

## Lesson 8: The Mystery of Death

The Deserted House - Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)

Life and Thought have gone away  
Side by side,  
Leaving door and windows wide.  
Careless tenants they!

All within is dark as night:  
In the windows is no light;  
And no murmur at the door,  
So frequent on its hinge before.

Close the door; the shutters close;  
Or through the windows we shall see  
The nakedness and vacancy  
Of the dark deserted house.

Come away: no more of mirth  
Is here or merry-making sound.  
The house was builded of the earth,  
And shall fall again to ground.

Come away: for Life and Thought  
Here no longer dwell;  
But in a city glorious -  
A great and distant city -have bought  
A mansion incorruptible.  
Would they could have stayed with us!

Prospice - Robert Browning (1812–1889)

Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,  
The mist in my face,  
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote

I am nearing the place,  
The power of the night, the press of the storm,  
The post of the foe;  
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,  
Yet the strong man must go:  
For the journey is done and the summit attained,  
And the barriers fall,  
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
The reward of it all.  
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,  
The best and the last!  
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes and forbore,  
And bade me creep past.  
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers  
The heroes of old,  
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears  
Of pain, darkness and cold.  
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,  
The black minute's at end,  
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,  
Shall dwindle, shall blend,  
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,  
Then a light, then thy breast,  
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,  
And with God be the rest!

Thanatopsis (A meditation on death) - William Cullen Bryant. 1794-1878.

TO HIM who in the love of Nature holds  
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks  
A various language; for his gayer hours  
She has a voice of gladness, and a smile  
And eloquence of beauty, and she glides  
Into his darker musings, with a mild

And healing sympathy, that steals away  
 Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When thoughts  
 Of the last bitter hour come like a blight  
 Over thy spirit, and sad images 10  
 Of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall,  
 And breathless darkness, and the narrow house,  
 Make thee to shudder, and grow sick at heart;—  
 Go forth under the open sky, and list  
 To Nature's teachings, while from all around— 15  
 Earth and her waters, and the depths of air—  
 Comes a still voice—Yet a few days, and thee  
 The all-beholding sun shall see no more  
 In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground,  
 Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears, 20  
 Nor in the embrace of ocean, shall exist  
 Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim  
 Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again,  
 And, lost each human trace, surrendering up  
 Thine individual being, shalt thou go 25  
 To mix forever with the elements;  
 To be a brother to the insensible rock,  
 And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain  
 Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak  
 Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould. 30  
 Yet not to thine eternal resting-place  
 Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish  
 Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down  
 With patriarchs of the infant world,—with kings,  
 The powerful of the earth,—the wise, the good, 35  
 Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,  
 All in one mighty sepulchre. The hills  
 Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun; the vales  
 Stretching in pensive quietness between;  
 The venerable woods—rivers that move 40  
 In majesty, and the complaining brooks  
 That make the meadows green; and, poured round all,  
 Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste,—  
 Are but the solemn decorations all  
 Of the great tomb of man! The golden sun, 45

The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,  
Are shining on the sad abodes of death,  
Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread  
The globe are but a handful to the tribes  
That slumber in its bosom.—Take the wings 50  
Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness,  
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods  
Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound,  
Save his own dashings,—yet the dead are there:  
And millions in those solitudes, since first 55  
The flight of years began, have laid them down  
In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone.  
So shalt thou rest; and what if thou withdraw  
In silence from the living, and no friend  
Take note of thy departure? All that breathe 60  
Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh  
When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care  
Plod on, and each one as before will chase  
His favorite phantom; yet all these shall leave  
Their mirth and their employments, and shall come 65  
And make their bed with thee. As the long train  
Of ages glide away, the sons of men,  
The youth in life's green spring, and he who goes  
In the full strength of years, matron and maid,  
The speechless babe, and the gray-headed man— 70  
Shall one by one be gathered to thy side  
By those, who in their turn shall follow them.

So live, that when thy summons comes to join  
The innumerable caravan which moves  
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take 75  
His chamber in the silent halls of death,  
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,  
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed  
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave  
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch 80  
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

In Memoriam A. H. H. (Introduction only)

- Tennyson, 1849.

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;

Thine are these orbs of light and shade;  
Thou madest Life in man and brute;  
Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot  
Is on the skull which thou hast made.

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:  
Thou madest man, he knows not why,  
He thinks he was not made to die;  
And thou hast made him: thou art just.

Thou seemest human and divine,  
The highest, holiest manhood, thou.  
Our wills are ours, we know not how;  
Our wills are ours, to make them thine.

Our little systems have their day;  
They have their day and cease to be:  
They are but broken lights of thee,  
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

We have but faith: we cannot know;  
For knowledge is of things we see  
And yet we trust it comes from thee,  
A beam in darkness: let it grow.

Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
But more of reverence in us dwell;  
That mind and soul, according well,  
May make one music as before,

But vaster. We are fools and slight;  
We mock thee when we do not fear:  
But help thy foolish ones to bear;  
Help thy vain worlds to bear thy light.

Forgive what seem'd my sin in me;  
What seem'd my worth since I began;  
For merit lives from man to man,  
And not from man, O Lord, to thee.

Forgive my grief for one removed,  
Thy creature, whom I found so fair.  
I trust he lives in thee, and there  
I find him worthier to be loved.

Forgive these wild and wandering cries,  
Confusions of a wasted youth;  
Forgive them where they fail in truth,  
And in thy wisdom make me wise.