

Tennyson's Early Days.



ALFRED TENNYSON, AGE 22.

LS it fair to attribute to certain persons and particular scenes the inspiration of a poet's masterpiece? Some say such a course is very unfair, as it makes the poet a photo-

grapher instead of an artist. But, while an undue insistence on the principle is not permissible, it is surely not unfair to connect scenes once familiar to the eyes of a poet with the products of his brain; or to identify in the characters he portrays persons with whom he may have been familiar.

That Lord Tennyson is at present the centre of so much interest to the generation is a happy augury for the perpetuation of his fame. Within the last twelve months more than one

volume has appeared in which the scenes surrounding him in early life, and personages with whom he was early acquainted, have been dilated upon and illustrated with more or less fulness and accuracy. All this shows conclusively that



"LOCKESLEY HALL."



BAG ENDERBY CHURCH.

our Laureate has a firm hold of the reading public, and is an evidence that references to the poet's early years are of great interest to his admirers. That we are not mistaken in attributing to those times the inspiration of his finished productions, is admitted by the Laureate himself.

In Mr. Jennings' "Biographical Sketch," Lord Tennyson is quoted as follows:—

"There was a period in my life, when, as an artist—Turner, for instance—takes rough sketches of landscape, &c., in order to work them eventually into some great picture, so I was in the habit of chronicling, in four or five words or more, whatever might strike me as picturesque in nature."

But, without doubt, some writers have been too ready to point to this or that local scene, or to particular individuals. Such definite identification precludes claim to any degree of authority. The Rev. Drummond Rawnsley, an old friend of the Laureate's, and who officiated at the poet's marriage, wrote in *Macmillan*, something like twenty years ago:—

"As a Lincolnshire man and long familiar with the district in which Mr. Tennyson was born, I

have often been struck with the many illustrations of our county's scenery and character to be found in his poems. What Wordsworth has done for the English Lakes and Scott for the Highlands, our poet has done for homelier scenes of his boyhood and early manhood in Mid Lincolnshire. They live for us in his pages, depicted with all the truth and accuracy of a photograph."

The identity of "Locksley Hall" has been fought over by the champions of various country houses. Local tradition, however, says that in an old house near the Lincolnshire coast, the Laureate wrote the first "Locksley Hall." Here is an interesting item which does not reflect upon the poet's creative genius. The tradition

has never been repudiated, although its existence is known to the Laureate's family. A sketch of the old house as it was seventy years ago is here given. Parts of the old edifice still remain, showing evidences of great age and an old-fashioned manner of construction. A large tract of land is now reclaimed between the house and the North Sea, but the tide formerly flowed to within a few yards of the door of the house.

One who has recently passed away used garrulously to tell of the poet visiting



STOCKWORTH MILL.

Mablethorpe as a young fellow, and how he would spend whole nights on the shore, and wander as far as Donna Nook, without sufficient care to prevent immersion by incoming tides. These protracted absences sometimes provoked anxiety, and search parties were sent out.

Above is a portrait of the Laureate in his youth. The original engraving by J. C. Armytage, from a crayon drawing by Samuel Lawrence, was first published in R. H. Horne's *New Spirit of the Age*. The villagers of Somersby and neighbourhood recognise in it a likeness to Dr. Tennyson, the poet's father.

Numbers of pilgrims have put on record their impressions of the neighbourhood where the Laureate first saw the light. The church of Bag Enderby, one of the livings held by Dr. Tennyson, is a quaint structure. The exterior is given on page 384.

Votaries of "the localising craze" say that Stockworth Mill was the home of "The Miller's Daughter." See the mill, page 384.

Somersby should be seen during each of the various seasons of the year in order to come into close sympathy with the moods of various local references in the poems. The last time we were there was early in February, when Holywell Glen was sheeted in snow-drops. Mrs. Thackeray-Ritchie says, "Lord Tennyson sometimes speaks of this glen." The same writer gives us a glimpse of the happy "circle" referred to in lxxxix., "In Memoriam":—

"Dean Garden was one of those friends sometimes spoken of who, with Ar-

thur Hallam, the reader of the Tuscan poets, and James Spedding and others, used to gather upon the lawn at Somersby—the young men and women in the light of their youth and high spirits, the widowed mother leading her quiet life within the rectory walls."

Old retainers of the Tennyson family still survive. Here is the portrait of an old dame who now sits in her chimney-corner and says, "Poet or no poet, I carried him on my back when he was a baby." This is the old servant, to whom the Laureate wrote so pleasantly in response to her congratulations on his becoming a peer. She remembers Arthur Hallam visiting the Rectory, and the distress occasioned there on the receipt of the news of his death. Although quite blind, the old lady is sprightly and cheerful, notwithstanding her extremely humble circumstances.

Another resident in the neighbourhood remembers being in service at Somersby Rectory—"a vast o' years sin'," she says.

She tells us that "Master Alfred" always had a book in his hand, and that he once gave her two volumes of his poems. She does not remember the Laureate's brothers writing poetry, but "*Arthur learned it after.*" This worthy dame remembers Dr. Tennyson as a good preacher. She has occupied her present snug cottage more than half a century. The few shillings she receives weekly is but a meagre subsistence, but she says, "I hate to be in the grumbling club."

Visitors to the locality may expect to encounter this retired



TENNYSON'S NURSE.

village pedagogue. He boasts of having coached Charles and Alfred Tennyson in arithmetic, when they were preparing for the University. It will interest some to know that the text-book used was "Walsingham's Tutor's Assistant." This old

gentleman is now eighty-five, but is still able to earn a maintenance by land surveying.

These members of a passing generation are interesting links between the days of the Laureate's youth and those of the ripened evidence of his genius.



TENNYSON'S SCHOOLMASTER.