

FAITH, IN LOCKSLEY HALL

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ALFRED TENNYSON was born in 1809 and died in 1892. This was a most stirring time in the world's unfolding. 1830 to 1842 saw the opening of the first railway in England, the great reform bill of Lord John Russell, abolition of slavery in the British Empire, and the development of the telegraph. Free trade and larger income taxes created far reaching changes in the political and economic systems. Two attempts were made on the Queen's life, and Chartism flourished. The voyage of the *Beagle* and rise of Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley and Charles Lyell led the imagination and ideas of the world into fresh paths. Carlyle and Maurice, Kingsley and Dickens, Mill and others proclaimed messages that caused tremendous upheavals in that time.

The impact of these men and events was cataclysmic. It meant a complete reversal of many older conceptions. Storms were raised which have hardly yet subsided. Investigation and invention brought about changes in the current ideas of geology, astronomy and biology. A growing use of machinery altered industrial life. With these there was a growing consciousness of man's intellectual and spiritual capacity, a questioning of the older authorities, and demand for relief in the mind and estate of the submerged. This quickening of hopes and claims for the more abundant life resulted in many a problem for those whose thought must mark out the road to happier conditions. *Reality* became a watchword, and the growth of materialism rapid. It was an age of shock that taxed the imagination.

In this period Tennyson began his important work. His first poems were published in 1827, the year before he entered Trinity College, Cambridge. He issued two volumes in 1842, which lifted him into fame, and from that date his voice expressed the soul of Britain. The 1842 volume included *Locksley Hall*, written in the fourth decade of the 19th century. In it youthful enthusiasm viewed the wonders and liberation being worked by science, discovery and social effort. These were expected to bring to pass all the hopes cherished by eager youth.

The hero of *Locksley Hall*, disappointed in love, turned for consolation to the triumphs of science. He would build

up a future on the sound basis of exact knowledge. Injustice, burdens and false teaching would then be overcome. Advance to more knowledge would save the world. Then forward to the highest heights; hope forever on her mountain; a short full life is better than a long one of primal stagnation. In the half century between *Locksley Hall* and its sequel a change had come about. Science had proved inadequate, it had created more problems. The earlier glamour had faded. It is now the deathless angel who points the way heavenwards:

Half the marvels of my morning, triumphs over time and space,
Staled by frequency, shrunk by usage into commonest common-
place,

He had come to see a deeply spiritual purpose behind science and material. The eternal plan of God was being revealed, and was seen to shape life towards perfection in the clearing process of evolution:

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

The unseen was becoming more real, and his sight stretched beyond the sunset. The physical existed only to declare the spirit, the image of God:

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills, the plains.
Are not these, O Soul, the vision of Him who reigns?

He also learned that material progress does not necessarily mean enrichment of spirit, and felt that a satiation in mundane glory might react in starvation of soul.

There were those who thought his tones too doleful. Even Gladstone, at the age of 77, sharply criticized him. This notable man was going through his own Gethsemane. He had been repulsed in the political field, was the target for bitter denunciation, base motives were ascribed to him, many friends were forsaking him. Yet he found time to challenge the tragic note of *Locksley Hall*. He recalled the solid tale of vast improvements, the enormous relief of suffering that was brought about under self-governing democracy. Times had become gentler, the public conscience more tender, indifference to injustice had changed to an active endeavour to right wrongs and remove handicaps from those unduly burdened. Tennyson had a deeper sight. He saw that vision had not kept pace with mater-

ial advance and evils had multiplied. Without vision a people carry their own destruction. The combat between the powers of light and darkness went on. This despair has often been uttered, and still finds expression. Material progress has not always helped the spirit.

While suffering from this great resurgence of feeling against harsh conditions that persisted, Tennyson was treading the winepress in his own spiritual life. His friend Hallam had died in 1833. This had a profound effect on his outlook and hope. His thought was stirred until it touched the reality beyond the shadows thrown on the wall of the cave. Longing for his friend set him on the way to a richer converse of spirit, more satisfying than the earthy walk. The old friendship was glorified with eternal quality. "I have thee still, and I rejoice." Love lived, and provided an indestructible element which lifted friendship out of time and place. This spiritualizing of his thought and reach into the realm of faith grew, and came into full force in the writing of *Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After*.

Youth nourished on the fairy tales of science, held to the present for the promise it carried, dipped far into the future and raised many visions of the wonders that may be. This is a sublime spectacle. It is not indifference, or artificial hopefulness, but a calm faith resting on the forces working out a glory beyond dreams. It was springtime, vibrant with all that declared a livelier pulse and feeling in colour, form and love. Love had passed him by for gold, the diamond necklace was chosen instead of the plainer ring. The golden glitter seemed better than attic affection. So he turned to right the wrongs that influenced such prostitution. He is not far from the sad Dane who cried out in his agony of spirit, "The times are out of joint, O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set them right." His half comfort is that a real love would not have been deflected by any possible influence. Love is forever, and in the wider world of action he would find palliative for disappointment. There is yet to come the new day, when magic undreamed of will work out conditions in which truth will prevail above falsehood. He would rise to doing, lest he wither in despair. He would find much to do in the wider arena of city life and need. In this hopeful ecstasy he gave utterance to a remarkable description, which the century's passing has too slowly moved to realization. Neither the ancient prophet who may have dreamed of the horseless chariot raging in the streets, rushing to and fro in the broad ways, appearing as torches, running like light-

nings, nor Mother Shipton, who had such strange foresight,
roused imagination to greater heights than did Tennyson in
the lines,

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonders that would be;

Saw the heavens filled with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;

Heard the heavens filled with shouting, and there rained a ghastly
dew
From the nation's airy navies grappling in the central blue;

Far along the world-wide whisper of the south wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the people plunging through the thunder
storm;

Till the war drum throbbed no longer, and the battle flags were
furled
In the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World.

There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe,
And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law.

It is a magnificent vision, and the faith that raised it sublime. Through the ages one increasing purpose is running, and men's hearts may widen to tolerance, sympathy and good will. Why may not such a dream become actual? Who can tell what good may not be just beyond the range of present sight? Faith reaches out and grasps what may be, and the wise one, even in the midst of the dark, goes on to the glory of a better day of universal peace. Can this be found away from the clang and stir of modern life? "In the summer isles of Eden lying in dark purple spheres of sea?" He would go back to the simplicity of primitive life, and rear his breed untouched by the artificial, and free from the pain and toil of the older land. He knows in his heart this is wrong, for "better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay." *Locksley Hall* may crumble, but life is greater than that heap, and he rises, phoenix-like, towards the better day. The covenant promise would never fail, ancient founts of inspiration are ever fresh. Personal sufferings or wrongs must not destroy what the Creator had made, nor turn the purpose of wise advance into despair or loss. The tone may be tear-shaken, rasping. But, like the eye that redeems the toad from ugliness, the vision and faith atone for the shadow thrown across the view.

Vast changes had come over Britain by the eighth decade of the century. The world had settled down to an age of peace. The British Empire had become consolidated, the distress of the civil war and reconstruction period in the United States was fast healing, after several revolutions France had settled into definite republicanism, Italy was united under Victor Emmanuel, the German Empire was finding a place among the great nations, Russia was wakening out of its long sleep. The Crystal Palace exhibition, the cable between Europe and America, rise of the modern press, industrial progress and social reform, an increasing opportunity for education marked an advance such as had not been noticed before in the same length of time. This advance had not accomplished the hope for an equal spiritual progress. Tennyson's earlier dream was not fulfilled. He must look anew for an agent that would work the magic. So the sequel, *Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After*, was written. This is longer, and touches a deeper note than the earlier poem. He had come to know a sounder love than the one he had fancied in his youth. Death had come into his ken, but life was found to be stronger than death and to be forever more. The Light that leads man is everything. Immortality is the lodestone. "The Good, the True, the Just, Take the charm, forever, from them, and they crumble into dust." Dreams are the reality. Forward becomes Now. His hope is in the Divine spark found in the hearts of mankind. Beware of false cries, equality is only the politician's bait, freedom is at the best anarchy, each carries its own mortality. Speak no easy word, delay not in action, open up the festering sores of the world, let in the light of Truth. Justice, love, truth will give substance to dreams, all diseases will be quenched by knowledge, the earth at length a warless world, a single race, a single tongue. Life, like a sea, may ebb and flow, may sway back and forth, but the evolutionary process through the ages goes on steadily. This is his faith, and the sheet anchor of his thought.

Though the evolutionary process may be hindered by reversion holding it to the mud, it moves on. "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 through the human soul, boundless inward in the atom, boundless outward in the whole." It is wondered if Hebrew prophet or Greek philosopher had a grander faith that lifted him nearer to the mind of the Eternal. Personal loss, all the perplexities of a confused social order could

not dim his eye or abate his strength. There was always hope upon her mountain, "some diviner force to guide us thro' the days I shall not see."

Far away beyond her myriad changes earth will be
Something other than the wildest modern guess of you and me.

Ere she gain her heavenly best, a God must mingle in the game,

Cruelty and chaos are elements in the cosmos. Force, envy, invidious distinctions prevail. Pretence and class rule the day. But the divine outcrop in scattered lives will save the day. All that spoils must be exposed. He would heal by cutting deeply into the infected areas, and letting off the foul accretion. Christian love must be more than the twin of heathen hate. City poverty, crime and sickness, economic oppression are poisons to be cast from the bosom of the age. He would oust every madness from the brain. "Let the trampled serpent show you that you have not lived in vain." It is the struggle of a sincere soul, seeking the new heavens and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. The secret of victory is in a faith that must prevail, and the proof is in actual expressions of holy love.

Tennyson taught Britain to view the whole long drawn out struggle of human existence as the creative work of God to bring about the kingdom of peace and good will. He calls for patience while working for this end. The way thereto is pointed out by the deathless angel and his message. It is to follow the risen Lord who has gone before. He carries light in himself to light each desert pathway. This is the answer to all strife and doubt, that torments weary and troubled souls to this day. Faith to follow light will lead the spirit out of every difficulty incident to prevailing conflict and despair. "The true philosophy bids us look not to science and what is, but to the ideals that have their root in gropings after what is higher and better than anything yet realized in this material world." Future promise, inner light, persevering faith results in attainment, and finally brings about every divine purpose. Factual knowledge can never be more than the shadow of the more basic still to be revealed. Belief in the never dying light, no matter how deep the darkness raised by wickedness, will secure further revelation of the light that carries guidance and power to every soul it illumines:

All diseases quenched by science, no man halt, or deaf, or blind;
Stronger ever born of weaker, lustier body, larger mind?

Earth at last a warless world, a single race, a single tongue—
I have seen her far away—for is not earth as yet so young?

Every tiger madness muzzled, every serpent passion killed,
Every grim ravine a garden, every blazing desert tilled,

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

Even to this day there are those who say the well-being of the race is secured in getting more knowledge, by digging deeper into the constitution of the universe and laws by which it is upheld, and applying these to get greater material comfort. Here and there one echoes Tennyson, that along with this there must be equal discovery of moral and spiritual paths. These can be overlooked. Duty, responsibility for others, regard to the well-being of the most lowly or unfortunate must go hand in hand with scientific apprehension. It has not as yet been made clear how far the ethic base underlies scientific process. There is a world of truth in the statement that there is real blessedness for the pure in heart in their seeing God in all his manifestations and purposes. Right, Truth, Light are beacons amid the dark maze of human life. This is Tennyson's faith. The love that died for mankind will triumph over all.

The duty becomes

Follow you the star that lights 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.

Forward, let the stormy moment fly and mingle with the past,
I that loathed have come to love him. Love will conquer at the last.