

Friedrich-Martin Balzer

»And The Cock Crowed Again«

Essays on Political Ideology
and German Church History

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on Political Ideology
and German Church History**

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Foreword by Martin Rumscheidt, Halifax

Years ago, the American historian Sydney E. Ahlstrom wrote the following, highly insightful and hermeneutically decisive words: Each generation can only say that a different portion of the past is open for its examination, that its angle of vision is altered, and that new standards of explanation and relevance prevail. A new present requires a new past and the historian's responsibility for creating a meaningful past depends more on his [or her] interpretation of accepted historical knowledge than on his [or her] addition to the world's overflowing treasury of fact.¹

Friedrich-Martin Balzer's essays – in the present volume as in his other writings – not only argue strongly in support of Ahlstrom's dictum that a new present requires a new past but actually confirm it. But Balzer's altered angle of vision has its genesis elsewhere than Ahlstrom's: what the latter learned from his ceaseless and commendable reflection on the historian's craft, the former had imposed upon him – whether he wanted it or not – by the horrid reality of Hitler's Germany of which he, like this writer, was (is) a child. The *existential* reality of being confronted by a past that incriminates proves Ahlstrom right more powerfully even than the *intellectually* convincing and salutary conclusion of one who confronts the past in order to gain understanding through endeavoring to create a meaningful past. Balzer's work helps in shaping responsibility in and for history.

The »new present« of which Balzer speaks with passion is a present that has »repented« of its past. This is not a contradiction or refutation of Ahlstrom's conviction, it »flavors« it somewhat differently. While these essays do, indeed, add to the treasury of fact, they do so critical of the kind of historical research and interpretation that is satisfied with »telling how it was«. Instead, Balzer wants to »do« history so that we may have a new present for a changed future. What theologians like

¹ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972. 3

me refer to as »apocalyptic eschatology« is significantly present in his reflections: the perduring vision of our world transformed through the instrumentality of revolution which Balzer not only does *not* shun – in the horror typical of all who wish to keep things as they are because they sustain their power – but readily embraces as a genuine option in and for history. By his own admission, Balzer is no theologian; still, the vision of and the conviction that there will be a »new heaven and a new earth«, which are at the core of that eschatology, are palpably present in his writings. We are told that Erwin Eckert – with whom Balzer identifies himself and who influenced him deeply in numerous ways – could dream with an unbroken spirit that one day »the spirit and power of Christ« will determine life among the nations and peoples. This unshaken belief remains even with me in this dim environment [viz. the jail], and in spite of the fate which has befallen me exactly because of this belief in the will of God that He revealed in Christ. I will find strength in this vision of humankind united in solidarity and peace in my cell on Christmas Eve as I have found strength in it many times before. (P ...)

In a moving passage that has autobiographical character, Balzer quotes from a poem by the then twenty-two years old Jura Soyfer, a Jew who was murdered in Buchenwald. The poet's words ring with that vision of a humanity »fully alive«. (Irenaeus of Lyons, 130-202 ce)

We were human beings once and will be human again one day when we completely recover from all this. But are we human today? No, we are not. All humanity has long been crushed. Let us not keep up the shallow appearance. If humans are to liberate themselves one day, there is only one way: to ask ourselves every hour if we are human, and to give ourselves the answer: No! We are merely the crudely designed sketch of a human being that still needs to be drawn, a poor prelude only to a great song. You call us humans! Hold back on that. (P ...)

The essays focus to a large extent on Erwin Eckert, a Christian pastor, a Communist, a German, a victim of injustice and more, all in one. The church defrocked him in 1931 and deprived him of his pension, citing the to this day ideologically (mis)interpreted »atheism« of Communism for that decision. The truth is much more that Eckert had spoken out against the National Socialists whom by that time a sizeable number of pastors had already joined. Eckert's witness to his

Lord Jesus Christ – many would dismiss it still as naïve or misguided – shows how a Communism, once freed of its party-hierarchy and rigid »new class« system, enriches a Christianity that intends to serve a humanity disfigured by the domination of the idols of this world's principalities and powers. Just as Eckert critiqued »the bourgeois pacifist circles that preach peace and reconciliation out of an outpouring of human kindness and sentimentality without supporting socialism«, (P ...) so he exposed the Socialism and Communism that leaves »the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled – in short, [all who see life] from the perspective of those who suffer«² to their fate while making speeches that promise a new world order. In a personal affirmation of where his heart beats, Balzer reasserts what was true for Eckert.

One thing is certain: the day will come when history is not to lose its meaning, and the belief in peace, justice, and keeping creation safe on earth shall reach its goal ... This may seem full of »pathos«. But pathos is the consequence of suffering from the fact that there is so little change, so little fundamental change, so slow a change. We all, and I as a member of the generation of »war children«, were given our lives and freedom in order to learn from the past and to prevent inhumanity, which does not come overnight and does not fall from the skies. In view of the things that have been possible there is no reason to opt for resigned withdrawal. Hope is essential to life in spite of everything. However, good intentions alone are not good enough, ... we need courage in order to translate with all our might into action what we have recognized as right. (P ...)

For Balzer that translation includes resolutely critiquing and, when the need arises, opposing those human institutions who have made self-preservation and self-advancement their mandate above everything else. Here Balzer gratefully acknowledges Dietrich Bonhoeffer's explorations on »the church for others«.

Like other historians who pursue the aim of creating a new past for a new present, Balzer chooses the essay for his medium of examina-

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972. 17

tion and communication. The essay seems to »fit« his commitment to combine historical research and personal testimony. I am reminded here of Fritz Stern of Columbia University in New York, whose own work as a historian is advanced in the essay format. Some years ago, Stern wrote:

»I find essays an attractive format. They allow for tentative explorations of new themes; they allow for a personal tone that larger studies tend to inhibit, though even in the latter the austere effort of »extinguishing the self, deemed imperative by some historians, has never been my goal or style. »Disciplining the self might be a better dictum, awareness of the self a better guide ... I am drawn to studying earlier periods through individuals who are of intrinsic and representative importance. Of course there are »the broad, anonymous forces« that characterize the setting or structure of an age, but it is the interplay between these forces and actual people that allows us to recapture something of the spirit of an age. In this fashion one can hope to detect not only the rational political motives of particular actors, but perhaps something of their less conscious, more spontaneous responses as well.«³

Balzer's essays allow us glimpses and insights into his own life and responses as he lets us experience something of persons and periods of the very past that we need to see anew, with new eyes, in order to see our present in that same way: anew.

It is a privilege and a joy to be associated with a fellow-German, a *Mitmensch* and a colleague – particularly one who feels and expresses anger at the way things are – in the task of seeing with new eyes for the sake of God's deeply beloved creation, God's covenant-partners, the creatures God made – as we theologians put it – for the sake of the humanity no longer alienated from itself – as Socialists and Communists put it. And even though I do not share every interpretation and conclusion Friedrich-Martin Balzer presents in these essays, I am wholly at one with him in that »pathos« and »apocalyptic eschatology«. I would also have translated particular passages and words differently,

³ Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Illusions. The Drama of German History*; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987. 5-6

but I found the work of seeking to understand what moves so deeply in the essays rewarding, instructive, provoking.

The generation of those, who still had immediate and sustained contact with those who were at the very centre of the events that Balzer addresses in these pages will soon no longer be among us. For that reason it is good to have these essays to assist us and those who take over from us in creating a meaningful past for the task of working for change.

Martin Rumscheidt
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Labour Day (4. September) 2000

T. S. Eliot. Some reflections on his Political Ideology with special regard to the play »Murder in the Cathedral«. (1965)

»Never commit yourself to a cheese without having first examined it.«

T. S. Eliot

The authority of Thomas Stearns Eliot as a critic, poet and dramatist seems to be firmly established. Even where reservations are made, his »greatness« is almost always, though grudgingly, acknowledged and the Eliot-critic Hugh Kenner went so far as to call Eliot the »most influential man of letters of the twentieth century«.

Yet Eliot's »tentative and embarrassing flirtation with fascism«, as the »Times Literary Supplement« referred to it in 1957, is little known and receives only occasional attention. Although it may be argued that Eliot's relationship with the political ideology of fascism, the most reactionary counter-revolutionary ideology of our time, was closer and more lasting than a mere flirtation, it is not our intention to assert that Eliot was a proto-fascist.

It is strange, however, that the general reading public did not take much notice of Eliot's sympathies with fascism, even if it was only a flirtation. Funnily enough, ignorance about this aspect of Eliot is far greater in West Germany than in England or America, though by rights there should be more sensitivity towards such things in those countries where fascism finally rose to power. Here in Germany, after the military defeat of fascism, Eliot was received with great enthusiasm, whereas in England even appreciations on the occasion of Eliot's death could not avoid mentioning that Eliot was a »social and political reactionary from his earliest years«, and that the whole body of Eliot's work constitutes a rejection of every new development in the social and moral scene, as Philip Toynbee remarked in the »Observer«. Another obituary, in the »New Statesman«, reminded the English reading public of Eliot's »Samurai posturing« and of his »learned half-fascist shouting about eugenics and war«, at a time when people were beginning to realize that the enemy would soon be imposing both these disciplines on Europe.

There seems to be no better way of illustrating the political outlook of Eliot than a consideration of Eliot's »escape« from America, where he was born, to England, whence, in the seventeenth century, his Puritan ancestors had started a then risky voyage to America, hoping to build a new world where democracy, liberty, progress and civilization could be freely thought about and discussed. To the pessimistic intellectual Eliot, the descendant of these progressive and optimistic Protestant emigrants, democracy was nothing more than a »silly idea«. Society is »worm-eaten with liberalism«, liberalism being the archenemy, a disintegrative destructive parasite on »Christianity« and »Culture«. Progress was only possible by going back to a social order where everybody had his god-given place in society and where the class-structure was maintained by authority and the restriction of education to the upper classes. Civilization is an evil product of commercial society and threatens to destroy Eliot's highly esteemed »cultural values«. Only the elite, not the public at large, is capable of deciding what is to be preserved and what must be weeded out. Eliot's theory of the elite can only be seen in connection with his deep-rooted contempt for the »lonely crowds«, the »small people that live among small things«. In pointing out that the elite had best join the governing classes if it wants to fulfil its task of preserving »cultural values«, Eliot supplies a formidable ideology for the governing classes to justify the continuation of the class-fortress. Eliot is not concerned with the problem of the elite's responsibility. If it is God, no criticism or rational control is possible unless the critics are prepared to be called blasphemous and rebellious against the law of God! If it is posterity, control would come too late. By making the elite independent of the consent of the rest of society Eliot makes leadership and government by the few uncontrollable by the many. Neither are poverty, war and the absence of knowledge and liberty problems that concern Eliot. For him the basic danger of our time is mass-civilization produced by increased educational opportunity, which according to Eliot leads to a lowering of the cultural level of society as a whole because of the cultural admittance of the socially inferior who have taken advantage of these new educational opportunities. Eliot despairs of secular society and warns that if Christianity goes, the whole of

our culture goes, too. The same is true of the relationship between Christianity and the Church.

As the »diabolical« development of modern society is most advanced in America, so Eliot's escape to England, where he later described himself as being »classicist in literature, royalist in politics and anglo-catholic in religion«, was more than a mere change of residence; it was escapism in the face of the reality of modern society and avoidance of the responsibility to change anything that is worth changing. It is obvious that Eliot does not take enough pains to analyse modern society in detail; he offers »remedies«, which rather involve abolition than any serious attempt to find a cure or an ameliorative solution. In view of T. S. Eliot's general political outlook, it is by no means surprising that, with the rise of fascism in Europe, Eliot publicly stated his admiration for the »Action Française« and its »leader« Charles Maurras, whose ideas he thought »strong and sound«. Eliot also recommended that the »leader« of the British fascist movement, Sir Oswald Mosely, should become Britain's saviour from the economic crisis. Eliot even permitted himself to follow the anti-Semitic path when he declared in 1933 that »reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable« and that »a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated«.

In the light of these facts we are justified in suspecting that Eliot's religious drama »Murder in the Cathedral«, which he wrote in 1935, is not free from political and ideological implications.

Before pursuing the analysis further, it would be best to define the term »political ideology« in the context of this essay. For the purpose of this essay it will suffice to accept the definition by Norman Birnbaum, whereby ideologies appear »wherever systematic factual assertions about society contain (usually by implication) valuations of the distribution of powers in the societies in which these assertions are developed and propagated«. We may suppose that a group generally accepts a view of society consonant with its interests, but we need not assume that ideologies are consciously fashioned to serve these interests. Ideological elements, following this definition, are also found in aesthetic, moral and religious statements about the human situation.

What is the human situation Eliot describes in his drama »Murder in the Cathedral«? We can glance only cursorily at this play, and perhaps this will suffice. »Murder in the Cathedral« was written for the church and is intended to be performed in church. The first thing that is noteworthy is the feudal setting. This is connected with Eliot's vision of a better society, which – once upon a time – was realized in feudalism. It may be argued that Eliot, ignoring the blood-stained history of feudalism, here starts to dream of a return to the »gardening Tudors«, bearing in mind, of course, that the play is set much earlier than the age of the »gardening Tudors«. Eliot had only to think of the tragedies written at that time to become aware that this »golden age« of his was not so golden as to merit a desire for its return as the only solution to current problems.

»Murder in the Cathedral« states all that Eliot believes, and thinks we should believe, about the sickness of states and the lies of statesmen. As the third priest says, there is »nothing quite conclusive in the art of temporal government, but violence, duplicity and frequent malversation«. Temporal government is devalued as such in order to elevate »spiritual power«. »Temporal power, to build a good world, to keep order, as the world knows order, is only a consideration for those who put their faith in worldly order not controlled by the order of God; those who, in confident ignorance do ›but arrest disorder, make it fast, breed fatal disease, degrade what they exalt«. The disease of our time is ›emptiness, absence, separation from God«. The historic development of mankind is discarded in favour of »destiny«, the »eternal pattern«, the »will of God«, and the »turning wheel«. »We do not know very much of the future except that from generation to generation the same things happen again and again. Men learn little from others' experience. Only the fool, fixed in his folly, may think he can turn the wheel on which he turns.« The unknown »Law of God« is put before the intelligible »Law of Man«. »Destiny waits in the hand of God, not in the hands of statesmen who do some well, some ill, planning and guessing, having their aims which turn in their hands in the pattern of time.«

Stevie Smith has therefore asked in his article »History or Poetic Drama«: What is Eliot after? It is something that at first sight looks

noble. But is it? Is it not rather something ignoble, a flight from largeness into smallness, a flight in fear to a religion of fear, from freedom to captivity, from human dignity to degradation? Is this the truth of philosophy and religion? »Back to the Church«, he cries, and he makes his archbishop so truly good and strong a man that we may forget to ask: »Were they all like this? Is the Church so sweet a thing? Does it smell so sweet? Was it not already, at this time of Becket, a bride of Christ somewhat stained with blood and no less greedy for political power than the State? Becket may or may not have been a man of the cast of Mr. Eliot's archbishop. Mr. Eliot's dealings with him are permissible, but is it permissible to distort the truths of humanity and offend against them, to cover the needs of men with a meretricious coat and to envisage with delight a dwindling of hope and courage?«

So, at the end of our essay, we are entitled to ask: how »Christian« is this »influential man of letters«, who calls himself a Christian and who propagates a »Christian Society«? Is his »Christian« message an invitation to reason and to Christian action or is it only a cover, a screen behind which an ideology for the justification of the existing distribution of power in our western societies is hidden? How non-Christian must one be to unmask the religious and political thinking of T. S. Eliot as being a counter-revolutionary ideology in the name of a traditional hierarchy, the preservation of a hereditary elite and the defence of »religion«? Such questions leave Eliot's »intentions« out of account and confine themselves to examining the ideological »function« of his theories in the society in which these theories were propagated.

Thirty years after the first production of »Murder in the Cathedral«, an article by the Rector of Woolwich, published in the »Observer«, raised an honest, self-critical question that might have startled Eliot: »How might the Church survive?« No subordination of the State to the Church is demanded, as Eliot had done so eloquently. The survival of the Church is not a question of subordination at all, but one of the drastic dismantling of the structure of the Church.

Before the Church starts to reform society, it needs to learn the lesson of history and reform itself; that is, if it does not want to remain a petrified, ineffective, hierarchical organization and a reactionary relic of pre-democratic times. The reform of the Church

would be in itself a valid step towards the reform of society – if the evolutionary method of reform is at all sufficient. The survival of the Church, but not in its present form, depends mainly on the preparedness of the Church to acknowledge the secularisation of society and the fact that modern man has »grown up« and no longer needs the guardianship of the Church. Above all, the Church as a social institution must disentangle itself from the Establishment and especially from the middle classes, which are the main reservoir of Church-goers today, in order to become acceptable to modern man and the great mass of the population who have lost contact with and confidence in the Church, in England at least since the turn of the century, in Germany much earlier.

The German Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, chief witness of John A. T. Robinson, Bishop of Woolwich, who created a scandal among the faithful within the Church with his book »Honest to God«, has outlined this programme for the Church of the future, that is to say, of a time when Christians adjust to an adult and autonomous world and live »etsi deus non daretur«. Bonhoeffer is the actual counterpart of Eliot's martyr Becket. In 1945 Bonhoeffer was executed in a fascist concentration camp.

Alfred Lord Tennyson's Poetic Treatment of the Social Problems of his Time. (1966)

A more striking contrast can hardly be imagined than that between Alfred Lord Tennyson, the celebrated court poet of Victorian society, and Friedrich Engels who, with his analysis of the economic and political structure of English bourgeois society, criticized the latter harshly.

They are contemporaries, and this might possibly be considered the only link between them. They interpreted and analysed the society in which both of them lived, the one as a well-to-do poet, the other as an emigrant from the wrecked Continental Revolution of 1848, their position in society separating them so radically that it is highly unlikely they ever paid the slightest attention to each other.

In 1845 Engels' inquiry into the situation of the English working classes was published.¹ This inquiry, based on Engels' own observations as well as on authentic sources, was dedicated to the proletariat. In 1850 Tennyson was made Poet Laureate by Queen Victoria, and this, in a way, made him »Minister of Poetry in Queen Victoria's and the Prince Consort's Government«.² Tennyson held this outstanding position until his death in 1892. He proved his gratitude for this royal favour by composing a dedication poem »to the Queen«, which found its place in the seventh edition of his »Poems from 1842«. While Tennyson regards society from above, from the position of the ruling classes who are anxiously concerned about their property and their social status quo and are mortally afraid of any revolutionary change, regarding the proletarian struggles for emancipation as rude disturbances of their sacred law and order, Engels, experienced in the study of bourgeois and political economy, regards the same society from below with the eyes of the proletariat which can only free itself by revolutionary action against bourgeois society and its ruling classes.

This confrontation of opposing ideas is not just sheer playfulness,

¹ Friedrich Engels, »Die Lage der arbeitenden Klassen in England«, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, K. Marx/F. Engels, II, Berlin (DDR) 1958, p. 225-506.

² D. C. Somervell, *Geistige Strömungen in England im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bern, 1946), p. 245.

but stands for the contrasts which are typical of 19th century English society, revolutionized by industrialization.

The antagonism of their political convictions, which are dressed in poetic form in Tennyson and which are open and scientific in Engels, is not merely an accidental and political antagonism which around the 1850s split England into ›Two Nations‹, a term used not only by Engels but also by Benjamin Disraeli in describing English society.³

It is absolutely essential to refer to the class-antagonism in English society in order to avoid the danger of identifying the ideas of the ruling class, or so-called public opinion, with society as a whole and its various ideas and aims.

Without this differentiation, it is possible that Tennyson might acquire the reputation of having shown in his poems a remarkably complete expression of the problems and spirit of Victorian England – a reputation which David Thompson in his ›England in the 19th century‹⁴ has in fact bestowed upon Tennyson, but which has to be rejected as false. When Thompson says at one point in his book that Victorian England had found her ›representative Poet Laureate in Tennyson‹,⁵ this statement is most certainly based upon a misconception. It is true that Tennyson's political convictions were representative to a large extent, but only for one of the ›two nations‹.

The Chartist movement, the political representation of the working class, in its political programme, known as the ›People's Charter‹ of 1838, demanded a general and equal right to a secret vote for all men. According to Engels, this request, innocent as it may have seemed, was ›sufficient to destroy the British Constitution as well as the Queen and the House of Lords‹.⁶ How could Tennyson have accepted this request of the working class?

Thompson's comment is accurate only when interpreted to the effect that Tennyson's political and other ideas were in keeping with the

³ Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (1845).

⁴ David Thompson, *England in the Nineteenth Century* (1815-1914), Pelican History of England, VIII (1964), p. 242.

⁵ Thompson, p. 103.

⁶ F. Engels, *Die Lage*, p. 445.

dominant ideas of his time which, according to Karl Marx, are always those of the ruling class. This Marxist theory is explained in detail in his »Deutsche Ideologie«:

»The ideas of the ruling class are the dominant ideas in every epoch, that is, the class which represents the predominant material force of society is at the same time its predominant intellectual force. The class which holds the means to material production simultaneously has at its disposal therewith the means to intellectual production, so that on average the ideas of those who must relinquish their means to intellectual production submit themselves to that class as well.«⁷

What has hitherto been expressed more or less plainly as a hypothesis, namely that in the class society of Victorian England Alfred Tennyson fulfilled the function of a political ideologist who favoured the ruling class, must now be verified on the basis of Tennyson's own statements. The truth and accuracy of this hypothesis can first be proved by an analysis of the poems of Tennyson themselves. Lucien Goldmann, who ranks as the most important representative of Marxist literary criticism in France, has formulated the relationship as follows:

»Like any other theory the assertion of the influence of economic and social factors on literary creation is not a dogma, but a hypothesis which is only valid to the extent that it can be confirmed by facts.«⁸

Historical materialism is not a closed system crowned with conclusive truth. It is the scientific *method* for the investigation of the human development process. In the examination of creative works of literature as far as historical materialism is concerned the most essential element is the fact that literature expresses »world views that are not individual, but social«,⁹ whereby for Goldmann a world view is a »coherent and homogeneous approach to the whole sphere of existence«.¹⁰

The original question about Tennyson's poetic reaction to the »social problems« of his time has in the meantime undergone a change. Since

⁷ Karl Marx, »Die deutsche Ideologie (1845/1846)«, in Die Frühschriften, ed. Siegfried Landshut (Stuttgart, 1953), p. 373

⁸ Lucien Goldmann, »Dialektischer Materialismus und Literaturgeschichte«, Neue Rundschau, II, (1964), p. 214.

⁹ Goldmann, p. 215.

¹⁰ Goldmann, p. 215.

Tennyson's world view, which is present explicitly or implicitly in his literary products, is itself already a »social« one, the humble question Tennyson puts to the Christian socialist, F. D. Maurice, »how to mend the dwellings of the poor«,¹¹ can for example no longer be the issue, but rather the question concerning the relationship between the literary work and the world views which correspond to individual social classes.

Before proceeding to answer the question on the basis of Tennyson's poems themselves, a preliminary curtailing remark is necessary. Goldmann, who has been quoted here, considers immanent aesthetic analysis in theory as an indispensable component of Marxist literary criticism. This aspect should and can perhaps be disregarded here, if one remains aware of this critical standpoint. This curtailment can however be defended on technical and practical grounds. For one thing no time limit has been proposed for the theme. On the other hand the complete works of Tennyson are too extensive for a detailed examination of his aesthetic qualifications as well within the scope of this essay. A practical consideration arises from the fact that Tennyson's poems in general are too short for a coherent and homogeneous world view to emerge clearly. Poems therefore have to be grouped together and those poems in particular cited whose political character is relatively explicit. That the so-called »unpolitical« poems of Tennyson, for example the »domestic idylls«, should also be examined for their political-ideological function might be noted in passing.

In the course of his poetic career Tennyson's political way of thinking underwent a development which is clearly marked by the two poems he wrote almost half a century apart: »Locksley Hall« (1842) and »Locksley Hall sixty years after« (1886).

Harold Nicolson has described this development as follows: »Tennyson, for his part, passed from an early suspicion of democracy, through a wholesome dislike of democracy, to a loathing of democracy so fierce and so violent that it upset not only his health, and his temper, but even his prosody.«¹² In the 1842 version of »Locksley Hall« a sort

¹¹ »To the Rev. F. D. Maurice«, in *Poems by Alfred Lord Tennyson* (Everyman's Library), ed. Mildred Bozman (London – New York, 1949), II, p. 399.

¹² Harold Nicolson, *Tennyson: Aspects of his Life, Character and Poetry* (London, 1925), p. 252.

of visionary optimism is dominant as well as a bold faith in progress, which makes the poet dream of a future world in which prosperity, affluence and peace are the ruling elements. What he did not realize was the fact that the »affluent society« by no means justifies the hope for a lasting peace and may perpetuate slavery instead of doing away with it. But these visions do seem peculiar in view of the social misery and the social war of which Engels has produced such detailed accounts. However, Tennyson's claimed belief in progress seems to have been a rather shaky one. This is clearly shown around the year 1886 when the material situation of the proletariat was improving, social measures were being taken (such as the legally fixed 10-hour day, after a long struggle by the working class). It is then that Tennyson discovers the repulsive ugliness of a proletarian existence and loses all faith in mankind's future. This former belief he now chooses to replace with a deep and haunting fear of the »rebellion of the masses«, which might destroy all the achievements of progress; he forgets that it was this very despised mass of people who fought for that social and political progress.

We have to remain sceptical when confronted with Tennyson's vision of a time in which war-cries are silenced and banners taken down, especially as Tennyson himself did absolutely nothing to achieve this aim. On the contrary, in numerous war-songs, full of nationalistic conceit, he revives the war-cries. He sings the song of the brave British soldier, who does his duty unquestioningly by slaughtering the inhabitants of the colonies for the fame and the glory of the British Empire. What is more, he has no scruples in encouraging the House of Lords to start a war with France. This he does in a poem called »The Third of February, 1852«, which was published anonymously.

Tennyson constantly complained about the »niggard throats of Manchester«¹³ who only moaned and grumbled when the »honour« of the British nation was at stake, but found his inner peace yet again at the agreeable thought »we are not cotton-spinners all«.¹⁴

In »Maud« Tennyson goes so far as to welcome the Crimean War ,

¹³ »The Third of February, 1852«, in *Poems*, ed. M. Bozman, I, p. 347.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, I, 347.