

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON

Alfred Tennyson was born in 1809 in the Lincolnshire village of Somersby. His father was the rector there, and had, besides Alfred, eleven other children. And here about the Rectory garden, orchard and fields, the Tennyson children played at knights and warriors. Beyond the field flowed a brook—



“That loves
To purl o’er matted cress and ribbed sand,
Or dimple in the dark of rushy coves,
Drawing into his narrow earthen urn,
In every elbow and turn,
The filter’d tribute of the rough woodland.”¹

Of the garden and the fields and of the brook especially, Alfred kept a memory all through his long life. But at seven he was sent to live with his grandmother and go to school at Louth, about ten miles away. “How I did hate that school!” he said, long afterwards, so we may suppose the years he spent there were not altogether happy. But when he was eleven he went home again to be taught by his father, until

¹ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “Ode to Memory,” 1830.

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he went to Cambridge.

At home, Alfred read a great deal, especially poetry. He wrote, too, romances like Sir Walter Scott's, full of battles, epics in the manner of Pope, plays, and blank verse. He wrote so much that his father said, "If Alfred die, one of our greatest poets will have gone." And besides writing poems, Alfred, who was one of the big children, used to tell stories to the little ones,— stories these of knights and ladies, giants and dragons and all manner of wonderful things. So the years passed, and one day the two boys, Charles and Alfred, resolved to print their poems, and took them to a bookseller in Louth. He gave them £20 for the manuscript, but more than half was paid in books out of the shop. So the grand beginning was made. But the little book caused no stir in the great world. No one knew that a poet had broken silence.—Henrietta E. Marshall, *English Literature for Boys and Girls*

Alfred was only seventeen years of age when his first volume of verse, *Poems by Two Brothers*, was published—to the great delight of their mother, who had encouraged them in their poetic pursuits.

The next year Charles and Alfred went to Cambridge. Alfred soon made many friends among the clever young men of his day, chief among them being Arthur Hallam, whose father was a famous historian.

At college Tennyson won the chancellor's prize for a poem on Timbuctoo, and the following year he published a second little volume of poems. This, though kindly received by some great writers, made hardly more stir than the little