

THOUGHTS ON TENNYSON

It has been said that there is in poetry a power to cheer, sweeten and elevate human life ; of no poetry can this be more truly said than of Tennyson's. He sings not for a particular class of people, but for all and comes very close to the heart of humanity. Almost every emotion of the human heart finds a responsive chord in Tennyson—almost but not all, for nothing which does not spring from pure sources finds a place there. His sympathies reach out to all, from the little child to the grey-haired man.

Our worldly-wise philosophers fail to appreciate such a song as "Minnie and Winnie slept in a shell" because they see no meaning in it, but the eyes of many a little child have brightened as the recital of it gave pleasure to the little heart. The child looks for no meaning in his nursery rhymes, he sings with gladness his little "Sing a song of sixpence" rhyme and his delight is marred rather than intensified when some one tells him that the king means the sun, the pie the day, the black-birds the twenty-four hours, etc. So Tennyson writes his child songs for children, not for adults who expect to find a moral in everything, and they are appreciated by those for whom he writes.

Youth and its aspirations find expression in such poems as "The May Queen," and "The Sailor Boy." There is not a boy who lives by the sea, especially a fisherman's son, who cannot say with the poet—

"God help me ! save I take my part
Of danger on the roaring sea
A devil rises in my heart
Far worse than any death to me."

And where is the young girl who does not feel the force of such lines as—

"There will not be a drop of rain the
whole of the livelong day
And I'm to be Queen o' the May, mo-
ther, I'm to be Queen o' the May."

For, of course, it could not possibly rain on such a great occasion, when the shepherd lads on every side were to come from far away to see her crowned Queen o' the May !

One can easily understand how a man

could enter into the feelings of young men sufficiently to write such poems as "Locksley Hall" and "Clara Vere de Vere," or to be able to paint for us such portraits as that of "Gawain," surnamed the courteous, fair and strong, nor often loyal to his word whose wonted courtesy was "courtesy with a touch of traitor in it." And the young Lavaine, who when he saw King Arthur, "Gaped upon him as on a thing miraculous." But when a man shows the ability to express the various humors of woman, as Tennyson does, we are surprised beyond measure. In this we think he ranks next to Shakespeare. While his women are all worthy of study, most of them strong and loveable characters, such as will likely restore to man his lost Eden, yet Tennyson delights in giving expression to their

"Delicious spites and darling angers
And airy forms of fluttering change."

Instances of this are very numerous. Take for example the Lady of Shalott, when she says "I am half sick of shadows," or Katie Willows in her quarrel with her lover. Or Guinevere, who when the King told her of his goodly hopes that Lancelot was no more a lonely heart—

"Yea, lord," she said,
"Thy hopes are mine," and saying that
she choked
And sharply turned about to hide her
face,
Past to her chamber and there
Clenched her fingers till they bit the
palm,
Then flashed into wild tears."

Yet this same Guinevere, when "an old dame came suddenly on the Queen with the sharp news, marred her friend's aim with pale tranquility."

Again take foolish little Oenone wishing that—

"Somewhere . . . I could meet with her
The abominable that uninvited came
Into the fair Peleian banquet hall
And cast the golden fruit upon the
board
And bred this change ; that I might
speak my mind