

THE PRINCESS: A MEDLEY

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The Princess: A Medley by Alfred Tennyson

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ALFRED TENNYSON

**THE PRINCESS: A
MEDLEY**

THE PRINCESS

A Medley

96728

By
Tennyson, 1st baron
Alfred (Lord) Tennyson

Edited with Introduction and Notes

By

Andrew J. George ...

Boston

D.C. Heath & co.

1896

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TO MY MOTHER.

THE PRINCESS:

A MEDLEY.

PROLOGUE.

SIR WALTER VIVIAN all a summer's day
Gave his broad lawns until the set of sun
Up to the people: thither flock'd at noon
His tenants, wife and child, and thither half
The neighboring borough with their Institute
Of which he was the patron. I was there
From college, visiting the son, — the son
A Walter too, — with others of our set,
Five others: we were seven at Vivian-place.

And me that morning Walter show'd the house, 10
Greek, set with busts: from vases in the hall
Flowers of all heavens, and lovelier than their names,
Grew side by side; and on the pavement lay
Carved stones of the Abbey-ruin in the park,
Huge Ammonites, and the first bones of Time;
And on the tables every clime and age
Jumbled together; celts and calumets,
Claymore and snowshoe, toys in lava fans
Of sandal, amber, ancient rosaries,

Laborious orient ivory sphere in sphere, 20
 The cursed Malayan crease, and battle-clubs
 From the isles of palm : and higher on the walls,
 Betwixt the monstrous horns of elk and deer,
 His own forefathers' arms and armor hung.

And 'this,' he said, 'was Hugh's at Agincourt ;
 And that was old Sir Ralph's at Ascalon :
 A good knight he ! we keep a chronicle
 With all about him ' — which he brought, and I
 Dived in a hoard of tales that dealt with knights
 Half-legend, half-historic, counts and kings 30
 Who laid about them at their wills and died ;
 And mixt with these, a lady, one that arm'd
 Her own fair head, and sallying thro' the gate,
 Had beat her foes with slaughter from her walls,

' O miracle of women,' said the book,
 ' O noble heart who, being strait-besieged
 By this wild king to force her to his wish,
 Nor bent, nor broke, nor shunn'd a soldier's death,
 But now when all was lost or seem'd as lost —
 Her stature more than mortal in the burst 40
 Of sunrise, her arm lifted, eyes on fire —
 Brake with a blast of trumpets from the gate,
 And, falling on them like a thunderbolt,
 She trampled some beneath her horses' heels,
 And some were whelm'd with missiles of the wall,
 And some were push'd with lances from the rock,
 And part were drown'd within the whirling brook :
 O miracle of noble womanhood !'

So sang the gallant glorious chronicle ;
 And, I all rapt in this, 'Come out,' he said, 50
 'To the Abbey : there is Aunt Elizabeth
 And sister Lilia with the rest.' We went
 (I kept the book and had my finger in it)
 Down thro' the park : strange was the sight to me ;
 For all the sloping pasture murmur'd, sown
 With happy faces and with holiday.
 There moved the multitude, a thousand heads :
 The patient leaders of their Institute
 Taught them with facts. One rear'd a font of stone
 And drew, from butts of water on the slope, 60
 The fountain of the moment, playing now
 A twisted snake, and now a rain of pearls,
 Or steep-up spout whereon the gilded ball
 Danced like a wisp : and somewhat lower down
 A man with knobs and wires and vials fired
 A cannon : Echo answer'd in her sleep
 From hollow fields : and here were telescopes
 For azure views ; and there a group of girls
 In circle waited, whom the electric shock
 Dislink'd with shrieks and laughter : round the lake 70
 A little clock-work steamer paddling plied
 And shook the lilies : perch'd about the knolls
 A dozen angry models jetted steam :
 A petty railway ran : a fire-balloon
 Rose gem-like up before the dusky groves
 And dropt a fairy parachute and past :
 And there thro' twenty posts of telegraph
 They flash'd a saucy message to and fro
 Between the mimic stations ; so that sport

Went hand in hand with science ; elsewhere 80
 Pure sport : a herd of boys with clamor bowl'd
 And stump'd the wicket ; babies roll'd about
 Like tumbled fruit in grass ; and men and maids
 Arranged a country-dance, and flew thro' light
 And shadow, while the twangling violin
 Struck up with Soldier-laddie, and overhead
 The broad ambrosial aisles of lofty lime
 Made noise with bees and breeze from end to end.

Strange was the sight and smacking of the time ;
 And long we gazed, but satiated at length 90
 Came to the ruins. High-arch'd and ivy-claspt,
 Of finest Gothic lighter than a fire,
 Thro' one wide chasm of time and frost they gave
 The park, the crowd, the house ; but all within
 The sward was trim as any garden-lawn :
 And here we lit on Aunt Elizabeth,
 And Lilia with the rest, and lady friends
 From neighbor seats : and there was Ralph himself,
 A broken statue propt against the wall,
 As gay as any. Lilia, wild with sport, 100
 Half child half woman as she was, had wound
 A scarf of orange round the stony helm,
 And robed the shoulders in a rosy silk,
 That made the old warrior from his ivied nook
 Glow like a sunbeam : near his tomb a feast
 Shone, silver-set ; about it lay the guests,
 And there we join'd them : then the maiden Aunt
 Took this fair day for text, and from it preach'd
 An universal culture for the crowd,

And all things great ; but we, unworthier, told 110
 Of college : he had climb'd across the spikes,
 And he had squeezed himself betwixt the bars,
 And he had breath'd the Proctor's dogs ; and one
 Discuss'd his tutor, rough to common men,
 But honeying at the whisper of a lord ;
 And one the Master, as a rogue in grain
 Vener'd with sanctimonious theory.

But while they talk'd, above their heads I saw
 The feudal warrior lady-clad ; which brought
 My book to mind : and opening this I read 120
 Of old Sir Ralph a page or two that rang
 With tilt and tourney ; then the tale of her
 That drove her foes with slaughter from her walls,
 And much I praised her nobleness, and ' Where '
 Ask'd Walter, patting Lilia's head (she lay
 Beside him) ' lives there such a woman now ? '

Quick answer'd Lilia, ' There are thousands now
 Such women, but convention beats them down :
 It is but bringing up ; no more than that :
 You men have done it : how I hate you all ! 130
 Ah, were I something great ! I wish I were
 Some mighty poetess, I would shame you then,
 That love to keep us children ! O I wish
 That I were some great princess, I would build
 Far off from men a college like a man's,
 And I would teach them all that men are taught :
 We are twice as quick ! ' And here she shook aside
 The hand that play'd the patron with her curls.