ILLUSTRATIONS OF TENNYSON

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Illustrations of Tennyson by John Churton Collins

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BY

JOHN CHURTON COLLINS

AUTHOR OF 'BOLINGBROKE: A HISTORICAL STUDY' ETC.

Nullum est jam dictum quod non dictum sit prius:
Quare æquum est vos cognoscere atque ignoscere
Quæ veteres factitarunt, si faciunt novi

TERENCE: Prol. in *Eunuch.*

What is borrowed is not to be enjoyed as our own, and it is the business of critical justice to give every bird of the Muses his proper feather—DR JOHNSON

And well his words become him; is he not
A full-cell'd honeycomb of eloquence
Stor'd from all flowers?

TENNYSON: *Edwin Morris*

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1891

PREFACE

Why so much importance should be attached to the comparative study of languages, and so little to the comparative study of literatures; why, in the interpretation of the masterpieces of poets, it should be thought necessary to accumulate parallels and illustrations of peculiarities of syntax and grammar, and not be thought necessary to furnish parallels and illustrations of what is of far greater interest and importance, analogies namely in ideas, sentiments, modes of expression, and the like, whether arising from direct imitation, unconscious reminiscence, or similarity of temper and genius—the compiler of this little volume has never been able to understand. One thing is certain. The poetry of Lord Tennyson has become classical, and is therefore becoming, and will become more and more, a subject of serious study wherever the English language is spoken. An important branch of that study must undoubtedly be an enquiry into the nature and extent of his indebtedness to the writers who have preceded him —must be to compare with their originals the

imitations, the analogies, the adaptations, the simple transferences in which his poems notoriously abound. Nor is this all. No commentary on poetry is more useful, as assuredly no commentary is more interesting, than that afforded by poetry itself. How greatly does the *Æneid* gain by comparison with the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Argonautica*, and how greatly do they, in their turn, gain by comparison with the *Æneid*. The power and beauty of a particular simile in Virgil may impress us to the full without any reference to the corresponding simile in Homer or Apollonius, but to say that our pleasure is not increased by examining them side by side is absurd. It is therefore with this double object, with the object partly of tracing Lord Tennyson's direct imitations and transferences to their sources, and also with the object of simply illustrating his poems by the commentary of parallel passages in writers of his own and other languages, that I have compiled this little volume. I have also had another object in view. To the disgrace of our universities, the study of the *literæ humaniores* in the proper sense of the term has no place in their curricula, so that in the very centres of national culture, while the English and Italian classics have no recognition at all, the writings of the Greek and Latin classics are regarded so entirely as the monopoly of the philologist that they have almost ceased to have any significance as contributions to literature. The consequence has been that

in all our schools and colleges where the English classics are a subject of study, the study of them has been severed on principle from the study of the ancient classics and the classics of modern Italy. I thought, therefore, that anything which could contribute to illustrate the essential connection existing between the four leading and master literatures of the world, those namely of ancient Greece and Italy and of modern Italy and England, could not fail to be of service in showing how radically inadequate must be the critical study even of a poet so essentially modern as Lord Tennyson, without constant reference to those literatures which have been to him what they have been to his superiors and his peers in English poetry from the Renaissance to the present time.

It would be absurd and presumptuous to conclude that the analogies which have been traced between the ideas and expressions of Lord Tennyson and those of other poets and writers were in all, or indeed in most cases, deliberate or even conscious imitations. In his own noble words, we moderns are 'the heirs of all the ages.' We live amid wealth as prodigally piled up as the massive and myriad treasure-trove of Spenser's 'rich strond,' and it is now almost impossible for a poet to strike out a thought, or to coin a phrase, which shall be purely original. What constitutes Lord Tennyson's glory as a poet, it is no part of the present volume to discuss; it need hardly be said that had the extent of his indebtedness to his pre-

decessors been much greater than it is, it would no more have detracted from that glory than Milton's similar indebtedness to his predecessors detracts from his. It was observed of Virgil that he never fails to improve what he borrows, though Homer was his creditor; and what is true of Virgil is, as a rule, true of Tennyson—'nihil tetigit quod non ornavit'—what he does still betters what is done.

I offer these illustrations simply as commentaries on works which will take their place beside the masterpieces of classical literature, and which will, like them, be studied with minute and curious diligence by successive generations of scholars. A versatility almost without parallel among poets has enabled Lord Tennyson to appeal to all classes. His poetry is the delight of the most fastidious and the most emotional. He touches Burns on one side, and he touches Sophocles on the other. But to the scholar, and to the scholar alone, will his best and most characteristic works become in their full significance intelligible. By him they will be cherished with peculiar fondness. To him they will be like the enchanted island in Shakespeare—

> Full of echoes,
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight.

To him it will be a never-ending source of pleasure to study his Tennyson as he studies his Virgil, his Dante, and his Milton.

It has been thought proper to affix to the passages