

“Tennyson is a great poet, for reasons that are perfectly clear. He has three qualities which are seldom found together except in the greatest poets: abundance, variety, and complete competence.” T. S. Eliot

Alfred Tennyson is as much representative poet of Victorian Age as was Chaucer of fourteenth century and Alexander Pope was of eighteenth century. Tennyson as poet represented the true spirit of his age. He is not only the follower but also an interpreter of the age. His truly representative character made him universally popular in his own age.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson was the most highly regarded poet of his period and the most widely read of all English poets. The quality of his work varied greatly for he included in his poetry themes and subjects that were of intense interest to the Victorians. Tennyson's technical skill and prosody were unsurpassed. Perhaps the most perceptive evaluation of his work is embodied in Tennyson's own remark to Carlyle:

“I don't think that since Shakespeare there has been such a master of the English language as I — to be sure, I have nothing to say.”

Tennyson actually breathed the spirit of his age into his poetry. That is why his poems are reflection of his age. Various characteristics of the Victorian age could be seen in the works of Tennyson. The age was an age of democratic spirit and common people were fighting for their equal rights and political freedom. Tennyson himself belonged to the upper middle class and could not go beyond the limitations of his middle class. He favoured peaceful and the slow evolution rather than any kind of struggle or revolution.

One of the major features of the Victorian age was the rise of scientific spirit. Tennyson's attitude towards scientific progress was sceptical. He always swung between the two extremes of science and religion. In such a situation he sought to preach a compromise.

Being a true Victorian poet Tennyson played the role of a moral teacher. Generally speaking, the Victorians had a keen fascination for moralizing and preaching. Tennyson understood people's expectations and thus he admirably played the role of a philosopher. According to Tennyson the poet's function was not to delight only but to teach the masses, the statesman and even the intellectuals. In hours of confusion the statesmen turned to time for light and wisdom. He taught people to be moderate patient and tolerant. His message of

action is truly represented in his poem “Ulysses” when he writes; “To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield”.

The Victorians believed in conjugal love rather than romantic. Tennyson supported this view most sincerely. He could not allow passion in love. Any relation between man and woman other than the married one was not sanctioned by him. However he preferred spiritual love to the physical love.

The Victorian people were intensely patriotic. They took pride in their Queen and national glories. Tennyson shared these feelings of his countrymen. In his poetry the sense of national pride and glory is well sounded. He represents English life and manners with utmost sincerity. Tennyson’s praise for his own country is the expression of a Victorian patriot who considered his country superior to all other countries of the world. He says;

“There is no land like England

Where’er the light of day be”

Tennyson treats Nature as an accompaniment of human emotions and sentiments. He never thinks of Nature without man. Man is always there in his Nature-paintings. Nature in Tennyson reflects joys and sorrows of his men and women. Nature to Tennyson is always a background for reflecting some human emotions. In his poem “The Lotus Eaters” this aspect of his approach towards nature can be seen;

“There is sweet music here that softer falls

Than petals from blown roses on the grass

Or night dews on still waters between walls.

Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass.”

Tennyson was a great poetic artist. Right from the beginning of his poetic career he practised to attain perfection in poetic. Art. As an artist he shows unity of impression and construction in his poems. He always selected the suitable words and appropriate phraseology to convey his ideas. This uniqueness can be seen when Tennyson writes in his poem “Ulysses”; “I cannot rest from travel/ I will drink life to the lease”

Another characteristic of Tennyson's art is its sublimity and grandeur. Tennyson always tried to attain loftiness in his expression like that of Wordsworth and Milton. In style, he is grand and embellished in language quite sensible while selecting words and phrases and in technique, from and texture, almost always lively and unmistakable. This highest feeling is reached in the hearts of readers when they read "Ulysses" where Tennyson writes;

"To follow knowledge like a sinking star,/Beyond the utmost bound of human thought"

Tennyson's art is abundantly rich in its pictorial effect. In this respect he follows his predecessors. He rises upon exact details, dresses them in expressive and musical phrases and presents a radiant image before the reader's eye. His poem "The Lotus Eaters" is full of superb pictures; "far off, three mountain-tops/ Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,/Stood sunset-flushed"

Thus, Tennyson presented in his poems all the essential features of Victorian life. His poetry represents the time itself with full intensity and glory.