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Review Article

Sweetest Songs That Tell of the Saddest Thought (Arnold's Personal Elegies)

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OVERVIEW

Poetry, an interpretation of life through imagination and feeling is broadly of two kinds; personal and impersonal, the personal is further divided and one of his most important divisions is the elegy. Elegy is a "mournful, melancholic, or plaintive poem especially a funeral song or a lament for the deal"1 (Jess Stein)

In a general sense, elegy can be defined as associated with poetic substance rather than form especially with death of some particular individual. It is that class of poetry with which the poets have handsomely glossed the deformity of death. It sprouts out of death as a poetic reflection on the death of particular individual or upon death itself. Its basis is generally absolute sincerity of emotion and expression.

There is a deep melancholy in Arnold's verse. What Arnold says about Clough's poetry in "Thyrsis", is truer still of Arnold's own poetry: "his piping took a troubled sound….", and, again, "his rustic flute learnt a stormy note of men contention test, of men who groan." Indeed, sadness or pensive melancholy is the true note of Arnold's poetry.

The elegiac note is the most striking feature of Arnold's poetry. We can even say that there is no English poet in whose work the elegiac spirit pervades to such an extent. Poets like Milton, Gray, Shelley and Tennyson have given eloquent expression to their grief in single elegies; but no one else returns so frequently as Arnold to the elegies form. We find in the elegy the outlet of his native melancholy, of his distress over the mournfulness of mortal destiny. It is the natural tone of an agnostic who feels regretful of the beauty, and the lost promise of that faith. Not only has Arnold written a large number of elegiac poems, but they constitute his best poetic work. The spirit of his elegiac poems is that of Gray rather than that of Milton, Shelley and of Tennyson. It other words, Arnold's elegies are charged with a sorrowful spirit, they do not have the triumphant and inspiring ring of Milton's and Shelley's. At the same time, his elegies are much more than poems written merely about individuals. The subject of Rugby Chapel is his own father, in A Southern Night it is his brother; in Thysis and in Westminster Abbey his most intimate friends. But even in these cases of keen personal sorrow, Arnold widens his view and deals with human destiny, almost as much as Gray does in his famous elegy. The same spirit inspires poems which are elegiac in tone and mood but which are not lament for individual men. The Scholar Gipsy is as elegiac in spirit as Thyrsis. In both the real subject is the painful conditions of modern life its feverishness, its sick hurry, and its divided aims. The same is the case with the Obermann poems, the Stanzas from The Grande Chartreuse, Heine's Grave, and Memorial Verses. In all these poems, there is the same dignity of expression and the same sad but calm tone. They are the expression of a spirit almost crushed under the burden of life. Arnold rebukes the materialistic spirit and makes a plea for gentleness and quiet as against bustling energy and "trenchant force". He is attracted to the monastic life, and he even tries momentarily for shelter in the cloister:

Oh, hide me in your gloom profound,

Ye solemn seat of holy pain!

Take me, cowl'd forms, and fence me round,

Till I possess my soul again.

Thyrisis is a pastoral elegy written on the death of Arnold's intimate friend Arthur Hugh Clough in Florence. Clough did not shine as brightly as was expected him. At Oxford

(1845-48), he was considered a brilliant student. Here they became good friends and roamed about the Oxford countryside together. Clough left Oxford and thereafter could not produce any thing very brilliant in literary field his death in 1861 left the question open if he had actually been a failure. Their friendship dimmed after Clough's departure, yet there remained an affectionate strain between the two. Arnold took five years to write down an elegy on his dead friend. However, it remains a debated question whether Clough is really the main subject of his poem because Arnold laments his Oxford days and vanished youth more than his friend.

Thyrsis is presented as an immortal wanderer. He is a spirit of the 'countryside'. He was an Oxford scholar but "tired of knocking at preferment's door", left the place to roam around the world with gypsies and to learn their "lore". This "lore" represents nay kind of divine or natural lore which cannot be learnt from books. It is an intuitive study of nature. Perhaps the underlying thought which provoked the presentation of this wanderer was that "the living world was fit only to be shunned, that modern life was in it self a 'strange disease' which would infect the free spirit with doubt and despair.'2 (Charles Duffin)

Arnold believes that there is a close relationship between The Scholar Gypsy and Thyrsis. Infact, Thyrsis is regarded as a companion piece to The Scholar Gypsy. It is an elegy in the pastoral convention. The person mourned is represented as a shepherd; the mourners are also shepherds. Rustic life with all its freshness and simplicity provide the background for this poetry. Nature is also the background of the simple joys and sorrows of the Shepherds. Thyrsis is Clough and Arnold represents himself as a shepherd, Corydon by name. In The Scholar Gypsy the poet does not represent himself as a shepherd, by in Thyrsis he does. Corydon that is Arnold laments the death of Thyrsis. Arnold also strikes a personal note in this poem.

Thyrsis is Arnold's criticism of life. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Arnold has not taken kindly to the Victorian life, which is often extolled as the golden age of prosperity, science and democracy. Arnold weighs his age in the balance and finds it wanting. He finds his contemporaries to be in the darkling plane constantly fighting, but knowing not what they are fighting for and whom they are fighting against. His ideal is Sophocles, "Who saw life steadily and saw it whole." Arnold is an advocate of culture, and not of civilization based upon materialism. He categorically points out that materialism can never lead to truth and spiritualism:

"This does not come with houses or with gold

With place, with honour, and a flattering crow.

Tis not in the world's market bought and sold.

(203-05)

Like Goethe, Arnold has also touched his figure on the malady of the age. Arnold complaints that in the Victorian age, there has, no doubt, been the expansion of industry, science and commerce but Man has lost his moral and ethical values. He has lost his pristine freshness, simplicity and innocence. Truth has been sacrificed on the altar of Materialism. Faith and religion have been replaced by skepticism. The criticism of life is fallowed by Arnold's message- the message of hope and optimism. "Thyrsis" is one of those very few poems, where Arnold strikes a note of hope, and not of despair:

Despair I will not, while I yet descry

'Neath the soft canopy of English air

That lonely tree against the, western sky,

Still, Still these slopes, tis clear.

Our Gipsy – Scholar haunts outliving thee!

(193-197)

The Scholar Gipsy never cared for material pursuits. He was a persistent seeker of truth. Clough and Arnold are also seekers of truth. Truth alone sustained them spiritually. Clough was also sick of materialism and skepticism like Arnold and thus left the world or alienated himself from the rest of the world in search of the truth:

"Yet hadst thou always visions of our light

And long with men of care thou couldst not stay,

And soon thy foot resumed its wandering way.

Let human haunt, and on alone till night." (227-230)

Through Thyrsis Arnold gives all account of the circumstances that crushed the spirit of Clough, and led to his departure from the fresh and simple joys of Oxford. He found mankind in a vale of tears, haunted by doubts, despair, incertitude and perplexed questionings. As his source of joy dried up, he could no longer write poetry, and his subsequent poetry was marked by doubt and despair. The strain for him was unbearable. He left Oxford and eventually he died. Arnold compares and contrasts Clough and a cuckoo. As soon as the spring is over the cuckoo leaves England for a southern country, only to come back at the advent of the spring. Clough,

however, will not return any more. Nor will he be able to write such joyous and fresh verse as well be widely loved and appreciated. Thyrsis i.e. Clough has died a natural death. Arnold mourns the death of Clough, which, to him, is an irreparable loss:

"My pipe is lost, my shepheard's – holiday!

Needs must I lose them, needs with heavy heart

Into the world and wave of men depart

But Thyrsis of his own will went away." (37-40)

For Arnold the death of Clough was really a kind of suicide and he said: "Thyrsis of his own will went away." Again Arnold says, "Hear it, O Thyrsis still our tree is there! …" he finds tht his friend cannot hear it and that his death in Florence is a second symbolic desertion of the Cummor field:

Ah! Vain! These English fields, this upland dim,

That lone, sky-pointing tree, are not for him.

These brambles pale with mist engarlanded

To a boon southern country he is fled. (171-174)

The poet, then, is left alone on the darkling plain. Yet Arnold wishes not only to relive past unthinking, but to renew the theme of the Scholar's search which, he had left at an unsatisfactory point in Scholar Gipsy. Nature, however, loved, is at best a congenial setting for this quest: the Scholar's light will not be found, in Wordsworthian, fashion in and through nature. The 'signal-elm' on the lovely ridge is less mystical. Nature has symbolized the search for truth: the light we sought is shining still.

Dost thou ask proof? Our tree yet crowns the hill,

Our scholar travels yet the loved hill-side. (238-40)

These closing words of the poem are the encouraging message. Arnold asks the spirit of Thyrsis to whisper to him, 'mid-city-noise' moods of 'fatigue and fear'. It is a serious reversal of the poem's direction. Arnold closes the poem not upon the regretful note. The main suggestions that the dead man has indeed won through at last to the light of truth, thought of this world- a truth which gives his spirit authority to testify that the quest remains meaningful, that the light is shining still.

The elm symbolizes everything that Arnold said in The Scholar Gipsy. As long as the tree survives, it is possible to have faith in the scholar and unworldly quest. Thyrsis like the earlier poem, therefore ends by affirming the life of imagination, that "fugitive and gracious light / shy to illumine", as over against the unpoetical world of actuality "faintest thou?" His ghostly voice of Clough asks:

I wandered till I died

Roam on! The light we sought is shining still,

Dost thou ask proof? Our Tree yet crowns the hill

Our Scholar travels yet the loved hillside (237-240)

In The Scholar Gipsy the issue of the quest may remain in doubt; but the quest itself takes on a real and immediate symbolic value because the scholar lives his role. In Thyrsis the signal-elm has become the agent of our apprehension. Its continued existence betokens the reality of the scholar, whose quest, itself a metaphor for the artist's self-imposed melancholy. The whole of the poem Culler, says is the "product first of the heart and imagination, then of the senses and understanding, and finally, of the imaginative reason."3

Thus, Thyrsis remains unique in Arnold's poetry, as a fusion of his typical tender nostalgia, associated with the natural scenes, he most dearly loved, with a mood not of melancholy defeatism, but of acceptance.

Rugby Chapel is an elegy on the writer's own father, Dr. Thomas Arnold, the famous headmaster of Rugby, a public school which he raised to a very high position in the eyes of the British public. Dr. Arnold rendered invaluable service to the cause of education in England and has been recognized as one of the greatest modern educational reformers. This poem was not written immediately after Dr. Arnold's death (in 1842), but some fifteen years or more afterwards. Arnold was moved to write this poem by an adverse opinion that had appeared in a magazine about his father. The writer of an article (Fitzjames Stephen) in that magazine had accused Dr. Thomas Arnold of being a "narrow bustling fanatic" and he had made this accusation in the course of his review of Thomas Hughes's novel Tom Brown's School Days which had depicted Dr. Arnold as a very great educational administrator. Rugby Chapel is a splendid tribute paid by a son to his father. The poem seems to have been intended as an enlargement of the view that the poet had, already in 1855, expressed about his father in a letter to his mother. In the letter he had written : "This is just what makes him great, that he was not only a good man saving his own soul by righteousness, but that he carried so many others with him, and saved them, if they would let him, along with himself". This idea was reinforced when Arnold read the novel Tom Brown's School-Days.

Dr. Thomas Arnold died suddenly in the prime on his life in 1842. The letter from which we have quoted above was written in 1855. Thomas Hughes's novel Tom Brown's School-Days, appeared in November, 1857. The magazine review of the novel was published in January, 1858. The poem Rugby Chapel might have been written at any time between 1858 and 1860. It may also be pointed out that Dr. Thomas Arnold was buried in the school chapel at Rugby, and that explains the title of the poem.

Rugby Chapel was written by Arnold primarily as a tribute to his father. It is a noble eulogy of a father written by his son. Arnold compares his father to a mighty oak that had provided shelter to him and to others against sunshine and rain. Indeed, the principal quality of Dr. Thomas Arnold, singled out by the poet, is the great headmaster's helpfulness to others. Dr. Arnold's work upon the earth, according to the poet, was to revive and succour those who wavered between vice and virtue. Dr. Arnold did not believe in conquering alone and reaching his goal alone. He used to beckon the trembler, and give his hand to the weary. In his Culture and Anarchy, Matthew Arnold has written : "The individual is required, under pain of being stunted and enfeebled in his own development if he disobeys, to carry others along with him in his march to perfection….." Dr. Thomas Arnold is depicted in the poem as a person who tried to carry others along with him in his onward march.

Arnold tends to widen the scope of his elegies by giving us his comments not only on the individuals whose death he laments but also on the conditions prevailing in their times. Dissatisfied with society as he was, these comments are invariably adverse. In Rugby Chapel, Arnold describes the purposeless existence of most people who strive blindly, achieve nothing, and die unnoticed.

He expresses a low opinion about the race of men whom he calls "so soulless, so poor". The majority of people, according to him, bluster or cringe, and they make life "hideous, and arid, and vile". The people, he goes on to say, have no unity of purpose and are weak-minded :

Some thirst plagues them; the rocks,

Rising all round, overawe;

Factions divide them; their host

Threatens to break, to dissolve.

The poem displays Arnold's vague belief in God and immorality : As is well-known, Arnold became a sceptic or an agnostic under the influence of the scientific ideas of the time. His loss of religious faith made him very unhappy. But here and there in his poems he still expresses a vague belief in immortality and in the existence of God. For instance, in this poem he refers to his father's soul as continuing to exert itself in some noble cause in some distant, shining region. His father's soul, he says, now lives in God:

Still thou performest the word

Of the spirit in whom thou dost live—

These two lines might have been written by an orthodox Christian. Arnold retreats this faith in God later in the poem when he describes the noble-minded and heroic persons as servants or sons of God who know their "Father's innermost mind". Referring to God, Arnold says that He "unwillingfully sees/one of his little ones lost". Again, he compares these noble-minded persons to angels who "appear radiant with ardour divine", and who try to lead mankind to the "City of God". Thus religious faith of a sort persisted in Arnold to some extent and reasserted itself on occasions.

There is plenty of moralizing in the poem. In fact, the poem seems to have been prompted as much by a didactic intention as by a desire to pay a tribute to Dr. Thomas Arnold. The lines in which the poet admires his father for the work he did on the earth are clearly didactic. Dr. Arnold, we are told, rescued those who wavered between vice and virtue. He beckoned the trembler, and gave to the weary, his hand. Arnold's object obviously is to inspire his readers with a similar ideal of service to society. Similarly, the concluding forty lines or so are didactic in character. In these lines the poet admires the spiritual leaders of mankind who show the right path to human beings and at whose words courage and order return to the stragglers and the dispirited persons. These spiritual leaders are compared to angels who are radiant with a divine ardour. They are beacons of hope. Addressing them, the poet says :

Langour is not in your heart

Weakness is not in your word,

Weariness is not on your brow.

Ye alight in our van ! at your voice,

Panic, despair, flee away.

In fact the whole value of this poem is moral and ethical. The poem may be treated as an excellent guide to conduct. It unholds and urges a great humanitarian ideal. This is not one of those poems which possess an aesthetic quality and which give keen pleasure to the

reader. It is an eulogy of a great man and it aims at spreading that great man's message and gospel. However, from the ethical standpoint, it is a noble poem and ranks with such works as Wordsworth's Ode to Duty.

The poem is written in perfectly simple and lucid style. Indeed, clarity of thought and lucidity of style are among its salient characteristics. There is an intense sincerity behind the poem, but the feeling of the writer is held in check and not allowed to gain extravagant proportions. This self-restraint on the part of the poet and the transparent simplicity of style give to the poem a classical character. But the style, thought simple, is not plain or bald. The style has a certain dignity; indeed, it is an elevated style as the following lines show :

Still thou upraisest with zeal

The humble good from the ground,

Sternly represent the bad !

Still, like a trumpet, dost rouse

Those who with half-open eyes

Tread the border-land dim

Twixt vice and virtue ; reviv'st,

Succourest ! this was they work,

This was thy life upon earth.

The figures of speech employed by the poet here and there lend a charm to the style. The poet's father rousing the wavering persons is compared to a trumpet. The common people who lead a purposeless existence and then die unnoticed are compared to the sea-waves which swell, foam for a moment, and are lost. The arduous course of human existence is described in terms of a journey through a mountainous region. The metaphor that is employed for this description is an elaborate one and is developed in as many as thirty lines (86-116). Another noteworthy feature as regards the style of the poem is a frequent use of a triple combination of adjectives : "bare, unshaded, alone" (line 35) : "zealous, beneficent, firm," (line 43) : "cheerful, and helpful, and firm !" (line 137), "hideous, and arid, and vile", (line 158); "fervent, heroic.

Arnold is most bracing, says a critic, "when he stands by a grave". This, without being Arnold's greatest poem, is perhaps the most calculated to leave a permanent impression on the reader. In spite of the loose, unrhymed metre, the moral fervour and passionate feeling which pervade it make it great. Lest anyone should think the impression of Dr. Arnold due to filial piety, they should recall the work of two pupils—Thomas Hughes in Tom Brown's School-Days and Stanley's Life of Arnold. Charlotte Bronte spoke to him as 'the greatest and best man of his time".

The spirit of Rugby Chapel is unusually religious. Arnold wrote the poem fifteen years after his father's death, when he had moved out of the despondency of his early middle years. It is probably for this reason that he is able to express the exhilarating belief that the great headmaster may still, after death, be exercising his splendid gifts ;

Somewhere, surely, afar,

In the sounding labour-house vast

Of being, is practiced that strength,

Zealous, beneficent, firm—

Arnold is very effusive and even sentimental in his poetry. Through Thyrsis, Arnold pays tribute to his friend Clough, and in the same manner he pays glowing tribute to his father, Dr. Thomas Arnold, passionately in his poem Rugby Chapel which is strikingly meditative in spirit. The poet does not mourn the death of his father. He simply mourns the weakness and weariness, the suffering and the misery of mankind, that has been led astray, and whom his father, like God's good angel, has come to rescue. He glorifies his father and does not shed tears over his death. Although Arnold does not shed tears on his father's death but his heart is filled with a void and once again he feels alienated or distracted himself from the world. It is so because his father was his teacher who gave him the moral values to sustain his life.

In Rugby Chapel Arnold speaks of three types of people: those who are completely devoid of ideals; those who have an urge for idealism, but do not have the strength and tenacity to pursue their ideals, and those who lead virtuous and help others to march along the right track and attain the spiritual goal. The majority of people in the world have no ideals. The few idealists, who lead a life of holiness and righteousness, think of their own salvation, and want to arrive alone in the City of God as that of Marguerite in The Forsaken Merman. For that kind of people God never feels sympathy rather he demands the compassion for suffering humanity.

Therefore Rugby Chapel is not a mere elegy mourning the death of an individual. It is a profound meditation on life. It is not a mere tribute to his father, but a tribute to all the noble sons of God, who help the weak and the frail in their spiritual adventure. What Arnold mourns is the lack of idealism and moral endeavors. Rugby Chapel is Arnold's

criticism of life. Although Arnold through this poem is trying to show the nobility of his father yet he cannot escape from presenting the bleakness which prevails his life. Through the description of nature, he presents the desolation of his own spirit. Autumn is again here representing the sad milieu which is spreading throughout the world. Arnold says, "the dark and yellow drifts of autumn, the fading light", and the silence all around heightens the solemn atmosphere of the poem. The gathering darkness and the cold provide a suitable background for the melancholy mood of the poem. The spirit of the poem is summed up in the words:

Coldly, sadly, descends

The Autumn evening (1-2)

The tone of the poem is serious. There appears the feeling of grief and desolation. It is said that Arnold loves Nature in her quieter and more subdued moods, and prefers her silences to her many voices. In Rugby Chapel he speaks of the whirl in an eddy of purposeless dust, the snow, the storm, sleet, avalanches, rugged precipices and deep hidden gorges, which may devour the humanity. Here Arnold shows a universe deprived of illusions and of light. Most men, in his opinion, are caught in the swirl of life, and do not know what they are aiming at:

What is the course of the life

Of mortal men on the earth?-

Most men eddy about

Here and there- eat and drink,

Chatter and love and hate

Striving blindly, achieving

Nothing and then they die- (59-65)

Arnold tends to widen the scope of his elegies by giving us comments not only on the individuals whose death he laments but also on the conditions prevailing in their times. Dissatisfied with society as he was, these comments are invariably adverse: He expresses a low opinion about the race of men whom he calls "soulless, so poor". The majority of people, according to him, blusters or cringes and they make life "hideous and arid and vile". The people, he goes on to say, have no unity of purpose and are weak minded:

Sore thirst plagues them; the rocks,

Rising all round, overawe.

Factions divide them, their host

Threatens to break, to dissolve. (178-181)

It is evident that Arnold became a skeptic or an agnostic under the influence of the scientific ideas of the time. His loss of religious faith made him very unhappy. But here and there in his poems he still expresses his faith in immortality and in the existence of God. As in Rugby Chapel, he refers to his father's soul as continuing to exert itself in some noble cause in some distant, shining region. His father's soul, he says, now lives in God:

Still thou performest the word

Of the spirit in whom thou dost live (47-48)

Arnold reiterates this faith in God later in the poem when he describes the noble-minded and heroic persons as servants or sons of God who know their "Father's innermost mind." Referring to God, Arnold says that He "unwillingly seas / one of his little ones lost." Again, he compares these noble-minded persons to angels who "appear radient with ardour divine", and who tries to lead mankind to the "City of God". Thus, Arnold tries to fill the void of his spirit through the nobleness of God, yet in the modern society he feels alienated and this feeling prevails more strongly in his spirit after the death of his father and his friend Clough.

As Arnold pays tribute to his father and friend through The Rugby Chapel and Thyrsis, in the same manner he pays tribute to Wordsworth, Goethe and Byron in Memorial Verses (1850) Infact, Memorial Verses is an elegy written on Wordsworth who is seen as embodying the two values of "poetry and nature", and with his death these values are lost to the present world. The poet laments the passing of old, beautiful times. After Byron and Goethe, next "Wordsworth has gone from us". His was the voice of joy:

He laid us as we lay at birth

On the coal flowery lap of earth,

Smiles broke from us and we had ease;

On spirits that had long been dead,

Spirits dried up and closely furled,

The freshness of the early world. (48-57)

In pastoral version, towards the end, the poet discovers that the person he is mourning is not dead but lives on in

some other form. What if the body is dead, his values survive him. Milton in Lycidas says:

"Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,

For lycidas your sorrow is not dead."

Likewise Shelley in "Adonais" changes the movement of the poem:

"Peace, peace! He is not dead, he doth not sleep-

He hath awakened from the dream of life."

This kind of change or say 'reversal' is not to be found in Memoral Verses. Goethe's "sage-mind' and Byron's force may be restored to us but Wordsworth's "healing power" is lost forever.

The Memorial Verses had celebrates the great romantic poets for lovely but indomitable opposition to the spirit of the times. It is all very well for Goethe to say:

The end is everywhere,

Art still has truth, take refuge there! (27-28)

Arnold says that Goethe, as a physician of the iron age, could know the cause of the malady of the age. He has himself seen the reign of terror and spiritual distress of the world. Pitted against the dark forces of destiny man could do nothing:

He too upon a wintry clime

Had fallen – on this iron time

Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears. (42-44)

Like Goethe, Wordsworth also lived in an age of spiritual degeneration, doubt, despair and joylessness. Both found to their distress that people were steeped in materialism. They cared only for arid intellect and pursuit of wealth. They lost their feeling. Wordsworth sang songs of nature and primary human affections. People were then moved to tears and their hearts, so long deadened, were awakened again. Wordsworth forged a link between man and nature. They had turned to urban life and artificialities, and Wordsworth persuaded them to go back to Nature. It was again feeling of happiness and comfort. They realized that they were spiritually rejuvenated. Their benumbed spirit was awakened. Materialism had cramped their spirit. Wordsworth's poetry revitalized them.

Arnold further suggests that wise men like Goethe and dauntless and energetic men like Byron will be born again. But Wordsworth is irreplaceable – a finalism which is more glaring because in the case of Goethe and Byron, who are associated with Wordsworth in the poem, there is a possibility of their return:

Time may restore us in his course,

Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force;

But where will Europe's latter hour

Again find Wordsworth's healing power?' (61-64)

The reason is clear here. The speaker in the poem is located on the burning plain and he is trying to get rid off the materialism and skepticism which is spreading in the society very rapidly. And Arnold finds the solution of this problem in the poetry of Wordsworth and that is everlasting. But at the same time, Arnold says that the gap which is created after the death of Wordsworth will never be filled again. Thus Arnold wants to suggest that if the despair and distress of the society appears again then Wordsworth will born again and soothe the disappointment and suffering people.

Nor will there be a poet like Wordsworth whose verse will minister to the needs of people, suffering from the maladies of materialism, skepticism and spiritual distress. Poets like Goethe and Byron may exhort people to face the baffling problems of life boldly and courageously. But Wordsworth's manner was totally different. He alone knew that the sorrows and sufferings of human beings can be forgotten in the heart of nature only.

Arnold believes that in this darkling plain only nature can soothe the aching heart of man. In Memorial Verse, he raises this point and in one more poem, i.e. A Summer Night, he refers to this point again. Arnold here describes that the city life or the earthly life is artificial, which is but the 'burning plains' and 'a brazen prison'. Amidst this unhappiness and universal confusion and despair, the poet longs for a life of peace. In A Summer Night, he speaks of the restlessness and agitation of his mind.

Arnold reacted sharply to the materialism and skepticism of his age, and, therefore, always felt sadness and restless. Unlike most people, Arnold suffers and cannot go back his mental poise and resilience. In fact, he is getting more and more unhappy and disappointment. He is listless and cold and cannot possess warmth of passion. His condition is precarious. He is neither passionate nor mentally deadened. He is at a loss and does not know whether he should allow the present state of mind to continue to suffer intensely, or adapt himself to the

mechanical life of the average run of people. He is deeply distressed to note that his mind has undergone no change for years, either for the better or for the worse:

That night was far more fair –

But the same restless pacings to and for,

And the same vainly throbbing heart was there,

And the same bright, calm moon. (22-25)

A sense of melancholy pervades the poem. Even on a moon lit night Arnold feels despair and melancholy. As the poet walks on the moon-lit street, he is alone. That sense of sadness is not Arnold's destiny alone. It is the destiny of mankind. The poet contrasts his restlessness with the peace of the moon. In fact, the moon seems to bring into sharp focus the sadness and restlessness of the poet. Arnold further speaks of the majority of the people of the world, who are no better than slaves in a prison-house. They are absorbed in dull and mechanical work throughout their life. They find no joy or interest, meaning and purpose in their daily drudgeries. They don't ever seek freedom. Their visions limited, and they do not know what exists outside the brass walls of prison. Their sensibilities are deadened, and they do not know what joy is:

For most men in a brazen prison live

Where, in the sun's hot eye,

With heads bent o'er their toil they languidly

Their lives to some unmeaning tasks work give

Dreaming of naught beyond their prison-wall (37-41)

The opening of the poem contains a vivid picture of the moon-blanch'd street and of the moon which the poet sees through a "break between the house- tops".

"The tranquil Moon light sets the poet brooding, by contrast, on his own restless and confused mind. Perhaps the scene described is one connected with Marguerite. There is at least one line which throws some light on the Arnold-Marguerite relationship. That line is, 'Never by passion quite possessed.' This certainly applies to Arnold's temperament and this is certainly the impression we get from the Marguerite poems." (Charles Duffin)4

Critics are divided in their opinion as to whether in the opening lines Arnold is thinking of Marguerite, the French girl, with whom he is believed to have had a love-affair, or of Frances Lucy Wightman, the English woman whom he married. According to Kenneth Allott,

"Arnold, after his engagement to miss Wightman, went several time late at night to gaze at her window in her father's house. Allott rejects the suggestion that Arnold is recollecting Lake Thun and Marguerite because Arnold mentions the spring tide, while the Swiss Lakes are not tidal:

The spring-tide's brimming flow

Heaved dazzlingly between…… 5 (Allott)

Infact, A Summer Night is one of those poems where Arnold describes, though vaguely, his life's philosophy, the erection of melancholy agnosticism into a creed. The note of this philosophy rings here not only faithfully but almost triumphantly.

Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse is one of the best known of Arnold's compositions and it is a reflective and philosophical poem. This is one of those poems among the works of Arnold which may truly be called a "Criticism of life". It is true that the poem is mainly subjective and personal in so far as it reveals Arnold's own spiritual doubts and religious skepticism, but the poem is also a comment on the faith of the Carthusian monks, on the beliefs of the romantic poets, on Byron's "haughty scorn", Shelley's "lovely wail", Senancour's "sad stern page", The poem also gives us a contrast between the silence and the peace of the Carthusian monks whose side Arnold takes, and the soldiers and hunters (that is, life of action and pleasure) of the world at large. The conclusion that the poet draws from his meditation is that the Carthusian monks (as also he himself) be allowed to continue their secluded life, undisturbed by the banner's, the soldiers and the bugle notes of the hunters.

In the Victorian age, the monastery had become almost an anachronism. People had lost their faith in religion. Arnold feels that like a typical Victorian, he is also between two worlds. He cannot pin his faith in the traditional thoughts and convictions. All this he very clearly presents in Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse.

Arnold was never an orthodox Christian. He inherited from his father Broad Church liberalism. The orthodox church is to him the dead word. He had the mixed feelings as Duffin says:

"He feels that he is out of the place, yet that he shares with the monks the world's mockery, though, as he admits, it is his melancholy, not skepticism that is condemned. With force he declares that the scorn of Byron the lonely wail of Shelley, the sad stern page of Oberman have left the world unredeemed. He says he cannot fully accept the

outlook of his times, which he exposes as materialistic and scientific, and concludes the poem with an analogy of children living near an old world abbey."6

Arnold in Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse seeks an escape from the Victorian age, remarkable for materialism, science and industry, and political progress. He feels like an alien in his time. The poem has a deep melancholy note. It has a solemnity of its own. It is profoundly melancholy, expressing the peculiar turn of Arnold's mind, at once religious and skeptical, philosophical and emotional. Arnold reaches the height of melancholy in this poem:

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,

The other powerless to be born,

With nowhere yet to rest my head,

Like these, on earth I wait forlorn,

Their faith my tears, the world deride-

I come to shed them at their side.

Oh, hide me in your gloom profound,

Ye solemn seats of holy pain,

Take me, cowed forms and fence me round,

Till I possess my soul again,

Till free my thoughts before me roll,

Not chafed by hourly false control (85-96)

As in Dover Beach, there is a note of calm even amidst melancholy. In the darkling plain love could sustain the poet. But in Grande Chartreuse there is absolutely no note of hope. From time to time he has turned to Byron, Shelley, and Senancour, but they have failed to deliver the goods. The material progress has no appeal to him. He finds an emotional affinity with the Carthusian monks, who live in a world of twilight, and have scrupulously avoided the garish light of the day and the world of action, pleasure and sensation. He looks forward to the age, when men will be wise but not dogmatic, cheerful but not frivolous. In fact, that is the only note of hope, the only silver lining amidst the encircling gloom. But till the advent of that golden age he will have to shed tears.

Arnold in Grande Chartreuse reflects upon the materialistic age and records his reaction to it. As far as he is concerned, Christian faith is dead. But the age in which thinkers will be wise but not dogmatic, cheerful but not frivolous, has not yet emerged. The armed soldiers represent men of action and invite him to a life of action. But he does not respond to their call. The hunters and the beautiful women, representing pleasure and sensation, tempt him to live a life of pleasure. And here also, he does not respond. He, at last, seeks refuge in the company of the Carthusian monks. The reason, why he seeks their company has been convincingly stated by Lionel Trilling:

These teachers [those who inspired him in his youth] are the men of the Enlightment and their heirs who had destroyed in him the faith among whose monuments he meditates. They are asking: "What dost thou in the living tomb?"

He answers that he knows their world to be true, knows the past world to be past-yet, cannot quite reconcile himself to the new, nor quite forget the yearning for the old. And somehow among the sepulchers of the dead Carthusians, he finds an after place for his melancholy than in modern life… Here is at least a refuge for one who does not yet possess his soul."

Arnold now moves towards the children, who are representing the monks. Arnold says that children are all dead. Their protective glade is a "close of graves", and the whole emphasis in describing the life of the monks is that it is a "death of life". They move about the corridors in gleaming white, like ghosts, sleep at night in the wooden beds that are later to be their coffins, and are, indeed, in all essentials in them already. And so the poet asks of himself, "what dost thou in this living tomb?" Thus Arnold's poem has been a complex effort to reascend simultaneously to his childhood, to medieval Christianity, and to the poetic ideal of the Romantic Poets. But all in vain. The Thunderer fulminates at him to join the modern world, and as the troops and hunters call to the children, they shrink back together with the cry:

Pass, banners, pass, and bugles cease,

And leave our desert to its peace, (209-210)

Arnold takes the advantage of the fact to have vision quickly crumble and leave him back where he began, in the desert of the modern world i.e. the alien in this modern world. Thus, the Christianity of the monks was "a dead times exploded" – and so too was the faith of the Romantic poets. So, the truth is, not that man is in a loving relation with a harmonious world, but that he is utterly and absolutely alone and sad:

For the world cries your faith is now

But a dead time's exploded dream;

My melancholy, socialists say,

Is a passed mode an outworn theme-

As if the world had ever had

A faith, or socialist been sad! (97-102)

Indeed, a feeling of melancholy, so characteristic of the bulk of Arnold's poetry, broods over the whole of this poem. In deed, the poet is in a mood of sadness verging on despair. "The kings of modern thought" are unable to help him. The philosophers of bygone times are also of no help. Nor do the theories and social attitudes of Byron, Shelley, and Senancour afford any support to the poet. The Carthusian monks are compared to children living in the shade of an old-world abbey wall and they are imagined as living in a "desert". The poet is not impressed by the scientific and material advancement, though he recognizes them. The only note of hopefulness is sounded in the stanza in which the poet speaks of the dawn of an age which will be wise but not hard, which will be gay but not frivolous or shallow. He would certainly like the advent of that age to be expedited but till them, he must permitted to shed tears of distress:

Years hence perhaps, may dawn an age,

More fortunate, alas! Than we,

Which without hardness will be sage,

And gay without frivolity

Sons of the world, oh, haste those years;

But, till they rise, allow our tears! (157-162)

Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse, in which Obermann again appears, is among the most pathetic of Arnold's personal confessions in verse. Nowhere else does he give us a clearer or a more poignant articulation of his feelings as a solitary, and all but forlorn, wanderer from all familiar folds of faith than in the lines where he speaks of the Carthusian 'brotherhood austere':

Not as their friend or child I speak!

But as, on some far Northern strand,

Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek

In pity and mournful owe might stand

Before some fallen Runic stone-

For both were faiths, and both age gone. (78-83)

A Southern Night is an elegy which deals with the deaths of the poet's brother and sister in law. He feels that it was wrong that his brother William and his wife should have been buried away from their own country. The English never once possess their souls, says the poet, and should therefore lie amid the traffic of cities. He contrasts the English with contemplative people like Indian sages and medieval romantics, and goes on to say that these two who are dead were so gentle and good that they, as much as those others were allied to the divine. In A Summer Night, he has expressed the view that man could by observing the peace of certain aspects of Nature, learn his unrealized capabilities. Here, he expresses the belief that there are people whose personality and life show that, not only nature, but humanity can partake in the life of God. A Southern Night is written in regular stanza form and is one of the best elegies by Matthew Arnold.

Haworth Churchyard, (1855) is an elegy written on Charlotte Bronte, whom Arnold did not really like nor did he admire her novels. Similarly Heine's Grave (1862-63) is about a person whose work initially disgusted Arnold. He points out in the poem that Heine has every other gift but Love and Charm. "Charm" here is the equivalent of joy. The poem ends like this:

"Bitter and strange, was the life

Of Heine ……..

Other and milder be mine!"

These poem are not rated very high as elegies. As A Dwight Culler:

"Arnold was not attempting to woo them. Indeed, this whole series of poems the Oberman Poem, Heine's Grave and Haworth Churchyard… are not so much elegies as attempts on Arnold's part of exorcise an evil spirit which dwelt within him.. To cite the words of popular song. 'I'll be glad when you are dead, you, rascal you' or to quote Mark Antony, 'I came to burry Caesar, not to praise him: This is what Arnold's elegies attempt to do."8

There is one more poem through which Arnold presents the melancholy note i.e. Resignation: To Fausta. It is a reflective poem and an exposition of Arnold's philosophy of life. Resignation is based upon the two walks which the poet took over the Wythburn Fells, the first in the childhood with a family group, the second, ten years later with his sister Jane (called Fauste in poem). The burden of the work is a somber philosophy of resignation which is supposed to be validated by the surrounding scene but which actually finds little to support it in the depiction of the earlier, childhood walk. As the "Mottey-band" of children flowed in its "wavering, many caloured line" up the

gracious slope, it found all the features of forest glade, shade rustic cheer and a bright brook which guided them down. Of course, before they reach the sea they have to cross the burning plain:

The town, the highway, and the plain

And, many a mile of dusty way,

Parched and road-worn, we made that day (79-81)

But this was their childhood experience. When they returned, two things had happened: their father had died very suddenly in the prime of his life and Jane's engagement had been abruptly broken off, hence, the theme of Resignation. The effect of this poem is that it becomes a kind of inverted Tintern Abbey. For where Wordsworth had revisited, he reported that its beauty had sustained and nourished him during the intervening years; Arnold rather found that the experience of the intervening years had revised his estimate of natural beauty. Nature was not really as gracious as he had supposed. Rather, he reported to Fausta:

……the mute turf we tread,

The solemn hills around us spread,

This stream that falls incessantly

The strange scrawled rocks, the lonely sky,

If I might their life a voice,

Seem to bear rather than rejoice. (263-268)

The theme of resignation is development by means of a contrast among three groups of figures representing three different ways of life. The first group consists of those determined questers who feel that salvation consisted in reaching some Mecca, some Jerusalem, some Rome-some city of God. But the poet sees that such persons are really slaves to their own passions and that they are mistaken in thinking that reaching their goal will bring them repose. Secondly, there are the gypsies who ramble aimlessly about the countryside with no idea of a fixed goal until at last death ends their vicissitudes. And, finally, there is the poet, who sits quietly on the mountain top and contemplates the whole life but does not take part in it. He is not unsympathetic to the people and he does not say, "I am alone", but he does not share their aspirations. After having described the ambitions and the active seekers after the goal of the completed action, the poet describes those who are resigned to accepting life as it comes. The gypsies according to poet emphasize the changelessness of life. Although the gypsies help to bring into relief the poet's isolation from society, their attitude of fatalistic hopelessness does not suffice for him. Nor is he willing, to rest in self-contemplation:

The poet, to whose mighty heart

Heaven doth a quicker pulse impart,

Subdues that energy to scan

Not his own course, but that of man. (144-147)

He feels impelled to submerge his individuality in the whole world of animate being: "that general life, which does not cease." The artist, be discovers, has natural aptitude for sharing in this "general life", which is:

The life he craves-if not in vain

Fate gave, what chance shall not control,

His sad lucidity of soul. (196-198)

In this poem the poet's sister, the Fausta of the subtitle, has the task of defending the position which Arnold himself had adopted in his poems. According to her argument, the poet is a man apart. By virtue of his capacity for intense feeling, he can at will escape into the life of imagination:

In the day's life, whose iron round

Hems us all in, he is not bound;

He escapes thence, but we abide

Not deep the poet sees but wide. (209-210)

For Fausta, the last line of this stanza signifies the artist's lack of involvement in the human drama; but Arnold reinterprets its meaning to support his own very assumptions. If the poet enjoys a kind of rapt security, this is not because of his sensibilities are different from those of men, but rather his natural insight enables him intuitively to "discern / what through experience others learn". The poet stands aside so thathe may by:

…. Winning room to see and hear,

And to men's business not too near,

Through clouds of individual strife

Draw homeward to the general life. (247-250)

The poet rejects action and suffering, and does not envy those who do great deeds and achieve great triumphs. He

feels that the secret of the universal life is a peaceful, continuity. That is the kind of life which the poet, with his "sad lucidity of soul", longs for:

A placid and continuous whole-

That general life, which does not cease

Whose secret is not joy but peace!

Thus, instead of trying to transform the world through social action, Arnold tries to understand it and place himself in harmony with it. This involves transforming the circular image of the wheel into the life circulation of nature.

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