

**ENGLISH CLASSICS - STAR
SERIES. TENNYSON'S
THE PRINCESS: A MEDLEY.
EDITED FOR SCHOOL USE**

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MARY BOWEN

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ALFRED TENNYSON.
After the painting by G. F. Watts, R. A.

English Classics — Star Series

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TENNYSON'S

THE PRINCESS: A MEDLEY

EDITED FOR SCHOOL USE

BY

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INTRODUCTION

I. TENNYSON

THE earliest picture of Tennyson that appeals to the memory is given in Mrs. Ritchie's reminiscences. "The wind . . . came sweeping through the garden of this old Lincolnshire rectory, and, as the wind blew, a sturdy child of five years old, with shining locks, stood opening his arms upon the blast and letting himself be blown along, and, as he travelled on, he made his first line of poetry and said, 'I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind,' and he tossed his arms, and the gust whirled on, sweeping into the great abyss of winds."

In the rectory of the pastoral hamlet of Somersby, "nestling embosomed in trees in a land of quiet villages, large fields, gray hillsides, and noble, tall-towered churches," Tennyson was born on August 6, 1809, the famous birth-year of Mrs. Browning, Holmes, Poe, and Darwin. He was the fourth of twelve children. A neighbor has described them as "running about from one place to another, . . . they all wrote verses, they never had any pocket-money, they took long walks at night-time, and they were decidedly exclusive." Tennyson later remembered how they played at being "champions and warriors, defending a field or stone-heap; or again they would set up opposing camps with a king in the midst of each." He liked, too, to recall the rambling little rectory, the Gothic, vaulted dining room, whose stained-glass windows cast "butterfly souls" on the walls; the pleasant little drawing-room lined with book shelves and furnished in yellow; the lawn outside, over-shadowed by larch and sycamore and

wych-elms, which inspired his early song of autumn, "A spirit haunts the year's last hours." Beyond the garden path, bordered by roses, lilies, hollyhocks, and sunflowers, the field sloped to a brook up which he followed, one April day in his fifteenth year, to a wooded hollow, where he carved on a rock the terrible news, "Byron is dead," "a day when the whole world seemed to be darkened for me."

A part of Tennyson's early education was received in the grammar school of the neighboring town of Louth, where he studied chiefly the classics. This was supplemented by much reading in his father's library, by close observation of nature, — forming a habit which lasted through his life, — and by ceaseless verse-writing from the time when, aged eight, he covered his slate with Thomsonian blank verse in praise of flowers, to later boyhood, when he translated long passages of Homer's *Iliad* into Popeian couplets and wrote a six-thousand-line epic in the manner of Scott.

Tennyson's college days have a peculiar interest to readers of *The Princess*. In his nineteenth year he entered Trinity College, Cambridge. Here he was soon associated with a remarkable group of young men, most of whom rose to distinction in Church or State in later life. Chief among them was Arthur Hallam, "The man I held as half-divine," with whom Tennyson formed the deep friendship which inspired *In Memoriam*. A friend describes the poet's appearance at that time as "six feet high, broad chested, strong limbed, his face Shakespearian, with deep eyelids, his forehead ample, crowned with dark wavy hair, his head finely poised, his hand the admiration of sculptors. . . . What struck one most about him was the union of strength with refinement." Another, on first seeing him, said, "That man must be a poet." This opinion he fulfilled, while still at Cambridge, by taking the university prize for poetry, and by publishing a volume of poems.

His college life was ended in 1831, by the death of his

father. Two years later Arthur Hallam died. Tennyson had retired to Somersby to take charge of the family and devote himself to poetry. Shortly before Hallam's death (1832) he published his second volume. After this came a decade of silence and quiet growth, whose truest biography perhaps is *In Memoriam*. The fruits of this time of meditation and experience were the two volumes published in 1842 which contained many of his now best-known shorter poems, such as *Locksley Hall* and "Break, break." A significant description of him at this time is given in a letter from Carlyle to Emerson. "Alfred is one of the few to whom your own soul can say, 'Brother!' a man solitary and sad . . . carrying a bit of Chaos about him, in short, which he is manufacturing into Cosmos. One of the finest looking men in the world. A great shock of rough, dusky hair; bright, laughing, hazel eyes; massive aquiline face, most massive, yet most delicate; of sallow brown complexion, almost Indian looking, clothes cynically loose, free-and-easy, smokes infinite tobacco. His voice is musical, metallic, fit for loud laughter and piercing wail, and all that may lie between; speech and speculation free and plenteous. I do not meet in these late decades such company over a pipe! We shall see what he will grow to."

On its publication in 1847, *The Princess* was received with adverse criticism and tokens of disappointment from the reading public. Tennyson's position as a poet was by this time too important to permit any production of his to pass unnoticed, yet the methods of his art were still considered somewhat questionable. *The Princess* gave new food for this discussion, especially in the matters of metrical innovations and unusual vocabulary; and it also aroused a new controversy over qualities in which he had not offended before, the structural unity of the poem and his comprehension of his theme. One, not entirely unfavorable, review (*North British Review*, May, 1848) gives the reader "a