

"there the folds of a
bright girdle



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“ There lives more faith in honest doubt, Believe me, than in half the creeds.”(In Memoriam, Section: XCVI, Line: 3374-3375) As a consequence of rapid scientific and industrial progress or the theories of Evolution and Communism, Victorian people and of course the literary writers are consigned to reach the acme of religious confusion or spiritual loss or conflict between faith and doubt. It is an admitted fact that the Victorian people and writers are divided into two idealistic worlds. So if one group goes in the favor of faith or religion, the other is of course in the favor of doubt. So conflict in ideologies is a must. As much ink is spilled overwriting or enough debate is tabled regarding this very issue, the topic conflict between faith and doubt or science and religious places in the different sorts of Victorian literary devices especially in the Victorian poetry as “ Poetry is the criticism of life.”⁶ This is because, Hugh Walker comments; ‘ it is curious that in the year 1850 both Tennyson and Browning produced poems in which the religious element is more prominent than it is in anything they had previously written.

”⁷ Needless to say hundreds of books like “ History of the Conflict between Religion and Science” (1875), Origin of Species (1859) and” The Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom (1876) by John Draper, Andrew Whites, and Charles Darwin respectively are written on this conflict. This is why, being the children of the time, Matthew Arnold, Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson and Cristina Rosette’s poetry started concerning with this very conflict and of course it becomes the mirror on which Victorian faith and doubt are clearly reflected. To lament on the loss of faith, Matthew Arnold “ who chastises and instructs the reader on contemporary social issues,”⁸

says in his poem : “ The Sea of Faith Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled. But now I only hear Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, Retreating, to the breath Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear And naked shingles of the world”. (Dover Beach, Line: 21- 28) In these quoted lines, making an explicit comparison between Victorian religious faith and sea, Arnold, in truth, laments over the transition from the age of faith into the age of skepticism, uncertainty or turbulence.

The sea of faith, to Arnold, was full in past. It had flown with great energy and left it vigorous waves on the seashore. But now the poet hears the melancholic sounds of withdrawing waves. More clearly, religious faith of the Victorian people is replaced by agnostic, atheistic or skeptic thoughts. Again, Matthew Arnold explicates the religious doubt or spiritual loss of a modern man of Victorian age in his poem. As he states: “.....this strange disease of modern man, With its sick hurry, its divided aims Its heads o’ertaxed, its palsied hearts,”(The Scholar-Gipsy, Line: 203-205) This disease, actually, indicates the religious or spiritual bareness and the victory of the irreligious or doubtful thoughts or immoral actions.

Which is why, the poet instructs the scholar-gypsy to escape from the world in which doubt and immorality prevails over faith and spirituality. Likewise, Alfred Lord Tennyson is considered to be one of the most well-liked British poets during more of Queen Victorian period 9 questions faith in God, in nature and even in scientific without any hesitancy in his poetry. In the truest sense of the term, we observe that Tennyson possesses mixed feeling about scientific progress. This is why, Tennyson acknowledged evolution as <https://assignbuster.com/there-the-folds-of-a-bright-girdle/>

progress and concerned about this conflict with the Christian scripture theory of creation like most of the Victorian people whose faith is being tempted by Charles Darwin's theory of Natural Selection. In this connection, Tennyson sometimes goes in the favors of religion and same times is in the favor of doubt or religion.

He is, actually, in between. This is because, Tennyson exposes his sufferings from the conflict of faith and doubt in his poetry. In the poems ' The Lotos-Eaters' " and ' Locksley Hall' the speakers are wild to abandon modern society and return to a savage lifestyle in the jungle. In the poem, ' In Memoriam' the Victorian poet concerns with this idea saying " We have but faith we cannot know.... For knowledge,..."(In Memoriam: Line: 21-22) But in every poem, Tennyson seems to arrive at the conclusion that we should have faith in scientific progression and of course in our religion. He is, in fact, reluctant to reject belief and to accept knowledge as the path of solution for the Victorian crisis of faith. In truth, he is keen to reconcile Victorian belief with knowledge.

So it can be noted that Tennyson wants to solve the problem originated from the Victorian conflicts of faith and doubt reconciling his faith with knowledge. In a similar manner, the Victorian crisis of faith and doubt has clearly appeared in the poetry of Elizabeth Barret Browning, one of the most prominent of the Victorian poets. Her very poem ' The Cry of the Children' speaks about the suffering and faithlessness of the Victorian people through child labor.

Even though Matthew Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach' discusses the Victorian crisis of faith from the spiritual point of view. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem 'The Cry of the Children' concerns with this very issue from the practical point of view. Children ask help to God but he doesn't pay need to them. "Is it likely God, with any around Him, Hears our weeping anymore"(Line: 227-228)But this scene is somewhat different for the dead girl. She looks happier because she is now out the industrially developed Victorian society.

And she has not been compelled to do a lot of work in mills and factories around fourteen to fifteen hours with little wages. In truth, the children symbolize the working class people, the worst sufferers of the Victorian society. This industrial unscrupulous society is established through the blood and sweat of the working classes people. Truly, the children are innocent but they are forced to go against the God. As the poem states: "How long," they say, "how long, O cruel nation, Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart, — ('The Cry of the Children': Stanza: xiii, Line: 33-34) This is because, the faith of Victorian children declines.

Again the poet says: "But, no!" say the children, weeping faster, "He is speechless as a stone;..... Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving — We look up for God, but tears have made us blind." Do ye hear the children weeping and disproving," ('The Cry of the Children': Stanza: xi, Line: 125-126 & 131-133) Here, we are not considering all Victorian people to be atheist. Because loss of faith doesn't mean atheism. It, to us, means the Victorian conflict between faith and doubt. Because scientific discoveries,

industrialization, and the theory of evolution and communism make the people skeptic regarding religion and even in science. 1.

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