

TENNYSON.

BY REV. JOHN MORRISON.

"HE is finer than his pictures, a man of good six feet and over, a big dome of a head, bald on the forehead and the top, and very fine to look at. A deep bright eye, a grand eagle nose, a mouth which you cannot see, a black felt hat, and a loose tweed suit." This is a word-picture of Tennyson, the greatest Anglo-Saxon poet of the nineteenth century, given by the late Bishop Phillips Brooks.

Surrounded by large fields and gray hillsides, on the lower slope of a Lincolnshire wold, midway between Horncastle and Spilsby, embosomed in trees, nestles the pastoral hamlet of Somberby. Here stands the parish church, of which Tennyson's father, a man of rare scholarship, was pastor; and near the church the rectory, where, on August 6, 1809, was born Alfred, the fourth child in a family of twelve, who, as a child, was possessed of so vivid an imagination that his thrilling stories would hold spellbound his brothers and sisters, and who was destined to be Poet Laureate and a peer of the realm.

At seven he was sent to Louth to school; and after some years of preliminary training there, returned home, and was taught by his father in languages, fine arts, mathematics and sciences, preparatory to entering Cambridge at the age of nineteen.

His early friends describe him as being very genial, having rare power of expression and Johnsonian common-sense. As a young man he was athletic and, throughout life, fond of outdoor sports and rambles, retaining to the day of his death the innocence, honesty and kind-heartedness of youth. His judgments of men were always kindly, the sunshine of his daily life marred only by a super-sensitiveness to harsh criticism of his work, causing occasional spells of melancholy and moods of misery unendurable.

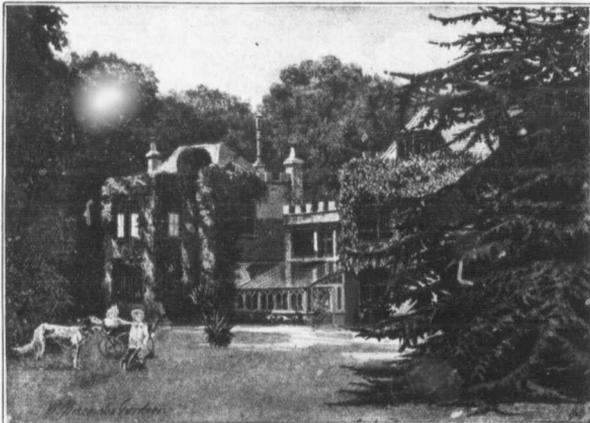
He was born a poet. At twelve he wrote an epic of six thousand lines; at fourteen an elegy on the death of his grandmother, for which he was rewarded by his grandfather, who said: "Here is half a guinea for you, the first you have ever earned by poetry, and take my word for it the last." At seventeen, he, in company with his brother Charles, published a book of poems; his grandfather's criticism being—"I had sooner have heard that he had made a wheel-barrow." He was an ardent student of the best works of ancient and more modern times; a poor or worthless book he never read; always a hard worker, he would say: "Perpetual idleness must be one of the punishments of hell." Never satisfied with his work until he had rewritten it again and again, he warmed himself by the heat of his discarded burning manuscripts; and in common with all men, was not always the best judge of his own work. "The Brook," that sparkling, crystalline gem of poetic beauty, like Kipling's "Recessional," was rescued from the waste-paper heap, to which he had consigned it. As of Dante's sorrow, caused by the death of his beloved Beatrice, sprang one of the great master-

pieces of the poetic world, "The Divine Comedy," so out of Tennyson's sorrow at the death of his youthtime and young manhood friend, Arthur Hallam, grew, seventeen years after, his greatest poem, "In Memoriam," which in grandeur of conception and sublimity of thought and language, will always find a place with the masterpieces of Milton, Dante, and Homer.

He was a deeply religious man, and an earnest student of the Bible. His poems

and best of all of them, "Crossing the Bar." As to-day Kipling is the idol of the British soldier, so in his day was the author of "The Charge of the Light Brigade," one soldier coming out of a terrible battle said, "I escaped with my life and my Tennyson."

One of the greatest in intellect and poetic genius, he was also one of the purest of the world's poets. No impure word or sentiment ever found a place in his poems, his words dedicated to the



"FARRINFORD," TENNYSON'S RESIDENCE IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT.

breathe a Christian optimism and hope, and are filled with biblical language and allusion. When asked as to his belief in the historic Christ, he replied, pointing to a beautiful rose, "What the sun is to that rose, Christ is to my soul." Could any answer have imparted more perfectly his personal experience? He said, "My creed I will not formulate, for people will not understand it if I do. It is impossible to imagine that the Almighty will ask you what your particular form of creed was, but, 'Have you been true to yourself and given in my name a cup of cold water to one of these little ones?'"

He believed in human free will and responsibility; his statement was, "Take away the sense of individual responsibility and men sink into pessimism and madness. If one cannot believe in the freedom of the human will as of the Divine, life is hardly worth having."

Our late Queen took great delight in reading his poems, and said to him after the death of Prince Albert, "Next to my Bible, 'In Memoriam' is my comfort."

He was an ardent "Imperial Federationist," advocating it whenever possible: when taking his seat in the House of Lords, he would not ally himself with either party, but sat upon the cross benches, saying that he must be free to vote for that which seemed to him best for the Empire.

He loved the restless ocean, as evidenced by such poems as "Ulysses," "The Revenge," "The Voyage," "The Sailor Boy," "Break, Break, Break" and last

memory of "Albert the Good" were applicable to himself.

"But thro' all this tract of years
Wearing the white flower of a blameless life."

Happy in his choice of a wife, a true helpmate of whom he said, "The peace of God came into my life before the altar when I married her," happy in his home with his children about him; happy in the conscious assurance of the love of God; happy in his work which he did for God, and the uplifting of humanity to higher levels of thought and action; he climbed the mountain slopes of life, crossing the snow line into a ripe old age. His passing seemed not death, but translation, when, soon after the midnight hour, October 6th, 1892, the light of the full moon streaming through the uncurtained window, enswathed him in a luminous winding-sheet, "And he was not, for God took him," and over the still form his son breathed his own prayer—"God accept him, Christ receive him."

Hands made tender by love placed him in the coffin, laying beside him his favorite copy of Shakespeare, rare and laurel wreaths, and in the glory of a splendid sunset, October 11th, placed the coffin on his own wagonette, made beautiful with moss and lobelia cardinals. Followed by the family, the villagers and the school children, he was taken to that shrine of England's honored dead, Westminster Abbey, where, on the following day, with simple yet majestic service, and the mourning of a bereaved nation, he, who