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This thesis purports to expand substantially upon the only extended treatment of Tennyson's historical trilogy, a thesis written for the University of Amsterdam in 1929. The first three chapters of the present thesis treat Queen Mary, Harold, and Becket in turn. The critical response to the publication of each play is examined, the production history of each play is studied, and reviews by drama critics are surveyed. A sketch of Tennyson's life during the writing of each play begins the respective chapters.

The fourth chapter is composed of two sub-chapters. The first begins with a survey of the more important, general depreciations of Tennyson's drama written during the last seventy years. In the critical essays on each play that follow, the particular dramatic deficiencies that prompted the foregoing condemnations are pointed out. A survey of general approbative essays begins the second sub-chapter, and this is followed by essays on the particular aspects of each play that elicited the foregoing appreciations.

TENNYSON'S HISTORICAL TRILOGY

by

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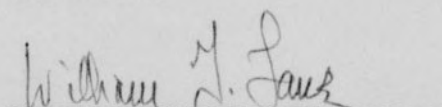

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

The only extended treatment of Tennyson's historical trilogy is by Cornelia Japikse. Her thin volume of criticism, published in 1929, was based on a thesis written for the University of Amsterdam. Charles Tennyson thought her work "useful though perhaps not very penetrating. . . ."[1] This thesis purports to expand substantially upon her work, especially in regard to the critical reception of the plays in England and in America.

The first chapter begins with a discussion of Tennyson's undertaking to write drama. An examination of the critical response to the publication of Queen Mary by surveying letters written to Tennyson as well as journal articles follows. The history of the production of the play is then given and the reviews by drama critics are examined. A study of the publication of the given play, a survey of the critical reception, a study of the production of the play and a survey of the critical reception to that also is basically the format for the study of Harold and Becket as well. A brief sketch of Tennyson's life since the publication of the last play begins both of these chapters.

The fourth chapter is composed of two sub-chapters. The first begins with a survey of the more important, general depreciations of Tennyson's dramas written during the last seventy years. These assessments deal in generalities and are included only to reveal the critical position the plays have held since their publication. There follows a

critical essay on each play in which I have attempted to point out the particular dramatic deficiencies which prompted the foregoing condemnations of Tennyson's dramatic efforts. A number of generally approbative essays on Tennyson's plays have appeared during the last century; these are surveyed. As in the previous sub-chapter, a critical essay on each play follows in which I have discussed the particular aspects of the play that have elicited the foregoing appreciations.

The bibliography is a working bibliography for research on Tennyson's historical trilogy. To incorporate, for instance, all the histories of nineteenth-century drama that mention Tennyson's trilogy would render the bibliography ineffective. Only those critical works that contribute substantially to a discussion of the trilogy have been included.

QUEEN MARY

Beginnings

In the spring of 1874, Tennyson began to fix his thoughts on definite explorations in stage drama. He was reinforced in his decision to begin work in a new genre by his friend W. G. Ward, who was indifferent to poetry but was a devotee of drama. Ward commanded an extensive knowledge of Shakespeare as well as of French literature. He claimed to have read every French play ever written. Tennyson was further prompted by the exhortations of the stage-struck Sabine Grenville.[2]

That Tennyson should have turned his attention to drama is hardly surprising. Since 1842 he had manifest his dramatic gifts in "Ulysses," "St. Simon Stylites," "Love and Duty," "Locksley Hall," "Lucretius," "The Northern Farmer," and "The Grandmother." His dramatic bent had shown itself in The Princess, Maud, and the Idylls.[3] His work was advancing toward dramatic art; the literary movement which he represented was basically dramatic, always lending itself to the study of the sufferings and attainments of others.[4] He felt the realization of his poetic potential would come only after dramatic success.[5]

Tennyson had long been a student of the Elizabethan and Greek theatre and of the romantic dramas of Goethe and Schiller. Since 1870 and his move to Aldworth, he had been spending much time in London, and he had renewed his youthful delight in the contemporary stage. He

admired the genius of Henry Irving and Helen Faucit, now his friends. He noted with great interest the successful production of Dora and Enoch Arden on the American stage. In 1870 W. S. Gilbert staged a successful parody of The Princess at the Olympic Theatre.[6]

Tennyson believed deeply in the future of the stage; he believed it to be one of the most humanizing influences. He had always longed to see the great English historical plays produced that they might enlighten the educational curriculum; he hoped the public schools would undertake it. But whenever he considered adding to this genre of historical plays, he realized how badly he wanted a basic knowledge of the mechanical details necessary for stage production. He had been a constant playgoer, though. And he could keenly follow the action of a play, the characterization, the incidents, the scenic effects, the situations, the language and dramatic points. Yet, he felt these were only stage formalities. He knew that being a first-rate historical playwright meant more research than he had been used to in the past; it meant exact history, which had taken the place of chance chronicle.[7] And so, even though he felt inadequate to the task, he also felt there would be great pride in the Laureate's becoming the poetical historian of England.[8] At sixty-five he knew he was taking a big risk. The work would be arduous; he had no experience. The departure from lyric and idyllic poetry would probably be resented by the critics and the public. But he thought himself ready to attempt it--the risk had to be taken.[9]

The atmosphere was propitious. The theatres were enjoying a new status and prosperity. There were now forty playhouses in London; most of them were small and encouraged new production ideas. There was gas

lighting and the industrial manufacturing of realistic scenery for more impressive effects. The long run began to oust the repertory system to the detriment of the actors' art but to the definite advantage of their purses--managers and playwrights included.[10]

Up until the mid-1860's all these advances had led to little substantial change in the theatre. But the rapid growth of the middle class was beginning to have an effect on drama and literature in general. The people craved contemporary life rather than melodrama and bombastic tragedy. In 1865 Squire Bancroft and his wife Marie Wilton brought new finesse, realism, and professional responsibility to the stage. In 1871 Henry Irving, at the age of thirty-three, took charge of the derelict Lyceum Theatre. He suffered an unfortunate start, but his enterprise was saved by his success in The Bells which was followed by a run of equal successes: W. G. Wills' Charles the First and Lytton's Richelieu. In 1874 Irving presented Hamlet, himself in the lead role. Within the week Irving was acknowledged master of the English stage, and the Lyceum became the Mecca of theatre patrons. Poetic drama was enjoying a revival; three other theatres in London staged Shakespearean plays shortly thereafter.[11]

It is significant that the Lyceum's first two successes were historical dramas. The same professional spirit was pervading the field of history, as seen in the work of Carlyle, J. R. Green and J. A. Froude. The treatment of history was more realistically human, and dramatists were turning to history for subject matter. Wills followed Charles the First with Mary Stuart, Jeanne d'Arc, and Anne Boleyn between 1870 and 1875.[12]

Not only were Carlyle, Green and Froude personal friends of Tennyson, but he, from his omnivorous reading, knew the developments in historical study. It is logical, then, that he turned to English history for the subject matter of his first experiment in the dramatic form.[13] The entry in his wife Emily's journal for April 10, 1874, states that Tennyson was at that time about to experiment.

> Lately we have been reading Holinshead and Froud's Mary, for A. has been thinking about a play of "Queen Mary," and has sketched two or three scenes. For a time he had thought of "William the Silent," but he said that our own history was so great, and that he liked English subjects best, and knew most about them, and that consequently he should do "Queen Mary."[14]

Queen Mary was to be followed by Harold (Godwinson) and Becket. The three plays would complete the line of Shakespeare's English chronicle plays which ended with the Reformation.[15]

The decision to write Queen Mary first was decided by a national controversy which reached its climax in the 1870's. The Tractarian movement in England, after the Catholic Emancipation in 1829, had meant the aggravation of religious struggle: the Catholic priests and chapels had increased very rapidly. The burgeoning of Catholic influence was compounded by the secession of noted Protestants to the Catholic camp, men like Ward, Newman and Manning. When Rome found its temporal power threatened in Europe, it moved to the political right. In 1864 Pius IX issued his Encyclical Quanta Cura which condemned equating civil with ecclesiastical authority. In 1870, he summoned the Ecumenical Council

which, the next year, confirmed by decree Papal Infallibility. England reacted to the increasingly conservative stance of the Catholic Church by forming the Protestant Alliance in 1865, and in 1871 the Convocation of Canterbury unequivocally denied Papal claims. Edward Miall moved for the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in the House of Commons. His move finally resulted in the Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874 which created a court to deal with questions of ceremony. Tennyson remained Protestant, heart and soul.[16]

But he had been moved by the religious tenacity of his Catholic friends--John Simeon, William Ward, Aubrey de Vere. He admired their faithful devotion to their church. (Tennyson was also lured by the mystical aspects of the Catholic Communion.) He felt the poignancy of the religious struggle leading to the Reformation and decided to attempt a play about Queen Mary's reign. Shakespeare, he considered, had not handled it, and the historians had not dealt with it satisfactorily. He was drawn by the fierce crisis as well as the wonderful scope of her reign.[17]

He was also enticed by the character of Mary herself. Her father had mistreated her mother and herself; the hurt must have pierced to her soul. Tennyson thought she had been harshly judged by tradition, which had delivered the popular verdict of "guilty." He wanted to portray her as his imagination saw her. For he sincerely pitied the poor child treated with such shameless contumely by her father and friends alike. He saw what caused her bright mind to be clouded over; he sympathized with her queenly courage. Tennyson thought nothing more tragic, after her hopes for her church and kingdom had been quenched,

then her deep longing for requited love, finding herself hated by the people and abandoned by her husband. Tennyson meditated upon the restless despair in which she died.[18]

After reading Froude's Mary to Emily in April 1874, Tennyson began comprehensive readings from various histories to insure fairness. He was not content with contemporary treatments, going back to earlier sources. The lists of books he read on the subject is in his notebooks. It contains: Collier's Ecclesiastical History; Fuller's Church History; Burnet's Reformation; Foxe's Book of Martyrs; Hayward's Edward; Cave's P. X. Y.; Hooker; Neal's History of the Puritans; Strype's Parker, Ecclesiastical Memorials, Cranmer; Philip's Pole, Primitive Fathers No Papists; Lingard's History of England, Church Historians of England, Zürich Letters and Original Letters and Correspondence of Archbishop Parker; as well as the works of Froude, Holinshed and Camden.[19] This list, as evidenced by the dramas, is not exhaustive. The scope of his reading was vast, but so was his aim--to realize the atmosphere of thought and feeling during those turbulent times, to gain a distinct and unbiased understanding of motives. Truth and fairness were, for Tennyson, always essential--and difficult: he strove to do justice to England's most unpopular monarch. He sought to make her human, not to justify her cruelty and hardness.[20] He sought to adhere to historical fact without corrupting it, to make us pity the sufferings of that wretched woman by subtle psychological exposition. The genius of the work is thus all the more striking when we realize that the poet is not in sympathy with Mary's political and religious opinions, nor does he want us to be.[21]

Because Tennyson planned to work on Queen Mary during that winter, in August 1884 he took the family to France. There he attended the Théâtre-francais and admired the recent works of Got and Coquelin, which were to influence his own, Becket especially. Tennyson and his son Hallam returned to England leaving Emily and his other son Lionel in Paris. During his stay Lionel became engaged to Eleanor Locker with whom he and Hallam had played as boys.[22]

Back at Farrington, Emily resumed the burden of answering the questioning letters sent to Tennyson. The letters asked advice of the Laureate or desired criticisms of his poetry in the main, but his views and opinions on so many topics were regarded as definitive by a large majority of his countrymen that his correspondence was voluminous.[23] Emily became fatigued answering these letters and resigned her position as his private secretary; she even gave up entering the course of their daily affairs in her journal. Though relatively sound physically (she was eighty-three when she died), she was hypersensitive. This final collapse was due to emotional strain; she, henceforth, was confined to the sofa. And it was from there that she exercised her considerable influence on the poet. Hallam's devotion alone matched his mother's. He left Cambridge that fall to become his father's reader, secretary, and companion.[24]

February, March, and April 1875 were spent, for the most part, in London. Not only did Tennyson, Emily, and Hallam want to be near Lionel, who was appointed to the India office in 1876, the poet also wanted to establish stage connections, now that he was resolved to write and stage poetic drama.

Publication

Queen Mary was published in May 1875, at six shillings per copy. Though the sales were poor, there was a second printing the same year. The physical appearance of the volume is the same as that of the first editions of his poetry. It was issued in dark green cloth boards with the title in gilt across the spine: "Queen Mary/Tennyson/Henry S. King and Co." The title page reads, "Queen Mary/A Drama/By Alfred Tennyson/Henry S. King Co., London/1875." The title page is followed by two pages of dramatis personae and the text, pages 1 to 278. The music was published separately under the title The Music to Alfred Tennyson's Drama: Queen Mary [,] consisting of Overture, Entr'actes, Songs and Incidental Music Composed by C. Villiers Stanford, London [1875].[26]

Tennyson thought the play quite good and agreed with his friend R. H. Hutton completely when he wrote "Almost all the characters who play a real part in the drama, however slightly touched, are clearly defined."[27] His other friends were no less enthusiastic. On May 7 Froude wrote Tennyson: " . . .you have reclaimed one more section of English History from the wilderness and given it a form in which it will be fixed forever. No one since Shakespeare has done that."[28] In his letter dated June 30, Browning told Tennyson, in the "Conception, execution, the whole and the parts, I see nowhere the shade of a fault. . . ."[29] Count Munster wrote Prince Bismarck that " . . .he had already read parts of 'Queen Mary' with the greatest pleasure and admiration."[30] Gladstone congratulated Tennyson "on the Poem, on the Study, and the grace and ease with which [he] move[d] in new

habiliments."[31] There were a few among his friends who were not quite so enthusiastic. Francis Palgrave was quite apprehensive. His was to be the contemporary critical opinion when he told Tennyson that he did not think the play good enough for the closet when read or dramatic enough for the stage when acted.[32]

The first major public review of Queen Mary was Sir Richard Jebb's in The Times. His praise was unqualified; he found the play to be "not only a fine poem but a fine drama."[33] He felt there was masterful harmony among the several powers that worked together in the play. He maintained that such "dramatic glow and impetus,"[34] such "dramatic fire"[35] had been missing from stage drama since Henry VIII. For him, Tennyson's treatment of Queen Mary's reign formed a vivid picture. He found Tennyson's art to rest in the skill with which the dramatist counterbalanced the horror which Mary as a persecutor excites with the compassion which is felt for Mary the sufferer. He proclaimed the narrative and descriptive passages and the songs all worthy of the Laureate.[36]

Few articles shared in Jebb's enthusiastic approbation of the play. Yet the critics could not easily assail Tennyson's work--his literary position was too secure.[37] This reluctance to criticize the Laureate's play is evident in the opening remarks in a review of the play in the Academy, June 26. "It seems so like an impertinence to say that the subject chosen by Mr. Tennyson . . . does not contain the stuff of tragedy . . . ."[38] The reviewer noted that Tennyson developed characters of great subtlety with his masterful touch and that the play was historically accurate in spirit and tone. But he questioned whether

Tennyson was not trying to make a tragedy where there were not the materials for one, from the "monotonous misery of her [Mary's] life."[39] Lang was one of the first critics to notice the un-Tennysonian quality of the verse in Queen Mary, which lacked his usual polish; Lang, however, found the plain verse appropriate to the play. He commended the careful portraits of Elizabeth and Gardiner.[40]

The Quarterly Review's long critical essay in the July issue compared Tennyson's play to the historical tragedies of Shakespeare and found Tennyson's lacking. The anonymous reviewer defended his position by pointing to Tennyson's over-reliance on chronicle, his too frequent description of action off stage (which would have been on stage in Shakespeare), his introduction of many people merely for the sake of criticism and comment. The reviewer found Queen Mary to be only closet drama, below the dignity of the stage, because action was subordinated to idea and subtle analysis was substituted for active imagination: there is more motive than effect.[41]

In fact, the reviewer found Queen Mary more a Greek than English play. One is expected to sympathize with the Queen as one sympathizes with Oedipus or pious Antigone, for both were actuated by great motives, yet impelled by destiny to perform deplorable deeds. Queen Mary, however, is not a classical shadow but a historical sovereign. Tennyson has made her subject to Nemesis, which, while it might have been the first principle of Greek works, is contrary to Christian free-will. In Shakespeare men are free moral agents--action predominates, but in Tennyson men are puppets of destiny--thought predominates.[42] Tennyson has followed Froude's history too minutely at the loss of his poetic

freedom; he lacks the greatness of Shakespeare's poetic manner. Lastly, while the reviewer found the play distinguished by vivid color, he found the versification less precise (than in the Idylls, for instance), containing more harsh, rugged and abrupt lines.[43]

The anonymous author of the review of Queen Mary in the Saturday Review for July 3 found the play wanting in interest. Tennyson has missed his mark: first, one feels contempt rather than pity for Queen Mary because she abandoned herself to a wasted passion; second, the poet failed to show any reason why her attendants should be as devoted to her as they are. Cranmer's final resolution appeared to this reviewer to be little more than a mixture of obstinacy and a wish to be on the safe side.[44] He judged the attempts at humor strained but the verse beautiful (except in passages of intentional roughness). Mary's passionate anger in the last act is good dramatically but deals in excess and finally repels us. "Despite the many beauties . . . the whole effect of Queen Mary is disappointing, and the impression which it leaves upon the reader's mind is one of a dreary and bitter harshness."[45]

In the September issue of Macmillan's Magazine, Jebb published a rejoinder to the hostile criticisms of Tennyson's play. In answer to the question of whether Queen Mary was a good heroine for a tragedy, he responded that she was pathetic rather than dramatic and that this made for great demands on the playwright. Tennyson's protagonist, however, was not simply Queen Mary but England during its most repulsive period. Tennyson was not concerned so much with the physical horror as the intellectual littleness of the Marian persecution--its cowardice and cruelty.[46]

Jebb stated that the characters are alive, except when deliberate historical study is undertaken which does result in closet drama. But these scenes are fleeting; the rest is real drama. He found the portraitures of Pole and Elizabeth particularly good: the former reveals a narrow mind dominated by Catholic enthusiasm;[47] the latter evolves as an attractive character who commands strong sympathy. Though isolated, Elizabeth is resolved to fight her own battles; she answers impertinence with quiet dignity and even though Jebb found the deliberate imitation of Shakespeare's coarseness disagreeable,[48] he concluded that Queen Mary is " . . .noble drama of which the distinctive power resides in subtle studies of character, not, like that of the Shakespearean histories, in a profusion of ideas and images rather loosely dependent on the theme."[49] Tennyson had successfully caught the difference between the two ages.

An anonymous retrospective review of Queen Mary published in the Edinburgh Review for April 1877 is representative of the English position on Tennyson's first play. The reviewer considered Queen Mary a closet drama which is the result of Tennyson's having saddled himself with a topic that had been given the attention of brilliant contemporary historians--he was tied to the details of history.[50] In regard to characterization, the reviewer found Queen Mary contemptible but by no means devoid of interest. There is pathos, though of an ignoble sort, and the realism, which gives an edge to some of the more salient passages, also forces detail on one's notice. The reader thus loses that broad, comprehensive view that might have given Queen Mary the kind of dignity which serious drama demands. The real weakness of the play,

however, lies not in its realism but rather in its want of intelligibly developed action and the subordination of the parts to the scheme and purpose of the whole. Second and third-rate characters make disproportionate claims on one's attention; long conversations often have no influence on the activities of the main character; in many scenes the poet is uncertain of his aim. The play has no climax and no results.[51] There is pathos and the power of indicating character certainly, "but that it should be spoken of a model of dramatic force only shows what contemporary dramatic criticism has come to."[52]

The reaction against Tennyson in England and the candid criticisms of his play emboldened critics in America so speak out where, for two decades, it would have been blasphemy to do so, though the voice of American criticism seldom became as harsh as the British.[53] The reviewer for the July issue of Nation wrote disparagingly of Tennyson's play, pointing out its un-Tennysonian lack of melody and sweetness, its little subtlety of sentiment or refinement of diction, its absence of the poet's personal passion. But against these changes the reviewer also defended Tennyson, reminding the reader that the Laureate was writing drama, not poetry.[54] Though moralistic at times and always patriotic, Tennyson, this reviewer decided, was true to dramatic principles: there is true historic drama, though there is no mounting dramatic interest, due to his close adherence to historical fact. Queen Mary is only a vivifying of known history. He was never tempted to represent the complex interaction and influencing of personalities; the intentions of the character are ever clearly before us--to the great merit of the work. In the full, masculine verse Tennyson caught

the virility of Queen Mary's age. And while aspects of the characters are left to conjecture, we get the feeling we have been with real persons. It speaks to Tennyson's success.[55]

William Dean Howells in the Atlantic Monthly for August also commented upon Tennyson's extreme departure from what had been associated with him; Howells expected something more classical. Queen Mary is Shakespearean tragic history without Shakespearean excellence, though some of the verse is superior.[56] There is little unity and no strong central spring, just the shifting of scenes without much relevancy. Mary and Philip are no more than collected historical traits, little added to by the poet; their passions are literary. Tennyson shows his want of dramatic genius in the minor scenes offstage: one only hears of Wyatt's being taken, of Lady Jane Grey's being put to death, of Cranmer's being burned. One learns too much by veiled and disputed report. Howells questioned the roughness of certain passages and finally concluded that the play is successful neither dramatically nor poetically, though it is interesting history.[57]

The anonymous review in Scribner's Monthly for September defended Tennyson's diction, stating that neutral diction was best for defining character--the heavy outlines of men in different poses. But there is little life in these men. Though historically correct, the work is heavy and un-united. The workmanship demands respect but not admiration. The play is Shakespearean in veneer only.[58]

The same month Henry James published a review of Queen Mary in The Galaxy. He, too, thought the play un-Tennysonian: "This reads like Tennyson doing his best not to be Tennyson, and very fairly succeeding."[59]

Mary's monologue over her imagined intimations of maternity he thought to be fine verse but the magic nothing of Tennyson's former greatness. These passages are " . . .hardly more vivid and genuine than the sustained posturings of brilliant tableaux vivants."[60] The shape of the play is its fundamental weakness, for it is only chronicle, though worked with ability. Its beginning, middle and end are determined by chronicle: it has no shape of its own. Tennyson needed invention but had none to bring to the task; history might have suffered, but poetry would have gained.[61]

For James, Queen Mary was the success of the poem: Tennyson kept her sympathetic and human, though he carefully darkened the shadows of her portrait. He rightly kept her a complex personage.[62] But the male characters are deficient in interest; Philip is too vague, and Cardinal Pole is inapt for action. There is merit, however; it lies in the elevated spirit of their collective characterizations, in the Tudor refusal to abdicate manhood.[63]

One of the few defenses of the play was printed in The International Review that same September. The unsigned review maintains that the characters in Queen Mary are boldly drawn, that the diction of the play is Tennyson's best, that there is unity of plot and sustained interest, that language is subordinate to action.[64] There is sustained dignity and polish as well as naturalness of dialogue. The reviewer assured his readers: "That this volume is far in advance of Mr. Tennyson's latest antecedent publications, as a work of literary art, and will add to his reputation, we have no doubt . . . ."[65]

The appreciative essay in the Southern Review for October was equally generous. The reviewer lauded the Laureate's play as a "new and noble contribution to the dramatic literature of the age. . . ."[66] Tennyson has moved from unreal legends to deal with significant history, from shadowy creations to deal with actual men. The protagonists are delineated with fair candor, all very worthily done.[67] The blank verse moves along easily; at times it seems but manly prose, only to break forth in exalted verse. In short, " . . .we congratulate ourselves and the literary world in general upon the acquisition of this last and most worthy effort of a great man's genius."[68] Few reviewers shared in the critical benevolence shown in the two foregoing reviews.

More indicative of the general opinion of American critics is a review of the play by Henry Adams in the October North American Review. Adams compared Tennyson's treatment of history to Shakespeare's. Tennyson's language is suggestive of the Bard's. Yet Queen Mary will not bear the test of comparison: there is no profoundly tragic human interest of passion. Tennyson added little to history; his characterizations are prosaic. But if he was deficient in inventiveness, he was a master of form. There is much in the drama that is carefully worked out, though the analysis, perhaps, is excessive. The rough diction is questioned as well as the manner of characterization: Tennyson deals with Mary respectfully (though he never wholly identifies with her), but he makes Philip vulgar, and the play is made vulgar in turn. Adams declared with a lack of assurance characteristic of much of the criticism of the time that the facts of a protagonist's character are

not reason enough to degrade poetry.[69] Adams stated, in short, that Tennyson is the master of form, not thought; that he could express, not invent. But Adams concluded his study with the optimistic observation that there is enough excellent work in the play to make the world ask for more.[70]

Production

Because Tennyson had never before written for the stage, he hoped that some actor or dramatist might approve of the play enough to edit it. It was gratifying to him that there was immediate interest, due no doubt to his poetical prestige. For although Swinburne, Browning, and William Morris had gained favor with youth, Tennyson's position was still unchallenged. Thus there was great excitement in theatrical circles when it was announced that Queen Mary would shortly be produced by the Batemans at the Lyceum. Tennyson was delighted to have secured Henry Irving to edit the play and take a leading rôle in it.[71]

Irving immediately began considering what was to be cut. Tennyson hoped he would play Cardinal Pole, but Sabine Grenville, who had been instrumental in getting the Batemans to accept the play, insisted that Irving should be Philip. Irving agreed to play Philip. His progress in the theatre had been checked by the comparative failure of both his Macbeth and his Othello. He was not certain what type of drama to try next; the role of Philip would give him an unexacting part, and during the time the play lasted, he could consider his situation.[72]

As a respite from negotiations Tennyson, Emily, Hallam and Lionel all went to Pau in August to benefit from the sun, sea, and air. When

they got home, the arrangements had been completed for production. The play had been drastically cut--it was reduced by more than half. The important and best-known characters had been all but eliminated: Cranmer, Cardinal Pole, Thomas Wyatt and Bonner. Tennyson gracefully accepted the mutilation because he needed the money from the production. The book sales of Queen Mary had fallen short, and he had substantial liabilities in the two country homes, the spring visits to London, and Lionel's engagement.[73]

Tennyson asked Charles Villiers Stanford, a friend of Hallam's, to compose the music. (He was not favorably received by the music director of the theatre who had wanted the commission for himself). Stanford had never composed on a small scale before; there was not enough room in the Lyceum for the orchestra his composition required. Tennyson himself paid for the removal of some of the stalls, and the score was accepted, which established the young Stanford.[74]

Queen Mary opened April 18, 1876. Mrs. Kate Crowe (the Batemans' daughter) portrayed Queen Mary, with Irving in the relatively small role of Philip. The first performance was received by an audience of Tennyson admirers who went into rapture over Irving's Philip. Sabine Grenville telegraphed her exuberant congratulations to Tennyson (who had refused to attend the rehearsal and said he would probably never see the play):

> Love, victory, blessing. Enormous applause. Audience listened to tragic part in breathless silence. Batemans ecstatic.[75]

Robert Browning wrote the next day: "I want to be among the earliest who assure you of the complete success of your 'Queen Mary' last night."[76]

The success of the play on the stage was attributed to Irving, however, and not to Tennyson. Ellen Terry in her autobiography stated that Irving had never done anything better in his life than Philip: "Never shall I forget his expression and manner when Miss Bateman, as Queen Mary (she was very good, by the way,) was pouring out her heart to him."[77] Terry thought Irving's performance a spellbinding study in cruelty and gave all the credit to Irving " . . .for Tennyson never suggested half what Henry Irving did."[78]

Frederick Wedmore in his review of the stage production in the Academy for April commended Irving's wise editing of the play in sacrificing most of the second and fourth acts. Wedmore observed that when Irving omitted Cranmer from the cast, he also omitted the struggle between Protestants and Catholics, altering the conflict to that between England and a foreign power. The play was now safer, politically, on the stage. Irving wisely eliminated Pole--he was too delicately drawn for the stage. Wyatt was dropped; the play now concerns itself with Mary, not the period of her reign. Though he knew many missed the deleted passages, Wedmore maintained that the very fact that they had to be removed for stage production says a good deal about the play's construction. Wedmore put forth two possible reasons the play did not do as well on the stage as it could have: first, the last act was unduly prolonged; second, there was a general absence of dramatic power in

the secondary actors in their ability to respond to the poet's characterizations.[79] William Archer blamed the ineffectiveness of the play on Miss Bateman whom he found inadequate to the task: " . . .a problem of extraordinary difficulty was attacked with ordinary means, and the result was naturally failure."[80]

From its publication the critics were against the play. The Era labeled Queen Mary "an unsatisfactory play, wanting in stamina, and altogether deficient in interest."[81] And the public interest shortly waned. For some the play had been cut of its most beautiful and moving scenes; for others the gloomy theme went unrelieved by the rich and varied panorama. To Tennyson's great disappointment, Queen Mary had to close after only five weeks.[82]

When Queen Mary began its short and unsuccessful run at the Lyceum in April, it had already been successfully performed in America at least twenty times and was destined to a career of more than fifty. Of these stage triumphs Tennyson knew nothing.[83]

Queen Mary was published in May, 1875; by December two separate acting versions adapted to the American stage had been published in New York. One was published by John M. Kingdom and the other by John H. Delafield; both were paperback editions giving complete stage instructions.[84]

The world premiere performance was given October 4, 1875, at the Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia. The gala event had been heralded by the press for weeks. Augusta Dargon, who had already attained fame in Canada and the West, was to play the lead role. Stephen Fiske, a

New York manager and editor, had been charged with reducing the play to stageable proportions, which he had done: there were now eight scenes and seventeen characters. The first American performance turned out brilliantly, but the praise was reserved largely for the acting, setting and management rather than the play itself. Fiske, however, had wisely not attempted to improve upon Tennyson's language, only edit it. The play enjoyed a fairly good run of a week.[85]

Queen Mary became Augusta Dargon's favorite role and remained so throughout her career. She took the play to Albany and Troy, New York, in October; to Toronto in January; and to St. Louis in February--it always met with unqualified success, night after night of sustained applause. After the 1875-76 season, she played many engagements without Queen Mary but still greatly enjoyed performing it. She began the 1876-77 season with it in Brooklyn in September: a great success.[86] A reviewer for The Nation was well pleased with the performance--and the play:

> The effect of hearing Tennyson upon the stage is quite peculiar; each word seems a necessity, and touches the ear with a distinctness of its own, the whole drama seeming the first ever played in really choice eclectic English. The chiselled phrases follow each other in a series of clear sculptural effects . . .like some piece of perfect word-joinery of Ponsard's or Feuillet's. . . .[87]

She returned to Brooklyn in October for four more performances of Queen Mary. During her last two seasons in America, she included the play in about half of her engagements, for everyone seemed to agree she

played to best advantage in Tennyson's drama. She played in New Haven, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Detroit, New Orleans, Mobile, San Francisco, and Portland, Oregon. As a result of various difficulties, her company disbanded in December 1876. She played on alone to small but enthusiastic audiences in San Francisco and Portland.[88]

Because of illness and financial difficulties, Augusta Dargon sailed to Australia in January 1879. She was tremendously successful there for several years. Queen Mary was very popular at the Melbourne Theatre Royal and enjoyed a long run there as well as at the Bijou Theatre, in the same city. Until her death in 1902, she continued to call Queen Mary her favorite role, always proud that she had introduced it on the stage. From time to time there were rumors in America that different companies were planning to stage the play, but they never did. Queen Mary rose and fell on the American stage with Augusta Dargon.[89]

HAROLD

1876-1877

Encouraged by his friends, Tennyson continued his dramatic writing. Sabine Grenville was insistent that he try his hand at a tragedy of village life, after the manner of his Lincolnshire poems. But he could not be turned from his ambition to complete Shakespeare's cycle of history plays, for which Queen Mary had been the epilogue. He now chose a prologue from the Norman Conquest, the first act of that long struggle against the Papacy that ended with Mary.[1]

The Laureate worked as hard on Harold as he had on Queen Mary; he had the play in draft by June. On June 21 Palgrave entered in his journal that Tennyson had read him the last act of Harold, which Palgrave found full of character and passion.[2] The poet took no foreign summer, for he wanted to have the play published by the end of the year. Instead, he and Hallam visited Battle Abbey to survey the site of Harold's last fight.[3]

At Battle Abbey they "found a rising ground to the English night, and he [Tennyson] pictured Edith and Stigand and the English canons of Waltham and the camp followers standing to watch the battle, and to catch a glimpse of their great Harold between the English standards which flapped high above the roof of flying arrows, and the deadly gleam of axes 'that lightened with a single flash about the summit.'"[4]

As the poet and his son stood meditating upon the noble past, uncaring tourists streamed across the lawn before them. Tennyson turned to Hallam and said, "Another England now we come and go, / A nation's fall has grown a summer show."[5] The visit to Battle Abbey was followed by a tour of East Anglia and a visit to Edward Fitzgerald's home, Woodbridge, in Suffolk. While there Tennyson hinted at another historical tragedy; Fitzgerald tried to dissuade him: "He should rest on his oars, or ship them for good now, I think."[6]

The remainder of the summer and fall of 1876 he spent visiting friends and reading while he prepared the final drafts of Harold. A considerable amount of historical research was being completed. Tennyson also found time to re-read Aeschylus and Sophocles (whom he found "full of noble reality and moral beauty") as well as study many recent plays.[7] Archbishop Trench had given Tennyson a copy of Sacred Latin Poetry which the poet admired extremely.[8] Tennyson's close reading of the thin volume of poetry greatly influenced the final form of Harold, as we shall see. During this period, while some of Tennyson's friends questioned the wisdom of his continuing in the dramatic genre, Browning encouraged him to press on. He published a selection from his work in two volumes that year and dedicated it warmly to the Laureate:

To
Alfred Tennyson
In Poetry - illustrious and consummate,
In Friendship - noble and sincere

Publication

Though dated 1877, Harold was issued in November, 1876, at six shillings per copy. The sales were very poor. The binding is uniform

with Queen Mary: dark green cloth boards with the title in gilt across the spine, lettered "Harold / ----- / Tennyson / Henry S. King Co." The title page reads: "Harold / A Drama / By / Alfred Tennyson / Henry S. King and Co., London / 1877." There is one page of dramatis personae and the text follows on pages 1 to 161.[10] The publication of the play buried the feud between Bulwer-Lytton and Tennyson because the poet dedicated his play to Bulwer-Lytton's son, who had just been appointed Viceroy of India. The young Lytton sent his sincere appreciation from Calcutta. Not even waiting to see if he could find a manager for the play, Tennyson immediately began a third historical tragedy, to treat another stage in the battle between England and the Papacy.[11]

Tennyson thought the protagonists in his historical tragedies were well chosen; Harold was no exception:

> No historical character united more completely than Harold all the elements of dramatic effect. His military genius, his civil virtues, his loyal and fearless champions of England against the dominion of strangers; his liberality, which has for its perpetual monument his secular foundation of Waltham; his frank and open bearing, in which prudent contemporaries blamed too slight a regard for self-interest; his generous courage, which panegyrists could not wholly vindicate from the charge of rashness; his tall statue, his comely countenance, that mighty physical strength to which the pictures of Bayeux tapestry bear witness - all these things make Harold a man fit to stand as the central figure of a drama.[12]

Tennyson's friends approved of his choice and handling of Harold and praised the play in general. Henry W. Longfellow in his letter of December 2 wrote Tennyson, "I have just been reading your 'Harold' and am delighted with its freshness, strength and beauty. . . it is a voice out of the Past, sonorous, strange, semi-barbaric."[13] In a letter dated

the same day, Browning wrote, "True thanks again, this time for the best of Christmas presents, another great work, wise, good and beautiful."[14] Dean Stanley wrote Tennyson a letter in appreciation for the play on Christmas day: "It cheered some mournful winter evenings for me, and it will, I trust, for the country at large, revive the dying torch of Truth and belief that there is something greater and nobler than capricious Norman Saints."[15]

In a letter to Tennyson shortly after Christmas, Aubrey de Vere lauded the poet's dramatic efforts: "The extreme simplicity of the drama requires a corresponding amount of strength to make it effective, and a sort of Aeschylean strength seems to me to belong to it everywhere, to its character, its action, its passions, its style and diction, and to all its most remarkable passages."[16] The Laureate's friend, G. H. Lewes, wrote in June of the following year: " . . .your wretched critics who would dissuade you from enriching literature with such dramas must be forgiven, 'for they know not what they say.'"[17] Edward Fitzgerald's was almost the sole dissenting voice among Tennyson's friends. In a letter dated December 30, 1876, he complained to the poet, "'Harold' came, King Harold. But I still yearn after a Fairy Prince who came from other skies than these rainy ones. . . ."[18]

Sir Richard Jebb reviewed the play in The Times for December 18, 1876. He recognized Tennyson's protagonist as a noble subject for a play: the last English King of England, a hero and martyr for English freedom.[19] Jebb wrote that the most distinctive feature of the play is the dramatic handling of Harold's oath to William. Here and elsewhere the main lines of the drama are clear and firm and the characters well

defined. Tennyson has successfully drawn from an incident (the swearing) a motive that gives unity to the entire work; the oath becomes Harold's avenging destiny.[20] In short, Jebb found the study of character better in Harold than in Queen Mary and the action--and sunshine--better diffused throughout the play.[21]

John Addington Symonds reviewed the play the following month in The Academy. Symonds applauded Tennyson's effective use of popular superstition: in the opening conversation about the comet, in Edith's and Edward's prophetic dreams, in Harold's visions before the battle of Senlac, and in the relics taken in vain at Bayeux which almost resulted in the unmanning of Harold by terror. Tennyson raised Harold above his superstitions; Harold scorns the comet and the curse of Edward which he brought down upon his head when he married Edith. But he too late realizes his "sin against the truth of love," and he is quelled by conscience.[22]

For truth is the basis of his whole being. Tennyson's dramatic deftness is best shown in his tracing this primal tendency of Harold's character and the slow corrosive effect of political contrivance, human passion, and predestined circumstance upon it. The battle offstage was certainly a major difficulty for Tennyson, but he dealt with it ingeniously through the introduction of Latin litanies which carry the tale of woe to the audience. (The technique was borrowed from Trench's Sacred Latin Poetry.) And, too, Edith's passionate response to the narrative of Stigand is a mirror wherein we may see the action of the play.[23]

Symonds contended that Harold is a better play than Queen Mary and supported his position by pointing to the choice of subject, which is

far more dramatic, and the activity inherent in it which builds to a conclusion. There is essential unity, for all the components of the play are interlaced around Harold. Harold is actual history made dramatic, to an extent. While Harold enjoys some distinct gains in dramatic effectiveness over Queen Mary, it suffers by comparison, however, in its versification and subtlety of characterization. The former lacks the spontaneity of Queen Mary and the latter has yielded to boldly drawn character sketches, with the craft and cruelty of William opposing the honesty and tenderness of Harold.[24] Symonds and others had complained of the dallying in the dialogues in Queen Mary, which Tennyson amended in Harold.

An anonymous reviewer in the Edinburgh Review for April 1877 also favorably compared Harold to Queen Mary. In contrasting the two, the critic was tempted to think that Tennyson had been experimenting on the public to decide upon one of two opposed forms. Weighing Harold, he found it in great measure prehistoric, the protagonist not being as weak and ignoble as in Queen Mary. The construction is logical, the action is continuous and connected. But he judged the results only a little more successful than Queen Mary. What dramatic advances have taken place are countered by the loss of discrimination in language and manner that was present in Queen Mary. Tennyson's manner of looking at the subject of his historical tragedies has become epic rather than dramatic; Harold is a study of opposing forces rather than characters, which is probably due to Tennyson's fatal self-consciousness and subsequent delineation of Harold as a chivalrous Englishman.[25]

In America, Henry James was disappointed with Harold but thankful for another work by Tennyson. In the January 18 issue of The Nation, he wrote that

> "Harold would be a respectable production for a writer who had spent his career in producing the same sort of thing, but it is a somewhat graveless anomaly in the record of a poet whose verse has, in a large degree, become part of the civilization of his day.... "Harold" is not in the least bad; it contains nothing ridiculous, unreasonable, or disagreeable; it is only deadly weak, decidedly colorless and tame.[26]

Although the author's imagination was burning low,

> Few fires are always at a blaze, and the imagination, which is the most delicate machine in the world, cannot be expected to serve longer than a good gold repeater. We must take what it gives us, in every case, and be thankful.[27]

James complained that there are few of the familiar Tennysonian qualities in the play: the prefatory sonnet is perhaps the finest verse in it. None of the characters are very vivid individually; Tennyson does not have the dramatic touch that illuminates character. The characters are generally mild and colorless, though their lines are sometimes truly commendable verse.[28]

The next month, the reviewer for the Atlantic Monthly made the same observation, that Harold is well imagined though not forceful. Throughout the play, which the critic thought a definite advance upon Queen Mary in its unity and action onstage, one is moved to like and pity Harold in his entrapped state. One becomes indignant when he is overthrown, though Tennyson brings about his end without dramatic or moral effect--his last cries are not those from the conscience as they should be. Even the great swearing scene is theatrical, not dramatic, even if

the revelation of William for the savage that he is be the best dialogue in the play. The reviewer found no pathetic passages and few touching scenes: it is hard to see what Tennyson has accomplished.[29] Harold, said the reviewer, " . . .affects one like tapestry. There is color and action, but the color has an unsatisfactory, dreamy blur; the action has the constraint of the loath material in which success is always more of a wonder than a pleasure."[30]

Baynard Taylor, in an uncommonly approbative essay on Harold in The International Review, praised Tennyson's strongly dramatic poem and its vivid passages. Taylor admired the carefully studied characters, the carefully executed blank verse, and the heroic mood which is maintained throughout. He defended Tennyson's waging the Battle of Hastings offstage, maintaining that it would destroy the effect of the tragedy if it were staged. Harold was for Taylor an example of lofty ambition and poetic devotion.[31]

Another review of Harold in The Atlantic Monthly appeared in July. Like most American and English reviewers, the writer liked Harold better than Queen Mary; but like other critics, he was not enthusiastic. He commented that while Tennyson's eyes were on one great figure which he outlined in heavy, knightly strokes, the play as a whole is too monotonous a reproof for lying. Tennyson has not thus far proved himself a successful dramatist: "At best, his dramatic style is what a friend of mine--with entire want of reverence but a good deal of truth--calls 'shaky Shakespeare.'"[32]

Production

Even though better adapted for the stage than Queen Mary, Harold was not produced during Tennyson's lifetime. The reasons are numerous, but the most important are, first, that there was no suitable part for Irving, and, second, that the women's parts were unattractive or ineffective. But whatever the reasons, Harold waited nearly forty years for its first production. Critics have been so certain of its unperformable nature that its first production has gone unnoticed. Sir Charles Tennyson tells us it was not staged until 1928.[33]

Harold was first performed by the Yale University Dramatic Association in New Haven on June 19, 1915. Great lengths were gone to in order to secure the success of the production: costumes were designed by a New York company (wigs by Oscar Bernner); the Glee Club sang the chorus. The performance was given on the Yale Field. Both the Yale and New Haven newspapers called the production an unqualified success. The estimated 1800 who saw the performance were enthusiastic. But the credit for its success was given to the acting, the costumes, the music and staging--not to the author.[34]

Harold was first performed in England in 1926. It was staged as part of a pageant at St. Leonards-on-Sea (near Hastings) in a version by F. Frankfort Moore. But the first major production of Harold in England was given two years later, in London at the Royal Court Theater. The play was produced by Sir Barry Jackson, and Laurence Olivier played the rôle of Harold (his first lead rôle).[35]

Punch, in the April 11 review of the performance, found Olivier

more noble than the play:

> Harold remains the patriot demi-god--a noble figure, well interpreted by Mr. Laurence Olivier (perhaps a little too young for Harold's forty stormy years), whose proud carriage and admirable elocution gave great pleasure.[36]

Tennyson's blank verse, however, fell victim to the review's caustic criticism: " . . .for every stirring or lovely line in Harold there is an intolerable deal of fifth-form prize-poem padding. . . ."[37] The critic did cede that the play was well put together (except in Harold's begging hunting-leave from Edward--not plausible with England in such a troubled state). In summarizing his response to the play, the critic declared that the play is of antiquarian rather than dramatic interest.[38]

A. G. Macdonell reviewed the Royal Court production in the May London Mercury. Unlike the reviewer in Punch, Macdonell found Harold a piece fit for the stage. He suggested on the basis of this play, that Tennyson knew more about human emotions than his previous dramatic work would lead one to believe. For even though he knew little about the technique of making characters talk, in Harold he seized the dramatic situation. The ideas in the play, however, have to emerge from a burden of words, and action is often suspended over undramatic speeches. And when Harold or Stigand are not on stage, the subsidiary figures are too sketchy to keep the play going in their absence.[39]

Macdonell saw Harold as a well-drawn, youthful, attractive mixing of energy and purpose-all combined with fearful superstition. For self-reliance in the beginning is not enough to defy superstition in the end: "He is caught in a net of ignorance, folly, treachery and

sloth."[40] It would have taken a greater man to have saved England. Tennyson has successfully conveyed the picture of a lonely commander who sees impending doom but who can do no more than go to meet it. Why did Harold's desperate defiance of superstition fail just before the end? Tennyson, Macdonnell concluded, makes the audience feel it was due to Harold's tragic flaw. Harold is "real drama."[40]

BECKET

1877-1884

Tennyson, Emily and Hallam spent the first three months of 1877 in London and were quickly caught up in its society. Lord Houghton invited the Tennysons to dine with him on March 28, and said he would introduce them to Gladstone. Gladstone or no, Tennyson would not come before 7:00 P. M. Lord Houghton later complained, "He will only dine out at seven; and all society has to submit to the idiosyncracy of the poetic digestion."[1] Henry James and Dr. Schliemann (who excavated Mycenae) were present also. During his stay of three months, he formed new friendships in London: Joseph Joachim, lord of the violin; Cardinal Newman; and John Bright, with whom he ardently talked Russian and Turkish politics. "Montenegro," published in the May Nineteenth Century, was the result of their discussions.[2]

After Lionel's visit to Victor Hugo in Paris, "To Victor Hugo" appeared in the Nineteenth Century for June; in it Tennyson paid homage to the monarch of French poets. After all, the poets were much alike: both were lords of language; both were masters of meter and lovers of rhetoric; both had limitless mood ranges, from humility to imperial indignity. They used common themes and felt a common sympathy for the poor; both had a passion for legend, religious questions, and patriotism in letters. Both were poetry incarnate in their countries-- Tennyson perhaps the more sincere and moral.[3]

In August Tennyson and Hallam visited Canterbury to go over the separate scenes of Becket's martyrdom. "Admirers of Becket," Tennyson noted later, "will find that Becket's letters, and the writings of . . . [others of the period] throw great light on those days. Bishop Lightfoot found out about Rosamund for me."[4] J. R. Green, author of the Short History of the English People and a new friend of Tennyson, also provided him with materials (as well as long discussions) on Becket. Work on the new play ceased toward the end of the year. The family's attention was turned to the forthcoming marriage of Lionel to Eleanor Locker, which took place in January 1878. All literary England attended.[5]

London life was intense. Browning and Tennyson met often and carried on vehement arguments about foreign and domestic politics. Tennyson hated the Russians and his great dislike is reflected in "The Revenge," which was immediately popular after its publication in March. The Nineteenth Century paid him 300£ for the poem (he thought it worth 500£).[6]

By mid-1878, Tennyson was progressing so well on Becket that he felt free to take a long holiday. He and Hallam went to Ireland. But there was no slackening of his literary productivity--there could not be. His concentration on drama had seriously affected his income. The collective book sales of Queen Mary and Harold had not exceeded 20,000 copies. During this period Henry S. King sold his publishing house to Paul Kegan. King's contract had paid Tennyson 5,000£ a year for the right to publish his previous works. Under the new contract with Paul Kegan, he got only 2,500£ for the next five years for the same privilege.

Tennyson had to advise Mrs. Moxon, who had waged a successful suit against the firm (and was accordingly better off financially), that he would have to stop paying her an annuity, as he had done since Edward Moxon's death in 1858. He had kept the source of the annuity secret from her until 1874. To supplement his income and keep secure his position as a narrative and lyric poet, he began work on a series of poems (without delaying progress on Becket). The first poem, "The Defense of Lucknow," was published by the Nineteenth Century in April. The poem is a nervously rapid companion piece to the breathlessly violent "The Revenge."[7]

Back at Aldworth in August, Tennyson read the unfinished Becket to his friend George Lewes. While Lewes liked the play in general, he had doubts which he only expressed in part.[8] But Tennyson was more interested in knowing the impression the play would have upon the Catholics (a factor that he now knew to take into consideration after the violent Catholic reaction to Queen Mary). Tennyson knew that William Ward was versed not only in Catholic dogma but in the contemporary English and French stage. Tennyson also thought Ward "grotesquely truthful."[9] Ward hesitatingly promised to come to Farringford to hear Becket read; he feared the play would be out of his line. But as Tennyson finished, Ward broke out enthusiastically, "I did not expect to enjoy it at all. It is splendid! How wonderfully you have brought out the phases of his character as Chancellor and Archbishop!"[10]

In January 1879, Becket was sent to the printers in a version much shorter than its final published form. It was perhaps specially prepared for Irving, now manager of the Lyceum, in hopes that he would

stage it immediately.[11] Irving, however, declined the play and wrote Tennyson that while he thought it was magnificent, it would cost too much, and he could not afford the risk. The excuse, which satisfied Tennyson, disguised Irving's true motive in refusing the play--he thought it lacked coherence. He appreciated the dramatic possibilities but doubted whether he could persuade Tennyson to make the radical changes he knew would be necessary for stage production.[12]

Tennyson had gone back to the panoramic methods of Queen Mary, though he had added a love theme. Irving did not think the play would have a long run without major revisions or bring in more than 150£ per night. The production fee he estimated at 2,000£ and nightly costs at 135£, without Tennyson's percentage. Staging the play could not be risked. Irving suggested a shorter play for the contemporary stage; Tennyson liked the idea. By March he had begun the dramatization of a story told in Plutarch, which ultimately took shape as The Cup. Tennyson had momentarily put aside trying to stage Becket. He did not publish the play, fearing unauthorized production in America.[13]

In May, after some years of hesitation, he published "The Lover's Tale" with a reprint of its sequel. In the brief foreword, he said he had been driven to publication by piracies. At the same time he began a one act romantic comedy, The Falcon, based on a story by Boccaccio. The play, which is full of the emotional extravagance, verve and delicacy of the Italian Renaissance but short on characterization and vividness, is decidedly un-Victorian.[14] The Falcon was staged by the Kendals at St. James' Theatre in December 1879. It ran 67 nights, and

was respectfully received by the critics. Before it opened, Tennyson was hard at work on The Cup.[15]

Early in 1880 Tennyson and Emily went for their usual visit to London. They took a furnished house on Belgrave Street. Here, in March, Thomas Hardy had the opportunity to find that Tennyson was more genial than the portraits of him could reveal through the briar beard and old steel spectacles. The poet during these months was not happy, but he was energetic. He decided to go on tour in May while the critics stayed behind to deride his dramatic works. He was still working on the play that would be his final dramatic effort--Becket.[16]

"De Profundis" was published in May in the Nineteenth Century. The whole is a reaffirmation of the creed outlined in "The Higher Pantheism"; it is Tennyson's great philosophical declaration of faith in a benevolent God--a study of the physical and moral miracle of birth.

> We feel we are nothing -- for all is Thou and in Thee;
> We feel we are something -- that also has come from Thee.

Swinburne rushed to parody:[17]

> God whom we see not is: and God who is not we see:
> Fiddle we know is diddle: and diddle we know is dee.

In November 1880, Paul Kegan published Ballads and Other Poems which includes "De Profundis." The volume contains "The Revenge" and "The Defense of Lucknow," both mentioned above, as well as "Rizpah," "The Northern Cobbler," and "The Village Wife," all ballads of common life. There is also the distressingly sentimental "In the Children's Hospital" and "The First Quarrel" as well as the richly lyrical "The Voyage of Maeldune."[18] The publication of the Ballads in the middle of the dramatic period is especially interesting and relevant to a

study of Tennyson's developing dramatic technique. The poems are the molding of old materials into new dramatic form. In the ballads, Tennyson is more vivid and intervenes less in the poems than before his dramatic period; the characters no longer speak with the voice of a poet. There may have been a new technique, but there was certainly the accustomed command of language. The November Edinburgh Review said that the age has changed, but Tennyson has remained constant. He was again the "Poet of the People."[19]

Late in December Irving announced a new Tennyson play would be produced at the Lyceum on January 3, 1881. Ellen Terry thought The Cup too expensive on the stage and too taxing on the players, but Irving thought the play splendid. The play was expensive to produce (2,370£), but it was also Tennyson's first major success on the English stage; it ran 125 performances.[20] The success of the play has been variously attributed to Irving's genius for production, to the experts from the British Museum who helped with the scenery and costumes. But the play itself is economical and strongly written; it is full of movement and poetic charm. Unlike Queen Mary, little could be omitted without damaging the whole. The play received due praise, and Tennyson was encouraged to go on with his dramatic work.[21]

Irving still would not accept Becket for the stage, suggesting that Tennyson write a play on Robin Hood. Tennyson and Hallam, accordingly, spent part of the early summer at Sherwood Forest imbibing atmosphere.[22] The play, The Foresters, was soon finished, but Irving refused it also; he did not feel the play would be sensational enough for the stage.[23]

1881 was a year of bereavements: Carlyle died in February (refusing internment in Westminster); James Spedding of his Trinity days, Dean Stanley and Drummond Rawnsley, who had married Tennyson and his wife, all followed in succeeding months. Tennyson felt an urgent, growing need for faith in God and immortality. "Despair," his grim monologue on disbelief, was published in November 1881 in the Nineteenth Century.[24]

1882 saw the publication of the vigorous and triumphant "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaclava." Tennyson spent the rest of 1882 finishing The Promise of May, a village tragedy, which was wisely refused by the Kendals and Irving when it was completed. But Mrs. Bernard Beere, having heard it read at Aldworth, staged it at the Globe Theatre after very brief rehearsals on November 11. Though the story is good, it has elements of improbability--especially in the characterization of the protagonist. His part makes the whole play seem like propaganda against free-thought, which it is to some extent. Tennyson's moral purpose had misled his critical sense.[25] W. S. Gilbert reportedly said that if he had the play for two weeks, he could have made it the comic success of the season.[26] Though the play ran for five weeks, The Saturday Review was right when it said that The Promise of May was "not so much a bad play as a production which was hopelessly remote from being a play at all."[27]

In March 1883, Tennyson visited Osborne to extend his sympathies to Queen Victoria over the death of her personal servant John Brown. She received him in the Prince Consort's room, and they sat for nearly

an hour talking; they had many affinities of character: integrity, simplicity, belief in domestic virtues, and extraordinary grandeur. She was one of the women he understood best; he had understood her desolation at the loss of Albert.[28] From Aldworth he wrote on his return:

> Dear and Honoured Lady
> My Queen
>
> . . .I will not say that "I am loyal" or that "your Majesty is gracious" for these are old hackneyed terms used or abused by every courtier, but I will say that during our conversation I felt the touch of that true friendship which binds human beings together, whether they be Kings or cobblers. . . .[29]

Tennyson experienced the sorrow of personal loss himself when Edward Fitzgerald died in June. Though they were constantly at critical odds, their friendship never varied.[30]

In September 1883, as a guest of Sir Donald Currie and in the company of Gladstone, Tennyson embarked for Norway and Copenhagen on board the Pembroke Castle. In Copenhagen he entertained the Emperor and Empress of Russia, the King and Queen of Greece, the King and Queen of Denmark and the Prince of Wales with readings from his poetry after dinner. On September 24, the Queen wrote Gladstone directing him to offer Tennyson a barony. Gladstone questioned Hallam as to whether he thought his father would now accept a peerage; Hallam thought he might on behalf of literature. Tennyson hesitated but finally wrote a letter of acceptance to the Queen in December.[31] The reasons for his acceptance were threefold: first, he felt that if an honor were to be done literature in his name, it would be selfish to refuse it; second, he thought the House of Lords the finest of all legislative

assemblies; third, he hoped the hereditary honor would compensate Hallam for giving up his career to assist his father.[32] The poet was gazetted Baron Tennyson of Aldworth and Farringford on January 18, 1884.[33]

Tennyson looked forward to the ceremony with dismay, to the point of regretting his decision. He wrote an old friend: "What can I do? How can I take off a cocked hat and bow three times in the House of Lords? I don't like this cocked hat business at all."[34] But he was dignified and composed when he took his seat in March. The evening of the ceremony Matthew Arnold met Hallam at dinner and leaned across the table to inform him: "I have come to the conclusion that your Father's fame is established."[35] Tennyson was the first English peer to owe his title to poetry.[36]

Tennyson's despondency due to the death of his sister, Mary Ker, in April was abated by the marriage of his son Hallam to Audrey Boyle at Westminster in June. Many of the spectators who attended were disappointed that he did not wear his cloak and wide hat, for which he had become notorious. Rather, he conducted himself with aplomb, appearing devoid of eccentricity. Hallam made arrangements for him and his wife to live with his father; his assistance, now that Tennyson was about to publish Becket, was indispenable.[37]

Publication

Five months after the wedding, Tennyson published Becket in book form, at six shillings per copy. The volume was bound in green cloth boards with "Becket / Tennyson / Macmillan & Co." lettered in gilt

across the spine. The title page reads: "Becket / by / Alfred / Lord Tennyson / Poet Laureate / London / Macmillan and Co. / 1884," followed by a dedication to the Right Honourable Earl of Selbourne. There is one page of dramatis personae and 213 pages of text.[38]

Tennyson decided to publish the play because the many efforts to draft an acceptable stage version had been fruitless; here even Irving had failed. Irving was now setting out for America, and though he had promised to take a copy of the play along for further consideration, Tennyson had given up hope of Irving's staging it. In November, therefore, he brought the play out in book form, publishing, at the same time, The Cup and The Falcon in a separate volume. The publication of the play is probably due to the proddings of Messrs. Macmillan who had recently secured his publishing contract (and remained his publisher until his death).[39]

Becket had been in Tennyson's thoughts a great while and when it was begun, it was certainly intended for the stage. But because of the failure of some of his former plays, Becket carried a disclaimer of its stageability--Tennyson presented Becket as closet drama.[40] This, of course, made little difference to Tennyson's friend, J. R. Green, who proclaimed that all of his research into the period had not given him "so vivid a conception of the character of Henry II and his court as was embodied in Tennyson's 'Becket.'"[41] Green was a historian, not a drama critic.

In reviewing Becket for The Times, (December 10, 1884), Sir Richard Jebb stated that "the poet of In Memoriam, of Maud, and of the

Idylls has no rival to fear in the author of Queen Mary, of Harold, and now of Becket."[42] But he added immediately that one must judge the play stirring drama: the Prologue is strong writing as is the succession of scenes where Becket consents to sign the constitution but finally declines to ratify it with his seal and flees into banishment. Jebb said the fine passages are "eminently illustrative of Tennyson's dramatic versatility and variety."[43] Jebb concluded that:

> Becket is a work eminently worthy of Tennyson's genius and fame. It is dramatic in its conception and execution, full of poetry and fire; its versification is strong and varied in cadance, and its several episodes are well conceived and skillfully woven together.[44]

The lyrics, however, because they are situational, are inferior.[45]

The author of the critical essay on Becket in the Saturday Review the next week began by waiving the question of whether the play would be successful on the stage. He regarded the play as a "dramatic memorial."[46] The reviewer noted a number of fine passages, like the dream scene in Act I, but on the whole thought the dialogue unequal and mechanical. The humor is labored; the introduction of Walter Mapp is wholely useless and uninteresting. Tennyson is more successful in the scene where the murderous knights are repulsed by the beggars. The dialogue is amusing, farcical--and filthy. The anonymous reviewer deemed the Henry-Rosamund scenes less than adequate: the love-making is all Rosamund's because Henry is distracted by thoughts of Becket. And in Rosamund's ignorance there is a definite lapse of credibility. Becket's intervention at the bower and Rosamund's weeping are commonplace senti-

ment; the introduction of Rosamund in the play at all is a mistake, for it creates an incongruity between the champion of the church and the guardian of the King's mistress. Moreover, after her inclusion, Tennyson left her featureless. If he fails in aim, however, his diction is pure, nervous English; he has many fine thoughts and a grand perception of what is noble, which is reflected in his verse. Why, asked the reviewer, does Tennyson write drama when he can write such poetry? The critic observed in conclusion: "As in all Lord Tennyson's plays, this, the latest, seems the result of a task deliberately set rather than a spontaneous effort of his genius."[47]

J. W. Mackail in the December 27 review of Becket in the Academy was impressed by the tragic depth of Becket's characterization, a definite advancement over Harold. Mackail noted the disparity between the historical and unhistorical portions (the Rosamund story) as had critics before him, but he maintained that the disparity is resolved in the lyrics that begin Act II; the transition from Northhampton to the bower fairyland is made through pure poetry. Tennyson's mastery of the tragic iamb is truly Shakespearean.[48]

The drama reviewer for The Athenaeum in his January 1885 essay thought Tennyson dispensed with certain stage requirements that cannot be dispensed with. In addition, he thought the church-state struggle would not appeal, and the manner of Becket's transformation he found historical but undramatic: the play is for the closet.[49] The positive attainments of the play did not go unnoticed, however. The review pointed out Rosamund's story which, he thought, was included with ingenuity and boldness. The story is great modern poetry; Becket is

as vigorous and masculine as Rosamund is beautiful and winning. There are no languid scenes in the play; where the writing is faulty, it is due to Tennyson's being too vigorous and painful. The critic asked in conclusion whether any poet before had shown the boldness Tennyson did in making Henry's anger at Rosamund's retiring to a nunnery the tragic impetus necessary to bring about Becket's death.[50]

The anonymous author of the review of Becket in the February issue of Macmillan's Magazine wished he could have seen more of the shrewd Chancellor; he thought an effective dramatic contrast had been hurriedly passed over. The play as a whole, however, he found skillfully and forcefully written. He lauded the delicate beauty of Rosamund, the powerful image of the great Archbishop, and the poetic love scenes between Henry and Rosamund. The confrontation between Eleanor and Rosamund is particularly effective, in the reviewer's judgment, for it reveals the hate, levity and vindictiveness of the Queen's character. But, like previous critics, the reviewer condemned Becket's intervention at the tower at the critical moment; to him it conflicted with the historical sense of the play. The last act, however, redeems the play in its excellent working out of character and action in the mingled grandeur and infirmity of Becket's nature, as revealed in the conversation between the Archbishop and John of Salisbury before the quick terror of the death scene. The reviewer concluded that the last act must produce a legitimate effect on the stage: the rapidity of action, the human interest, the conflict between the strength of heroism and that of brute force, the questions posed--the necessary elements for dramatic success are present.[51]

It is paradoxical that the American reviewers, whose criticisms of Tennyson's first two plays were seldom biting, boldly condemned his last play while the English critics, as we have seen above, generally concluded that Tennyson's last play was his best. The most plausible reason for the unfavorable reception of the play in America is that the conflict between the church and state held less interest for the American than for the Englishman.

The general disfavor into which Becket fell in America is reflected in the review of the play in The Literary World for February 1885:

> . . .Becket will have probably a certain success of curiosity and will then take its place among the unread and unremembered productions in the vast lumber-room of literature sacred to the works of genius decayed or misapplied.[52]

The reviewer found nothing of the old Tennyson, only occasional flashes of genius. " . . .one puts down the book with a sigh, thinking of the Alfred Tennyson of other days."[53]

George E. Woodberry's rather more perceptive review of the play in the April issue of The Atlantic Monthly warrants close reading, for it points up those areas in which Tennyson succeeded. Those are also the very areas most attacked by the reviewers of previous plays; Tennyson would seem to have harkened to their advice. Woodberry observed that Becket is a stronger, finer, more manly play than the first two; that it is a powerful play with beauty, a touch of humor, and a certain realism in character details.[54] But most importantly, Woodberry was among the first critics to commend Tennyson's perfect handling of the play--its diction, its subordination and unity, its climax. "Tennyson

has mastered the theory of drama. . . . He has written a noble narrative, like that told in a tableaux." "But," added Woodberry, "like the tableaux, it has dignity--not life."[55] There are no quotable lines, no fine beautiful passages, for attention is directed to the action of the play and its simplicity.[56]

Woodberry's observations cannot help but bring to mind the criticisms of Queen Mary. What an evolution in Tennyson's dramatic style! Woodberry did not find these changes all for the good, however, for he thought they had made Becket into a tour de force of professionalism rather than inspiration.[57]

M. F. Egan's review of the play in the December 1885 Catholic World sums up the Catholic reaction to the play which, in America, was vehement. Egan compared Aubrey de Vere's play on Becket with Tennyson's, attacking the lack of nobleness in the latter. While Egan acknowledged that Tennyson had to make the play fit the arbitrary demands of the stage, he found the Rosamund episode an offense against historical truth, good art, and taste. Egan also lamented Tennyson's destruction of Becket by making him, on the eve of his sublime death, weigh what he might have gained had he married.[58] Moreover, Tennyson does not see the anomaly of making a canonized saint insubordinate and mutinous; Tennyson makes him too human, to the exclusion of his saintly qualities.[59] Becket's humanity ruins the last act: In the death scene Tennyson sins unpardonably. He shows us the archbishop rushing to his death from obstinacy and want of self-control."[60]

Production

Lawrence Barrett, a wellknown American actor, who had rented the Lyceum for some months in 1884 (the year of Becket's publication) was again acting in London in 1889 and approached the poet with an offer for the British and American rights. Tennyson, of course, hated to give up hope for a production under Irving; he advised him of Barrett's offer. Irving again declined to produce the play; so, in July, Tennyson wrote Barrett to accept his offer. In December the poet was heartened to hear that Barrett had signed the contract for the play and had already completed a trial version. March, however, brought news which, for the time, dashed Tennyson's hopes of ever seeing Becket staged: Barrett had died. But he had worked out a satisfactory way of adapting the play for the stage, and this Tennyson communicated to Irving, who now began to re-examine the play in earnest.[61]

Becket, as adapted by Barrett and Irving, is only five-sevenths of the original play. Irving sent Bram Stoker to Tennyson to see if he would allow the dramatist to cut the play as he thought necessary. "Irving may do whatever he pleases with it!" snapped Tennyson. Stoker responded: "In that case, Lord Tennyson, Irving will do the play within a year!" Tennyson seemed gratified.[62] In subsequent conferences through Stoker, Irving put before Tennyson the suggestion that he introduce a speech which would, form a dramatic point of view, strengthen Becket's position by having the people voice their support of him--a shout from the kneeling crowd perhaps.[63] When Tennyson understood that the stage required overt opposition between the King and his people, Tennyson wrote additional speeches for the stage version that fulfilled

the dramatic requirement as well as advancing Becket's cause. The speeches reveal real dramatic instinct.[64] Tennyson pleaded with Stoker to see whether Irving could not spare Walter Mapp, a favorite of his in the original. Irving spent many days weighing it, but concluded that the reinstatement of Walter Mapp would not do. There was no argument over who was to compose the music, however. They were agreed on C. Villiers Stanford.[65]

Louise Rehak asserts, like many other critics, that Irving did most of the editing of the play himself, but she further points out the informed regard for the interests of the producer and starring actor in his editing. While it is true that Irving combined and shortened scenes, providing the necessary pace for performance and that he eliminated some of the exposition of the historical setting and tightened the bower story to reduced set changes, his cutting reflects his partiality.[66] In his own interests as a heroic actor, he edited the role of Becket, deleting many lines to preserve the actor's dignity. He cut Becket's bickering and most of Salisbury's criticism of Becket, which amounts to a distortion of the Tennysonian concept of the grim comedy of spiritual pride.[67] Irving was probably cognizant of what he was doing, for he knew from theatrical experience that the conflict must be clearly drawn if the audience is to grasp the play. A sympathetic figure for identification or admiration was necessary, even though such a figure meant departing from Tennyson's intentions.[68]

During the negotiations with Irving through Stoker, Tennyson knew that he was dying. Toward the end, Tennyson would daily ask those about him if there was news about Becket. His doctor reassured him

about the play, and Tennyson calmly stated: "It will be successful on the stage with Irving," adding, "I suppose I shall never see it?" "I fear not," replied the doctor. Tennyson died on October 5, 1892.[69]

At the time of Tennyson's death, Irving was staging Lear; the production was an apparent failure. He pressed on with his preparation of Becket. To Irving fell the task of making the conversion of the worldly Chancellor Becket of the Prologue into the saintly Archbishop Becket of the first act seem credible as well as dramatic. For all his scissors-and-paste labor, the play was still episodic here and there, though he did succeed in tightening the rôle around him like the superb garment of the Archbishop as the rehearsals went on.[70] To Ellen Terry fell the almost impossible task of giving life and credibility to the scenes in which Rosamund de Clifford had been introduced in Tennyson's dramatic naïveté. Though Irving was uncertain that the play would appeal to the public, he was determined to stage it as handsomely as he could to honor the Laureate, now in Westminster Abbey.[71]

On February 6, 1893, Irving's fifty-fifth birthday, Becket opened at the Lyceum and met with a rapturous reception. Irving's impersonation delighted and astonished all, for in Becket he was a "new" Irving. His diction was clearer than before and he was moved, it seemed to those in attendance, as if the inspiration that had sustained Becket was also sustaining him. He dwarfed the other actors in his simple grandeur; he seemed to life a romantic poem to climactic tragedy.[72]

When the Prince Consort died in 1861 all gaieties at Windsor were stopped. For thirty-two years no plays were given at Windsor. In March 1893, Irving was summoned to Windsor by Queen Victoria to give a

performance of Becket in the Waterloo Chamber. Victoria wanted to see the work of her Laureate.[73] The occasion was the visit of the Empress Frederick of Germany to her mother. She recorded in her diary Victoria's telling Irving, "It is a very noble play. What a pity that old Tennyson did not live to see it. It would have delighted him as it has delighted us."[74]

Since Irving's coming to London, none of his productions had been received with such unanimous approval. The critics who had read the published Becket betrayed their surprise. They proclaimed that they had been witness to a miracle seldom wrought in the theatre: the expression of a poet of genius realized on the stage by and in the personality of an actor of genius.[75]

Within a week of the February 6 opening, the Saturday Review announced to the public that " . . .the loyal services of an actor and a manager had so illuminated the inexpert work of a poet as to make it seem for the hour to bear the stamp of dramatic genius."[76] The reviewer found the production a triumph for Irving and Ellen Terry who, he maintained, gave Rosamund the life that the Laureate had denied her.[77] Frederick Wedmore reviewing the production for Academy called it a surprising success--a succès d'enthousiasme had taken the place of Queen Mary's succès d'estime. Wedmore decided that while Tennyson's language was not exalted, it had the merits of directness and simplicity. He concluded that "As a whole, Becket is scarcely an inspired utterance; yet it has fine scenes, fine passages, and, of course, from beginning to end, scholarly and delicate treatment."[79] The success of

the play on the stage, however, was solely Irving's: "Seldom has somewhat limited literary material been applied to better effect."[80]

The noted drama critic William Archer in his lengthy study of the play's dramatic assets and deficiencies indicated a number of the play's shortcomings. He noted that one has no hint of Becket's process of thought and feeling that led him to break with his career, friend, and worldly interests. The social and political issues in the play are vague; it is not that the poet is impartial but rather that he is indefinite.[81] The relationship between Henry and Becket is not worked out adequately--"the conflict between inward affection and outward antagonism."[82] The Rosamund fairy tale also drew Archer's fire: "Of this Rosamund episode I can scarcely trust myself to speak: the lapses of a great poet are best passed over in silence."[83] Archer found the sub-plot "unhistorical, inconceivable, and profoundly uninteresting."[84] Archer preferred the really noble, moving passages that are fine examples of Tennyson's large, panoramic treatment of history. (The broad scope that was in Queen Mary, that was not in Harold and which was missed by the critics, was again present in Becket.)

For Archer it was difficult to decide whether the play was impressive because of Irving's artistic aptitude or his very manner:

> It would be almost impossible for Mr. Irving to fail in an ascetic, a sacerdotal character. His cast of countenance, his expression, his manner, are all prelatical in the highest degree. Nature designed him for a Prince of the Church. . . .[85]

In three or four vital scenes, Tennyson sketched a noble, touching figure and assigned him speeches that truly complimented him. Archer held that while Tennyson's history and drama may be bad, his writing

is exquisite. And Irving, with his imagination, composition, and diction did Tennyson justice.[86] Archer contended that to say Becket's part is melodramatic and that the acting is more important than the play is unfair to both poet and actor: both cooperated in a poetic "character-creation of remarkable beauty."[87]

Irving took Becket on his 1893-94 tour and performed the play more than any of the other ten plays in his repertoire. He opened with it in San Francisco on September 4, 1893. By the end of the engagement, standing room was at a premium. He opened with it in St. Paul, Minnesota where it was tremendously applauded and he later performed Becket fifteen times in Chicago; the reviews were superlative.[88]

The highlight of the tour was the dedication of the Abbey Theater in New York where Irving opened on November 8 with Becket. The Critic paid tribute to Irving for making Tennyson's play more coherent and interesting, if not exciting. The reviewer found the scenery striking and the acting worthy of the play.[89] Irving played there for a month and a half; the audiences were large and sophisticated, and the run was prosperous.[90]

In Boston, Irving opened with Becket on January 1 for a four-week run at the Tremont Theatre; the audiences were enthusiastic. Though the Boston reviews were not as favorable as previous ones, audiences flocked--at advanced prices. Irving went next to Philadelphia where he opened with Becket; after a two-week run there, he opened in Washington with Becket on February 12. There were always capacity audiences. He performed in Canada February 19 through 24, returning to New York and the Abbey Theater where he once again opened with Becket.

From there he went to Boston and also opened there again with Becket, on March 12.[91]

On July 9, 1894, Irving revived Becket on the English stage at the Lyceum. William Archer was waggish but perceptive in his review of the production:

> Becket, revived last week at the Lyceum, is a mild and dignified rebuke to apriorist criticism, with its rules and formulas. There is no rule that it does not break, no formula that it fails to set at naught...it is what most of all it oughtn't to be--a success...in sum, [Becket] is not a coherent, organic drama, but a series of animated historic scenes, beautifully written, staged, spoken and acted.[92]

Irving staged Becket ten times in major cities during his 1895-96 American tour: Boston, New York, Baltimore, Atlanta, St. Louis and Chicago. As always, the reviews lauded Irving's performance, crediting the success of the play to him solely. Irving did not bring Becket with him on any of his later American tours; there is no record of any other company's having performed it.[93] Professor John O. Eidson has said that "Irving's stage-version of Becket did more than anything else toward giving Tennyson the name of dramatist which he so ardently desired. . . ."[94] The American acclaim was certainly tremendous. Tennyson, ironically, did not publish Becket for five years after he had written it, fearing an unauthorized American staging of the play. But had he lived to hear its reception here, he could not have failed to be pleased.

Becket was performed for the last time on the English stage on October 13 (Friday) 1905. Those who were performing in the cast with Irving during that final week had sensed that the great actor was dying

before their eyes. Though he played Becket with his usual strength, there was an unusual serenity in his manner. During Irving's and Becket's last performance the audience, too, sensed something supernatural in Irving's impersonation of Becket; they hung upon his every word. Becket's last words were almost Irving's own: "Into they Hands, O Lord, into thy Hands!" The curtain fell, and Irving died shortly thereafter.[95]

Irving's personal impression of Tennyson's play is succinctly revealed in a letter he wrote Hallam in 1893:

> To me "Becket" is a very noble play, with something of that lofty feeling and that far-reaching influence, which belong to a "passion play." There are in it moments of passion and pathos which are the aim and end of dramatic art, and which, when they exist, atone to an audience for the endurance of long acts. Some of the scenes and passages, especially in the last act, are full of sublime feeling, and are worth regard to both their dramatic effectiveness and their poetic beauty as fine as anything in our language. I know that such a play has an ennobling influence on both the audience who see it and the actors who play it.[96]

His admiration for the play increased over the years. He once told Mrs. W. H. Pollock that no dramatic writing had influenced him so much. She mentioned the oft expressed view that he had made the play. Irving emphatically denied it stating, "No, no, the play made me. It changed my whole life."[97] While one may hesitate to believe that the play had such an impact on him, there is no denying that Tennyson's play was one of the most successful plays he ever staged, and that he left no successor adequate to the task of interpreting the rôle of Becket.

THE PLAYS IN PERSPECTIVE

General Depreciations

A survey of the major criticisms of Tennyson's plays that are at least in part, depreciative must begin with Morton Luce's biography, Tennyson (1901). In it he maintains that Tennyson does not have Shakespeare's originality or the Bard's ability to embody the spirit of the times, that the informing spirit of the Victorian age was not conducive to Tennyson's writing good drama, and that Tennyson's plays subsequently are lacking in the points of dramatic excellence that lead to good stage adaptation: plot, incident, and character.[1]

Arthur Waugh in his study, Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1902), defines the two necessary aspects of dramatic genius. By the first, the psychological aspect, the dramatist must have the power to identify himself with motivations and emotional responses perhaps alien to himself; he must, in a way, be able to live the life he strives to depict. By the second, the physiological, the dramatist must have a sense of condition or situation and physical response. The psychological in Tennyson overpowered the physiological: his dramas are intellectual successes but dramatic failures, though his poetic craft is beyond question.[2]

Arthur Benson, in his Alfred Tennyson (1907) attacks the plays as being uninteresting. Tennyson laid the wood for the fire but it does

not kindle; Benson often feels when reading the plays that they are like Tennyson's description of Maud's face: "Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null,/ Dead perfection, no more."[4] It is Hugh Fausset's contention in his Tennyson: A Modern Portrait (1923) that Tennyson renewed history, but he did not enliven it: that his efforts for all his care are not dramatic. While the dialogue flows mellifulously at the hands of an eminent poet, the characters themselves are but "shadows, proud, pathetic, sensual or heroic, counselling compromise, practicing coquetry, or drifting with laborious eloquence across a creaking stage."[5] Too often Tennyson's skillful manipulation of words, images, and rhythms only conceals a lack of content.[6]

This skillful manipulation Harley Granville-Barker in his study of Tennyson's drama in The Eighteen-Seventies (1929) finds too practical for good art: art is turned to account. Tennyson may have gone to school to Shakespeare, but he never quite grasped what he had to learn, or the importance of what he did learn.[7] Granville-Barker maintains that Tennyson's dramatic faults are due to the fact that he wrote all his life to be read rather than spoken. He wrote reflectively and analytically, which would be acceptable in drama were there the primary emotions beneath, but they are not.[8] The critic also censures Tennyson's blank verse which he finds at random, dull, though it does rise to the occasion.[9]

Paull Baum in Tennyson: Sixty Years After (1948) commends Tennyson for having attempted excellence in another genre--though drama seems to have been a bad choice. Baum reminds us that Tennyson had no special training (even though he attended the theatre as a critic), and that he

expected his plays to be edited by those who had this training. He simply wrote according to the tradition as he understood it and left the rest to Fate. The Elizabethan stage modified by literary, not dramatic, considerations was his model. His dramatic diction evolved as a synthesis of sixteenth and nineteenth century diction. The resulting closet-chronicle tragedy, Baum concludes, is certainly a bastard literary form.[10]

Allardyce Nicoll in A History of English Drama: 1660-1900 (1959) states that the plays have no theatrical value and that didacticism blunts their temper. Nicoll attributes what success the plays did enjoy to the author's fame and the popular acting of Irving and the Kendals.[11] Valerie Pitt in his Tennyson Laureate (1962) finds the plays rambling, tedious and, in short, worthless. He has deduced that while Tennyson understood English history, he certainly did not understand English drama.[12]

Individual Depreciations

As seen above, the plays in general are regarded as dramatic failures. A more detailed study of the dramatic inadequacies of each play is now in order.

Queen Mary is Tennyson's first and longest play. The dramatis personae are bewildering: there are forty-five characters, not including the supernumeraries. Few of that forty-five play important parts; hardly more than a dozen are involved in the basic conflict. The play is overloaded with history--the details of history--and miscellaneous information, all of which take away from what plot there is.

Too often the play is not only historical but academic, weighing the Catholic persecution and the bid for Catholic supremacy in England. This results in the play's unfortunate didacticism and many of the lesser characters' being wholly good or bad: the Protestants are brave and tolerant patriots; the Catholics are fanatics.

Queen Mary is not devoid of interest, however; there is strong dialogue and occasionally intense dramatic activity. It would be impossible for Tennyson to have poured all his energies into a literary production and have it be completely deficient in interest. But the play does lack motive and dramatic construction. Much of the conflict essential to a true drama is missing and the scenes often follow each other without any vital connection, resulting in a chronicle play that is at times long, heavy, and dull.

Briefly outlining the play in one's head naturally shows Queen Mary at its worst, but it also reveals what may be the principle reason for the play's failure to attain lasting recognition: one's interest is spread too thin during the two periods of her greatest mental strain. In Mary's rabid desire to secure Philip and in her futile longing for the birth of a son, there are motivations presented that the Victorians and some contemporary critics as seen above, find undramatic. There is only psychological stress that is difficult to portray with dramatic animation. The conflict arising from Philip's weariness of Mary could have been dealt with at greater length, being developed into something to give true spirit to the play.

Mary is the childless center of the action, which is not unpleasant, but is certainly undramatic at times when irrelevant detail impedes her

character development. Mary is a weak woman and for the same reason is perhaps a weak protagonist--her only motivation throughout the play is to win the love of Philip, who is hardly ever more than a shadow. Tennyson looked for tragedy where there may have been only pathos.

The forsaken figure of Queen Mary in the last act is legitimate and well pictured:

> Alice: Your Grace hath a low voice.
> Mary: How dare you say it?
> Even for that he hates me. A low voice
> Lost in a wilderness where none can hear!
> A voice of shipwreck on a shoreless sea! (V, ii)

But this, too, is reflective and analytical and points up the major reason for the unfavorable critical reception of the play: the action is too often slack or simply irrelevant. The incidental virtues of the play, and there are many as will be seen in the next sub-chapter, do not make a play. Tennyson commands devices in Queen Mary that are often significant and interesting, but seldom cohere. The poet turned to Elizabethan drama for its form but did not see its heart.

The subject for Tennyson's second historical tragedy held many attractions for the poet: there was great conflict; most of the characters were just names in history providing the opportunity for the imaginative creation of character; the two important figures were sufficiently complex; and the powerful Greek element of fate could be woven in. But Tennyson took advantage of these possibilities only in part or not at all. The poet turned to Bulwer-Lytton's and Freeman's histories and wrote another chronicle play, a form that he again failed to master as Shakespeare or Marlowe had.

Harold was to be a "tragedy of doom," and this was to organize the play. But there were three forces present in the play other than the tragedy of doom, showing England at her crucial hour. The play is also a tragedy of feuding houses, wherein Nemesis holds sway; a tragedy of character, wherein a right-meaning protagonist is worsted; and a drama of intrigue, and the Aldwyth and Edith affair. All of this made for a rich plot, and critical indigestion has been the logical result.[14]

The characterization is questionable. Edward, in his pietistical incompetence, is fairly dealt with, as is Harold, in his inconsistency of character--though it divides our sympathies and weakens the effect. Harold evolves as something less than heroic due to his false oath as well as his secret and political marriages to Edith and Aldwyth respectively. If Harold's characterization is counted a failure, it is due to the uncertainty of his moral effect. We are permitted to see that much is not morally right with Harold in his behavior, yet we are asked to sympathize, and this is very difficult, for to see Harold as a victim of circumstances is moral confusion. For all his strength, courage, and peculiar kind of truthfulness, however, Harold remains too uncomplicated to demand sustained attention.

Few of the women are drawn with enough color to assume life. Aldwyth is a melodramatic schemer; her love story and treachery are not convincing. Edith is frail, sweet, and maudlin to a distressing degree.

Tennyson's unfettered anti-Catholicism serves only to debase the play. Behind the persona of Harold, Tennyson says,

The Lord was God and
came as man--the Pope
Is man and comes as God. (III, ii)

The anti-Catholic dogmatism is compounded by his ambition to be Shakespearean.

Edith, Edith
Get thou into thy cloister . . . (V, i)

is really disturbing. In sum, the characterization and diction in Harold are not nearly as good as in Queen Mary.

Becket is unquestionably the best play of the three, but it, like Queen Mary, bears the heavy burden of historical fact; Tennyson was too cautious with known history to take creative liberties. There is more of the vividly portrayed court in Becket than Queen Mary, but the accurate tableaux do not have dramatic life. The scenes often lack an inner force which must come from true theatrical instinct and dramatic conception. There is action without the motivating energy.

In Becket, Tennyson has the regrettable habit of underlining the point he was making. The chess game in the "Prologue" is good subtle foreshadowing until Becket announces to Henry,

...for you
see my bishop
Hath brought your king to a stand-
still. You are beaten. (Prologue)

The chart Henry shows Becket indicating the hiding place of the bower is marked with a "blood-red line"; the motifs are simply "underlined and overwritten."[15] Had the motifs been treated less obviously, there would have been occasion for the forces of Fate to act, but they lost their chance and strength when Tennyson moved against them pedogogically passage by passage.

Tennyson's attempt to blend the love theme in with political history is not completely convincing. The sub-plot, which is, for the most part, melodramatic, does not function as it should with the main happenings between Becket and Henry. Becket and Henry themselves, though they have splendid moments, are not entirely satisfactory. Here again the analysis is subtle, ironic and generally convincing, but their actions lack life.

Eleanor's contrived sarcasm to Henry rings painfully true; her lines in the play, however, are so stilted that they hardly seem intended for the stage. The problem with Becket is that there is not sufficient dramatic order imposed upon historical fact. Thus the implications of the catastrophe that the play is about never seem to be recognized. Becket's death is something less than tragic, because the reasons for his death are unresolved. His end is ironic and ambiguous. Rosamund is introduced at the last disguised as a monk and the play almost closes in bathos.

Becket is better than the former plays; it can be read, for the most part, with pleasure. But it is not eminently good drama.

General Appreciations

A survey of the major criticisms of Tennyson's plays that are, at least in part, appreciative must begin with William Archer's study of the plays in his English Dramatists Today (1882). His position is summarized in the following back-handed commendation:[16]

> The chronicle play is not the highest form of dramatic art, but neither is it despicable. Mr. Lowell's saying, "not failure but low aim is crime," does not apply to the drama. On the stage it is better to hit a low mark than to miss at a high one.

Louis F. Block, in his splendid defense of Tennyson's dramatic abilities in an article in Poet-Lore (1896), maintains that the plays articulate the new spirit in drama. He hypothesizes that the plays, in a genuinely modern manner, reveal the sources of action, that they enter into the mind of Harold, Becket, and Mary. Tennyson's plays are not so much the study of great deeds as the motivations for those deeds. They are not merely the selective reproduction of historical incident, but the analysis of great moments in English life.[17] These same deeds and moments Morton Luce (1901) believes to be tastefully dealt with.[18]

In his Studies in Tennyson (1920), Henry Van Dyke rebukes those who cavil at the plays simply because they do not meet the exigencies of the stage. He enjoins the public to consider the plays at least as closet drama; such a consideration for the efforts of so great a poet is a debt of honor. After all, the trilogy can hardly be dismissed as the folly of an overactive mind; true genius, like Tennyson's, seldom makes three such mistakes in succession. The plays are not the productions of retirement that reveal dotage; on the contrary, there is fire

and force. They err in exuberance, from which harshness and incoherence sometimes result. Tennyson could have achieved more if he had attempted less.[19]

Yet, in spite of this overflow of dramatic energy, Van Dyke asserts the plays have a clearness of direction that warrants close study. The tragedies must be seen as that of individuals only so far as they represent divergent social factions. The plays trace the fate of individuals as it relates to the fate of nations; the plays throw color on the black and white outline of history, revealing vivid human passions.[20]

Hugh Fausset (1923) extols the high poetic level of the trilogy's verse. Years of observing the human condition had sobered Tennyson's political, moral, and social opinions, giving his dramatic poetry a certain pathos and perhaps grandeur.[21] Cornelia Japikse in her study of Tennyson's plays (1926) recognizes the tendency among critics to acknowledge the literary value of the play which they believe serves, in part, to compensate for the plays' want of action. Japikse also observes that the modern play-goer is ready to enjoy character studies imparted by dialogue even though not much is happening on the stage.[22]

Harley Granville-Barker (1929) defines Tennyson as a poet who can frame character and deal with history in terms of drama; at times, Tennyson is the true dramatist: he can fill a scene with one significant act, which is the proof of dramatic instinct.[23] Paull Baum (1948) states that in comparison with the closet drama of the early part of the century, Tennyson's dramatic efforts are masterpieces.[24]

In a substantial article in the University of Toronto Quarterly (1963), Louise Rehak lauds Tennyson's wide sympathies and warm ironies. She holds that while Tennyson may not have written successful Shakespearean drama, he was one of the successful precursors of the contemporary drama of alienation. The psychological realism makes the plays enjoyable Tennyson and fine literature.[25]

Individual Appreciations

As seen in the preceding sub-chapter, the plays in general are regarded as dramatic failures, but that there is some degree of psychological realism and poetic proficiency cannot be denied. A more detailed study of these facets in each play is now in order.

Tennyson's scholarly caution resulted in his reluctance to simplify by omission; the plot of Queen Mary is accordingly very complicated. But his caution gave him a sharp sense of the instability, internal turmoil and confusion of England under Mary. Tennyson caught the temper of the time; witness Lord Paget on Cranmer's execution:

> My Lord, the world is like a
> drunken man,
> Who cannot move straight to his end,
> but reels
> Now to the right, then as far to the
> left.
> Push'd by the crowd beside-and un-
> derfoot
> An earthquake... (III, iv)

The controversies, the contending parties are present in Queen Mary. In Act V, scene ii, there are two Protestants outside the Palace where the Queen is dying; they are cursing her party. A third joins them, a stranger, who condemns both parties. Such a turn is well suited to

Tennyson's genius, for Queen Mary was from the beginning not so much a play as a dramatic panorama of an age--the age of Mary. In this respect, Queen Mary is a notable achievement, showing a remarkable grasp of a complicated political era.

The characterization is sharp and distinguished. Mary is very realistically drawn; she is sensuous, obstinate, passionate and suspicious. Her character is vigorously delineated through her two great periods of longing. She cries out triumphantly when her parliamentary foes yield and Philip is secured:

> My foes are at my feet, and Philip
> King (II, iv)

Her hysteria when she first believes that she is carrying a child is traced with inspiration:

> He hath awaked! he hath
> awaked!
> He stirs within the darkness!
> O Philip, husband! now thy love to
> mine
> Will cling more close and those bleak
> manners thaw,
> That make me shamed and tongue-
> tied in my love.
> The second Prince of Peace-
> The great unborn defender of the
> Faith,
> Who will avenge me of mine en-
> emies-
> He comes, my star rises. (III, ii)

So is her smoldering passion which bursts into flaming anger before she rents the portrait of Philip that stares mimickingly at her upon her death bed:

> Women, when I am dead,
> Open my heart, and there you will
> find written

Two names, Philip and Calais; open
his-
So that he have one,-
You will find Philip only, policy, pol-
icy,-
Ay, worse than that - not one hour
true to me!
Foul maggots crawling in a fester'd
vice!
Adulterous to the very heart of hell! (V, v)

Mary is delineated with tragic depth. She is shown as being destroyed by an unreasoning, obsessive love for the unloving Philip. Had Tennyson given her center stage, the play would have what it most lacks--a subject.

The real difficulty Tennyson had was to give sufficient relief from Mary's intense sadness, especially when Mary's devotion is opposed by Philip's coldness. In the last scene where she sits upon the ground, rocking in lament, only the holy calm of the penitent and meek Cranmer is adequate artistic relief.

Philip--little worth Mary's passion--is a bloodless schemer who does not care for her or her country; we are repelled at first meeting him. It is Philip's influence working in the background rather than his actions, however, which directly influence the course of the play. For Philip is flat; he was drawn to be bored and made more bored by the English queen and her country. There is usually economy and superb irony in his lines:

Mary: O, if I knew you felt this parting,
Philip,
As I do!
Philip: By Saint James I do protest,
Upon the faith and honor of a Span-
iard
I am vastly grieved to leave your
Majesty.
Simon, is supper ready? (III, vi)

His characterization approaches caricature.

The major characters have subtle, well-rounded personalities. Buckley's succinct assessments are valuable: Cranmer, who suffers from the divided motives of politician and martyr, is "a man of courage, remorse, humility, and proud convictions"; Pole, who follows the course of least resistance, is a "convincing blend of sensitivity, fearfulness, and cruelty born of disappointment"; Elizabeth "combines sympathetic understanding with an imperious reserve willing to bide its time."[26] Tennyson gave life to the personages of history without violating the facts of history. This, added to their number, renders the play a psychological study of the period, as briefly discussed previously.

Throughout, the blank verse is skillful, and there are occasional interesting variations (as in Mary's speech on her assumed pregnancy). The language is concise and dignified without affectation.

Harold is a structural advance over Queen Mary. A single tragic progression of events makes the play more coherent; skillful timing results in high dramatic tension; fewer characters, less historical detail, speeches of appropriate length focus attention where it should be: on the protagonist. Yet, as in Queen Mary, a sense of the hostile conflicts of many interests and a clear picture of the details--social, economic and religious--are preserved.

Harold satisfied the structural demands of tragedy. Each scene is closely connected, beginning with Harold's marriage to Aldwyth and ending with his surrender to superstition. Harold's faith in himself and his followers is sapped by his remembrance of the fatal oath, which

he can neither keep nor forget:

> Leofwin: Good brother,
> By all the truths that ever priest hath
> preach'd,
> Of all the lies that ever men have lied,
> Thine is the pardonablest.
> Harold: Maybe so!
> I think it so, I think I am a fool
> To think it can be otherwise than so.

Harold's is a tragic situation worthy of dramatic resolution. Tennyson wrote a study on ethical casuistry and made it dramatic by the introduction of superstition.

Harold himself is well-defined. Open, wide-minded, chivalrous, Harold yields but once to temptation and is ruined for life by a lie. For after yielding to temptation, he yields to superstitious fears and rationalizing sentiments, subduing them only before his death. William and Harold both hold superstitious ideas, but William commands his, using them as tools; Harold is only made weaker by his. Harold is the better man, but William is the better ruler.

Aldwyth, scheming and ambitious, has only one redeeming trait--her abandoned love of Harold, which provides much of the motivation for evil in the play. Aldwyth is evil but not inhuman, for throughout the play her love for her dead king would seem to cover a multitude of her sins. Edith, who is saved from tender, retiring sentimentality by the final proclamation of her love in her wild fight for Harold's body, dramatically evolves from the simple, trustful, singing maid. The play is her <u>rite de passage</u> into womanhood. William of Normandy, who remains completely unredeemed, represents the brutal unscrupulousness whereby one can work treachery under the cloak of friendship. In

splendid portrait, Fostig is seen first as an aspiring man but revealed later as a spoiled, selfish child; Wulfnoth is a lifeless coward.

Harold is filled with numerous pages of beauty and force. Edward's death vision was the fitting prelude to the birth of a new England:

> The green tree!
> Then a great Angel past along the highest
> Crying. 'The doom of England!' and at once
> He stood beside me, in his grasp a sword
> Of lightenings, wherewithal he cleft the tree
> From off the bearing trunk, and hurl'd it from him
> Three fields away, and then he dash'd and drench'd,
> He dyed, he soak'd the trunk with human blood,
> And brought the sunder'd tree again, and set it
> Straight on the trunk, that, thus baptized in blood,
> Grew ever high and higher, beyond my seeing,
> And shot out sidelong boughs across the deep
> That dropt themselves, and rooted in far isles
> Beyond my seeing; and the great Angel arose
> And past again along the highest, crying,
> 'The doom of England!' (III, i)

The oath scene in Act II and the battle scene that closes the play with its hymn of the monks, its descriptions of Stigand and wailing Edith, its cries from the troops, and its description of Harold's death can both be compared to advantage with scenes from any play of the century.

Becket is unquetionably Tennyson's finest dramatic work. The play is structurally better than Queen Mary, though as stage drama it is probably inferior to Harold. The comparative success of the play is due to the fact that it is not so much a historical study but a dramatic study of character and situation. The action is motivated by the conflict between the Church and State which is compounded by a conflict between legitimate and illegitimate love. The long, bitter struggle, condensed, would have made for profound tragedy.

Where history has been set aside, the dramatic situation has been strengthened. Like Queen Mary, the story is one of prolonged tension.

But, unlike Queen Mary, there are respites from this tension; there is dramatic give and take between the contending parties, especially between Henry and Becket. As one of the major contenders, was Becket worldling or saint? Tennyson reveals his position on Becket's nature in the first scene, at chess. While the King's mind wanders, Becket is intent upon the game; he cannot bear doing what he may not do well--he wins.

The secret of Becket's personality and the key to his fierce antagonism toward Henry is his overriding desire to dominate every sphere he enters. This Henry did not understand, but Becket did. He knew that for Henry to make him Archbishop would be to make him as inflexible a defender of the Church as he was of the Crown as Chancellor. Tennyson caught Becket's mental struggle in his resisting the promotion to what he knew he could never be, defender of his Church and King. Becket warns Henry:

> Mock me not. I am not
> even a monk.
> Thy jest - no more. Why - look - is
> this a sleeve
> For an archbishop? ("Prologue")

Becket is capable of changing his position, but not compromising it. He yields at last, accepting the mitre, though he knows it will mean sundering himself from Henry and precipitating Henry's hatred.

Tennyson was never more perceptive in his plays than in showing the conflict in Becket's breast between the church and King he loved and in revealing Henry's emotional resolve to bring his stubborn Archbishop back under his command. When Becket renounced the world,

he henceforth looked upon himself as the head of the Church. He became a great, impulsive figure with a strong sense of duty: he was now the people's bulwark against crown and baronage. This idea became so dominant in his thoughts that it betrayed him to rash acts, for he finally lost himself in such enthusiasm for the idea that he died in spiritual ecstasy. The power of the play is fullest felt in the last two scenes--no threats move Becket. His death (in which Tennyson closely followed historical fact) is unsurpassed in simplicity and beauty.

Even though Becket's end is transcendent ecstasy, his life was filled with a very real and tender compassion for the poor, the weak, and the unprotected. Even in the melodrama of the death scene, one feels, with the poet, the wronged Rosamund's devotion to Becket as she bends over his body. For all of Becket's ethical and spiritual rigor, he can be indescribably tender, as when he remembers youth's daydreams:

> There was a little fair-
> hair'd Norman maid
> Lived in my mother's house; if Rosa-
> mund is
> The world's rose, as her name imports
> her - she
> Was the world's lily.
> . . . .
> The drowning man, they
> say, remembers all
> The chances of his life, just ere he
> dies. (V, ii)

The remembrance may not befit one (who has since been canonized) at the point of surrendering all for life eternal; but it divinely befits the man about to die.

Becket's strength lies in its psychological realism and political objectivity and in Tennyson's ability to make good use of the ironic

opportunities of Becket's career. Even with these dramatic assets, however, the play lacked a definite climax, which Tennyson realized. He added the Rosamund-Eleanor sub-plot to compensate for the loss of suspense. The intended assistance is perhaps a dramatic flaw, but it shows the poet's determination to be realistic apart from the chronicle of history. And despite Becket's burden of historical fact, the play does deal in universals. The implied moral theme, drawn from a humanistic (not supernatural) morality, is an extension of Tennyson's horror of excess.

Tennyson does not, however, comment directly on Becket's actions, though we suspect he is behind the persona of Mapp, the Chorus, or John of Salisbury who is always urging moderation. We cannot know whether the historical Becket was inspired by God or deluded by pride, and Tennyson, unlike Eliot, makes no final declaration. He suggests the latter through the use of dialogue but tempers his scepticism in Becket's genuinely faithful death.

Becket contains scenes of unrivaled eloquence; witness Becket on his dream in which he was selected by God to head the Church and oppose Henry:

> Methought I stood in Canterbury
> Minister,
> And spake to the Lord God, and said,
> 'O Lord,
> I have been a lover of wines, and
> delicate meats,
> And secular splendors...
> Am I the man? "and the Lord answered me.
> 'Thou art the man, and all the more
> the man.' (I, i)

Or Henry's condemnation of Becket because he will not seal against the rights of the church:

> God's will be what it will,
> the man shall seal,
> Or I will seal his doom. My burgher's
> son-
> Nay, if I cannot break him as the
> prelate,
> I'll crush him as the subject. Send for
> him back. (I, iii)

Or the extremely melodious song sung at Rosamund's bower:

> 1. Is it the wind of the dawn that I hear
> in the pine overhead?
> 2. No; but the voice of the deep sleep as it
> hollows the cliffs of the land.
> 1. Is there a voice coming up with the
> voice of the deep from the strand,
> One coming up with a song in the
> flush of the glimmering red?
> 2. Love that is born of the deep coming
> up with the sun from the sea. (II, i)

In certain instances Tennyson rightly found verse inappropriate. The beggar's scene, Margery's soliloquy, and Eleanor's two passages are in prose. Walter Mapp's speeches are in prose, but a grandly vulgar prose possessing something of the metaphysical. Witness Mapp to Becket on the Pope:

> Your lordship affects the unwaver-
> ing perpendicular; but His Holiness,
> pushed one way by the Empire and
> another by England, if he move at all
> -Heaven stay him! -is fain to diag-
> onalize.

The vocabulary ranges in a like manner, from the most elaborate conceits (Eleanor's) to coarse, artificial attempts at vulgarity (a beggar's).

In spite of its defects, Becket is entitled to take rank as a fine play worthy of its author.

To take a definite stand on the worth of Tennyson's plays, even after reading the plays numerous times and weighing the opinions of some of the most noted critics of the last century, is difficult indeed. One cannot help being moved by the magnificence of certain blank verse passages which animate powerful figures from the gray outline of English history and in so doing harken back to the excellence of the Idylls. On the other hand, one can hardly overlook Tennyson's dramatic inadequacies. It seems to me that Henry James' position on the plays, which appears at first ambivalent, is the only possible resolution. In the summarizing statement below, James is speaking of Queen Mary, but his assessment is applicable to the plays in general.

> The great merit in Mr. Tennyson's drama...is not in the quotableness of certain passages, but in the thoroughly elevated spirit of the whole.... The temper of the poem...is so noble that the critic who has indulged in a few strictures as to matters of form feels as if he had been frivolous and niggardly...though it is not the best of a great poet's achievement, only a great poet could have written it.[27]

FOOTNOTES

PREFACE and QUEEN MARY

[1]Charles Tennyson and Christine Fall, Alfred Tennyson: An Annotated Bibliography (Athens, Georgia, 1967), p. 98.

[2]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson (New York, 1949), p. 410 William George Ward (1812-1882), Roman Catholic theologian and philosopher. See DNB. Mrs. Sabine Grenville, a devoted admirer of Tennyson's works was sister-in-law of Dighton Probyn, Master of the Prince of Wales' Household.

[3]Henry Van Dyke, Studies in Tennyson(Port Washington, N.Y.). p. 169.

[4]Arthur Waugh, Alfred, Lord Tennyson: A Study of His Life and Work (London, 1902), p. 172.

[5]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 410.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son (New York, 1899), II, pp. 174-175

[8]Hugh I'anson Fausset, Tennyson: A Modern Portrait (New York, 1923), p. 251.

[9]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 411.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid., pp. 411-412.

[12]Ibid., p. 412. John Richard Green (1837-1883), historian. See DNB. James Anthony Froude (1818-1894), historian and man of letters. See DNB.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Hallam Tennyson, p. 156.

[15]Ibid., p. 173.

[16]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 413.

[17]Ibid. Sir James Simeon, the Roman Catholic squire of Swainston Hall. He was a country gentleman, a good scholar and landlord; master of the Isle of Wight Foxhounds; representative of the Isle to Parliament.

[18]Hallam Tennyson, p. 178.

[19]Ibid., p. 176.

[20]Cornelia G. H. Japikse, The Dramas of Alfred, Lord Tennyson (London, 1926), p. 6.

[21]Ibid., p. 11.

[22]Joanna Richardson, The Pre-Eminent Victorian: A Study of Tennyson (Oxford, 1962), p. 198. From Mlle. Reichemberg in L'Ecole des Femmes Tennyson would borrow the idea for Margery in Becket; Ibid.

[23]Harold Nicolson, Tennyson: Aspects of His Life, Character and Poetry (New York, 1923), p. 197.

[24]Richardson, p. 198.

[25]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 424.

[26]George C. Marshall, A Tennyson Handbook (New York, 1963), p. 180.

[27]Hallam Tennyson, p. 176.

[28]Ibid., p. 180.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid., p. 181.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Richardson, p. 201. Frances Turner Palgrave (1824-1897), poet and critic. See DNB.

[33]Sir Richard Jebb, "Queen Mary," The Times (June 19, 1875), reprinted in The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson (New York, 1908), V, p. 638.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid., pp. 643-46

[37]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 427.

[38]A. Lang, "Queen Mary," Academy, VII (June 26, 1875), p. 649.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Ibid. p. 650.

[41]"Tennyson's Queen Mary," Quarterly Review cxxxix (July 1875), pp. 239-240.

[42]Ibid., p. 243.

[43]Ibid.,pp. 244-245.

[44]"Queen Mary," The Saturday Review, XL (July 3, 1875), p. 19.

[45]Ibid., p. 20.

[46]R. C. Jebb, "Notes on Mr. Tennyson's Queen Mary," Macmillan's Magazine, CXLV (September 1875), p. 435.

[47]Ibid., p. 438

[48]Ibid., p. 439.

[49]Ibid.

[50]"The Dramas of Alfred Tennyson," Edinburgh Review, xxxii April 1887), p. 385.

[51]Ibid., p. 402.

[52]Ibid., p. 403.

[53]John Olin Eidson, "The Reception of Tennyson's Plays in America," Philological Quarterly, xxxv (October 1956), p. 435.

[54]Tennyson's Queen Mary, The Nation, xxi (July 22, 1875), p. 60.

[55]Ibid., p. 61.

[56]William Dean Howells, "Recent Literature," Atlantic Monthly, xxxvi (August 1875), p. 240.

[57]Ibid., p. 241.

[58]"Tennyson's 'Queen Mary'," Scribner's Monthly, x (September, 1875), p. 645.

[59]Henry James, "Mr. Tennyson's Drama," The Galaxy, xx (September, 1875), p. 394.

[60]Ibid., p. 395.

[61]Ibid., p. 399.

[62]Ibid.

[63]Ibid., p. 402.

[64]"Queen Mary: A Drama," The International Review, II (September 1875), p. 701.

[65]Ibid., p. 702.

[66]"Queen Mary. A Drama. By Alfred Tennyson," The Southern Review, xviii (October 1875), p. 484.

[67]Ibid., p. 486.

[68]Ibid., p. 492.

[69]Henry Adams, "Queen Mary. A Drama. By Alfred Tennyson," North American Review, ccxlix (October 1875),pp. 424-427.

[70]Ibid., p. 429.

[71]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 428. Hezekiah Linthicum Bateman (1812-1875), actor and theatrical manager. See DNB.

[72]Lawrence Irving, Henry Irving: The Actor and His World (New York, 1951), p. 19.

[73]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 429.

[74]Richardson, p. 201.

[75]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 430.

[76]Hallam Tennyson, p. 185.

[77]Ellen Terry, The Story of My Life (London, 1908), p. 122.

[78]Ibid., p. 123.

[79]Frederick Wedmore, "Queen Mary at the Lyceum," Academy, IX (April 22, 1876), p. 392.

[80]William Archer, English Dramatists of Today, (London, 1882), p. 339.

[81]Quoted in Waugh, p. 179.

[82]Charles Tennyson, Albert Tennyson, p. 431.

[83]John Olin Eidson, "Tennyson's First Play on the American Stage," American Literature, xxxv (January 1964), p. 519.

[84]Ibid., p. 520.

[85]Ibid., pp. 521-522.

[86]Ibid., pp. 523-525.

[87]"Notes," The Nation, xxiii (September 28, 1876), p. 200.

[88]Eidson, "Tennyson's First Play on the American Stage," p. 526.

[89]Ibid., p. 527.

HAROLD

[1]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 423.

[2]Richardson, p. 202.

[3]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 423.

[4]Hallam Tennyson, p.187.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Waugh, p. 180.

[7]Hallam Tennyson, p. 188.

[8]Waugh, p. 180.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Marshall, p. 182.

[11]Richardson, p. 204.

[12]Hallam Tennyson, p. 186.

[13]Ibid., p. 188.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid., p. 191. Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (1815-1881) dean of Westminster. See DNB.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid., p. 192. George Henry Lewes (1817-1878), miscellaneous writer and man of letters. See DNB.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Sir Richard Jebb, "Harold," The Times, (December 18, 1876), reprinted in The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson (New York, 1908), V, p. 655.

[20]Ibid., pp. 671-672.

[21]Ibid., p. 674.

[22]John Addington Symonds, "Harold: A Drama," The Academy, XI (January 6, 1877), p. 1

[23]Ibid.

[24]Ibid.

[25]"The Dramas of Alfred Tennyson," Edinburgh Review, CXLV (April 1877), p. 403.

[26]Henry James, "Mr. Tennyson's New Drama," The Nation, XXIV (January 18, 1877), p. 43.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid., p. 44.

[29]"Recent Literature," The Atlantic Monthly, XXXIX (February 1877) p. 416.

[30]Ibid., p. 243.

[31]Baynard Taylor, "Tennyson," The International Review, IV (May 1877), p. 416.

[32]"The Contributor's Club," The Atlantic Monthly, XL (July 1877) p. 102.

[33]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 435.

[34]John Olin Eidson, "The First Performance of Tennyson's Harold," The New England Quarterly, XXXVII (September 1964),pp. 387-389.

[35]Ibid., p. 389.

[36]"At the Play. Harold (Royal Court)," Punch, or the London Charivari, CLXXIV (April 11, 1928), p. 414.

[37]Ibid.

[38]*Ibid.*

[39]A. G. Macdonell, "*Harold*. By Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Royal Court," *London Mercury*, XVIII (May 1928), p. 87.

[40]*Ibid.*

[41]*Ibid.*, p. 88.

BECKET

[1]Waugh, p. 180.

[2]Richardson, pp. 205-206. John Bright, whom Tennyson had attacked in March as the "broad-brimmed hawker of holy things," met the poet through Gladstone; Bright apparently bore no malice.

[3]Ibid., pp. 206-207.

[4]Hallam Tennyson, p. 193.

[5]Richardson, pp. 207-208.

[6]Ibid., pp. 208-209.

[7]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 444. Henry Samuel King (1817-1878), banker and publisher. See Boase. Tennyson entrusted Edward Moxon (1801-1858) with the publication of his work until Moxon's death.

[8]Richardson, p. 210.

[9]Hallam Tennyson, p. 194.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 446.

[12]Irving, p. 364.

[13]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 446.

[14]Ibid., p. 447.

[15]Richardson, p. 210.

[16]Ibid., p. 211.

[17]Quoted in Richardson, p. 213.

[18]Richardson, p. 213.

[19]Quoted in Richardson, p. 214.

[20]Richardson, p. 214.

[21]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 457.

[22]Richardson, p. 215.

[23]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 458.

[24]Richardson, p. 216. James Spedding (1818-1881), editor of Bacon's works. See DNB. Robert Drummond Burrell Rawnsley (1818-1882), prebendary of Lincoln Cathedral 1877 to death. See Boase.

[25]Ibid., p. 218.

[26]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 465.

[27]Quoted in Richardson, p. 218.

[28]Richardson, pp. 221-222.

[29]Ibid., p. 222.

[30]Waugh, p. 214.

[31]Nicholson, pp. 208-210.

[32]Richardson, p. 224.

[33]Waugh, p. 212.

[34]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 273.

[35]Richardson, p. 225.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 476.

[38]Marshall, p. 201.

[39]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 482.

[40]Waugh, p. 215.

[41]Hallam Tennyson, p. 193.

[42]Sir Richard Jebb, "Becket," The Times (December 10, 1884), reprinted in The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson (New York, 1908), VI, p. 445.

[43]Ibid., p. 455.

[44]Ibid., p. 464.

[45]Ibid.

[46]"Tennyson's Becket," Saturday Review, LVIII (December 15, 1884), p. 757.

[47]Ibid., p. 758.

[48]J. W. Mackail, "Becket," Academy, XXVI (December 27, 1884), p. 421.

[49]"Becket," The Athenaeum (January 3, 1885), p. 7.

[50]Ibid., p. 8.

[51]"Lord Tennyson's Becket," Macmillan's Magazine, LI (February, 1885), pp. 291-294.

[52]"Tennyson's Becket," The Literary World, (February 7, 1885), p. 39.

[53]Ibid.

[54]George E. Woodberry, "Professional Poetry," The Atlantic Monthly, LX (April 1885), p. 565.

[55]Ibid., p. 566.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid.

[58]M. F. Egan, "St. Thomas of Canterbury and Becket," Catholic World, XLII (December 1885), p. 382.

[59]Ibid., p. 389.

[60]Ibid., p. 393

[61]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, pp. 519-522.

[62]Bram Stokes, Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving (London, 1906), I, p. 222. Bram Stoker was Irving's friend and manager.

[63]Ibid., p. 225.

[64]Ibid., p. 225.

[65]Ibid., p. 232.

[66]Louise Rouse Rehak, "On the Use of Martyrs: Tennyson and Eliot on Thomas Becket," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXIII (October 1963), p. 56.

[67]Ibid., p. 57.

[68]Ibid., p. 58.

[69]Irving, p. 554.

[70]Ibid., p. 555.

[71]Ibid., p. 556.

[72]Ibid.

[73]Stokes, II, p. 216.

[74]Irving, p. 560.

[75]Ibid., p. 557.

[76]"Becket at the Lyceum," Saturday Review, (February 11, 1893), p. 146.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Frederick Wedmore, "Tennyson's Becket," Academy, XLIII (February 18, 1893), p. 158.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid., p. 159.

[81]William Archer, The Theatrical "World" for 1893 (London, [1894]), p. 47.

[82]Ibid., p. 48.

[83]Ibid.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Ibid., p. 50.

[86]Ibid., p. 51.

[87]Ibid., p. 53.

[88]John Olin Eidson, "Tennyson's Becket on the American Stage," The Emerson Society Quarterly, XXXIX (Quarter II, 1965), p. 16.

[89]"Becket," The Critic, XX (November 18, 1893), p. 326.

[90]Eidson, "Tennyson's Becket....", p. 16.

[91]Ibid., p. 18.

[92]Quoted in M. J. Moses, Representative British Dramas, Victorian and Modern (Boston, 1925), p. 344.

[93]Eidson, "Tennyson's Becket....", p. 18.

[94]Ibid., p. 19.

[95]Irving, pp. 669-670.

[96]Hallam Tennyson, p. 196.

[97]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 535.

[1]Morton Luce, Tennyson (London, 1901), p. 131.

[2]Waugh, pp. 172-173.

[3]Arthur Christopher Benson, Alfred Tennyson (New York, 1907), p. 59.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Fausset, p. 251.

[6]Ibid., p. 252.

[7]Harley Granville-Barker, "Tennyson, Swinburne, Meredith - and the Theatre," The Eighteen-Seventies: Essays, by Fellows of the Royal Society of Literature, ed. Harley Granville-Barker (Cambridge, England, 1929), pp. 168-169.

[8]Ibid., pp. 175-176.

[9]Ibid., pp. 170-171.

[10]Paull F. Baum, Tennyson: Sixty Years After (Chapel Hill, 1948), pp. 214-215.

[11]Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama: 1660-1900 (Cambridge, England, 1959), V, pp. 208-209.

[12]Valerie Pitt, Tennyson Laureate (Toronto, 1962), p. 222.

[14]Baum, p. 219. Tennyson called Harold a "Tragedy of Doom," citing the scenes in which a comet appears, Harold's shipwreck and capture, the oath, Edward's curse and death, the marriage and coronation of Harold and Aldwyth, and the great Battle of Senlac; see Hallam Tennyson, p. 186.

[15]Ibid., p. 225.

[16]Archer, p. 351.

[17]Louis F. Block, "The Dramatic Sentiment and Tennyson's Plays," Poet-Lore, VIII (October-November, 1896), p. 520.

[18]Luce, p. 132.

[19]Van Dyke, pp. 171-172.

[20]Ibid., p. 172.

[21]Fausset, pp. 250-253.

[22]Japikse, p. 157.

[23]Granville-Barker, p. 169.

[24]Baum, p. 224.

[25]Rehak, p. 59.

[26]Jerome H. Buckley, The Growth of a Poet (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 202.

[27]Henry James, "Mr. Tennyson's Drama," p. 402.

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