

**LORD TENNYSON
1809-1892. A
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649740932

Lord Tennyson 1809-1892. A Biographical Sketch by Henry J. Jennings

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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From a Photograph by the Cameron Studio

PREFACE.

THE greater part of this volume was published in 1884, while Lord Tennyson was alive; and it is perhaps permissible to state now, in answer to one or two critics who thought that undue liberty had been taken with some particulars of his private life, that the manuscript passed in the first instance through the hands of a near member of his family, to whose friendly co-operation the details referred to owed their appearance in the text. Since then a number of Autobiographies and Reminiscences have seen the light, many of which contained interesting references to Tennyson. These, together with a brief record of his life since 1884, have been incorporated in the present edition. In due course, no doubt, a more exhaustive biography will be forthcoming from the pen of one who was on terms of close intimacy with the poet; but in the mean time this sketch—for it purports to be nothing more—of the more notable incidents of a long and illustrious career will, I hope, be of some small service to Lord Tennyson's admirers.

H. J. JENNINGS.

GROSVENOR CLUB,
Oct. 6, 1892.

LORD TENNYSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE materials for a biography of Lord Tennyson, apart from the purely literary incidents of his life, are not considerable. Few among the noteworthy personages of our time more assiduously shrank from the public gaze, or shunned with a more sensitive persistency the "fierce light" which, in this prying age, beats upon the domestic concerns of eminent men. His life was essentially one of retirement, yielding little to the "literary leeches" who swarm in these "days that deal in ana." Seldom, during a long life, to be met with in that vortex of wasted ambitions called "fashionable society"—rarely taking part in public affairs—avoiding with something of shyness all kinds of conventional ceremony and popular hero-worship, he "dwelt apart," in a very literal sense of the words, from the hubbub and turmoil of the great world, and in his country homes, in the company of a few chosen friends, secluded from the reach of the curious, led a life of studious contemplation, shaping into imperishable verse the strivings of the poet's soul. Although in later life the mellowing influences of age relaxed somewhat the austerity of his isolation and social reserve, he cherished for the most part an emphatic prejudice against, sometimes deepening into a great hatred of, the babblement that dogs the heels of fame. He never gave the faintest encouragement to those enterprising *littérateurs* who delude themselves with the comforting belief that they are benefiting mankind by lifting the curtain

which veils the privacy of a great man's home-life. That he had a wholesome dread of the fate which, even after a poet has shuffled off this mortal coil, may await him at the hands of indiscreet biographers, is shown by the verses which, in 1849, he wrote in the *Examiner*, "after reading the Life and Letters of a Deceased Poet":—

- "For now the poet cannot die,
 Nor leave his music as of old,
 But round him ere he scarce be cold
 Begins the scandal and the cry :
- "Proclaim the faults he would not show ;
 Break lock and seal : betray the trust :
 Keep nothing sacred : 'tis but just
 The many-headed beast should know."
- "Ah, shameless ! for he did but sing
 A song that pleased us from its worth ;
 No public life was his on earth,
 No blazoned statesman he, nor king.
- "He gave the people of his best :
 His worst he kept, his best he gave.
 My Shakespeare's curse on clown and knave
 Who will not let his ashes rest !"

The passionate indignation of these lines has lost none of its fire, and the invocation none of its warning. They remind the biographer, if he were in any need of such a reminder, that the range of his inquiries has limitations, and that the scope of his narrative must be bounded by a sense of what is due to the rights of privacy. Of Lord Tennyson's life, apart from the records of his literary work and the glimpses occasionally afforded by the divulging candour of his personal friends, not a great deal is known, and only the vulgar would seek, without the direct encouragement of family sanctions, to know more.

Alfred Tennyson was born on August 6, 1809, at Somersby, a village in Lincolnshire, about half-way between Spilsby and Horncastle. He was one of twelve children, of whom seven were sons. His elder brothers, Frederick and Charles, became favourably known, when they reached manhood, as writers of poetry that would unquestionably—especially that of Charles—have made a larger mark in the world but for the overshadowing

dominance of his own powers. Frederick has published two or three volumes of poems, "Days and Hours," "The Isles of Greece," and "Daphne and other Poems." Many of his efforts, especially those which deal with classic legend, are characterized by considerable wealth of imagery and a subtle depth of thought. His letters are well worthy to give him a place among famous letter-writers, and show how false in his case, as in that of Alfred, is the popular belief that a good poet is never a good prose writer. The other brothers in a less conspicuous degree wooed the muses, but their fugitive pieces, with scarcely an exception, have been borne on the bosom of that rushing river which carries so much literary drift, promising as well as worthless, down to the great sea of oblivion.

Alfred Tennyson's father was the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, LL.D., rector of Somersby and vicar of Grimsby, who married Elizabeth Fytche, daughter of the vicar of the neighbouring town of Louth. Dr. Tennyson was the son of a wealthy retired lawyer, George Tennyson of Bayon's Manor, Lincolnshire, but the bulk of the property went to the second son Charles, uncle of Alfred, who subsequently took the name of D'Eyncourt by royal licence, and was for some time member of parliament for Lambeth. The Tennysons were, in fact, of ancient and honourable descent, tracing their pedigree to the Plantagenets through the old Norman family of D'Eyncourt. In view of the poet's elevation to the peerage in 1883, and the criticisms which, in certain quarters, it provoked, this distinguished ancestry has an interesting significance.

A halo of romantic interest always hangs about the birth-places of distinguished men. The homes and haunts of genius are hallowed spots—shrines invested by the pilgrim and the worshipper with unique and memorable interest. In years to come Somersby, by reason of Tennyson having been born there, will be detached in the world's esteem from the multitude of English villages with which it possesses features in common. Any one picturing it without the guidance of description would probably fancy that it partook

