

Q. 2. Comment upon Tennyson's attitude to life as presented in *Ulysses*.

Ans. *Ulysses* is not 'a poem in which we are at all conscious of the morbid and the melancholy, though we may, if we like, see in it Tennyson's resolution to overcome the mood of despair brought on by the death of Hallam. The biographical approach, indeed, has its uses here, if only to show how admirably Tennyson has mastered his experience and turned it into the impersonal form of a work of art.' However, Tennyson's ideals of life have been made explicit in the poem.

The main theme of the poem is that life has its fruition in work. Life is meant for ceaseless work. A life of indolence is no more than death. It is a life in death. A life of rest from all toils and moils is not desired. It is an abhorrence. Knowledge is endless, so there is no end to work. We should all seek knowledge which is like a sinking star ever beckoning men to follow it. Life is action, adventure. It is a long journey from the known to the unknown. As life is short and death inevitable, we should not sit idle. Every hour of our life should be spent in search of new experiences after experiences.

Ulysses yearns to believe that his life is not just a past, it still has a future. He is a modern man of action. To remain satisfied with the limited life of a king and to confine himself to customary, pious and virtuous deeds hold no charm to him. He says :

It little profits that an idle king,  
By this still hearth, among these barren crages,  
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
Unequal laws unto a savage race,  
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.  
I cannot rest from travel ; I will drink  
Life to the lees :

He has more than enough of honour, fame and name ('I am become a name'). Yet he will not rest contented with what he has already attained. He has had enough experiences of the world. But this experience, however rich and varied it may be, is not final.



Experience is like an arch of the horizon. It enables one to have a vision of the unknown, unexplored world but the ideal is hardly to be attained :

Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'  
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades  
For ever and ever when I move.

Ulysses says that our span of life is not sufficient for the purpose of reaching our goal in life. Man's life is short. Ulysses is left with only a small fraction of this little span of life. He is therefore firmly determined to make the best use of every hour of life. To remain inactive means an end of life. Of one such life he will add new knowledge to it. He says,

.....Life piled on life  
Were all too little, and of one to me  
Little remains : but every hour is saved  
From that eternal silence, something more,  
A bringer of new things :

Ulysses condemns a life of idleness. He likes to exhaust all his energies to spend his life in action. He likes to gain more knowledge, to go beyond the limits of human knowledge. He will follow the star of knowledge beyond the horizon of the known into the regions of the unknown :

... ..vile it were  
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,  
And this grey spirit yearning in desire  
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

Ulysses appeals to his mariners to join him in his last great journey. It is true that they have become old and the vigour of youth has been taken away from them. But still they are left with a great deal of their ancient strength of body and mind. With the remnant of this they will make new discoveries :

Tho' much is taken, much abides ; and tho'  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven ; that which we are, we are ;