

Thus, the final note of Tennyson's song, which he makes the prelude of his poem, terminates where the final note of Dante's song terminates, in that Love which moves the world, the sun and all the other stars.¹

XIII.

"In Memoriam," viewed from the ground upon which we now stand, is a highly finished expression of the heart-hunger of a soul groping after the fulfillment of its desires and aspirations, searching into science and art, and challenging heaven and earth to yield up the secret of happiness and contentment, and in the primitive instincts of human nature together with the essential truths of the Christian religion—in these alone interpreted in the light of faith—discovering the meaning of life and answers to the questionings of doubt and materialism. In this fact lies the claim of the poem to rank with "Faust" and the "Divina Commedia," not indeed in degree of greatness and fullness of expression, but in kind. "In Memoriam" is also a world-poem.

¹ *Paradiso*, xxxiii. 131.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

1. In the previous pages we have sought the ideal in thought and applied the principles of criticism which we regard as most fruitful in word and work. Had the writer known a more elevating doctrine he would have imparted it cheerfully, were the expression of it ever so inadequate. The mere negations of criticism are barren of results; the mere clash and clamor of controversy only too frequently end in personal animosities and the strengthening of prejudice. Meanwhile thought is starving and paralyzed for want of the warmth of life and the nourishment of life-giving food in men's teachings. Keen and bright intellects, hungering and thirsting, grope in cold and darkness after spiritual meat and drink with a yearning and an earnestness that are rarely witnessed in the history of human thought.

2. Beneath the rationalism and agnosticism of the day there is a strong religious feeling crying out for light and life and warmth. Witness the neo-Christian movement in France. It is a reaction against the barrenness of materialism in philosophy and the rottenness of realism in literature. It is a school of choice spirits who refuse to subscribe to

the doctrine that there is no unseen world, and who would converge their best thoughts upon the soul and its destiny. These writers hold by the reality of spiritual life. They crave nourishment for that life. Faith in that life and religious truth and moral right they regard as integral portions of human activity. With Renan they hold a man's worth to be in proportion to the amount of religious sentiment he has preserved from his early training, that religious sentiment giving fragrance to his whole life.¹ Religion is from their point of view as great a need for the intellect as philosophy. They do not vouch for the truth of their conception of religion, but they have no doubt whatever concerning its beauty and goodness. "Faith," says M. Edouard Rod, "has an answer for every curious question; it explains all. It gives the reason for our existence, since it proves to us that we are the centre of the world; it lends us the courage to support our sufferings, since it teaches us that they are a preparation for a better destiny; it imparts a relish for life, since it convinces us that life is eternity. By plunging into mystery it has caused all fear thereof to vanish; its affirmations have banished doubt, and in the triumph of its certitude it has established a marvelously constructed system upon an imaginary basis, which, designed as it is to meet every intellectual want, leaves no room for despair."²

¹ *Feuilles Détachées*, pref. p. xvii.

² *Le Sens de la Vie*, p. 26.

3. So speaks one of the apostles of the neo-Christian movement. He talks of faith; but faith in what? — there's the rub. The new creed speaks respectfully of religion, but it accepts no dogma; it assumes the Christian code of morality without the Christian sanction and the fundamental religious truths upon which both code and sanction are based. It is merely a vague sentiment. Christian morality without the Christian religion is an abstraction; religion without dogma is a chimera of the brain. In attempting to appropriate from Christianity its beautiful morality, its consoling faith, its all-embracing mysteries, without the doctrine and the dogma of Christianity, the neo-Christian disciples are plucking flower and leaf, leaving behind the root and stem through which life-giving nourishment flows. As well expect the plucked flower to ripen into fruit as this admiration for Christianity to be productive of spiritual life and growth or to end in the robust activity that is a mark of every genuine Christian institution.

4. Nothing can supersede the Catholic Church as a great social and intellectual force — the Church of Clement and Augustin and Aquinas, the Church that inspired Dante and à Kempis — with its unchanging dogma, its harmoniously developed doctrine, its significant ritual and ceremonial; with its priesthood, its sacraments, its hymns and prayers; its all-embracing charity embodied in the various institutions established throughout the world for the healing of human misery and

the well-being of society. This is the substance of which the neo-Christian movement is but the shadow. Herein do flower and fruit, root and stem, all receive life and nourishment from the Word in whom they are planted.

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