

## CHAPTER XI

### THE VICTORIAN AGE

#### THE MODERN PERIOD OF PROGRESS AND UNREST

When Victoria became queen, in 1837, English literature seemed to have entered upon a period of lean years, in marked contrast with the poetic fruitfulness of the romantic age which we have just studied. Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Byron, and Scott had passed away, and it seemed as if there were no writers in England to fill their places. Wordsworth had written, in 1835,

Like clouds that rake the mountain summits,  
Or waves that own no curbing hand,  
How fast has brother followed brother,  
From sunshine to the sunless land!

In these lines is reflected the sorrowful spirit of a literary man of the early nineteenth century who remembered the glory that had passed away from the earth. But the leanness of these first years is more apparent than real. Keats and Shelley were dead, it is true, but already there had appeared three disciples of these poets who were destined to be far more widely read than were their masters. Tennyson had been publishing poetry since 1827, his first poems appearing almost simultaneously with the last work of Byron, Shelley, and Keats; but it was not until 1842, with the publication of his collected poems, in two volumes, that England recognized in him one of her great literary leaders. So also Elizabeth Barrett had been writing since 1820, but not till twenty years later did her poems become deservedly popular; and Browning had published his *Pauline* in 1833, but it was not until 1846, when he published the last of the series

called *Bells and Pomegranates*, that the reading public began to appreciate his power and originality. Moreover, even as romanticism seemed passing away, a group of great prose writers — Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle, and Ruskin — had already begun to proclaim the literary glory of a new age, which now seems to rank only just below the Elizabethan and the Romantic periods.

**Historical Summary.** Amid the multitude of social and political forces of this great age, four things stand out clearly. First, the long struggle of the Anglo-Saxons for personal liberty is definitely settled, and democracy becomes the established order of the day. The king, who appeared in an age of popular weakness and ignorance, and the peers, who came with the Normans in triumph, are both stripped of their power and left as figureheads of a past civilization. The last vestige of personal government and of the divine right of rulers disappears; the House of Commons becomes the ruling power in England; and a series of new reform bills rapidly extend the suffrage, until the whole body of English people choose for themselves the men who shall represent them.

Second, because it is an age of democracy, it is an age of popular education, of religious tolerance, of growing brotherhood, and of profound social unrest. The slaves had been freed in 1833; but in the middle of the century England awoke to the fact that slaves are not necessarily negroes, stolen in Africa to be sold like cattle in the market place, but that multitudes of men, women, and little children in the mines and factories were victims of a more terrible industrial and social slavery. To free these slaves also, the unwilling victims of our unnatural competitive methods, has been the growing purpose of the Victorian Age until the present day.

Third, because it is an age of democracy and education, it is an age of comparative peace. England begins to think less of the pomp and false glitter of fighting, and more of its moral evils, as the nation realizes that it is the common people who bear the burden and the sorrow and the poverty of war, while the privileged classes reap most of the financial and political rewards. Moreover, with the growth of trade and of friendly foreign relations, it becomes evident that the social equality for which England was

**The Ideal of Peace**

**Social Unrest**

**Democracy**



contending at home belongs to the whole race of men; that brotherhood is universal, not insular; that a question of justice is never settled by fighting; and that war is generally unmitigated horror and barbarism. Tennyson, who came of age when the great Reform Bill occupied attention, expresses the ideals of the Liberals of his day who proposed to spread the gospel of peace,

Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furled  
In the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the world.

Fourth, the Victorian Age is especially remarkable because of its rapid progress in all the arts and sciences and in mechanical inventions. A glance at any record of the industrial achievements of the nineteenth century will show how vast they are, and it is unnecessary to repeat here the list of the inventions, from spinning looms to steamboats, and from matches to electric lights. All these material things, as well as the growth of education, have their influence upon the life of a people, and it is inevitable that they should react upon its prose and poetry; though as yet we are too much absorbed in our sciences and mechanics to determine accurately their influence upon literature. When these new things shall by long use have become familiar as country roads, or have been replaced by newer and better things, then they also will have their associations and memories, and a poem on the railroads may be as suggestive as Wordsworth's sonnet on Westminster Bridge; and the busy, practical workingmen who to-day throng our streets and factories may seem, to a future and greater age, as quaint and poetical as to us seem the slow toilers of the Middle Ages.

**Literary Characteristics.** When one is interested enough to trace the genealogy of Victoria he finds, to his surprise, that in her veins flowed the blood both of William the Conqueror and of Cerdic, the first Saxon king of England; and this seems to be symbolic of the literature of her age, which embraces the whole realm of Saxon and Norman life,—the strength and ideals of the one, and the culture and refinement of the other. The romantic revival had done its work, and England entered upon a new free period, in which every form of literature, from pure romance to gross realism, struggled for expression. At this day it is

An Age of  
Prose

obviously impossible to judge the age as a whole; but we are getting far enough away from the early half of it to notice certain definite characteristics. First, though the age produced many poets, and two who deserve to rank among the greatest, nevertheless this is emphatically an age of prose. And since the number of readers has increased a thousandfold with the spread of popular education, it is the age of the newspaper, the magazine, and the modern novel,—the first two being the story of the world's daily life, and the last our pleasantest form of literary entertainment, as well as our most successful method of presenting modern problems and modern ideals. The novel in this age fills a place which the drama held in the days of Elizabeth; and never before, in any age or language, has the novel appeared in such numbers and in such perfection.

The second marked characteristic of the age is that literature, both in prose and in poetry, seems to depart from the purely artistic standard, of art for art's sake, and to be actuated by a definite moral purpose. Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle, Ruskin,—who and what were these men if not the teachers of England, not vaguely but definitely, with superb faith in their message, and with the conscious moral purpose to uplift and to instruct? Even the novel breaks away from Scott's romantic influence, and first studies life as it is, and then points out what life may and ought to be. Whether we read the fun and sentiment of Dickens, the social miniatures of Thackeray, or the psychological studies of George Eliot, we find in almost every case a definite purpose to sweep away error and to reveal the underlying truth of human life. So the novel sought to do for society in this age precisely what Lyell and Darwin sought to do for science, that is, to find the truth, and to show how it might be used to uplift humanity. Perhaps for this reason the Victorian Age is emphatically an age of realism rather than of romance,—not the realism of Zola and Ibsen, but a deeper realism which strives to tell the whole truth, showing

Moral  
Purpose



moral and physical diseases as they are, but holding up health and hope as the normal conditions of humanity.

It is somewhat customary to speak of this age as an age of doubt and pessimism, following the new conception of man and of the universe which was formulated by science under the name of Evolution. It is spoken of also as a prosaic age, lacking in great ideals. Both these criticisms seem to be the result of judging a large thing when we are too close to it to get its true proportions, just as Cologne Cathedral, one of the world's most perfect structures, seems to be a shapeless pile of stone when we stand too close beneath its mighty walls and buttresses. Tennyson's immature work, like that of the minor poets, is sometimes in a doubtful or despairing strain; but his *In Memoriam* is like the rainbow after storm; and Browning seems better to express the spirit of his age in the strong, manly faith of "Rabbi Ben Ezra," and in the courageous optimism of all his poetry. Stedman's *Victorian Anthology* is, on the whole, a most inspiring book of poetry. It would be hard to collect more varied cheer from any age. And the great essayists, like Macaulay, Carlyle, Ruskin, and the great novelists, like Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, generally leave us with a larger charity and with a deeper faith in our humanity.

So also the judgment that this age is too practical for great ideals may be only a description of the husk that hides a very full ear of corn. It is well to remember that Spenser and Sidney judged their own age (which we now consider to be the greatest in our literary history) to be altogether given over to materialism, and to be incapable of literary greatness. Just as time has made us smile at their blindness, so the next century may correct our judgment of this as a material age, and looking upon the enormous growth of charity and brotherhood among us, and at the literature which expresses our faith in men, may judge the Victorian Age to be, on the whole, the noblest and most inspiring in the history of the world.

## I. THE POETS OF THE VICTORIAN AGE

ALFRED TENNYSON (1809-1892)

O young Mariner,  
You from the haven  
Under the sea-cliff,  
You that are watching  
The gray Magician  
With eyes of wonder,  
I am Merlin,  
And I am dying,  
I am Merlin  
Who follow The Gleam.

.....  
O young Mariner,  
Down to the haven  
Call your companions,  
Launch your vessel,  
And crowd your canvas,  
And, ere it vanishes  
Over the margin,  
After it, follow it,  
Follow The Gleam.

One who reads this haunting poem of "Merlin and The Gleam" finds in it a suggestion of the spirit of the poet's whole life, — his devotion to the ideal as expressed in poetry, his early romantic impressions, his struggles, doubts, triumphs, and his thrilling message to his race. Throughout the entire Victorian period Tennyson stood at the summit of poetry in England. Not in vain was he appointed laureate at the death of Wordsworth, in 1850; for, almost alone among those who have held the office, he felt the importance of his place, and filled and honored it. For nearly half a century Tennyson was not only a man and a poet; he was a voice, the voice of a whole people, expressing in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, their griefs and their triumphs. In the wonderful variety of his verse he suggests all the qualities of England's greatest poets. The dreaminess of Spenser, the

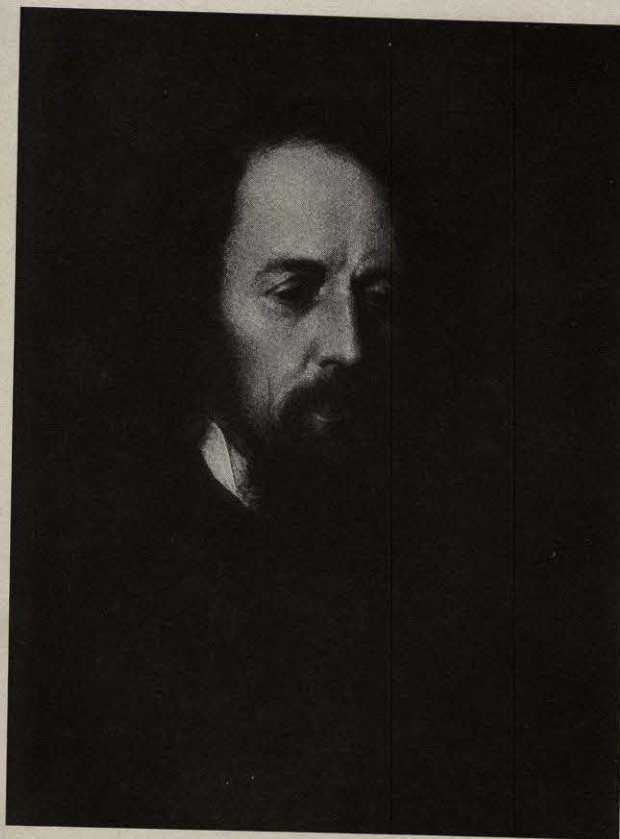


majesty of Milton, the natural simplicity of Wordsworth, the fantasy of Blake and Coleridge, the melody of Keats and Shelley, the narrative vigor of Scott and Byron, — all these striking qualities are evident on successive pages of Tennyson's poetry. The only thing lacking is the dramatic power of the Elizabethans. In reflecting the restless spirit of this progressive age Tennyson is as remarkable as Pope was in voicing the artificiality of the early eighteenth century. As a poet, therefore, who expresses not so much a personal as a national spirit, he is probably the most representative literary man of the Victorian era.

**Life.** Tennyson's life is a remarkable one in this respect, that from beginning to end he seems to have been dominated by a single impulse, the impulse of poetry. He had no large or remarkable experiences, no wild oats to sow, no great successes or reverses, no business cares or public offices. For sixty-six years, from the appearance of the *Poems by Two Brothers*, in 1827, until his death in 1892, he studied and practiced his art continually and exclusively. Only Browning, his fellow-worker, resembles him in this; but the differences in the two men are world-wide. Tennyson was naturally shy, retiring, indifferent to men, hating noise and publicity, loving to be alone with nature, like Wordsworth. Browning was sociable, delighting in applause, in society, in travel, in the noise and bustle of the big world.

Tennyson was born in the rectory of Somersby, Lincolnshire, in 1809. The sweet influences of his early natural surroundings can be better understood from his early poems than from any biography. He was one of the twelve children of the Rev. George Clayton Tennyson, a scholarly clergyman, and his wife Elizabeth Fytche, a gentle, lovable woman, "not learned, save in gracious household ways," to whom the poet pays a son's loyal tribute near the close of *The Princess*. It is interesting to note that most of these children were poetically inclined, and that two of the brothers, Charles and Frederick, gave far greater promise than did Alfred.

When seven years old the boy went to his grandmother's house at Louth, in order to attend a famous grammar school at that place. Not even a man's memory, which generally makes light of hardship and glorifies early experiences, could ever soften Tennyson's hatred



ALFRED TENNYSON

After the portrait by George Frederic Watts



of school life. His complaint was not so much at the roughness of the boys, which had so frightened Cowper, as at the brutality of the teachers, who put over the school door a wretched Latin inscription translating Solomon's barbarous advice about the rod and the child. In these psychologic days, when the child is more important than the curriculum, and when we teach girls and boys rather than Latin and arithmetic, we read with wonder Carlyle's description of his own schoolmaster, evidently a type of his kind, who "knew of the human soul thus much, that it had a faculty called memory, and could be acted on through the muscular integument by application of birch rods." After four years of most unsatisfactory school life, Tennyson returned home, and was fitted for the university by his scholarly father. With his brothers he wrote many verses, and his first efforts appeared in a little volume called *Poems by Two Brothers*, in 1827. The next year he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, where he became the center of a brilliant circle of friends, chief of whom was the young poet Arthur Henry Hallam.

At the university Tennyson soon became known for his poetical ability, and two years after his entrance he gained the prize of the Chancellor's Medal for a poem called "Timbuctoo," the subject, needless to say, being chosen by the chancellor. Soon after winning this honor Tennyson published his first signed work, called *Poems Chiefly Lyrical* (1830), which, though it seems somewhat crude and disappointing to us now, nevertheless contained the germ of all his later poetry. One of the most noticeable things in this volume is the influence which Byron evidently exerted over the poet in his early days; and it was perhaps due largely to the same romantic influence that Tennyson and his friend Hallam presently sailed away to Spain, with the idea of joining the army of insurgents against King Ferdinand. Considered purely as a revolutionary venture, this was something of a fiasco, suggesting the noble Duke of York and his ten thousand men,—"he marched them up a hill, one day; and he marched them down again." From a literary view point, however, the experience was not without its value. The deep impression which the wild beauty of the Pyrenees made upon the young poet's mind is reflected clearly in the poem "Cenone."

In 1831 Tennyson left the university without taking his degree. The reasons for this step are not clear; but the family was poor, and poverty may have played a large part in his determination. His father died a few months later; but, by a generous arrangement



with the new rector, the family retained the rectory at Somersby, and here, for nearly six years, Tennyson lived in a retirement which strongly suggests Milton at Horton. He read and studied widely, cultivated an intimate acquaintance with nature, thought deeply on the problems suggested by the Reform Bill which was then agitating England, and during his leisure hours wrote poetry. The first fruits of this retirement appeared, late in 1832, in a wonderful little volume bearing the simple name *Poems*. As the work of a youth only twenty-three, this book is remarkable for the variety and melody of its verse. Among its treasures we still read with delight "The Lotos Eaters," "Palace of Art," "A Dream of Fair Women," "The Miller's Daughter," "Enone," and "The Lady of Shalott"; but the critics of the *Quarterly*, who had brutally condemned his earlier work, were again unmercifully severe. The effect of this harsh criticism upon a sensitive nature was most unfortunate; and when his friend Hallam died, in 1833, Tennyson was plunged into a period of gloom and sorrow. The sorrow may be read in the exquisite little poem beginning, "Break, break, break, On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!" which was his first published elegy for his friend; and the depressing influence of the harsh and unjust criticism is suggested in "Merlin and The Gleam," which the reader will understand only after he has read Tennyson's biography.

For nearly ten years after Hallam's death Tennyson published nothing, and his movements are hard to trace as the family went here and there, seeking peace and a home in various parts of England. But though silent, he continued to write poetry, and it was in these sad wandering days that he began his immortal *In Memoriam* and his *Idylls of the King*. In 1842 his friends persuaded him to give his work to the world, and with some hesitation he published his *Poems*. The success of this work was almost instantaneous, and we can appreciate the favor with which it was received when we read the noble blank verse of "Ulysses" and "Morte d'Arthur," the perfect little song of grief for Hallam which we have already mentioned, and the exquisite idylls like "Dora" and "The Gardener's Daughter," which aroused even Wordsworth's enthusiasm and brought from him a letter saying that he had been trying all his life to write such an English pastoral as "Dora" and had failed. From this time forward Tennyson, with increasing confidence in himself and his message, steadily maintained his place as the best known and best loved poet in England.

The year 1850 was a happy one for Tennyson. He was appointed poet laureate, to succeed Wordsworth; and he married Emily Sellwood,

Her whose gentle will has changed my fate  
And made my life a perfumed altar flame,

whom he had loved for thirteen years, but whom his poverty had prevented him from marrying. The year is made further remarkable by the publication of *In Memoriam*, probably the most enduring of his poems, upon which he had worked at intervals for sixteen years. Three years later, with the money that his work now brought him, he leased the house Farringford, in the Isle of Wight, and settled in the first permanent home he had known since he left the rectory at Somersby.

For the remaining forty years of his life he lived, like Wordsworth, "in the stillness of a great peace," writing steadily, and enjoying the friendship of a large number of people, some distinguished, some obscure, from the kindly and sympathetic Victoria to the servants on his own farm. All of these he called with equal sincerity his friends, and to each one he was the same man, simple, strong, kindly, and noble. Carlyle describes him as "a fine, large-featured, dim-eyed, bronze-colored, shaggy-headed man, . . . most restful, brotherly, solid-hearted." Loving solitude and hating publicity as he did, the numerous tourists from both sides of the ocean, who sought him out in his retreat and insisted upon seeing him, made his life at times intolerable. Influenced partly by the desire to escape such popularity, he bought land and built for himself a new house, Aldworth, in Surrey, though he made his home in Farringford for the greater part of the year.

His labor during these years and his marvelous freshness and youthfulness of feeling are best understood by a glance at the contents of his complete works. Inferior poems, like *The Princess*, which was written in the first flush of his success, and his dramas, which were written against the advice of his best friends, may easily be criticised; but the bulk of his verse shows an astonishing originality and vigor to the very end. He died very quietly at Aldworth, with his family about him in the moonlight, and beside him a volume of Shakespeare, open at the dirge in *Cymbeline*:

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,  
Nor the furious winter's rages;  
Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages.



The strong and noble spirit of his life is reflected in one of his best known poems, "Crossing the Bar," which was written in his eighty-first year, and which he desired should be placed at the end of his collected works:

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as, moving, seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar.

**Works.** At the outset of our study of Tennyson's works it may be well to record two things, by way of suggestion. First, Tennyson's poetry is not so much to be studied as to be read and appreciated; he is a poet to have open on one's table, and to enjoy as one enjoys his daily exercise. And second, we should by all means begin to get acquainted with Tennyson in the days of our youth. Unlike Browning, who is generally appreciated by more mature minds, Tennyson is for enjoyment, for inspiration, rather than for instruction. Only youth can fully appreciate him; and youth, unfortunately, except in a few rare, beautiful cases, is something which does not dwell with us long after our school days. The secret of poetry, especially of Tennyson's poetry, is to be eternally young, and, like Adam in Paradise, to find every morning a new world, fresh, wonderful, inspiring, as if just from the hands of God.

Except by the student, eager to understand the whole range of poetry in this age, Tennyson's earlier poems and Early Poems, his later dramas may well be omitted. Opinions and Dramas vary about both; but the general judgment seems to be that the earlier poems show too much of Byron's influence, and their crudeness suffers by comparison with the exquisitely finished work of Tennyson's middle life. Of dramatic works he wrote seven, his great ambition being to present a large part of the history of England in a series of dramas. *Becket* was one of the best of these works and met with considerable favor on the stage; but, like all the others, it indicates that Tennyson lacked the dramatic power and the humor necessary for a successful playwright.

Among the remaining poems there is such a wide variety that every reader must be left largely to follow his own delicate The Princess, lightful choice.<sup>1</sup> Of the *Poems* of 1842 we have and Maud already mentioned those best worth reading. *The Princess, a Medley* (1847), a long poem of over three thousand lines of blank verse, is Tennyson's answer to the question of woman's rights and woman's sphere, which was then, as in our own day, strongly agitating the public mind. In this poem a baby finally solves the problem which philosophers have pondered ever since men began to think connectedly about human society. A few exquisite songs, like "Tears, Idle Tears," "Bugle Song," and "Sweet and Low," form the most delightful part of this poem, which in general is hardly up to the standard of the poet's later work. *Maud* (1855) is what is called in literature a monodrama, telling the story of a lover who passes from morbidness to ecstasy, then to anger and murder, followed by insanity and recovery. This was Tennyson's favorite, and among his friends he read aloud from it more than from any other poem. Perhaps if we could

<sup>1</sup> An excellent little volume for the beginner is Van Dyke's "Poems by Tennyson," which shows the entire range of the poet's work from his earliest to his latest years. (See Selections for Reading, at the end of this chapter.)



hear Tennyson read it, we should appreciate it better; but, on the whole, it seems overwrought and melodramatic. Even its lyrics, like "Come into the Garden, Maud," which make this work a favorite with young lovers, are characterized by "prettiness" rather than by beauty or strength.

Perhaps the most loved of all Tennyson's works is *In Memoriam*, which, on account of both its theme and its exquisite workmanship, is "one of the few immortal things that were not born to die." The immediate occasion of this remarkable poem was Tennyson's profound personal grief at the death of his friend Hallam. As he wrote lyric after lyric, inspired by this sad subject, the poet's grief became less personal, and the greater grief of humanity mourning for its dead and questioning its immortality took possession of him. Gradually the poem became an expression, first, of universal doubt, and then of universal faith,—a faith which rests ultimately not on reason or philosophy, but on the soul's instinct for immortality. The immortality of human love is the theme of the poem, which is made up of over one hundred different lyrics. The movement takes us through three years, rising slowly from poignant sorrow and doubt to a calm peace and hope, and ending with a noble hymn of courage and faith,—a modest courage and a humble faith, love-inspired,—which will be a favorite as long as saddened men turn to literature for consolation. Though Darwin's greatest books had not yet been written, science had already overturned many old conceptions of life; and Tennyson, who lived apart and thought deeply on all the problems of his day, gave this poem to the world as his own answer to the doubts and questionings of men. This universal human interest, together with its exquisite form and melody, makes the poem, in popular favor at least, the supreme threnody, or elegiac poem, of our literature; though Milton's *Lycidas* is, from the critical view point, undoubtedly a more artistic work.



SIR GALAHAD



*The Idylls of the King* ranks among the greatest of Tennyson's later works. Its general subject is the Celtic legends of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table, and the chief source of its material is Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. Here, in this mass of beautiful legends, is certainly the subject of a great national epic; yet after four hundred years, during which many poets have used the material, the great epic is still unwritten. Milton and Spenser, as we have already noted, considered this material carefully; and Milton alone, of all English writers, had perhaps the power to use it in a great epic. Tennyson began to use these legends in his *Morte d'Arthur* (1842); but the epic idea probably occurred to him later, in 1856, when he began "Geraint and Enid," and he added the stories of "Vivien," "Elaine," "Guinevere," and other heroes and heroines at intervals, until "Balin," the last of the *Idylls*, appeared in 1885. Later these works were gathered together and arranged with an attempt at unity. The result is in no sense an epic poem, but rather a series of single poems loosely connected by a thread of interest in Arthur, the central personage, and in his unsuccessful attempt to found an ideal kingdom.

Entirely different in spirit is another collection of poems called *English Idylls*,<sup>1</sup> which began in the *Poems* of 1842, and which Tennyson intended should reflect the ideals of widely different types of English life. Of these varied poems, "Dora," "The Gardener's Daughter," "Ulysses," "Locksley Hall" and "Sir Galahad" are the best; but all are worthy of study. One of the most famous of this series is "Enoch Arden" (1864), in which Tennyson turns from mediæval knights, from lords, heroes, and fair ladies, to find the material for true poetry among the lowly people that make up the bulk of English life. Its rare melody, its sympathy for common life, and its revelation of

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson made a distinction in spelling between the *Idylls of the King*, and the *English Idylls*, like "Dora."

the beauty and heroism which hide in humble men and women everywhere, made this work an instant favorite. Judged by its sales alone, it was the most popular of his works during the poet's lifetime.

Tennyson's later volumes, like the *Ballads* (1880) and *Demeter* (1889), should not be overlooked, since they contain some of his best work. The former contains stirring war songs, like "The Defence of Lucknow," and pictures of wild passionate grief, like "Rizpah"; the latter is notable for "Romney's Remorse," a wonderful piece of work; "Merlin and The Gleam," which expresses the poet's lifelong ideal; and several exquisite little songs, like "The Throstle," and "The Oak," which show how marvelously the aged poet retained his youthful freshness and inspiration. Here certainly is variety enough to give us long years of literary enjoyment; and we need hardly mention miscellaneous poems, like "The Brook" and "The Charge of the Light Brigade," which are known to every schoolboy; and "Wages" and "The Higher Pantheism," which should be read by every man who thinks about the old, old problem of life and death.

**Characteristics of Tennyson's Poetry.** If we attempt to sum up the quality of Tennyson, as shown in all these works, the task is a difficult one; but three things stand out more or less plainly. First, Tennyson is essentially the artist. No other in his age studied the art of poetry so constantly or with such singleness of purpose; and only Swinburne rivals him in melody and the perfect finish of his verse. Second, like all the great writers of his age, he is emphatically a teacher, often a leader. In the preceding age, as the result of the turmoil produced by the French Revolution, lawlessness was more or less common, and individuality was the rule in literature. Tennyson's theme, so characteristic of his age, is the reign of order, — of law in the physical world, producing evolution, and of law in the spiritual world, working out the perfect man. *In Memoriam*, *Idylls of the King*, *The Princess*, —



here are three widely different poems; yet the theme of each, so far as poetry is a kind of spiritual philosophy and weighs its words before it utters them, is the orderly development of law in the natural and in the spiritual world.

This certainly is a new doctrine in poetry, but the message does not end here. Law implies a source, a method, an object. Tennyson, after facing his doubts honestly and manfully, finds law even in the sorrows and losses of humanity. He gives this law an infinite and personal source, and finds the supreme purpose of all law to be a revelation of divine love. All earthly love, therefore, becomes an image of the heavenly. What first perhaps attracted readers to Tennyson, as to Shakespeare, was the character of his women, — pure, gentle, refined beings, whom we must revere as our Anglo-Saxon forefathers revered the women they loved. Like Browning, the poet had loved one good woman supremely, and her love made clear the meaning of all life. The message goes one step farther. Because law and love are in the world, faith is the only reasonable attitude toward life and death, even though we understand them not. Such, in a few words, seems to be Tennyson's whole message and philosophy.

If we attempt now to fix Tennyson's permanent place in literature, as the result of his life and work, we must apply to him the same test that we applied to Milton and Wordsworth, and, indeed, to all our great poets, and ask with the German critics, "What new thing has he said to the world or even to his own country?" The answer is, frankly, that we do not yet know surely; that we are still too near Tennyson to judge him impersonally. This much, however, is clear. In a marvelously complex age, and amid a hundred great men, he was regarded as a leader. For a full half century he was the voice of England, loved and honored as a man and a poet, not simply by a few discerning critics, but by a whole people that do not easily give their allegiance to any one man. And that, for the present, is Tennyson's sufficient eulogy.

## ROBERT BROWNING (1812-1889)

How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ  
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!

In this new song of David, from Browning's *Saul*, we have a suggestion of the astonishing vigor and hope that characterize all the works of Browning, the one poet of the age who, after thirty years of continuous work, was finally recognized and placed beside Tennyson, and whom future ages may judge to be a greater poet, — perhaps, even, the greatest in our literature since Shakespeare.

The chief difficulty in reading Browning is the obscurity of his style, which the critics of half a century ago held up to ridicule. Their attitude towards the poet's early work may be inferred from Tennyson's humorous criticism of *Sordello*. It may be remembered that the first line of this obscure poem is, "Who will may hear Sordello's story told"; and that the last line is, "Who would has heard Sordello's story told." Tennyson remarked that these were the only lines in the whole poem that he understood, and that they were evidently both lies. If we attempt to explain this obscurity, which puzzled Tennyson and many less friendly critics, we find that it has many sources. First, the poet's thought is often obscure, or else so extremely subtle that language expresses it imperfectly, —

Thoughts hardly to be packed  
Into a narrow act,  
Fancies that broke through language and escaped.

Second, Browning is led from one thing to another by his own mental associations, and forgets that the reader's associations may be of an entirely different kind. Third, **Browning's Obscurity** Browning is careless in his English, and frequently clips his speech, giving us a series of ejaculations. As we do not quite understand his processes of thought, we must stop between the ejaculations to trace out the connections.