

**TENNYSON FOR THE
YOUNG. WITH
INTRODUCTION AND
NOTES BY ALFRED AINGER**

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Tennyson for the Young. With Introduction and Notes by Alfred Ainger by Alfred Tennyson

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PREFACE

It is hoped that this little volume may be found acceptable in the schoolroom, as well as in the hours of leisure and recreation ; but it is distinctly not intended as a schoolbook, nor as an indirect instrument of studying grammar, the English language, or the Lives of the Poets. The Editor's aim will have been best attained if it prove utterly impossible to make out of its contents material for an examination paper. With this end in view, studiously avoiding criticism or presumptuous praise, he has limited the Notes to just so much matter as may give the young reader a few facts about the poems and their origin, and explain the few (very few) words or allusions that are likely to be unfamiliar. It is the Editor's earnest wish, as far as these poems are concerned, to remove English Poetry from the list of subjects the thought of which suggests preparing a lesson. For it is from such unfortunate association that the enjoyment of the masterpieces of English

Poetry and Prose by young people is at this moment most in danger.

Rather does the Editor hope that this little book may become a favourite when the school hours are over, on a bench in the summer garden, or on a sofa in the winter evenings; that it may be taken up again and again because of its delightfulness, and not because a coming lesson already 'casts its shadow before'; and that it may serve to illustrate that most certain truth that the wisest education may be in progress where any thought or idea of education is least present. And though the sympathetic voice and educated intelligence of mother or elder sister, reading these poems aloud, will often be found helpful, still there is hardly a poem here included that will not reveal something of its meaning and beauty to the very youngest by 'its own radiant light.'

The principle on which the poems here collected have been chosen is very simple. Variety—within the proposed limits—has been aimed at, and no one class of subjects or treatment will be found to predominate. Poems of a metaphysical cast have been avoided. The thoughts and speculations of *The Two Voices*, or the deep moral problems suggested in the *Palace of Art* or the *Vision of Sin*, are not for the young. Poems dealing with Love, in its more passionate aspect, have for like reasons

been excluded. Fragments, again, except in one or two instances, have not been given, and only when the passage (as from *In Memoriam*) could be separated with least injury to its interest or significance. But when these exceptions are allowed, the Editor has been surprised to find how much of Lord Tennyson's finest and most thoughtful verse is suitable to those whose acquaintance with literature is as yet of the slightest.

This remark, however, is not meant to suggest that even the easiest and simplest of the poems here printed are to be completely gauged or fathomed by the young, and that there is not, in the so-called simple poetry of any great poet, much that will 'travel with us' far beyond the term of childhood, teaching and unfolding ever more of truth and beauty as we advance. It is the infallible test of the best verse that it is never outgrown. Its charm abides. As we grow, it grows with us. A poem such as *Dora*, which does not contain a word, an allusion, a thought, a sentiment, that may not interest and delight a child of ten, can never lose any of its beauty and pathos for the very oldest reader. Such is the privilege and the power of genius.

On the other hand, I have allowed certain pieces to be here included in apparent violation of the principle just laid down. The *Lady of Shalott*, for instance, might seem an allegory

too deep or too subtle for the young, and to need, more than most of its companions, the interpreting aid of riper years and 'the graver mind.' This is so, and yet there are other qualities in such a poem, appealing to the ear and heart of even the youngest, and it is of primary importance that these qualities should become early familiar. The witchery of consummate verse — lyrical or descriptive — its exquisite music, may so early fill and possess the ear of the young (so the Editor's experience has taught him) that a standard of judgment is insensibly formed, effectually preventing the taste being ever afterwards allured by what is vulgar and garish, or the ear being ever fascinated by some clever poetical diction which yet is not Poetry.

Nor is this to precipitate matters, or reverse an order which we should all recognise as fitting, in the cultivation of taste. A mistake is sometimes made, confounding *easy* verse (verse such as beginners may understand) with verse that is mediocre. Teachers appear sometimes to assume that the taste may safely be formed upon something which a maturer judgment will some day look back upon as inferior, and wonder that it could ever have been enjoyed. A great mistake. There is no need to have resort to what is inferior. There is abundance of the best in poetry that can