TENNYSON

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TENNYSON

Christopher Ricks

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Preface

ALFRED TENNYSON HAD a long life, from 1809 to 1892, and he wrote a very great deal—*The Poems of Tennyson*, which I edited for Longman Annotated English Poets (1969), has eighteen hundred pages. Any book which aims to deal with both the life and the work is therefore thrust into drastic decisions. I wished to do three things: to create a sense of what Tennyson in his private life underwent and became; to make an independent exploration of his poetry, seeking to comprehend its special distinction and to establish distinctions; and to suggest some of the relationships between the life and the work, in the spirit of Carlyle's vivid glimpse of Tennyson in 1844: "a man solitary and sad, as certain men are, dwelling in an element of gloom,—carrying a bit of Chaos about him, in short, which he is manufacturing into Cosmos!"

Since a preface is the place for saying what one has not done, it should be made clear what it was that these decisions excluded. First, there is much of Tennyson's poetry which I had no room to mention, let alone to explore; if the poems which figure in these pages are the traditional choices to the point of predictability, that is because in my opinion the traditional sense of what was most creative within Tennyson's achievement is a just one. Second, I have not embarked upon Tennyson's times, upon history or literary history or history of ideas; Tennyson was not a recluse, but his essential life was the private life, and this made me decide,

moreover, that a biographical study could without falsification (though with a sad forfeiting of some fine anecdotes) phase itself out. By the 1850s, when Tennyson was married, middle aged, famous, secure, and the Poet Laureate, he had undergone all that truly formed him. Thereafter this book speaks simply of the poems.

A word about the two biographies of Tennyson which matter. *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir* (1897), by Tennyson's son Hallam Tennyson, is capacious and honorable, at its best in breathing a sense of what it was like in the immediate vicinity of Tennyson during the second half of his life. But the *Memoir* is unfortunately inaccurate, sometimes willfully so, and it is inordinately reticent. The truth about Tennyson's early life was first told by the poet's grandson, Sir Charles Tennyson, in his *Alfred Tennyson* (1949), a biography which is compact, humane, wide ranging, and unsuperseded. Neither of these biographies, however, gives any references; I have tried in the important cases to do what seems necessary at the present stage of Tennyson studies—that is, to go back behind the biographies to their unspecified sources. Such notes are at the end of the present book.

Two other accounts of Tennyson ask mention. R. W. Rader's *Tennyson's "Maud": The Biographical Genesis* (1963) stands as a notably important contribution, revealing, among other things, a love affair the failure of which mattered a great deal to Tennyson. Then, of a very different kind, there is the *Diary* (1907) of Tennyson's friend William Allingham; Allingham establishes, through his innumerable shrewd and exhilarating conversations with and about Tennyson, what seems to me the most living sense of the man Tennyson was.

Acknowledgments

I AM GRATEFUL to Lord Tennyson and Sir Charles Tennyson for permission to quote manuscript and other material. Permission to quote manuscripts has also been kindly granted by Lord Boyne; Mr. Robert Taylor; Major Alfred Tennyson d'Eyncourt; the Beinecke Library, Yale University; the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations; the British Museum; the Brotherton Collection, University of Leeds; Duke University Library; the Harvard College Library; the Huntington Library, San Marino; the Library of the University of Texas at Austin; Wellesley College Library. Quotations from the Tennyson manuscripts at Trinity College, Cambridge, are given by permission of Lord Tennyson's Trustees and with the approval of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge. My special thanks are due also to the Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, and its director, Mr. F. T. Baker, and to Mrs. N. Campbell; and to the Lincolnshire Archives Committee and Mrs. J. Varley. The British Academy gave permission for me to incorporate, in an amended form, my Chatterton Lecture (1966) on "Tennyson's Methods of Composition"; the *Malabar Review* likewise for an amended form of my essay on "Tennyson as a Love-Poet," published there in October 1969 (number twelve). I am indebted to Professor Cecil Y. Lang, who is editing Tennyson's letters and who most generously shared his knowl-

edge; also to Professor M. A. Epstein, for an opinion on scirrhus of the liver.

Quotations from the poems are from my edition of *The Poems of Tennyson* (Longman Annotated English Poets, 1969). Remarks by Tennyson, Hallam Tennyson, and Edward FitzGerald for which no source is given will be found in my edition; they derive from the Eversley Edition (1907-8). In quoting from letters, I have made a few minor changes in spelling and punctuation, particularly in expanding casual contractions; similarly in a few cases when quoting from the letters and journals of people other than Tennyson.

Mr. Graham Wicks is at work on a reprint of Hallam Tennyson's *Materials for a Life of A.T.*; this draft of the *Memoir* was printed but not published, and exists in several states at Lincoln; the existence there too of the manuscript draft for the *Materials* makes any reconstruction complicated but rewarding.

Finally, though my particular undertaking made me think it better to use my space to quote from Victorian rather than from twentieth-century critics, I wish to draw attention to two recent essays which I have found especially stimulating and truthful: one by Martin Dodsworth, in *The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations* (edited by Isobel Armstrong, 1969); the other by William E. Fredeman, on "St. Simeon Stylites," in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, volume xxxviii (1968).

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