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*TENNYSON AND PESSIMISM.

THE bitter criticism that has greeted Lord Tennyson's second "Locksley Hall," shows how much people still love the first "Locksley Hall," and how little they have learned from it. An almost universal opinion declares the new poem to be a purely abnormal product, whereas the first poem, according to the same opinion, was something quite natural and healthy. The new "Locksley Hall" is thus denounced as a sort of treason. This cruel father sacrifices the child of his own youth. This worn-out old hero shows himself at last before all the world as a coward, and whines where once he sang the battle-hymn. This Tory lord now bids crouch whom the rest bade aspire. Such is the general sense of popular criticism, at least in this country. And, at first sight, what could be more natural than this judgment? The first "Locksley Hall" gave us a view of life so honest, so youthful, so modern, so comprehensible, that it would seem as if nobody capable of feeling what young men feel, could fail to adopt that view, or, having adopted it, could abandon it without regret. If now the creator of this old ideal appears as its denouncer and destroyer, can we who loved the old poem do anything but condemn the final mood of its maker?

But this popular view is no less plausible than unjust. In fact the second "Locksley Hall" is, despite a certain falling off of technical skill,

* LOCKSLEY HALL SIXTY YEARS AFTER, ETC. By Alfred, Lord Tennyson.
New York: Macmillan & Co.

still substantially the fulfilment of the first. Whatever unhealthiness exists in the latest poem, is in germ in the original one, and, on the whole, the new poem, notwithstanding a number of frantic opinions and of unpleasant lines, is healthier, more manly, more devout, and even more cheerful, in a deeper sense of the word cheerful, than was the first poem. Neither poem is truly sound. Both suffer from the same disease. Both illustrate Tennyson's characteristic weakness. But of the two the old man's poem, if artistically inferior, is ethically higher, and for this reason is far more satisfying. Such is the thesis that this paper wants to defend.

What makes people blind to this is the fact that the disease from which both of these poems suffer is a very prevalent disease. It is a cause of numerous modern superstitions, and casts a gloom over many lives. We need to become conscious of its nature, and to get rid of it from our own minds. For my part, then, I am thankful to our poet for the second "Locksley Hall," because, taken with the first, it illustrates so well and so instructively a great man's conflict with this, the favorite disease of his age. I should be glad if people saw this truth more readily, and I venture upon the few hasty suggestions which follow for the sake of helping others, possibly, to direct their attention to the matter.

A devout man is one who believes that there is something in the world which demands both his worship and his loyalty, and who, accordingly, tries to worship and be loyal. Now, if any man seeks to be devout, his great difficulty is that he is all the while in the midst of petty and disheartening things, which at once attract, corrupt, pain and horrify him. In his religious faith, or in his poetry, or in his dreams, he therefore tries somehow to neutralize, or to explain away, or at the worst occasionally to forget, this baseness of the details of life. Only when he can somehow either transcend or forsake these coarse facts, has he the chance to feel the desired devotion. "If, therefore, there is anything divine in the world," he says to himself, "I shall not find it while I am joined to these cloying and hateful experiences." And so he asks of his religious teachers, or of his poets, or of the others who have spiritual wares to offer him, that they shall somehow purge his soul, from time to time, of the corruption of finite things,

and show him that divine good, whatever he chooses to call it, which is to be the true object of his loyalty.

Now, since this is the natural desire of a good man, it is also but natural that everybody at some time tries to take the shortest road to this goal of spiritual freedom. To get above the petty and coarse things of life, we must forget them, so we say. This seems the only fashion of escape. In consequence of this resolve, we often ask of our poets not so much that they shall transcend, as that they shall disguise or deny, or ignore, the coarseness of the real world. "Hide it," we say to them, "declare it unreal, dream it away, talk of it as illusion. Deliver us from evil by simply destroying the very idea of it, so long as we are in your company." When we make this demand of our poets, we ask them to be romantic, and the poets who habitually appeal to this demand are called the romantic poets. As is well known, however, Lord Tennyson himself is a romantic poet. Always one of the most devout of men, he gives as his ideal of the devout mood something that can be realized only through a more or less complete separation from the world of concrete life. He offers us the things of the spirit in sacred places, not elsewhere. His realm of divine truth is and always was for him a dream-land, to be reached through mystical exaltation, or by the ecstatic fancies of hopeful youth. He has believed in God, but in a God that hideth himself, and that still showeth himself, on rare and romantic occasions, to the devout. This is the God of the "Holy Grail," or of the wondrous mystical experience during the night scene on the lawn, in the "In Memoriam." This God, to tell the truth, seems afraid of his own world. He doubtless knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust, but he regards us meanwhile with a distant, although mildly pitiful negligence. On occasion he lets us catch glimpses of himself, but there is neither rule nor rationality about the coming of these glimpses. "Look at me if you can," the divine truth says to us. Otherwise we seem to form no part of its business. We are not the sort of people that it habitually meets in a social way.

All this is only a matter-of-fact statement of the romantic spirit, familiar to us, of course, in many poets besides Lord Tennyson. But it is needful to remind ourselves what this spirit means, in order that we

may see just now how it expresses itself in the first "Locksley Hall." In that poem, to be sure, there is nothing of what one usually calls mysticism. There is, in fact, no theology at all. Hence, indeed, the essentially modern sound of the verses. Lord Tennyson's age is doubtless out of harmony, and from the first has been out of harmony, with the more esoteric and theological element in his romanticism. Yet this age has no sort of objection to divinely significant truth, if only you can express it in terms of well-known astronomical, physical, or biological theories, and can make it sound unmiraculous. That, in a fashion, was what the first "Locksley Hall" did, by means of a few skilful and even prophetic phrases. What the age views with great dislike, namely, the expression of the higher truth in traditional or in mystical forms, was what the first "Locksley Hall" ingeniously avoided. Hence people who make little or nothing of "In Memoriam," who find all the "Idyls of the King" at their best too fanciful, and who think the "Holy Grail" quite unintelligible, may still admire endlessly the dreams about the far-off future in "Locksley Hall."

Yet "Locksley Hall" is precisely as romantic and as full of the remote ideals as is the "Holy Grail." You may state the thing in mediæval terms if you like, or in terms of fancies about flying-machines and international Federations. Yet the result is precisely the same. The world that you move in is, in both cases, the old romantic world, the land of magic fire, of talismans, and of a beautiful darkness. You are on a quest for the ideal. It is a sort of creature that won't be caught in a commonplace way. You must go on knightly wanderings, and lose yourself in deserts and oceans. The mighty wind arises, roaring seaward, and you go. Your business is somewhat indescribable. You are sure only that it is vastly important. Its most prominent feature is that it takes you away from earthly relations. You are shamed through all your being to have loved so slight a thing as an actual flesh-and-blood woman, who, of course, must have been quite incapable of understanding such a nature as yours. Nevertheless, after all your misfortunes, the crescent promise of your spirit has not set, and you propose to do something on a grand scale. The outcome of the business will be some sort of ineffable glory for future humanity. The distance beacons, and not in vain. You cry "forward," quite ignorant, of

course, of just what the word means, but sure that if we only get far enough away from where we are, we shall not fail to find perfection. The good is something absolutely and fatally destined to be reached by us, although it is also of a certainty something so very remote that we have not the least idea when we shall reach it. Such, then, is your Holy Grail, your increasing purpose that runs through the ages, your divine truth. Your description of its features may vary, but it always has the same "unmistakable marks," by which you may know it wheresoever you go.

This summary may perhaps seem mere scoffing. The matter has, of course, another side. This devotion to a vague and romantic ideal, which is chiefly defined by the fact that it is a good way off, has its strong features. The purity of intention is, in Lord Tennyson's poems, undoubted. Their educating value, in their place and time, is of the highest. How much we owe to this teacher of the ideal in a sordid age, who may know? But if, for the sake of awaking our enthusiasm, these vague dreams of abstract perfection are invaluable, we must never forget two things about them: first, that they are never the only expressions, never the highest expressions, of the love of ideals; and, second, that the invariable outcome of such dreams, unless they give place to some more solid sort of idealism, is sooner or later hateful and pessimistic despair. This romantic idealism of so many among Tennyson's poems, is, therefore, not only vague, but essentially transient. In case of the mood of "Locksley Hall," also, the idealism must give place to a deeper and less romantic devotion, or else it must end in out and out pessimism. The second "Locksley Hall" especially shows us in what sense the first "Locksley Hall" was already, in germ, a pessimistic poem.

For in the first "Locksley Hall," if we will be honest with it, there is plainly great faith that God is the God of the future; but in no true sense does he appear as the God of the present. The present is a world of wicked squires, who drink wine and love dogs, of false and fickle cousins,—who probably lie awake o' nights weeping because they feel themselves unworthy of our high regard,—and in general of social lies and sickly forms. There are a few good people in it, in the foremost ranks of time, namely; but their concern is not with its absurdities, but with the service of the

ideal future humanity. The noble youth of the poem is simply a pessimist as to the world that now is. It is out of joint, and he is not born to set that world right, but rather to forget it. His optimism concerns the world that is not, but some day shall be. Of that, all sorts of amusing things are true. God's attention is plainly devoted to the realms of dreams, and the divine plan has no place for the squire and the cousin. This of course is optimism with a vengeance, but is it not also in a much deeper sense pessimism? God is not in this place, and Jacob, on a famous occasion, made a blunder. God is somewhere else, sleeping, as it were, or on a journey, and we must set out to find him. Nay then, is not this optimism of progress, this assurance that the divine truth is still playing truant, a very dark thought, after all? "One increasing purpose," indeed! But so far it has culminated in the squire and the social lies aforesaid. What is wanted is still a very great increase of this "purpose." For thus far we have to curse very frankly, in the poem, pretty much all, save our noble selves, that the "purpose" has produced. Where then is the "promise of his coming?" Or rather, what is it all but a bare and wearisomely reiterated promise, whose fulfilment is only in dream-land, and is apparently there to stay for as long as we can definitely foresee. But then the "distance beacons." Yet it is only distance, only the far-off. There is no meaning in life save what that far-off gives to it. *Das Dort ist niemals Hier.* At heart then, despite all our fervor, we are only pessimists. The good is somewhere, just as "oats and beans and barley grows where you nor I nor nobody knows." And that is the whole tale of our airy and meaningless hopes. We have only to wake up to this fact to turn all our enthusiasm into disaster and gloom.

Now in so far as the second "Locksley Hall" is truly pessimistic at all, its pessimism is simply the explicit statement of the sense of this very thought. Unless God is here, says in substance the poet of the second "Locksley Hall," how do you know that he is anywhere else? Unless the present has divine meaning, how worthless the dreams of a far-off starry future, dreams comparable only to the fancies about the perfect life that may dwell in the other planets:—

"Hesper—Venus—were we native to that splendour or in Mars,
We should see the Globe we groan in, fairest of their evening stars.

“Could we dream of wars and carnage, craft and madness, lust and spite,
Roaring London, raving Paris, in that point of peaceful light?

“Might we not in glancing heavenward on a star so silver-fair
Yearn, and clasp the hands and murmur, ‘Would to God that we were there?’

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“‘What are men that He should heed us?’ cried the king of sacred song;
Insects of an hour, that hourly work their brother insects wrong,

“While the silent Heavens roll, and Suns along their fiery way,
All their planets whirling round them, flash a million miles a day.”

Such are the thoughts that finally determine the poet to give up the optimism of progress. The process of the world, such as it is, is far too vast to be expressed in merely temporal terms. Regarded in time merely, there is doubt about all this plan. There seems at all events to be rhythm as well as growth:—

“Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good.
And Reversion ever dragging Evolution in the mud.”

And so much that we take to be progress, after all, turns out not to be such! Still again, where we are in doubt about the reality of anything that we have called progress, we become appalled at once by the magnitude of the powers of the world. How, looking at them externally, can we be sure of their meaning?

“Forward, backward, backward, forward, in the immeasurable sea,
Sway’d by vaster ebbs and flows than can be known to you or me.”

To be sure, even now we can repeat our youthful dreams of the future peace and perfection of humanity. Perhaps there will come an “end after madness” for our poor earth:—

“Every tiger madness muzzled, every serpent passion killed,
Every grim ravine a garden, every blazing desert till’d,

“Robed in universal harvest up to either pole she smiles,
Universal ocean softly washing all her warless Isles.”

But then, not only are these things hard, even as dreams, (“Who can fancy warless men?”) but just behind all that is the picture of the physical death of our planet, a death sure to come at last. Is not the moon dead? “The

moonlight is the sunlight, and the sun himself will pass." For the old dreams we therefore have left only the gloomiest of mysteries, and the saddest of assurances.

But, after all, does not the true secret of this pessimism lie in our original abandonment of the real world about us for that world of dreams? When we sought the ideal far off, and refused to recognize it in human life as it is, were we not already just what we have found ourselves to be, pessimists? Can we not then escape our outcome by abandoning our romantic mood? To a certain extent, Tennyson undertakes to do this in the new "Locksley Hall," and this is what makes me say that there is, with all the weakness and the gloom of this latest poem, a far healthier view of life, in many of its lines, than we find in the old "Locksley Hall."

First then, in general, the poet distinctly recognizes at last that, if this is God's world, what others have called the "perfection in imperfection" of just these struggles, sins, tears, strivings and loves about us today, must be the expression of God's will. The sins are none the less sins that they and the struggle with them are alike necessary to the genuine realization of the good. We need cry out no less against evil whilst we still hold evil to be, not the transient absence of the god of Evolution from his world, but the living strife in the midst of which the true God maintains himself *in* his world. This view of evil is the one that among recent poets, Browning has especially been commissioned to illustrate afresh for us. This is what he has said in all his best poems. But this view is the one that Tennyson's romanticism has always tried to escape. Tennyson has lamented the evils of life, but has never been ready to take them for what they are, the evils of God's own world. They have seemed to him the accidents of God's remoteness. In this latest poem he somewhat haltingly recognizes, amidst all his complaints, the inevitable fact. The good simply is not and cannot be realized, save in the midst of the conflict with evil. Yet that truth makes the good no less good, and the world no less divine. Through all his despair the poet now at last turns towards this light as his only guide:—

"Follow you the Star that lights a desert pathway, yours or mine.
Forward, till you see the highest Human Nature is divine.

"Follow Light, and do the Right — for man can half-control his doom —
Till you find the deathless Angel seated in the vacant tomb."

It is with this new sort of faith in mind that the poet says of our earth, not, as of old, that it is a joy to see her spinning down the ringing grooves of change, but that

"Ere she reach her earthly best, a God must mingle with the game."

He feels too that there are "those about us whom we neither see nor name." He is sure that, amid all the mysteries of the heavens, mysteries upon which the word Evolution throws no sort of light, there must still be a living presence: —

"Only That which made us, meant us to be mightier by and by,
Set the sphere of all the boundless Heavens within the human eye,

"Sent the shadow of Himself, the boundless, thro' the human soul,
Boundless inward, in the atom, boundless outward, in the Whole."

This faith is still vague, it is still clouded, it still loves romantic forms of speech. But after all it is more genuine than that blind old trust in whatever might happen to fill the remote future. For if this mysterious world is even now the world of a divine plan, boundless both in the whole and in the atom, if we wait not for some far-off divine event, but believe in the actually present God, then our lives become, for all their horror and their problems, at any rate genuine lives. It is a game, at worst, this life of ours, and not a procession. We play it, and do not simply watch it to see what is some day to follow: —

"You, my Leonard, use and not abuse your day,
Move among your people, know them, follow him who led the way,

"Strove for sixty widow'd years to help his homelier brother men,
Served the poor, and built the cottage, raised the school and drained the fen."

The man who does his commonplace business in the living present is, after all, the true man. He fights the good fight, and the good is nothing if it is not the good fight.

The particular true man, however, whom Leonard, the "grandson" of the new poem, is to follow, is none other, be it noticed than the old squire

himself, that dog-loving creature, who used to hunt in dreams, and behave otherwise disagreeably. There is a beautiful completeness about the late apology which the poet now makes to that much abused person. Every reader will be amused by the apology. But possibly some reader may not note its full significance. Returning, as the poet does from the world of vain dreams to the world of human beings, he finds not only horrible and gloomy things, such as fill him with fear, but true and genuine things, such as express God's own heart. Among these things are the very relationships that the romantic youth had affected to despise. Amy, to be sure, is gone, long since. But the old squire has lived even until yesterday. The poet has come at last to be present at his funeral. And when one sums up the squire's hearty, simple, benevolent, unromantic life, one sees what it meant: —

“Worthier soul was he than I am, sound and honest, rustic Squire,
Kindly landlord, boon companion — youthful jealousy is a liar.”

After all, it is the straightforward and manly life that is praiseworthy. Once it seemed to us mere Philistinism, and perhaps, in its narrowness it may often have been nothing better. But narrowness is not cured by negations. “Forsake this present life because it is narrow,” our romantic youth had said. Now we see that it is in this present life, not out of it that we are to find God. Take this commonplace life, and without denying it, without forsaking it, make it no longer narrow. Make it large and full, but keep it concrete: that is the lesson that the old squire has taught us, and we thank him for it as he lies dead. We have no better advice for Leonard than that he shall follow this example.

Thus then, Tennyson's latest pessimism is not without its brighter comrades, courage, and faith in the real world. In so far as our poet has reached this view he has distinctly progressed from disease towards health. The old man thinks gray thoughts, for he is gray; but not all his thoughts are of death. Experience has brought him the end of romantic dreams, and his only hope is now in the actual.

One hears nowadays, very often, of youthful pessimism, prevalent, for instance, among certain clever college students. When I hear of these

things, I do not always regret them. On the contrary, I think that the best man is the one who can see the truth of pessimism, can absorb and transcend that truth, and can be nevertheless an optimist, not by virtue of his failure to recognize the evil of life, but by virtue of his readiness to take his part in the struggle against this evil. Therefore, I am often glad when I hear of this spread of pessimistic ideas among studious but undeveloped youth. For I say to myself, if these men are brave men, their sense of the evil that hinders our human life, will some day arouse them to fight this evil in dead earnest, while, if they are not brave men, optimism can be of no service to cowards. But in any case I like to suggest to such brave and pessimistic youth where the solution of their problem must lie. It surely cannot lie in any romantic dream of a pure and innocent world; far off somewhere, in the future, in Heaven, or in Isles of the Blessed. These things are not for us. We are born for the world of manly business, and if we are worthy of our destiny, we may possibly have some good part in the Wars of the Lord. For nothing better have we any right to hope, and to an honest man that is enough. We may be glad that our poet now feels this truth.

Josiah Royce.

A WAFT OF SUMMER.

A FEW brown grasses in a waste of snows,
 A dim red moon beyond a gloom of pine,
 A shifting wind that loiters as it blows
 The snow-dust whirling, sculpturesque and fine.

And yet with so sweet lulls, we well may deem
 He comes remorsefully, a truant rover,
 From fields where dusky meadow-lilies dream
 Through sultry days above the ripened clover.

Bliss Carman.