compassion and mercy."

The line "the Saviour lives but to bless" seems to affirm this idea also, as does the strong confidence of the mother that she will not find her son "in hell." Therefore Tennyson seems to be saying that Christ's function is to reveal God's love and mercy. In this sense the poet is expressing faith in a God of compassion who will not condemn the erring to eternal punishment.

And the mother's statement, "I have been with God in the dark," could well be Tennyson's own statement that he has felt God's spirit in his moments of dark doubt and does not have to be told about Him, especially by someone who has not had experiences that are similar to his. And just as the mother felt that her visitor meant well, so did Tennyson show tolerance for the views of others, even though he could not accept them.

"Columbus," another poem published in 1880 in the same collection as "Rizpah," is also a dramatic monologue that shows both faith and doubt. Faith is more evident,

however, as the aged Columbus reminisces of his experiences and reveals that he had doubts during his journeys. He tells once of hearing God's voice speaking to him:

'O soul of little faith, slow to believe!
 Have I not been about thee from thy birth?
 Given thee the keys of the great Ocean-sea?
 Set thee in light till time shall be no more?
 Is it I who have deceived thee or the world?
 (ll. 145-49)

The next stanza apparently is an expression of the poet's own feelings, as well as Columbus' words of courage and hope:

And more than once in days
 Of doubt and cloud and storm, when drowning hope
 Sank all but out of sight, I heard His voice,
 'Be not cast down. I lead thee by the hand,
 'Fear not.' And I shall hear his voice again--
 I know that He has led me all my life,
 I am not yet too old to work His will--
 His voice again.
 (ll. 151-58)

Then doubt seems to flood the mind of the ailing, lonely discoverer, and just as Tennyson himself seemed to move from moods of faith to moods of doubt, so does Columbus. But determination is evident as the pain-ridden Columbus says that he is "ready to sail forth on one last voyage."

Also contained in this collection of Ballads and Other Poems is a nine-line, two-stanza poem that may well be the epitome of the poet's faith:

THE HUMAN CRY

I
 Hallowed be Thy name--Halleluiah!--
 Infinite ideality!
 Immeasurable Reality!
 Infinite Personality!
 Hallowed be Thy name--Halleluiah!

II

We feel we are nothing--for all is Thou
 and in Thee;
 We feel we are something--that also has
 come from Thee;
 We know we are nothing--but Thou wilt
 help us to be.
 Halleluiah be Thy name--Halleluiah!

If this had been Tennyson's last poem, one could confidently say that he had found the unwavering faith for which he had so long sought. This was not his last poem, however, because he continued to write during the remaining twelve years of his life. And some of these poems show that the questioning of the poet is no nearer to a resolution than before.

One such poem is "Despair," printed in The Nineteenth Century in 1881.⁶ The title reveals the type of poem, because from the first the despair is evident in the monologue of the man who was rescued three days earlier, when his wife drowned. There is faith, of course, shown in the fact that the man was rescued by a minister who preached a creed that the man and his wife could not accept. This seems to indicate that organized religion has its purpose, but the man's disbelief expressed throughout the poem causes one to wonder if Tennyson were not in a depressed state when he composed this work.

The rescued man begins his statements to the minister by revealing that his last three days have

⁶Rolfe, p. 495.

been no better than the days before his attempted suicide. As he continues to express his misery, and his hopeless attitude, the man seems to blame "the fatalist creed," which he also calls "the cramping creed," as the reason that he and his wife broke away from the church that taught of "a hell without help, without end."

The man is bitter as he continues to tell the minister that his sanction of a creed that taught "the dark side of your faith and a God of eternal rage" was responsible for man's desire for death. Furthermore, he is bitter that the minister prevented his intended death, since he knows only loneliness and hopelessness without his wife and without any hope of immortality. In fact, the doubts concerning immortality had caused him to reach this conclusion:

Why should we bear with an hour of torture,
 a moment of pain,
 If every man die for ever, if all his griefs
 are in vain,
 And the homeless planet at length will be
 wheel'd thro' the silence of space,
 Motherless evermore of an ever-vanishing
 race,

(ll. 81-84)

Then the man admits that he has been "crazed" by reading "horrible infidel writings":

For these are the new dark ages, you see,
 of the popular press,
 When the bat comes out of his cave, and
 the owls are whooping at noon,
 And Doubt is the lord of this dunghill and
 crows to the sun and the moon,

(ll. 88-89)

He sees the creed of the minister, however, as offering no more hope than the "know-nothing books," and he says, "We have knelt in your know-all chapel too, looking over the sand." The adjective "know-all" is merely a term of scorn; otherwise, the word "sand" would not be used.

Apparently the next stanza is the key to the poem:

What! I should call on that Infinite Love
 that has served us so well?
 Infinite cruelty rather that made everlast-
 ing hell,
 Made us, foreknew us, foredoom'd us, and
 does what he will with his own;
 Better our dead brute mother who never
 has heard us groan!

This stanza and the next sound like the words of an infidel; especially these lines:

And so there were hell for ever! but were
 there a God, as you say,
 His love would have power over hell till it
 utterly vanish'd away.
 (ll. 101-02)

The next stanza, however, reveals the truth that the poet is attempting to express in this poem:

Ah, yet--I have had some glimmer, at
 times, in my gloomiest woe,
 Of a God behind all--after all--the great
 God, for aught that I know;
 But the God of love and of hell together--
 they cannot be thought,
 If there be such a God, may the Great God
 curse him and bring him to nought!

This stanza reveals that the speaker believes the true God to have power over hell because He is a God of love. The next two lines strengthen this belief:

Blasphemy! true! I have scared you pale
 with my scandalous talk,
 But the blasphemy to my mind lies all in
 the way that you walk.
 (ll. 111-12)

Burton sees this poem as an attack against pre-destination, and not an attack upon the scriptures nor a rejection of God.⁷ This seems likely since Tennyson said a number of times that he could not conceive of a God who loves man but who would doom him to eternal punishment.⁸ Nevertheless, it can be called a poem of the darkest doubt that man can imagine, for it does not end on a note of hope. Instead, the doubter tells the minister that he still plans to kill himself at the first opportunity. And this is how Tennyson probably would have felt if he had not believed in a God of love. In fact, during depressed moods he may have momentarily experienced such doubts.

Although it cannot be said that Tennyson gained a profound faith, it can be said that he fought till the last in this lifelong struggle. "Doubt and Prayer," a sonnet used as the introductory poem in an edition printed in 1892,⁹ is evidence that the struggle continued to the last:

And let not Reason fail me, nor the sod
 Draw from my breath Thy living flower and grass,
 My Father, and my Brother, and my God!
 Steel me with patience! soften me with grief!

⁷Burton, p. 224. ⁸Ibid., p. 222.

⁹Sir Charles Tennyson, "Tennyson's 'Doubt and Prayer' Sonnet," Victorian Poetry, I, No. 5 (1968), 3.

Let blow the trumpet strongly while I pray,
Till this embattled wall of unbelief
My prison, not my fortress, fall away!
(11. 5-12)

V. CONCLUSION

An "embattled wall of unbelief" definitely did hinder Tennyson in his struggle for an unwavering faith. In fact, he seemed uncertain at times concerning the strength of his own faith, and this explains why scholars and critics would also be uncertain and would disagree concerning his attainment or his lack of attaining his goal of a faith strong enough to win any battle against doubt.

Uncertainty about Tennyson's faith explains why Masterson seemed undecided and why Smyser and Van Dyke seemed confident that the poet was victorious in his struggle for a triumphant faith. It also explains why Hallam, the poet's son, Dr. Wood, and Willey reached the conclusion that Tennyson did not win, but fluctuated between the attitudes of doubt and faith throughout his lifetime.

Since Hallam was able to give firsthand knowledge concerning his father's ideas and beliefs, his Memoir has been extremely helpful in this study. Especially did it help to verify the fact that Tennyson was a sincere searcher for eternal truths and that his questioning mind would not allow him to accept wholeheartedly that which he could not prove. Since he could not find answers

for certain questions about God, man, and the universe, it is understandable that he could not develop a steadfast faith in the reality of an intelligence that created the universe and man. Therefore he did much speculating and sometimes thought of God as being anthropomorphic and at other times thought of Him as being pantheistic.

The poet did, however, maintain that some kind of God of love exists and that He is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient. In Memoriam and "Rizpah" reveal the attribute of love, but this can also be seen in most of Tennyson's poems that discuss God. Other attributes that the poet stresses are mercy and forgiveness, evident also in "Rizpah" and in "Guinevere."

Certain of the speculative poems, especially "The Higher Pantheism," In Memoriam, "De Profundis," and "The Ancient Sage," reveal the poet's conclusion that it is impossible for the finite mind to comprehend the infinite. His hope is that man will eventually understand, however.

Perhaps the easiest conclusion for the poet to reach concerned the reality of Spirit. This seemed of utmost importance to him, and it seemed the basis of what faith he possessed. Perhaps this explains his frequently changing attitudes of doubt and faith, for if he happened to be in an optimistic mood, his poetry reflected his faith. On the other hand, if he were in a depressed mood, his poetry reflected doubt. After his trancelike experience in In

Memoriam, however, his faith seemed bolstered on occasions by a reflection of that spiritual contact with his dead friend Hallam.

Another conclusion that the poet struggled to reach concerned immortality. After Hallam's death this belief was essential to his faith, but his argument in favor of immortality was rather weak at times. In fact, he seemed "as an infant in the night" crying out for assurance of eternal life. But on different occasions his argument was primarily based on his continued love for his dead friend, in addition to the memory of the spiritual experience in In Memoriam.

In most of Tennyson's poetry, however, a positive view is taken toward immortality; otherwise, life held no meaning. But his most positive attitude was the hope of a "far-off divine event" that ends In Memoriam and "The Passing of Arthur." This was not always confidently expressed, though; instead, it was a mere hope on occasions.

Perhaps Tennyson would not have expressed doubt so frequently if he had believed certain religious dogmas. He could not accept the fatalistic creed, however, for his idea of God as a God of love ruled out His harsh, judge-like aspect that Calvinists stressed. In addition, there is no evidence that the poet accepted the belief in Christ's vicarious suffering and death. Instead, there

are implications in "Supposed Confessions," as well as "Rizpah," that he rejected this dogma.

But the poet did realize the importance of prayer, as mentioned in relation to "The Passing of Arthur" and "Doubt and Prayer" especially. Also, he did sincerely seek for a steadfast faith, but he was unable to achieve his goal because of the age in which he lived, his own inquiring mind, and his dual personality.

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