CHAPTER VII

Conclusion
In 19th century, Tennyson was, in fact among the greatest of English poets. His work is magnificent by any standards: and no subsequent English poet has triumphed in such varied fields. No doubt his successes include serious poems, light poems, narratives, elegies, ballads and occasional verses but his inequality is strange considering the range and virtuosity of his verse tales.

A natural instinct for narration meant for entertainment gave birth to verse tale which in its earliest period came into being in the form of 'lay'. It passed through a number of modifications and changes in different centuries taking different forms—Epic, Romance and then Ballad the three basic types of verse tale though it sometimes took the form of allegory, burlesque and fableau in different ages in the hands of different poets.

The splendid and glorious tradition of verse tale, started by Beowulf (an epic) and Anglo Saxon poets, was carried on by Chaucer in 14th century, by Spenser and Shakespeare in 16th century, by Milton and Dryden in 17th century, by Pope, Gray, Collins and Thomson in 18th century, and by Wordsworth, Scott, Shelley, Byron and Keats in early 19th century. But the real glory and high place to it was given in 19th century by the creative hands of Tennyson.

The subject matter of verse tales from the very beginning have been various. It was used first of all to
describe war deeds, Chivalry of great heroes and warriors, myths and legends; then for religious purpose by priests and monks. After that it turned towards romanticism describing knight-hood gallantry, romance, courtly love, valour and in 14th century humorous realistic situations by Chaucer. In 17th century it took classical story material and the thoughts and works of great classical like Plato, Aristotle, Ovid, Virgil, Homer etc,. In the early 18th century of reason it was used for satirical purpose and wit. At the end of the 18th century, the subject matter of the verse tale comprised marvellous and the unknown, mystical and the supernatural, and at the same time passion, sentiments and tenderness. It was in the 19th century that the verse rale was adorned with different subject matters full of social - democratic note, religious and spiritual scepticism, aestheticism and medieval - romanticism and the credit for this adoration goes to Lord Tennyson whose work is the object of my study. The knowledge of Tennyson in different fields was so wide that he could write on all subjects with perfect ease. Being a versatile story - teller, he exhibited his power of narrative in all his poems whether dealing with the theme of industrialization, woman's place in society, crude mammonism, true love and marriage, great heroes, battles etc, and was able to grip the attention and interest of the reader up to the end. Not only the disturbing present but also the glorious past was equally the matter of interest and liking for him. So therefore we
find in him a happy blending of classical and modern style. The pathos and tragic note in his verse tales give them a tinge of romanticism.

I have come to the truth after a thorough analysis that there were two Tennysons: what may be called the fundamental Tennyson, and the superficial. The fundamental was inborn, the superficial was largely the product of the period in which he lived. The fundamental Tennyson was an aesthete and a man of heart, tender, vulnerable, passionately affectionate, intensely responsive to whatever appealed to his sense of beauty and glory and wonder, and with a delicate delighted sensibility to the quality of words and the movement of the metre. The superficial Tennyson was a less unusual phenomenon; an intelligent, conscientious nineteenth century English man, liberal minded, domestic, seriously concerned with the political and religious issues of his time and who shared with his earnest contemporaries a strong sense of social responsibility.

This last was to his disadvantage as a poet for it prevented him from simply answering the call of his inspiration; and instead made him feel it his duty to set up as a teacher and use his gifts to deliver a moral message to his countrymen. He gave literary voice to the doubts and beliefs of the Victorian people aroused due to the scientific, industrial and religious revolution. He snatched the attention of the public towards some major
burning problems prevailing at that time through the medium of his verse tales, and forced them to think about them. He wrote such verse tales like 'Locksely Hall', 'Princess', 'Maud' and others with a definite end which show his talent towards didacticism. He thought it his responsibility to make the countrymen cautious of the coming dangers which may be aroused by the prevalent social, political and religious crisis. The impact of French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars created in his mind a disliking for revolutionary methods. A distaste for growing materialism expressed by Wordsworth in his "The World is too much with us" tortured the sensitive mind of Tennyson. His social criticism and apatheticism towards class superiority is seen best in Locksley Hall. In this poem he criticized the money-minded society. At the same time this poem shows Victorian attitude towards woman which considered woman inferior to man in the field of intellect. Tennyson tried to abolish this attitude of Victorians through his poem Princess in which he declared through the mouth of Lady Psyche and Prince man and woman equal in every field. Stricken by the bad condition of the woman in England, he laid a powerful stress on the education of woman keeping in mind her influence on the family. She should be given equal rights and equal opportunities so that she may give vent to her inborn talent and calibre without violating the call of natural impulses. His ideal of 'manhood fused with female grace', and the idea of the 'perfect type of humanity'
comprising the 'union of tenderness and strength' is presented here. This tale shows Victorian earnestness, scientific progress, its culture, its traditional prejudices, and its evolutionary faith. Besides these social poems, Tennyson's deep and fervent love of his country stirred him to pen down some distinguished political tales which infused the spirit of patriotism in the heart of the Victorians.

The legendary tale of King Arthur which was first seen in Welsh tales and then in the works of Geoffrey, Wace, Malory and others, when reached in the hands of Tennyson became a perfect specimen of his workmanship. The death of Hallam who according to Tennyson was an ideal of perfect manhood, inspired him to write the first major poem 'The Idylls of the King', the greatest of all poetical subjects, which had fascinated him from his early childhood. This epical poem is a wonderful museum of classicism, medievalism, romanticism, didacticism, symbolism and craftsmanship. He has traced through narrative and description the rise and decline of an ideal king and his kingdom, and explained through allegory the principles on which the health of any good society must depend. This tale shows Soul at war with flesh. Man should strive for the ideal but at the same time he should not forget his ordinary duties. He laid stress on the necessity of self reverence, self knowledge and self control. This poem shows Tennyson's
philosophy of love in applauding the spiritual love of King Arthur and condemning the sinful love of Guinevere.

Such verse tales set Tennyson partially as a thinker, philosopher and reformer. It was by the virtue of these social verse tales that he was adorned by the title of poet Laureate after Wordsworth. But unfortunately Tennyson's true talent was not of the didactic type. This is what is wrong with weak parts of The Princess and 'The Idylls of the King' in which the superficial Tennyson diverts him from his true path.

The fundamental Tennyson - Tennyson the aesthete and tender by heart, did invest some of his subjects with an everlasting beauty, grace, charm, freshness and neverfailing appeal. The result is a group of romantic verse tales we have discussed in V chapter which are unforgettable for their flights of imagination, colourful atmosphere of youthful romance, sentiments and passions, lively pictures of rural life and glowing colours. The most striking thing about these poems is that they share in some measure the nature of classicism in moral, form and clarity of expression which is a great tribute to English literature.

The spirit of medieval romance and mystery enjoyed by great romantics like Keats, Coleridge was captured by Tennyson in The Lady of Shalott. The extreme minuteness of the description, profound imagery and a sincere fidelity to
Nature found in this and other such poems link him to Pre-Raphaelite school of painting. The Miller's Daughter, The Gardener's daughter, Dora and other poems illustrate Tennyson's philosophy of love, his power of swift narration, pictorial art and abundance of sensuous pictures. The freshness of English rural scenes, sentiments and note of pathos all make these idyls highly pastoral and romantic. It is noticeable that in these romantic tales feminine figures are more prominent than the masculines. They are mostly lonely figures meeting their tragic ends. The simplicity and elegiac mood of Dora reminds us of the story of Ruths. The sentiments and emotions of the May Queen make the poem pathetically very appealing. In all these poems imagination plays a great role. In The Lady of Shalott and A Dream of Fair Women Tennyson's imagination wanders in the mythical past. He attributes poetic sensibility to nature in his verse tales. His imaginative verse - tales are generally love idyls aesthetically represented and express his admiration of conjugal love. The skilful use of sound and rhythm makes these poems intensely felt.

The fundamental Tennyson speaks with a voice so magical and compelling. As much as Keats himself, he loved the principle of beauty in all things and he had an equally strong power to discriminate the precise qualities that gave each manifestation of beauty his unique individuality; Natural beauty in particular. Tennyson is a supreme painter
of verbal landscapes.

He responded with an equal sensibility to the quality of beauty in the world of imagination; in classical myth or medieval romance and fairy tale, and shows the same capacity to isolate and convey the characteristic aesthetic quality in both. 'The Lady of Shalott' anticipates and surpasses the Pre - Raphaelite poets in its power to recreate the charm of medieval romance as it appeals to later ages: in 'Tithonus' and 'Idylls of the King' Tennyson shows himself able to communicate the very different atmosphere and attraction of classical myth and legendary tales.

Further, Tennyson's command of his medium is superb. It is as varied as his subject matter. He is a master of many styles, light as in 'Dora', grand as in 'Ulysses' and 'Idylls of the King', spare and simple as in his songs.

Clarity, melody and dignity - these three qualities characterise Tennyson's best work. His language and diction deserve praise as it has many merits like terseness, finish, polish, uncommon phrases and imageries. His word - pictures present the visible world in more authentic, descriptive and panoramic form, and thus give him the honour of being a superb pictorial artist. Well chosen epithets, original similes, apt metaphors all are used by him for vivifying his narratives. The Princess, The Lady of Shalott all testify to it. Accurate scientific perception of the various moods
of Nature and tender poetic feelings attached to it give his
tales a classic beauty and grandeur. His perfect technique
and craftsmanship is strengthened by the wonderful use of
sound and rhythm. He is merited as a great musical poet for
a fine verbalism is to be found in his poems created by the
use of melodious vowels, liquid consonants, assonance,
alliteration and onomatopoeia. Every variety of rhythm and
rhyme, sound and cadence is used freely by Tennyson in his
verse - tales such as Locksley Hall, The princess, The Lady
of Shalott which are specimen of his metrical skill. He is
unequalled in the field of versification. His command of
blank verse is finer in quality, grace, flexibility and
noble cadence than most of the poets except Milton. He made
experiments and modifications in metres for making them the
perfect medium of expression. His metres, melodious in
themselves, are the exact echo of their sense. The movement
of the lines is the precise musical counterpart of the
movement of thought and feeling that the words express.
They also show that he writes as well for the eye as he does
for the ear. They compose a picture in which every word
tells, and tells beautifully. Indeed, Tennyson's most
characteristic gift is that for the concentrated evocative
phrase depending, as often as not, on a single word for its
effect.

In accordance with the character and nature of the
subject matter of the poem, Tennyson made certain
experiments in blank verse and other metres. The beauty and charm of the verse has been enhanced by the skilful use of rhythm, cadence, mental and sensual imagery, and felicity of detail. Tennyson being a talented story teller could create the atmosphere according to the subject with the help of detailed descriptions and apt images. The rich and dignified language and diction of his poems help in conveying the idea that Tennyson wants. The reason behind the immense popularity and appeal of Idylls of the King, Princess and others is his outstanding gift for narration which shows his capacity for effective, swift and rapid dramatic movement.

"Tennyson's style and sensibility are made moving and significant by the fact that they are always the vehicle of feeling. His landscapes are never merely descriptive: they are always related to the sentiment inspiring the poem in which they appear. His classic and medieval poems are not merely tasteful escapes from the drab present to a picturesque Never-Never Land. Like the landscapes they are vital symbols of Tennyson's own experience, metaphors of his personal sentiment. 'The Lady of Shalott' expresses his sense of the risk an imaginative spirit runs when it is lured by passion to leave the region of contemplation and plunge into that of active human drama. Emotional force is one of his outstanding qualities. In his poems he passionately regretted for vanished bliss." (David Cecil)
His intense responsiveness to beauty and to love brought with it an equally intense realization of their inevitable transience:

"The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,
The vapours weep their burden to the ground,
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan."

In views of Harrison, Compton Rickett, Hadow and others Tennyson's poetic art has supreme perfection, faultless precision, harmonious musical effect, rich museum of words, glorious language and diction and excellent versification.

Thus both the thought content and the technical excellence of Tennyson's narratives attracted me towards their critical analysis. In fact, the quality and quantity of his verse tales are responsible for enshrining him in the poetic temple of name and fame.