Alfred Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*  
(an elegy for his friend and an expression of religious doubt in the face of Darwinism)  
XXVII

I envy not in any moods  
The captive void of noble rage,  
The linnet born within the cage,  
That never knew the summer woods:  

Nor, what may count itself as blest,  
The heart that never plighted troth  
But stagnates in the weeds of sloth;  
Nor any want-begotten rest.

I hold it true, whate’er befall;  
I feel it, when I sorrow most;  
’Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all.

- *Animals born in captivity aren’t envied for their ignorance of the nature of things.*
- *Charlotte Smith writes of envy for the madman who seems unfettered, but Tennyson does not.*
- *Skylarks and Nightingales seem blest and carefree, but they do not “plight troth” (pledge loyalty), so their lack of sacrifice and suffering seems stagnant and empty.*
- *Gray’s “Ignorance is bliss” is isn’t endorsed here.*
Oh, yet we trust that somehow good
   Will be the final goal of ill,
   To pangs of nature, sins of will,
   Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
   That not one life shall be destroy'd,
   Or cast as rubbish to the void,
   When God hath made the pile complete;

That not a worm is cloven in vain;
   That not a moth with vain desire
   Is shrivell'd in a fruitless fire,
   Or but subserves another's gain.

Behold, we know not anything;
   I can but trust that good shall fall
   At last -- far off -- at last, to all,
   And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream: but what am I?
   An infant crying in the night:
   An infant crying for the light:
   And with no language but a cry.

Tennyson’s speaker clings to his trust, his faith in God’s plan, that somehow it all makes sense, but Darwinism suggests to him that he “know[s] not anything.”

Even so, he still trusts, and he still dreams.

But he feels like a child, desperate for consolation in the face of fear and uncertainty.
The wish, that of the living whole
No life may fail beyond the grave,
Derives it not from what we have
The likest God within the soul?

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life;

That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

“The type” suggests the Darwinian idea that Natural Selection promotes the species, not the single life.

Nature (personified) seems to care about the species, the type, since survival of the fittest suggests Nature’s interest in the advancement of the species, though it cares little about the individual.

But the next section shows cruel Nature doesn’t even care about the species…

By the way, the alliteration and imagery of the last two stanzas here exemplify Tennyson’s poetic strengths.
"So careful of the type?" but no.
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries, "A thousand types are gone:
I care for nothing, all shall go."

"Thou makest thine appeal to me:
I bring to life, I bring to death:
The spirit does but mean the breath:
I know no more." And he, shall he,

Man, her last work, who seem'd so fair,
Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
Who roll'd the psalm to wintry skies,
Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer,

Who trusted God was love indeed
And love Creation's final law --
Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw
With ravine, shriek'd against his creed –

Who loved, who suffer'd countless ills,
Who battled for the True, the Just,
Be blown about the desert dust,
Or seal'd within the iron hills?

No more? A monster then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons of the prime,
That tare each other in their slime,
Were mellow music match'd with him.

But no! It turns out Nature isn’t even careful to preserve the species. Fossil records from "scarped cliff and quarried stone" suggest "A thousand types are gone." Nature is cruel—she cares "for nothing, all shall go." Nature is competitive and bloody—"red in tooth and claw." And will man, said to be created in God’s image, be granted any special VIP treatment by Nature, or will he go the way of the dinosaurs, "dragons of the prime / that tare each other in their slime"? Will man eventually lead itself to extinction? Man’s cries are worse than dragons’.