

INTRODUCTION

IN December, 1836, Richard Monckton Milnes, afterwards Lord Houghton, an old Cambridge friend, wrote to Tennyson a letter in which these sentences occur: "Now, be a good boy and do as you are told; Lord Northampton is getting up a charity book of poetry for the destitute family of a man of letters, born in the dead letter office, and he earnestly prays you to contribute, not your mite, but your might, to it. I have half-promised you will give him something pretty considerable, for the fault will be that the contributions are not as great in dimension as in name. He has got original things of Wordsworth, Southey, Miss Bailey, R.M.M., etc. I will love you more and more, therefore, if you will send some jewels directed to the Marquis of Northampton, Castle Ashley, Northampton, as soon as convenient."

To this appeal Tennyson returned a refusal couched in a half-bantering strain, and ending with the lines, "How should such a modest man as I see my small name in collocation with the great ones of Southey, Wordsworth, R.M.M., etc., and not feel myself a barndoor fowl among peacocks." Milnes, however, took this good-natured denial with a very bad grace, and sent the poet a letter in which he gave expression to his anger in no measured terms. Tennyson, in utter amazement, answered immediately in a letter that has become a classic of its kind. One sentence will bear quotation: "Had I spoken the same things laughingly in my chair,