

In Memoriam A. H. H.

In Memoriam, as the name suggest, appears to be the poem comes out of memory or written in the memory of someone; and the statement seems true when we look at the background of the poem which tells us that the poem is the result of the grieve that Tennyson felt after losing his the best friend Arthur Henry Hallam who died in 1833.

Prologue:

The Poem begins with a prologue which can be summarized as the commentary on the entire poem. It was believed to be the last poem except **39**, added in the collection of the poems. Richard Gill writes:

Since, with the exception of 39, the Prologue (sometimes called Introductory stanzas) was the last poem to be written, it can be read as a commentary upon the whole work rather than as an integral part of it. Thus it is concerned with life, death, human limitation, faith knowledge, forgiveness and poetry. It is sometimes felt to be too bland and assured, but even the apparently firm opening stanza can be read as an expression of doubt and uncertainty:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;

The choice of words to characterise Christ - 'Strong', 'immortal Love'- looks more like expressions of what the poet needs to believe than language which is appropriate to prayer. In an age of doubt there is a need for a strong figure upon whom people can rely, and, as shall be seen, since the poet desperately wants to believe that his love will never die, it comes naturally to him to call Christ 'immortal Love'. The need to be assured is evident in the second line, where the poet places himself and his readers in the position of doubting Thomas, the disciple who would not believe in the resurrection unless he saw the risen Christ. The need and the doubt may account for the strain felt in the over-emphatic insistence of 'By faith, and faith alone, embrace'. 'Faith alone' is a common phrase in religious circles, but here it borders on despair. In effect, the poet is saying: this is all we have. 'Embrace', too, is equivocal. In that it reminds the reader of the kiss with which Judas betrayed Christ it has sinister undertones, but it is also disturbingly inappropriate in another way: the very physical and even amorous associations the word has point the reader away from Christ to the earthly friendship between the poet and his late friend. It is as if the poet's mind is wandering while he prays. The last line is an example of the subtlest undermining of overt confidence. 'Believing' is, in grammatical terms, a participle, whereas 'we cannot prove' is a verb in a negated form. Because participles are related to verbs but don't

perform all their functions (a sentence with just a participle and no verb is not really a sentence) they are considered weaker forms. In the last line the positive '-believing' - is therefore less strong than the negative - 'we cannot prove'. The first stanza, then, is much less assured than a quick reading might suggest. Consequently, it is a quite appropriate introduction to the whole poem.

The Prologue introduces another very important aspect of the poem. The oddness of the first line's language has been noted, and a reason for it has been advanced. If that reason is explored, it becomes evident that the Prologue (and much of the rest of the poem) is an expression, not of orthodox Christianity, but of the religion that comes naturally to an ordinary person who knows little or no theology and may not even care to know. Christ (who is not named as such) only 'seemest human and divine', and man merely 'thinks he was not made to die'. This, for many readers, makes the poem both moving and noble. The poet is a searcher, an inquirer who does not assume the truth of, or easily resort to, traditional Christian formula tions. In the darkness of his doubt he lamely admits that 'we have but faith: we cannot know', so all he can do is 'trust it comes from thee'. He also asks for something that, in its day, must have seemed more impressive to some readers than faith - knowledge. The very way he asks for it is fraught with strain in that the plea for both knowledge and reverence stretches over from one stanza to another. The desired harmony is thus made to seem a very remote possibility:

May make one music as before,

But vaster.

The poem concludes with three sentences all of which commence with 'Forgive'. What needs forgiveness is his 'sin', his 'grief' and his 'wild and wandering cries'. The last is a reference to his poetry. That is a subject to which the whole poem will frequently return.

(Richard Gill)

Notes is prepared by consulting the book written by Richard Gill