

**MAYNARD'S ENGLISH CLASSIC SERIES.
IDYLLS OF THE KING: THE COMING OF
ARTHUR, GARETH
AND LYNETTE, GUINEVERE, LANCELOT
AND ELAINE, THE HOLY GRAIL, THE
PASSING OF ARTHUR**

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ALFRED TENNYSON

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©
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THE COMING OF ARTHUR

GARETH AND LYNETTE

GUINEVERE

LANCELOT AND ELAINE

THE HOLY GRAIL

THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

BY

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

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WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES



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BIOGRAPHY

Of Alfred Tennyson it is preëminently true that the events of his life took place in his intellect. It was a peaceful, well-ordered life—that of this Lincolnshire rector's son, born August 6, 1809. His first published poetry was in a slim volume (1827) in partnership with his brother Charles. This brother, his senior by a year, was his close friend. Together they attended the Louth grammar school (1816-20), and, after being tutored by their father, together they went to Trinity College, Cambridge (1828), where Alfred gained the Chancellor's medal by his poem *Timbuctoo* (1829). At Cambridge then were many choice spirits—Thackeray, Helps, Sterling, Kinglake, Maurice, Trench, Milnea, Merivale, Spedding. Tennyson's closest friend was the gifted young Arthur Henry Hallam, with whom he made a tour of the Pyrenees in their summer vacation (1830). Hallam's early death (1833) was the great sorrow of Tennyson's young manhood and the inspiration of "Break, Break, Break," and *In Memoriam*. Among his other early friends were Hunt, Hare, Fitzgerald, Carlyle, Gladstone, Rogers, Landor, Forster. These recognized his genius, but the public and critics generally were slow in doing so, and volume after volume of his poems met indifference, censure, ridicule. At last (1842) a volume containing among other noble poems *Locksley Hall*, *Ulysses*, *The Two Voices*, and the revised *Palace of Art* convinced the English people that a new poet had arisen in its midst. Tennyson's ensuing years were, for the most part, a progress from one literary triumph to another. The year 1850 was his *Annus Mirabilis*. In it he published *In Memoriam*, he was made

Poet Laureate in place of the deceased Laureate, Wordsworth, and he married Miss Emily Sellwood. The chief events in his later tranquil life were the publication of various poems; leaving his Twickenham home for Farringford, Isle of Wight, and later migrations to Aldworth in Sussex; the birth of his sons Hallam (1852) and Lionel (1854); and occasional journeys about Great Britain or on the Continent. In 1884 he was elevated to the peerage. In 1886 his younger son, Lionel, died on his way home from India, and October 6, 1892, the Poet Laureate, full of years and honors, died and was laid to rest in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Carlyle gives a vivid word-picture of the poet at middle age: "One of the finest-looking men in the world. A great shock of rough dusky-dark 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."

The Princess (1847), a midsummer day's dream, has yet a strong moral purpose, being Tennyson's contribution to the discussion concerning woman's proper sphere.

In Memoriam (1850) is perhaps the greatest of the four great English elegies. It voices the religious feeling and thought of the age. Doubts—born of woe, sorrow, heart-break—are overcome by triumphant faith in the God who is immortal Life and hence immortal Love.

Maud (1857), Tennyson's favorite among his poems, is generally considered the poorest. It is a lyrical monodrama of love and madness.

The Idylls of the King (1859-85) is an epic of a series of Idylls founded on the old British legends of King Arthur and the Knights of his Round Table, which

Tennyson imbued with deep moral significance. "If this be not the greatest narrative poem since *Paradise Lost*, what other English production are you to name in its place?"—*Stedman*.

Tennyson's genius is lyric and idyllic rather than dramatic. Some of his character-pieces are dramatically powerful, but his dramas are doubtful successes or unequivocal failures. The best are *Harold* (1876), *Becket* (1879), and *Queen Mary* (1875), which constitute an historical trilogy on the making of England. His other dramas are *The Falcon* (1879), for the plot of which Tennyson was indebted to Boccaccio; *The Cup* (1881), founded on Plutarch's *De Claris Mulieribus*; *The Promise of May* (1882), and *The Foresters* (1892), an "idyllic masque" of Robin Hood days.

Poetry was to Tennyson not the pastime of an idle day, but the serious work of a lifetime. He pruned and perfected his verse until carping critics came to say it was too smooth and polished, over sweet and beautiful. To the charge that he lacked animation and strength, the ringing ballad *The Revenge* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and the powerful blank verse of *Ulysses* are all-sufficient answer. Among the many perplexed and obscure voices of the age it behooves us to be thankful for one true man and true poet who united deep thought, calm wisdom, and serene faith with clarity of expression.

The only authoritative biography is *Tennyson's Memoir* by his son; in the Harper edition of 1884 there is a pleasant biographical sketch by Mrs. Anne Thackeray Ritchie. There are many good critical works on Tennyson—those of Brooke, Van Dyke, Dixon, Stedman, and others, and special studies by Gatty, Genung, Dawson, Robertson, Rolfe, and many more, which are all helpful in their degree. But the essential thing is the careful study of the works by which this master soul reveals himself to us.

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