

Tennyson's Selected Poems on Politics – An Overview

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Abstract: Alfred Lord Tennyson is recognized as the most distinguished British poet of Victorian Age. His poems mostly explore the vital issues confronting Victorian England. He reveals his sense of political responsibility in his patriotic verses. His poems also reflect the descriptions of nature, his interest in science, religious and philosophical views, treatment of love and passion, etc. His poems Locksley Hall, The Charge of the Light Brigade, Sir Galahad, The Defense of Lucknow and The Revenge dominate the theme of political conditions of England in Tennyson's Age. Hence this paper overviews the themes and arguments of Tennyson on politics and other social scenario of his age

Keywords: Patriotism, Knighthood and Honour

1. Introduction

Tennyson is chiefly remembered as the most representative poet of the Victorian Age. He was a national poet, whose poetry reflected the various important tendencies of his time. That is why he was so popular in his own days. The most notable feature of Tennyson's poetry is that it reflects the political tendency of the Victorian Era. This is the reason why he is considered as the truly representative of that Age. If one wants to learn the current of Victorian Era, one must read Tennyson, because he is the literary historian of that period. Like a intent spectator, he closely watched the ebb and flow of events happening in his country. He remained keenly alive to the currents of affairs in every sphere of activity. His reading of current events was so accurate, that he could even see the forthcoming political changes of his country. He was not a visionary or a prophet merely dreaming of a glorious future. On the contrary, he was his nation's mouth – piece, voicing her younger hopes and aspirations.

Tennyson lived in the age of intellectual ferment, when the minds of people were actively preoccupied with the most vital problems of individual and national life. The problems include the religious doubts, social problems, and the revolt of cultured mind against a corrupt society and the spirit of compromise. These matters are faithfully reflected in Tennyson's poems. The following poems are selected for the overview on the theme of Politics in Tennyson's Selected Poems. Tennyson's Locksley Hall Sixty Years After, reflects the change in social and political opinions of Victorian Period. The Charge of the Light Brigade and Sir Galahad are the patriotic poems, which reflect

the patriotism and political rules of Victorian era. Most of these poems reflect the qualities and devotion of knights towards their country. The Locksley Hall shares the speaker's visit on a Locksley Hall, where he spent his boyhood and youth. Here, the speaker describes the vision of the future that he used to experience in his younger days. He used to imagine the wonders that the future would bring. He also visualizes the aerial wars. At the same time, he used to hope that the wars would not last forever and wishes the nations would come to a peaceful understanding. The parliament of Man and the federation of the world would have been regarded as prophetic. The League of Nations, formed at the end of World War II actualized Tennyson's dream of the parliament of man and the federation of the world. These are seen in the following lines of Tennyson's poem The Locksley Hall:

Till the war drum throb'd no longer, and the battle – were furl'd

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.
(127 – 130)

In the latter part of the poem Tennyson explores the status of women in Victorian England and about his disappointment in love towards Amy. This poem helps to understand the scientific invention, woman status, social and political changes of Victorian Age. The poem also seems to be a landmark of Victorian era.

The Charge of the Light Brigade, describes the courage and commitment of six hundred soldiers towards their nation. This poem also depicts the history of Victorian England. It also reveals the Commander's power and order or rules in leading his army. This poem is an evident of Tennyson's devotion towards his country and his interest towards political matters. The Charge of the Light Brigade is a simple poem, which describes wholly about the charge of light brigade in war. Through the following lines:

Cannon to right of them,

Cannon to left of them

Cannon behind them

Volley'd and thunder'd,

Storm'd at with shot and shell
 White horse and hero fell,
 They that had fought so well
 Came thro' the jaws of Death,
 Back from the mouth of hell,
 All that was left of them,
 Left of six hundred (39 – 49)

Tennyson exposes the boldness and courage of the English soldiers. This poem also depicts the history of England, their war and powers during Victorian age. In Sir Galahad, Alfred Tennyson portrays the ideals and the achievements of Sir Galahad, one of the knights of King Arthur. Sir Galahad had taken a vow of chastity and lived a life of exemplary purity and chastity in thought and deed. This is evident in the forthcoming lines of the poet:

My good blade carves the casques of men, my tough lance
 thrusteth sure, and my strength is as the strength of ten, because
 my heart is pure

.....
 How sweet are looks that ladies bend
 On whom their favours fall!
 For them I battle till the end
 To save from shame and thrall:

.....
 I never felt the kiss of love
 Nor maiden's hand in mine

.....
 So keep I fair through faith and prayer
 A virgin heart in work and will (1 – 4, 13 – 16, 19 – 20- 24)

King Arthur was a noble, virtuous, popular and beloved King of England in the middle ages. He chases the best persons of virtue, honesty, integrity and bravery for all walks of life and made them knights. These members of the order of knighthood were known as Knights of the Round Table. These knights, who were of excellent moral, character, bravery and heroism redressed wrongs and helped ladies in distress. They took part in tournaments and battles, and defended their country against the inroads of the enemy. Sir Galahad was one such knight.

Tennyson believed in the cultivation of one virtue patriotism and love for England. He showed the ferocious qualities of the English race and the militant nationalism of a powerful nation through his poem. In his foreign and imperial politics, Tennyson had the vision of a narrow insular patriot, who considered all foreigners as devils and all democratic movements on the continents as devilish, which is visualized in the poems like *The Defense of Lucknow* and *The Revenge*.

Sir Richard is the central figure of the poem *The Revenge*. He is proud of his country and dies fighting for the honour of his country. Sir Richard sacrifices his life and faces death fearlessly and gladly, so that the world may look upon his nation with admiration. This poem shows Tennyson's deep and fervent love of his country. It breathes the true spirit of courage and

determination in the presence of danger. The very spirit of the Elizabethans is infused into the lines of *The Revenge*. A realistic picture of Englishmen's cool courage amidst overwhelming odds, their love of adventure and their hatred of Spain are presented beautifully in this poem.

The Defence of Lucknow is considered as the imperialistic poem. It is on the valour of English celebrating the victory of British army of the Lucknow Residency. The situation refers to the siege of the Lucknow Residency during the outbreak of the mutiny in the Indian army, more commonly known as Sepoy Mutiny. From the rulers point of view the Indian Mutiny brought out the treachery, the savage and cruel nature of the Indian. For eminent Indian historians like Ramesh Chandra Mazumdar, it was the first great and direct challenge to the British rule in India, which furnished a historical basis for the struggle for Independence.

The Defense of Lucknow is highly charged with the poet's patriotic, national spirit and racial pride. The poem vehemently termed the Indian rebels, who are heroes in Indian eyes, as 'dark pioneer', 'myriad enemy' or 'fell mutineers'. These are portrayed in the following lines:

Keep the revolver in hand! You can hear him the murderous
 mole!

Quiet, ah! Quiet – wait till the point of the pickaxe be thro':

.....
 Now let it speak, and you fire, and the dark pioneer is no
 more;

And ever upon the topmost roof our banner of England blew!

.....
 Fiercely on all the defences our myriad enemy fell

.....
 Kill or be killed, live or die, they shall know we are soldiers
 and men! (26-46).

The whole poem resembles a vivid narration of events in pictorial prose. Most of Tennyson's poems reflect the zeal happenings of Victorian age and its political situations. Thus, Tennyson's poems prove him to be a national poet of the Victorian Age.

2. Conclusion

This paper presented an overview of Tennyson's selected poems on politics – an overview.

References

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