

English.

All articles and communications intended for this department should be addressed to the ENGLISH EDITOR, EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL, Room 5, 11½ Richmond Street West, Toronto.

THE STUDY OF TENNYSON WITH A VIEW TO TEACHING "RING OUT, WILD BELLS."

BY LAURA A. M'RAE.

To insure a profitable and successful lesson, it is of the utmost importance that the teacher have thorough preparation, not being content with the bare outline of facts. It is impossible to interpret, much less to appreciate, a poet's writings without knowing something of his life. How true this is in the case of Tennyson's verse!

Nothing is more difficult than to trace, with any degree of accuracy, the qualities of a man to their origin in inherited qualities, youthful environment, and the circumstances, influences, and opportunities of the years of active life. That their innate characteristics and early training had much to do with the mature minds of the Tennysons is shown to some extent by likenesses observable in Frederick, Charles, and Alfred; as boys they were all filled with literary ambition, and as men they all achieved distinction as poets, though the youngest alone was marked by what we call genius. At college he was known for his gift of poesy and the reluctance with which his sensitive nature allowed his work to be submitted to criticism. The charmed circle of his early years was to be rudely broken by the shock of a profound grief. The blow which fell on Tennyson was secret. The death of Arthur Henry Hallam, in 1833, caused no great revulsion in English politics, brought no visible disaster to church or state, sent only the lightest and most transient ripple of sorrow across the surface of society; but to the heart of *one* man it was the shock of an inward earthquake, upheaving the foundations of life, and making the very arch of heaven tremble. Bound to Hallam by one of those rare friendships, passing the love of women, Tennyson felt his loss in the inmost fibres of his being. The world was changed, darkened, filled with secret conflicts. The importunate questions of human life and destiny thronged upon his soul. The ideal peace, the sweet, art-satisfied seclusion, the dreams of undisturbed repose, were no longer possible for him. He must fight, not for a party cause, but for spiritual freedom and immortal hope; not against incorporate and embattled enemies, but against unseen foes, thrones, principalities, and powers of darkness. We have some record of this strife in poems like "The Two Voices" and "The Vision of Sin," but there is a more profound and successful treatment in his later poem, "In Memoriam."

What better summary of this beautiful poem can we desire than the following verses:

"The record of a faith sublime,
And hope, through clouds, far-off discerned,
The incense of a love that burned
Through pain and mist, defying time;

"The story of a soul at strife
That learned at last to kiss the rod,
And passed through sorrow, up to God,
From *living* to a higher life;

"A light, that gleams across the wave
Of darkness, down the rolling years,
Piercing the heavy mist of tears—
A rainbow, shining o'er the grave."

But it is of a particular part of this sublime whole we wish to speak. Altogether the poem consists of 131 lyrics, each in itself a perfect gem in a noble setting. One of these—the *cvi.*—is the poem all Fourth-Book pupils are familiar with, beginning with the well-known lines:

"Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light;
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die."

What impressed beauty and significance it gains from being studied in connection with the whole! Therefore, though well-nigh an impossibility, in this age of "cramming," to lead a class through the intricate mazes of the preceding lyrics, it would

at least be well to give them the story of "In Memoriam," showing them thus more clearly the relation of the lesson to the complete poem. Twice before in "In Memoriam" the poet has referred to the ringing of the church bells. In the 28th lyric he is represented as listening to the rise and fall of the sound of the church bells of four neighboring villages. It is the first Christmas Eve after Hallam's death, and the familiar sound mingles his former happiness with his present sorrow.

In lyric *civ.* the poet spends the eve of the third Christmas after his bereavement in his new home. There is but *one* bell, instead of the four he was used to. Everything seemed strange, new, and unhallowed. But (in lyric *cvi.*) the bells of New Year's Eve stir the poet to manly hope and faith; he would gladly see the evil of the world and the morbidness of his own heart give place to light, and power, and an ideal state. This lyric is also a song of triumph, triumph over his former doubts, questionings and morbid sorrow.

With the advent of the New Year he hopes to have a deeper insight into the perplexing mystery of life, and be able to touch *all* the chords of the human heart. Tennyson was not a poet to shut himself off from all communion with the outside world. In his early youth the murmurings of the nation at the oppressive Corn Laws, the riots consequent on a scarcity of food, and the Chartist agitation, would all interest and rouse him. He sings of the greatness of his beloved England, celebrating the extension of her territory to New Zealand, Australia, and India. How in sympathy he must have been with her soldiers to immortalize their deeds in such stirring verse as "The Charge of the Light Brigade," "The Defence of Lucknow," and "The Revenge." His own great grief enabled him to sympathize more deeply with our Sovereign in her irreparable loss—the death of the Prince Consort in 1861.

The odes written on the occasions of the great exhibitions, the International and, later, the Colonial, give us a glimpse of the poet's patriotism. From these and sundry references in "Locksley Hall," sixty years after, we see his great longing for the unity of, at least, the English speaking nations of the world. This seemed in a fair way to realization before Tennyson died.

After studying Tennyson's life and the history of his time, surely one can far more truly appreciate the full meaning of the lines:

"Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

"Ring out a slowly dying cause,
And ancient forms of party strife;
Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer laws.

"Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times:
Ring out, ring out, my mournful rhymes,
But ring the *fuller* minstrel in."

In Canada, happily, we have no such class distinctions as exist in England. However, with a little explanation, or illustrations, the class will readily grasp the thought contained in the lines:

"Ring out false pride, in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right;
Ring in the common love of good."

In the lines,
"Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be,"

we have a summary of the whole lyric; Christ, "The Light of the World," is contrasted with "Darkness." In the last clause Tennyson expresses his belief in the ultimate triumph of good, *i.e.*, Christ's kingdom on the earth.

In taking up the lesson critically the teacher should draw the attention of the pupils to the clearness of thought, simplicity of language, and, above all, to the high moral tone of Tennyson's poetry. If an interest in the work of this, one of our greatest poets, has been aroused by this glimpse of his great grief and his triumph over it, surely the teacher has accomplished much.

There is no one from whose writings better lessons can be drawn for the conduct of life, for morals in their higher ranges, than can be drawn from Tennyson. The more one reads Tennyson the more one finds that, below all conduct, as its foundation impulse, lies in this poet's work *the love of the Infinite Love, the passion of unending effort*

for it and the conviction of an eternity of life in which to pursue after it. This eternal continuance in us of the *conscious life of love*, in other words, of *incessant action toward the greater nearness to the illimitable love* which is God, is the position of Christ, and it is the position of one who believes in a personal immortality. From his poetry endless examples might be quoted to prove this was Tennyson's position.

Looking at the study of this poet from an educational standpoint, one readily recognizes the immense advantages gained by an intimate knowledge of his ennobling writings; from a selfish point of view, one can understand that, besides the great pleasure of reading such poetry, there underlies it all such a true strain of sympathetic concord, that, perhaps unconsciously, our sympathies are broadened; our views of human life and destiny made better, and brighter, and clearer.

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PRACTICAL EXERCISE IN ENGLISH.

MISPLACED ADJECTIVES AND ADVERBS.

A word, a phrase, or a clause, used as an adjective or adverb, should come next to the word, or words, which it modifies.

The word *only* requires special care. Observe how the position of *only* affects the meaning in the following sentences: "Only he lost his hat"; "He only lost his hat"; "He lost only his hat," or "He lost his hat only"; "He lost his only hat."

EXERCISE LXXIX.

Correct the errors of position in the following sentences:

1. Metal reflectors are only used now for cheap search-lights.
2. I will only mention some of the best.
3. I only had time to read "King Lear."
4. He only spoke to me, not to you.
5. Coons are only killed with the help of dogs. The coon only comes out in the night-time.
6. Lost, a Scotch terrier, by a gentleman, with his ears cut close.
7. Canteens were issued to the soldiers with short necks.
8. We all went to the sea-shore for a little fresh air from the city.
9. At one time Franklin was seen bringing some paper to his printing-office from the place where he had purchased it in a wheel-barrow.
10. He went to Germany to patronize the people in the little German villages from which he came with his great wealth.
11. The three young men set out and finally arrived at the college dressed in girls' clothes.
12. The maskers were nearly dressed alike.
13. Erected to the memory of John Smith accidentally shot as a mark of affection by his brother.
14. Lost, an umbrella by a gentleman with an ivory head.
15. A piano for sale by a lady about to cross the channel in an oak case with carved legs.
16. He blew out his brains after bidding his wife good-bye with a gun.
17. The Moor, seizing a bolster, full of rage and jealousy, smothered Desdemona.
18. Wanted, a handsome Shetland pony suitable for a child with a long mane and tail.
19. Wolsey left many buildings which he had begun at his death in an unfinished state.
20. My cousin caught a crab and took it home in a pail of water which we had for our tea.
21. I scarcely ever remember to have had a rougher walk.

ADVERBS BETWEEN "TO" AND THE INFINITIVE.

"A careful writer will do well to avoid the construction which places the adverb between *to* and the infinitive. It is true that the construction is a common one; but it is also true that those who are most addicted to the practice are not those who count most as authorities on questions of good usage."

EXERCISE LXXX.

Improve the arrangement in the following sentences:

1. Hermes caused the milk pitcher of the old couple to never be empty.
2. His political enemies tried to in this way impeach the courage of the President.