



LADY TENNYSON.

ALFRED, BARON TENNYSON.

The whole civilized world mourns the death of England's Laureate. "Byron was dead," he wrote long ago, "and I thought the whole world was at an end." To the English speaking people now it seems almost as if the office of Laureate must die with him, for who is there to fill his place, so strong, so sweet, so noble, so pure? His deathbed, says his physician, Sir Andrew Clarke, was the most glorious that I have ever seen. There was no artificial light in the room and the chamber was almost in darkness save where a broad flood of moonlight poured in through a western window. The moon's rays fell across the bed upon which the dying man lay, bathing him in their pure pellucid light, and forming a Rembrandt-like background to the scene. All was silent, save the sighing of the autumn wind as it gently played through the foliage which surrounded the house, a fitting requiem for the poet who sung of the love and beauty of nature. Motionless Lord Tennyson lay upon his couch, the tide of his life gently, slowly ebbing out into the ocean of the infinite. No racks of pain or sorrow choked its course or caused a ripple upon the outgoing tide. As peacefully and gently as he had lived, so he died, looking until the end into the eyes of those dear to him. All the members of his family were by the bedside, and Sir Andrew Clarke remained by his side from the moment of his arrival until he breathed his last. So gentle and painless was his passing away that the family did not know he had gone until Sir Andrew broke the news to Lady Tennyson, who bore the closing scenes of her great trial well in spite of her extremely delicate health. About an hour before he died he spoke to Lady Tennyson, and his words to her were the last he uttered.

Alfred Tennyson was the son of a Church of England rector in Somersby a small village in Lincolnshire. He was born August 6, 1809. His father is described as a tall, striking looking, accomplished man, with a strong, high tempered but high souled nature. From his mother the poet inherited much of his poetical temperament. She was a very imaginative woman, very sweet and gentle and intensely religious. She could never bear to see anything hurt, and some of the coarser natures around her soon got to know this and frequently imposed upon her. Villagers have been known to beat their dogs under her windows sure that she would bribe them to stop, or perhaps buy the animal outright. In the "Princess" her son describes her as

"One
Not learned, save in gracious household ways,
Not perfect, nay, but full of tender wants,
No Angel, but a dearer being, all dipt
In Angel instincts."

Her children early showed that they inherited their mother's imaginative nature. Charles Tennyson, an older brother, was, of all his family, the poet's special comrade. "So gentle, spiritual, noble, and simple, was he," his friends say, "that he was like something from another world."

Any sketch of Tennyson's youth would

be incomplete without a mention of his greatest friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, the son of the historian, "the finest youth," to quote one of his old masters, "who ever entered Eton." Mourning his untimely death, as a modern David lamenting his Jonathan, he exclaimed:—

"My Arthur, whom I shall not see
Till all my widowed race be run,
Dear as the mother to the son,
More than my brothers are to me."

The impression which the geographical character of Lincolnshire made upon Tennyson may be traced all through his works. One comes constantly across references to bulrushes, dark woods, meres, reeds, willows, water fowl, "Leagues of grass, washed by slow broad streams." "The low morass, and whispering reed." "The Brook" is still there and upon its banks the old house on "Phillip's Farm." John Baumber, a neighbor, was the original of the "Northern Farmer," and the house in which he lived was the original of "The moated Grange."

His first poems were published in 1826 in a little volume entitled "Poems by two Brothers," his brother Charles contributing to the book.

The poet's education before entering college was conducted largely under the direct supervision of his father, whose own university career had been exceptionally brilliant at Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1820 he won the gold medal offered by the Chancellor for the best poem on a named subject. The subject was anything but a promising one—"Timbuctoo."

A year after this he published "Poems, Chiefly Lyrical." Like many another genius Tennyson received for his earlier works scant encouragement from critics and reviewers. One of these, however, "Crusty old Christopher North" while he was severe was also just, and the young poet profited much by his advice. In 1830 he published another volume containing some of the earlier ones revised and greatly improved.

In 1842 he published two more volumes and this time the critics found their occupation gone; Tennyson was the poet of the people.

In these volumes first appeared "Morte d'Arthur," "Godiva," "The May Queen," "Dora," and "Locksley Hall." In 1847 "The Princess" appeared, but was re-cast in 1850. High praise has been accorded it. The famous songs in it "Sweet and Low," "Home They Brought Her Warrior Dead," "The Bugle Song," and "Ask Me no More," Edmund Clarence Stedman pro-

nounces the finest group of songs produced in this century.

In 1850 "In Memoriam" appeared, written to the memory of Arthur Hallam who was drowned seventeen years before. It is told that a number of men of letters were once asked to name the three poems of this century which they would most prefer to have written and on each list, either first or second, was found "In Memoriam."

Tennyson's married life was an ideal one. About 1859 he married Emily Sellwood, whom he had known at Somersby, the daughter of a country gentleman, whose ancestors, long before the time of the Stuarts had lived in the forest which bears their name. Soon after their marriage, they went to live at "Farringford" in the Isle of Wight. Lady Tennyson is an intense lover of music and a composer of no mean power. She has set the music to many of her husband's songs.

She is a niece of Sir Benjamin Franklin, the intrepid Arctic explorer, whose epitaph in Westminster is one of the finest things Tennyson ever wrote.

"Not here! the white North hath thy bones,
And thou, heroic sailor, soul,
Art passing on thy happier voyage now
Toward no earthly pole."

His home at Aldworth, Surrey, was built about twenty years ago, largely because her physicians considered the climate there better for her. Another reason was, to escape the lion hunters who made his life intolerable at Farringford.

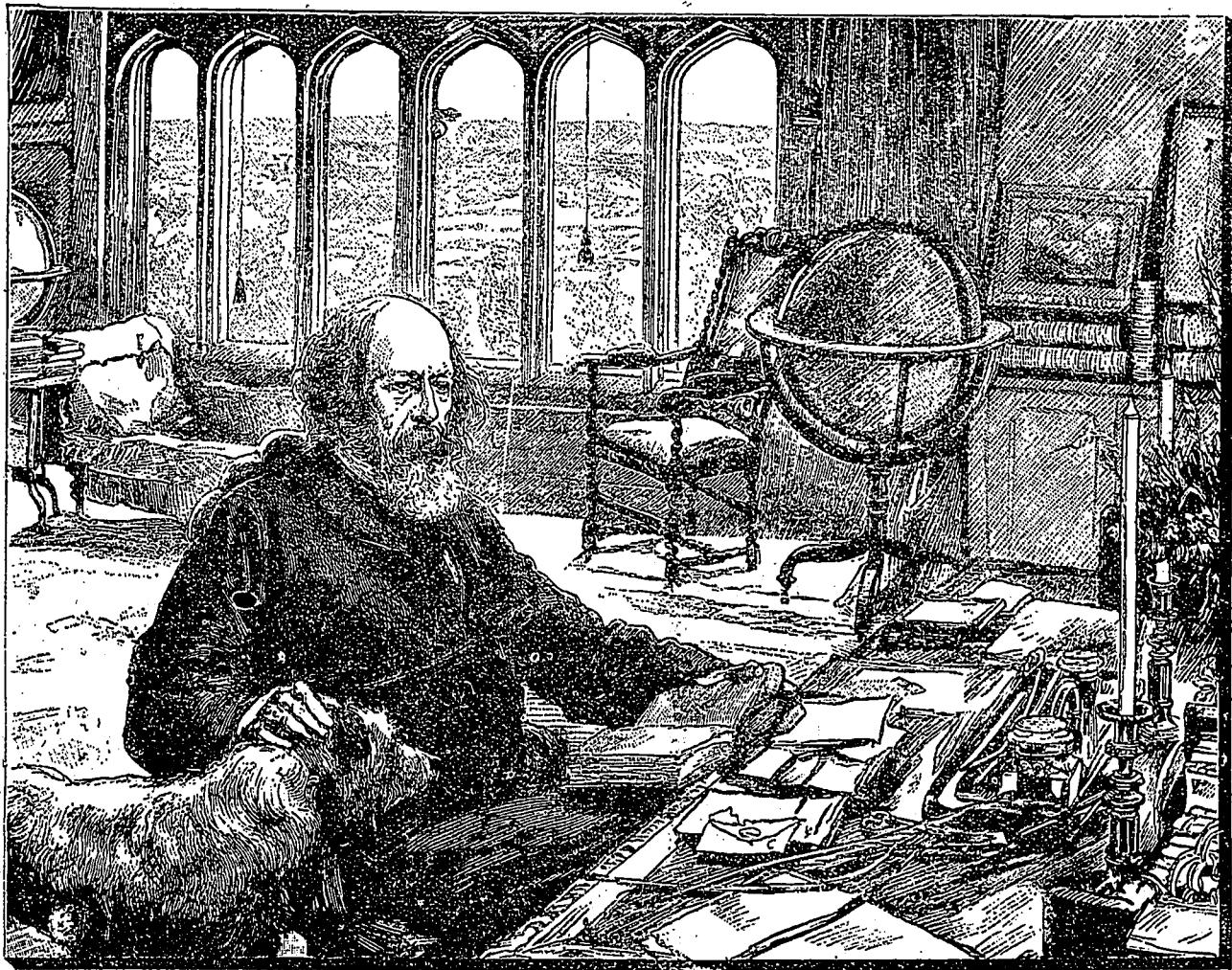
Lord Tennyson at one time made a practice of running up to London at least once a year, and roaming about, as far as possible, unrecognized, but no one could pass him by without turning to look at one of the strangest figures that ever trod the streets of modern London. A tall, round-shouldered man, growing stout in these later years, he always walked with a stick, and gave the impression that he was not entirely free from gout. A long beard covered his face, and he looked out through a pair of large spectacles upon a world which, on the whole, he was rather inclined to despise. In supplement of his spectacles there dangled across the somewhat shabby-looking tweed dustcoat a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez. The tweed dustcoat, in color a musty red, was evidently an acquaintance of many years, and had now grown too tight for him across the chest, over which it was, nevertheless, determinedly buttoned. Dark trousers, with gaiters over his thick-soled boots, and a broad brimmed felt hat, probably older by some years than the tweed dustcoat,

completed the dress of the poet Laureate when last he was seen sturdily plodding across Regent's Park.

One of the pleasantest descriptions of his life at Farringford was given by Bayard Taylor in a letter to Stedman in 1867:

"He was delightfully free and confidential, and I wish I could write to you much of what he said; but it was so wrought with high philosophy and broad views of life that a fragment here and there would not fairly represent him. . . . We dined at six in a quaint room hung with pictures, and then went to the drawing-room for dessert. Tennyson and I retired to his study at the top of the house, lit pipes, and talked of poetry. He asked me if I could read his 'Bardic.' I thought I could. 'Read it, and let me see!' said he. 'I would rather hear you read it,' I answered. Thereupon he did so, chanting the lumbering lines with great unctious. I spoke of the idyl of 'Guinevere' as being perhaps his finest poem, and said that I could not read it aloud without my voice breaking down at certain passages. 'Why, I can read it and keep my voice!' he exclaimed triumphantly. This I doubted, and he agreed to try after we went down to our wives. Tennyson took up the 'Idyls of the King.' His reading is a strange, monotonous chant, with unexpected falling inflections, which I cannot describe, but can imitate exactly. It is very impressive. In spite of myself I became very much excited as he went on. Finally, when Arthur forgives the Queen, Tennyson's voice fairly broke. I found tears on my cheeks, and Mr. and Mrs. Tennyson were crying, one on either side of me. He made an effort and went on to the end, closing grandly. 'How can you say,' I asked (referring to previous conversation) 'that you have no surety of permanent fame? This poem will only die with the language in which it is written.' Mr. Tennyson started up from her couch. 'It is true!' she exclaimed, 'I have told Alfred the same thing.' . . . When I spoke of certain things in his poetry which I specially valued, he said more than once, 'But the critics blame me for just that. It is only now and then a man like yourself sees what I meant to do.' He is very sensitive to criticism, I find, but, perhaps, not more than the rest of us; only one sees it more clearly in another."

Tennyson had always a great dread of his memoirs being written and, it is said, has left very little material that can be made use of for the purpose.



THE LATE LORD TENNYSON IN HIS STUDY AT ALDWORTH.