GOBLE

The Early Reviews of Tennyson's "Maud"

English

A. M.

1907

THE EARLY REVIEWS OF TENNYSON'S "MAUD"

BY

LLOYD GOBLE, M. S. (WESTFIELD COLLEGE, 1896)

THESIS FOR

THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN ENGLISH

IN THE

GRADUATE SCHOOL

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1907

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

May 31 1907

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Lloyd Goble, M. S.

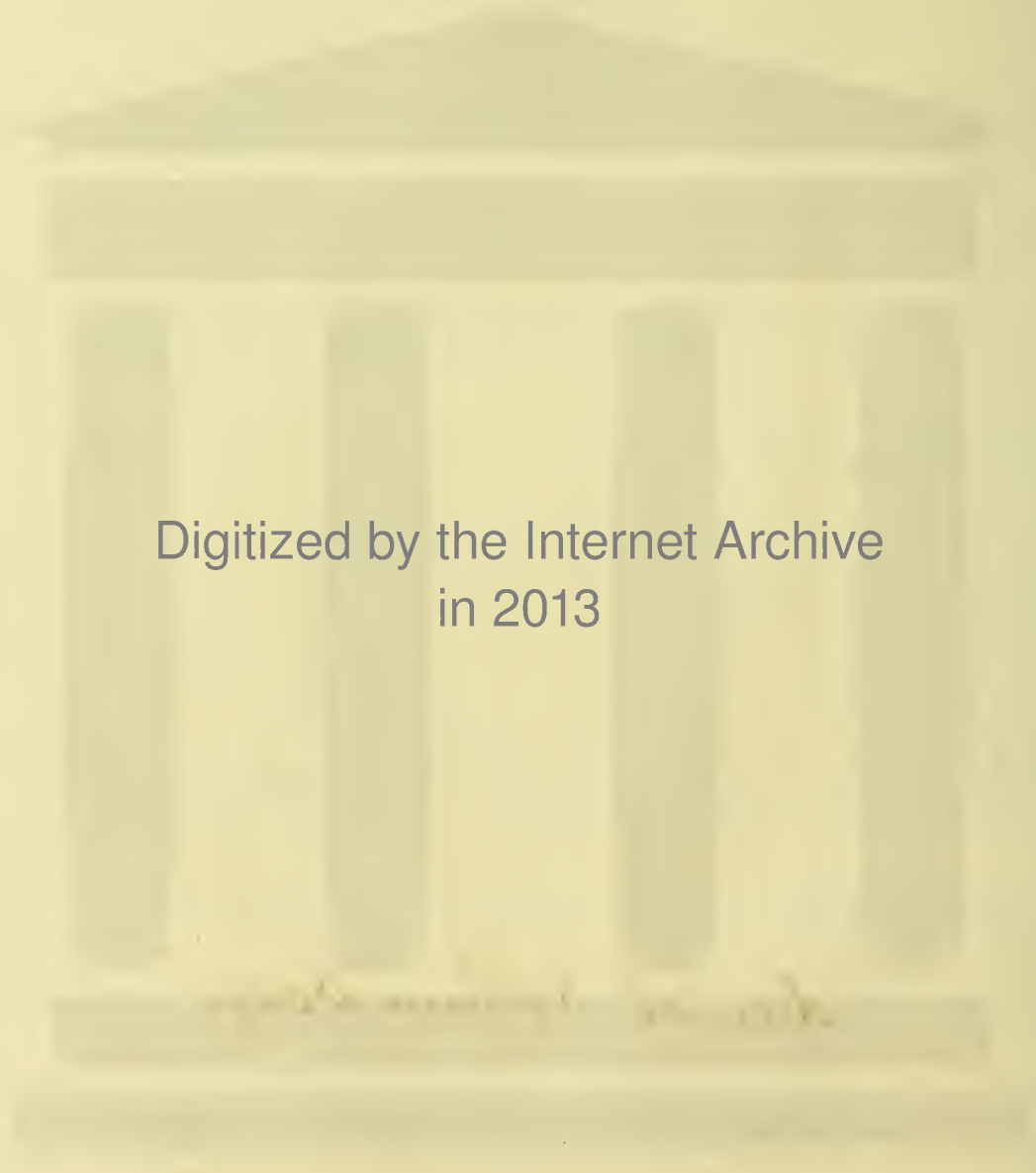
ENTITLED Early Reviews of Tennyson's "Maud"

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF Master of Arts

Daniel Kilham Dodge

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF English



THE EARLY REVIEWS
of
TENNYSON'S "MAUD."

The effect produced by any work of art depends in a large measure upon the condition, the attitude, even the mood of those for whom that art was intended. No message can accomplish its purpose so long as the message itself is not understood. It therefore happens that good poetry often meets with a very unfavorable reception. Byron, Keats, Shelly, Wordsworth, Browning, and almost all other modern poets have suffered at the hands of the reviewers. In almost every instance, however, it was before the poet and his work were well known, when he was struggling for recognition or like Browning, sitting quietly at his task and caring only to do it well whether praise or blame should follow. But seldom indeed does a poem of such unusual merit by an author so favorably known meet with a reception so hostile as did Tennyson's "Maud." The author himself never doubted his work, and a small circle of readers were as enthusiastic in its praise as the reviewers were hostile; but the great body of serious students have been very tardy in extending recognition, and after fifty years are only coming to appreciate it fully.

What were those early conceptions of the work, to what were they due, and what has made them give way to juster views? We know that human nature is not wilfully perverse, nor is the aesthetic sense arbitrary in extending appreciation

when genuine appeal is made to it. The explanation, then, must be rational. There are no inexplicable difficulties. The problem is both simple and interesting. "Maud" was ready for the printer in April 1855 and made its appearance about the first of August. Before a discussion of the treatment which it received from the critics is given, it may be well to note briefly three things: the condition of Europe at the time mentioned, Tennyson's position as a poet, and how "Maud" came to be written.

The Crimean war fever was at its height. Tennyson was deeply interested in the struggle; but many statesmen regarded England's part in it as a very unworthy one. They thought that blood and treasure should not be poured out to preserve the balance of power in Europe if at the same time it kept the Turks north of the Bosporus.

As to Tennyson, he held undisputed superiority among English poets. When the volumes of 1842 appeared, such men as Wordsworth said with confidence, "He is decidedly the first of our living poets."* Then came "The Princess" and later "In Memoriam." The former, it is true, was not all that his ardent admirers had hoped for, but it was indeed very beautiful poetry; the latter was beyond question the noblest elegy in our language. After the death of Wordswworth, he was made

---

*Letter to Henry Reed of Philadelphia, 1845:- Quoted by Dr. Henry Van Dyke in his Introduction to "Poems by Tennyson," Athenaeum Series, Ginn & Co.

Poet-laureate. To him everybody looked for great things.

The germ from which the poem grew was published in 1837 in "The Tribute,"** a memorial volume edited by Lord Northampton. It was "a charity book of poetry for the destitute family of a man of letters." The issuing of such books was a conventional charity-device which Tennyson did not like, though the year previous he had helped in such a venture. When R. M. Milnes, then, in behalf of Lord Northampton wrote to Tennyson for a contribution, the poet refused to comply. Milnes was angry and spoke his mind freely in a second communication. Tennyson, who loved peace and was sincerely generous, then relented and sent in his contribution. He complied not only with the letter of the request but also with the spirit, for, concerning Lord Northampton's desire, Milnes had written, "He prays you to contribute not your mite but your might." Swinburne, speaking of some of the chief contributions to "that fortunate volume of miscellaneous verse," describes this one as "what seems to certain readers the poem of deepest charm and fullest delight of pathos and melody ever written even by Mr. Tennyson." The stanzas were reprinted about eight years

---

**Curiously enough the Laureate in his outline of the poem ("Memoirs," Vol. 1, p-402-05) erroneously mentioned the "Keepsake" as the volume in which the stanzas first appeared. His memory for the moment was at fault; or possibly the error was due to the poet's son who edited the outline for the "Memoirs." The "Keepsake" was published a year earlier than the "Tribute." This is made clear on page 160-Vol. 1, of the "Memoirs."

later in The Knickerbocker Magazine. The poet's friend and neighbor, Sir John Simeon, suggested that the verses in their isolated shape were unintelligible, and might with added verses be woven into a story of dramatic power. The hint was taken, and the author set himself to work. He continued with ardor and enthusiasm; and all the while his wonderfully sensitive nature was keenly alive. So the poem came into being.

"Maud" was reviewed by the Athenaeum in its issue of August 4, 1855. The reviewer, whose identity yet remains concealed, was not in the least doubtful in his interpretation; but like most of his fellows he was wrong. He said: "Maud" is a mystery - a parable - an allegory. But the mystery resides in the form of the poem, rather than in the meaning. The fashion of the verse, written in a score of varying meters, wild, fantastic and provoking, some times running into rhymes and cadences the very soul of music, sometimes stumbling over words and phrases that defy modulation, closely resembles the fashion of the thought it clothes. This last is shifting, morbid, and entangled as the phantasmagoric of a dream, while the meanings which it involves, and which come out clear at last, are as literal as a judge's summary. Even in the wildest rhapsodies of the "Princess" Mr. Tennyson has never been so careless, visionary, and unreal as in this poetical treatment of a plain, popular and literal theme. "Maud' is an allegory of the war." It was on this point that most of the English reviewers erred. The imagined relation of the poem to the war was a stumbling-block over which all tripped, though some approached the obstacle with greater confidence than did others.

The poem was an allegory; so the reviewer must tell what each character represents. "A voice recites the poem:- the voice of one who appears restless, morbid, uncontent, vexed with himself, vexed with the world, conscious of much moral abasement, conscious also of high spiritual aspirations. This voice we take it, is meant to represent the Present Age. Maud is the theme of the rhapsody, a gay, ideal, delicate creature - meant, we suppose, to represent the Hope of the world, and to embody all of Goodness and of Beauty that remains in a barren age." War is vindicated as an arbitration, terrible yet necessary when pride and passion will not bow to reason, but it must be appealed to only as an instrument of good, as a devine means for the accomplishment of a devine purpose. The reviewer accepts what he thinks is Tennyson's argument and cites history to prove it. Most of England's great men are grouped according to periods of great military activity. Times of peace produce only pygmies. He is sure that "we import our learning from Germany, our art from Italy, our singers from Sweden,- our dancers from Spain: We are abdicating our intellectual thrones." Then he goes on to say: "Great books are no longer written; great passions no longer stir us. Something is deeply rotten in our state of Denmark. For such result there must be cause. What is the cause? Mr. Tennyson tells us, in his allegory of 'Maud,' that we are rotting with peace." The reviewer is in sympathy with England's part in the war and on that score could praise the poem; but unfortunately the poetry is not of a high order. There are

some things that are "exquisitely mystical and attractive;" the garden song is "very beautiful and delicate." He thinks Tennyson meant John Bright when he wrote about "This broad-brim'd hawker of holy things, whose ear is stuffed with cotton and rings." It does not anger him either, and he calls it a "piece of character-painting." There seemed no possibility of a mistake. Who but a Quaker should wear a "broad-brim'd?" and John Bright was the one of them all. "The Brook", which was printed in the volume with "Maud," is called "a pretty Idyl, pretty, and nothing more," The review closes with this paragraph: "This volume is not worthy of its author. Not a few lines are singularly harsh, broken and unmusical. Less of finish is observable in the structure and emendation of the verse. Less of brightness in the fancy - less of tenderness in the pathos - less of quaintness in the thought - are also noticeable. Yet there are also, as we have shown, occasional sweetness of line - originality of conception - characteristic dreaminess of movement, and individual color in the poetry of 'Maud.' We rank Mr. Tennyson's muse so high that we unwillingly receive from her any song which is less than perfect."

Perhaps the most remarkable of all the reviews is the one which appeared in Blackwood's, Sept., 1855. It doubtless had greater influence than any other upon the minds of ordinary readers. This was due not simply to the great influence of the magazine, but quite as much to the reviewer's pungent and brilliant style, his dash and self-assurance. These things have great weight with those who entrust their thinking to

others. No doubt remains concerning the authorship of the article. Immediately after the appearance of the volume, W. E. Aytoun wrote John Blackwood asking the privilege of reviewing it for the magazine. The letter is interesting because it reveals the spirit in which the work was done. He says: "You know how I have stuck up for Alfred through thick and thin, and will readily believe I have not come to this conclusion without a pang; but poetic justice must be done, else the small fry who are occasionally served up as white-bait for the gluttons of the magazine would have just cause for complaint. He shall not, however, have his scalp lifted by an ignoble hand; that of a brother bard shall wield the tomahawk, and already I have in fancy worn his top-lock on my moccasins."* When one reads the review, he is compelled to believe that Mr. Aytoun took more delight in the thought of scalp-lifting than in the belief that he was meting out poetic justice. He does, however, repeat: "In justice to others of less note, upon whose works we have commented freely, we cannot maintain silence when the Laureate has taken the field. Some of those whom we have previously noticed, may possible think that our judgments have been harsh - for when did ever youthful poet listen complacently to an honest censor? - but they shall not

---

*"William Blackwood and his Sons" Vol. 3, p. 24.

have an excuse for saying that, while we spoke, our mind freely with regard to them, we have allowed others of more acknowledged credit to escape, when their writings demanded condemnation." The reader is convinced that Mr. Aytoun was a free-lance who loved a fight for its own sake. Concerning him Mrs. Gerald Porter says: "His criticisms were often written in a spirit of drollery, not always to be taken au pied de la lettre, though no doubt containing the truth which is often spoken in jest. For example, Aytoun's feeling for Tennyson was one of genuine admiration, but the great poet sometimes appears to have excited a mirthful and whimsical mood in his 'brother bard,' as Aytoun liked to call himself, into which no feelings of reverent awe were allowed to enter."*

The review begins with high praise of many of the poems which appeared in 1842. Some are so exquisite in their expression, their music so delicate. Tennyson, however, is declared "unequal in composition". Some of the poems which the poet considers his best are his very worst. The reviewer could never join in the admiration lavished upon "In Memoriam." It is grief so drawled out and protracted as to loose its primary character, and to assume that very modified form which the older poets used to denominate the luxury of woe. The "Princess," too, must be condemned as being merely bizarre, novel, and ingenious, though it contains beautiful lines and passages. It was probably intended to be a freak of fancy,

---

*"William Blackwood and his Sons," Vol. 3, p. 24.

therefore no one should apply to it the stringent rules of critisism. But "Maud!" - the reviewer arose after its perusal dispirited and sorrowful. The poet was losing ground with each successive effort. Poetry was decadent in all Europe. This was especially noticable in Germany and England. Mr. Aytoun has a genuine case of the dumps, and continues as above for several columns; then he is willing to concede that, "Had 'Maud' been put into our hands as the work of some young unrecognized poet, we should have said that it exhibited very great promise - that it contained at least one passage of such extraordinary rhythmical music that the sense became subordinate to the sound, a result, which, except in the case of one or two of the plaintive ancient Scottish ballads, and some of the lyrics of Burns, has hardly ever been attained by any British writer of poetry. Such passages---alternate with others of positively hideous cacophony, such as we should have supposed that no man gifted with a tolerable ear and pliable fingers would have perpetrated - that some times a questionable taste had been exhibited in the selection of ornaments, which were rather gaudy than graceful, and often too ostentatiously exposed - that there were other grave errors against taste which we could only attribute to want of practice and study - that the objectionable and unartistic portions of the poem were, leaving the mediocre ones out of the question, grossly disproportionate to the good - and that the general effect of the poem was unhappy, unwholesome, and disagreeable. Such would have been our verdict, had we not known who was the writer; and we

feel a double disappointment now when forced to record it against a poet of such deserved reputation." Alas! Alas! Tennyson had been petted, flattered, and spoiled. He had been led astray by poetic theories, and needed good, wholesome, fatherly advice. He should not obstinately adhere to those theories and injure his reputation as Wordsworth and Southey had done some years earlier. To be sure, there was nothing yet to indicate any decay of his native or acquired powers. He only needed to be led back to the right path to delight the world once more with such poetry as he had enunciated in his youth.

The reviewer quotes eight stanzas of sec. 1, then stops to ask: "Is it not altogether an ill-conceived and worse-expressed screed of bombast, set to a meter which has the string-halt, without even the advantage of regularity in its babble?"

Of Sec. V. which begins:

"A voice by the ceder tree,
In the meadow under the hill! -

he says: "This passage is the first in the volume which displays a scintillation of poetic power, or reminds us in any way of the power writings of Mr. Tennyson." Sec. X11, which Tennyson was wont to read with such charming effect, is quoted with simple comment: "O dear, dear! what manner of stuff is this?" The next part of the poem that provoked comment was Section XV11. Of it he said: "We make every allowance for the raptures of a lover on such an occasion, and admit that he is privileged to talk very great nonsense; but there must be a

limit somewhere; and we submit to Mr. Tennyson whether he was justified, for his own sake, in putting a passage so outrageously silly as the following into the mouth of his hero:" The entire section was then quoted. Other reviewers have awarded it especial praise; but Aytoun could only say: "Mr. Halliwell some years ago published a collection of Nursery Rhymes. We have not the volume by us at present; but we are fully satisfied that nothing so bairnly as the above is to be found in the Breviary of the Innocents."

The reviewer quotes much else that he calls namby-pamby; but of the garden song he cannot speak too highly. Here in his review he is sincere. "The music of it is faultless ---We treasure it the more, because it is the one gem of the collection - the only passage that we can read with pure unmixed delight.---Only in this one does the verse flash out like a golden thread from a reel; and we feel that our hands are bound, like those of Thalaba, when the enchantress sang to him as she spun."

Mr. Aytoun was not concerned about Tennyson's attitude toward the war; he was not alarmed about any permicious teachings. One so alarmed and nervous might be pardoned a little hysteria. But he pretended to judge the poem purely as a work of art. It is only charitable to regard him as insincere when he dubs the work "gibbrish." He cannot see in it even an intelligent study of madness. Some critics now think that in this respect it is excelled only by "Hamlet." Aytoun says: "We are told that there is method in madness, and Shake-

speare never lost sight of that when giving voice to the ravings of King Lear; but this is mere barbarous bedlamite jargon, without a vestige of meaning, and it is a sore humiliation to us to know that it was written by the Laureate." Columns like this follow; and the reviewer closes with the hope that he might succeed in chastising the poet back into good, sensible behavior. He displays as much cheap and vulgar egotism as did the reviewers of an earlier day.

It is worthy of note that after a year had passed Aytoun's opinions of "Maud" had undergone some change. In a review of Macaulay's celebrated history he says: "We were greatly struck the other day, looking for a second time over Mr. Tennyson's 'Maud' - a poem which we were by no means disposed to be complimentary to - with the extreme and exquisite skill of its construction, and admirable fashion in which the story, poor and unworthy as it is, was told. We disliked and disapproved the book, but we could not deny ourselves the technical and professional admiration of a craftsman towards the marvels of constructive skill implied in its making."*

The article that appeared in the Edinburgh Review of October, 1855 was very sincere and judicious in tone. The author showed himself to be a very careful and appreciative student of Tennyson. Indeed, he seems to have been one of Tennyson's very near friends. It is well-known that James

---

*Blackwoods, Vol. 80, p. 365.

Spedding reviewed for the Edinburgh the volumes of 1842. That review will long be regarded as one of the most sympathetic and judicious that any critic has ever written of a contemporary. In the later review we have the following reference to it: "Neither 'The Princess' nor 'In Memoriam' fulfils the hope to which we long ago gave expression, - that Mr. Tennyson would employ his evidently sufficient powers in the production of a work, which, though occupying no longer space than the contents of his collection of 'Poems,' 'should as much exceed them in value as a series of quantities multiplied into each other exceeds in value the same series simply added together.'"* It seems that the reviewer's "we" refers to himself rather than to the periodical. If so, Spedding is the author of both reviews. When one puts the two side by side he finds there is much evidence to support that conclusion.

We have first in the article an attempt to explain Tennyson's ever increasing popularity. He is compared to Byron and Scott. These two wrote romances of powerful narrative interest. To appreciate them one needed no high poetical, intellectual, or moral culture. Moore's effusions in favor of "women and wine" were popular because of their easy grace, gaiety and reckless abandon. In morals and philosophy Tennyson was meditative and uncommon-place, and in religion much too vague and speculative to appeal to those who enjoyed greatly Watts or Keble. The reviewer seems to feel that the highest art can hardly make a popular appeal. He says: "A classic

---

*Edinburgh Review, Vol. 77, p. 391.

finish of expression, the result of indefatigable labour and of days spent sometimes on a single line; an observation of natural objects so affectionately accurate and minute as often to be valueless to all but the microscopic eye of him who is in heart and mind, if not in act, a poet; a preference of that kind of beauty, which he that runs can never read, which is the harvest of a quiet eye; and requires much leisure of life and tranquility of heart - two very rare things in this age - to commend it; a most fastidious taste in the melody of language, seeking purity of tone, sometimes even at the expense of strength on the one hand, and sweetness on the other, and scarcely ever resting until it has arrived at the reduction our rough and consonantal English to the bell-like clearness of the Italian; these, and most other qualities by which Mr. Tennyson's poetry is characterised, are certainly not such as could have been expected to produce a popularity exceeding probably that of any living English writer in verse." Spedding could not think the English people were cultured enough really to appreciate Tennyson. His great popularity must be due in part to the fact that his star arose when few others were in the heavens.

Spedding's modesty stands in strong contrast to Aytoun's egotism. He thinks that up to a certain point it may be proper to act upon the fiction that a poet has more to learn from a critic than a critic from him. But poets 'make r ich the blood of the world,' and after the critic has become imbued with the sweet influences by which this is done, he is able only to make more or less just comparisons of various

singer's gifts; and it becomes him to assume his real position as assistant to the formation of popular opinion rather than strive to be tutor to such minds as those which have constituted the great dynasty of Laureates.

The critic's views of "The Princess" and "In Memoriam" are interesting and may be mentioned here to show how he valued them in comparison to the poem under consideration. The subject of the first he considered of but transitory interest. The sentence in which he tells us that is very interesting in the light of recent attacks upon the House of Commons by "suffragists." He days:"This piece though full of meanings of abiding value, is ostensibly a brilliant serio-comic jeu d'esprit upon the noise of 'woman's rights,' which even now ceases to make itself heard anywhere but in the refuge of exploded European absurdities beyond the Atlantic." He thinks the piece is all that it pretends to be. The author failed not in what he attempted; but what he attempted was not worth his doing. "He expended in pyrotechny a power which might have heaved the earth." "In Memoriam" is a work of much higher worth and poetical integrity, although much of its value depends on the fact that it is not a premeditated work. It comes to us with an unpretending air. The author is too modest. "In Memoriam will rank in some respects with Shakespeare's Sonnets, as one of the curiosities of passion, remarkable, not as most great poems are, for the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin, but for the exceptional feeling which makes the whole world wonder. Nothing but the indubitable and entire sincerity

of the feeling, and the simplicity, with which it is expressed, could have saved such a work from being charged by most people with extravagance and unfaithfulness to truth." The critic has no doubt that as a speciman of poetic style it surpasses all poems of equal magnitude written in the century preceding it. "The style which has been attained by other recent poets, only in short and crack passages, is here the average style, and must henceforward be that of all verse having any chance of permanence." He compares its style with that of the "Palace of Art" and says: "In one case nature seems to be reflected in the depths of a clear lake, its surfact gently rippled with the breath of emotion, making the picture softer, and almostfairer than the truth; in the other we find all forms reflected with minuteness, hardness, and chilling brilliancy, as in a mirror of polished steel."

In turning from "In Memoriam" to "Maud" the reviewer found his pleasure greatly diminished; for the qualities appreciated most highly in the former are precisely those which are wanting in the latter. One is reminded here of Lowell's oft-quoted statement that "Maud" is the antiphonal voice to "In Memoriam.'" No one can help regretting that the reviewer failed to understand the poem. Had he done so he would most certainly have been enthusiastic in its praise. The plot is given in full with frequent comments which show his erronious conception of the purpose of the poem. He says: "If we make out Mr. Tennyson's purpose rightly, - and of this we are doubtful, for we confess that careful and repeated perusal has not

enabled us to apprehend with any distinctness the leading intention and subjective idea of this poem, - the element of a morbid mind is introduced, less in order that it should illustrate or be illustrated, than as a means of pitching the tone of the work in a key of extraordinarily high poetic sensibility, and at once providing for the expression of thoughts and feelings with the strongest emphasis, and with almost total irresponsibility on the part of the writer." Dr. Mann in his celebrated essay has nothing but sarcasm for this, and rightly too; for the reviewer only denies in one form what he asserts in another. Had he understood the dramatic character of the work, he could not have made that mistake. He says: "The story isn't an attractive history. It belongs to the same class with the author's earlier poem,"Saint Simeon Stylites." Both have the serious defect of leaving the mind of the reader in a painful state of confusion as to the limits of the sane and the insane. Both are written with inquestionable power and an undercurrent of 'dramatic irony.' But it is impossible to discover in either where the irony is intended to end and the truth to begin. Of one thing, however, we may be sure; and this is, that the vast proportion of what most of Mr. Tennyson's would-be-complimentary critcs regard as the expression of his own views and feelings, <u>is</u> irony; and, that it should have been mistaken for anything more, is a remarkable illustration of the carelessness of modern habits of reading and thinking." So far as the poem under consideration is concerned the reviewer was not greatly mistaken. The thoughts

and sentiments were not Tennyson's own, but they were not irony.

The critic is right in regarding the love passages as the soul of the poem; and he is happy in his appreciation of them. It is expressed as follows: "We do not remember anywhere to have seen the passion of love described with the combined intensity and refinement of some passages in this poem. We cite as an example the following verses, which, for grace and tenderness, we can compare to nothing in modern art, except one or two of the best of Mendelssohn's 'Songs without words.'" The section quoted is Section XVlll. which begins,-

"I have led her home, my love, my only friend,-"

This was one of the three passages which the poet loved best. The reviewer's comment is eminently true and worthy of consideration: "These and several other scarcely inferior passages in 'Maud', might well have been entitled 'music without notes.' This kind of poetry is almost a modern invention, and of which Mr. Tennyson is probably the greatest master, asks to be read as it was written, in a mood in which reflection voluntarily abandons for a time its mental leadership; and thought follows instead of guiding the current of emotion. A vague spiritual voluptuousness takes the place of abstract conceptions; and we should as soon think of judging such verses by the ordinary laws of language as of determining the merit of a drama by the melodies of an opera. A sustained passage of this sort is perhaps one of the rarest if not the highest triumphs of poetry, 'that sweeter and weaker sex of truth!" We are reminded by Morton Luce that Tennyson could not bear to hear his

songs sung. "Poetry," he remarks,"does sometimes transcend music, - poetry in which faultless form is vitalized by faultless spirit; so vitalized indeed, that form and spirit 'touch, mingle and are transfigured,' as far as may be in poetic art. Such poetry has a charm not inferior to the charm of music, in which the transfiguration is complete; nay, rather superior, because expressed in that word-symbolism by whose aid the sound-symbolism of music was developed, and to which consciously or unconsciously, the eloquence of music must for many generations longer be related."*

The Edinburgh's critic was able by means of this striking figure to put in small compass his conception of "Maud" as a work of art: "About the love-strain which we have called the soul of this poem, the other parts range themselves like pitchy clouds about the moon, to the great increase of its loveliness and their own obscurity. But, notwithstanding the service thus rendered by the latter to the former, we cannot help wishing the clouds away. They are not the clouds of nature, even in a morbid state, but contain a large admixture of London smoke or some such murky element, which renders them unfit for a poetical picture." He felt the poem had much to do with the war, so he was constrained to add: "The fever of politics should not have been caught by the Laureate, even under the disguise of a monomaniac, or, at all events, of one who has so little method in his madness as to assume that the metropolitan grocers will put less chicory

---

*"Handbook to Tennyson's Works," p. 312.

in our coffee, because 'the long, long canker of peace is over and done,' and we are paying double income tax for a reviving fight with the Czar."

There is much else worthy of comment. A protest is made against the notion that a poem cannot be profound unless it is obscure. This, we take it, comes from the reviewer's consciousness of his own failure to understand the poem. Then there is an able discussion of the verse-technique of the volume. He speaks with authority; and as few other reviewers mentions what is so worthy of mention, we append a few of his comments: "In a greater portion of the poem, we have a complete return to the Anglo-Saxon principle of isochronous bars, of which the filling up is left to the will of the poet. Hitherto, all poets, since the total disuse of the Anglo-Saxon measure, which long survived the Anglo-Saxon language, have held themselves bound by certain classical laws, fixing the invariable use, or at least the great preponderance, of one and the same kind of 'foot' in the same kind of verse,--- But, in the greater part of 'Maud,' there is really no other metrical foundation than equality in the number of accents in each verse." The measure is hexameter of the most lawless kind; it is Anglo-Saxon in character though it employs rhyme and the latter did not; furthermore it does not make any systematic use of alliteration, which was essential to the Anglo-Saxon. "It has no equal in ancient or modern verse for its freedom from law. Such freedom is always an immense disadvantage for any but the greatest masters."

Much space has been given to a discussion of this review because it seems eminently worthy of it. The author did not speak at random nor with a desire to be sensational. He had profound insight and understood much, though, he did not understand the poet's main purpose. Why he in common with others failed to understand it will be discussed later. His mental attitude toward the poet was right as is evidenced by his comment on "The Brook." "This piece is of that class in which we have declared our opinion that Mr. Tennyson is incomparable. When we read his poetry in this kind we wish that he might 'ever do nothing but that.'"

Not all the reviewers were hostile in their criticism of 'Maud.' Some were very sympathetic and mingled generous praise with moderate censure.. Fraser's Magazine for September, 1855 contained a very note-worthy article. The opinions expressed in it correspond very closely to those entertained by the best critics of today. Fortunately, too, Fraser's Magazine at that time held high rank among English periodicals. It was established in 1830, being modeled after Blackwood's. An authority tells us that "the literary standard of Fraser's soon equaled and possible surpassed that of Blackwood's."* Among its writers were Carlyle, Thackeray, Father Prout,

---

*"Early Reviews of English Poets" p. XLIX, John Louis Haney.

Thomas Love Peacock, Allen Cunningham, Coleridge, Charles Kingsley and Southey. We have no hesitation in saying the review was the work of Charles Kingsley. He had in 1850* reviewed anonymously the Laureate's works, giving special attention to "In Memoriam." Fortunately the review of 1855 quotes the earlier one in a manner which leaves no doubt that they were written by the same man. In the review of 1855 there is this statement: "What rank among poets that gentleman (Tennyson) seems to us to hold, we have already boldly said in this magazine. -- We have said that Mr. Tennyson was the only man now living in Great Britain who seems to have any claim to the name of a great poet." We find on turning back to the earlier review these words: "There is but one man in England possessed at once of poetic talent and artistic experience sufficient for so noble a creation ('In Memoriam')." The entire review puts him far above his contemporaries. Many parallel passages might be cited, but one other will suffice. We have this from the later review: "In 'The Brook' Mr. Tennyson's old grace and skill are shown forth in perfection. We have ere now compared him, when he attempts this style, to Theocritus and the Sicilians." In the earlier review it is expressed as follows: "It is this very power (to portray the simpler manifestations of Man and Nature by

---

*Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 42 pp. 245-255. The review was published later in "'Sir Walter Raleigh and his Times,' and other Essays."

investing them with a rich and delightful tone of coloring, perfect grace of manner, and perfect melody of rhyme) which has made Mr. Tennyson, not merely the only English rival of Theocritus and Bion, but in our opinion, as much their superior as modern England is superior to ancient Greece."

No critic has bestowed higher praise on "The Princess" and "In Memoriam" than has Charles Kingsley. "Maud," however, is a poem of a very different kind, and we can hardly expect him to appreciate it so greatly as he did those two. He does not hesitate, however, to say: "In 'Maud' as in his previous poems, Mr. Tennyson keeps easily the first place; our only question is whether he remains quite equal to himself. That there is most beautiful poetry in 'Maud' and in every piece in the volume, no unprejudiced person can deny. but are they, as wholes, eaual to what the Laureate has written long since?" "The Brook," he is sure, is the best idyl in the English language. The poet is at his best in such delineations.

Kingsley discusses very pertinently the Laureate's developement as revealed in "Maud" and earlier poems. It is like the developmentof "Pre-Raphaelitism" into "Raphaelitism." His poem "Maraina," in which he endeavored to draw exactly the thing which he saw, believing it his business not to improve but to copy God's world, is parallelled by pre-Raphaelite products; and his later poems like "The Brook" have their counterpart in Millais' "Rescue." The early photographic exactness has given way to power and deep human feeling

idealized and refined. In "Maud," however, the critic thinks Tennyson has fallen back into some of his early errors. "He has surely laid on his color here and there too lavishly and gaudily, so losing harmony; in attempting to exhibit strong passion and action under modern forms, he has surely been tempted now and then, as Mr. Dickens (the pre-Raphaelite of novelists) has, into caricature."

Kingsley, like Spedding, is modest. He quotes a remark of Goethe's that every critic ought to keep in mind. "All great works of art produce at first sight a feeling of disappointment in the beholder, till he is content to set himself before them as a student, and see with the artist's eyes, instead of requiring the artist to see with his." A critic can not be a true critic as long as he pretends to be an infallible judge. He thinks Mr. Tennyson has the fullest right to say, - "you know that I can write good poems, while you cannot. Allow me therefore to understand my own business best." Feeling so, he says: "Nay, we frankly confess to such a love and reverence for Mr. Tennyson and his poems, that we will if we can, let no one find fault with them but ourselves. --- After all, our complaints are of little weight, balanced against the great amount of really beautiful poetry in the book."

Mr. Kingsley does not like Byronic heroes. The one in 'Maud' is of that kind. He is not as noble a person as him of "Locksley Hall." He is the same man, but narrower and weaker. Through even his highest rapture there runs a tone

of effeminacy. The garden song is quoted and gets its due measure of praise; but the reviewer thinks it is the passion of a southern woman rather than of an English man. The language is Juliet's rather than Romeo's. Mr. Tennyson meant that his hero should be in earnest; the leap, the ring in every line shows that; but an Englishman in earnest would not talk thus.

The accessory characters are criticised not merely because they are bad, but because they are "bad without cause." The critic failed to see that they do not appear in their true character, but as viewed by one who is jealous and misanthropic. "At least the poor fellows ought to be justified in some way. As it is, one's sense of harmony is jarred by such coarse figures by the side of "Maud." They belong to the realm of satire, not of the eclogue or tragedy; it is a mistake like that of Van Lerius in putting a stage devil, horns and all, close by his sleeping Adam and Eve."

Mr. Kingsley gives an analysis of the poem and his interpretation of it. Here he is especially happy, hitting so near to the truth. The hero from the first has in himself the possibility of madness. A great horror has fallen on his childhood. He is solitary and oppressed with the sense of wrong. He has a fierce sense of the evils of the time; but that only maddens him, and he has yet no inclination to try to right those wrongs. Withdrawing into himself more and more he becomes more and more fit for madness. To such a man love comes - love of one of the very family by

whom he considers himself wronged. Unjust suspicions and contempt give way; moods succeed each other the gradual vanishing of which Tennyson has drawn with wonderful truth and grace, making the very changes of meter symbolic of the changes of feeling. His love is not of the highest order; self runs all through it - self purified, pardonable, harmless. But there is nothing more. Maud is a pure and beautiful thing which loves him, but of higher womanhood no glimpse is given us in her, and no desire in him. His love is egoistic; and for that reason, his outbursts of song are inordinately fanciful. In his ecstasy he is near madness, "if, as we say, madness be the inability to see that which is without us save according to our own weak and wayward will. The impersonation of every flower is as much a token of danger as the dizzy exaltation of the rhythm. One jar and the rapture may crash into fury; as indeed it does." After this the downward career is direct. The revulsion from joy to grief, like that from grief to joy which preceded it, has been too sudden. The man has no strength to fight calamity. He drops his hands helplessly and waits his doom. "This is all true psychologically; and with terrible truth it is told." The man is in complete outward loneliness; but now his love is purged of its selfishness since its object as an earthly possession is no longer attainable. The beloved one in a vision points out to him a life of self-sacrifice which he embraces and sanity returns. "The poem ends right. If, as we have said, madness be the absolute triumph of self-will

and selfishness, then a fixed purpose, and that one of righteous duty, and hopeful toil and self-sacrifice for others, for our country, for all mankind if it may be so, is the one real deliverance for the deseased soul of man from madness, or the possibility thereof. ---Such is our analysis of 'Maud.' awkward and stupid enough, no doubt, as commentaries are wont to be; yet it does seem to us, that if readers will take the trouble to wade through his justification of the poem, they will find that Mr. Tennyson has no more spoken lightly in it than he has spoken clumsily."

The heart of the mystery is here revealed, the poet's purpose clearly understood. It seems unfortunate that Spedding could not have seen it so clearly, or that Kinglsey did not have the former's find artistic temperament. He did not appreciate fully the marvelous beauty of the poem. Perhaps he was unable to take a healthy interest in anything that was morbid. These two reviewers were complementary to each other. Some one possessing the qualities which were dominant in each might have written a satisfactory review.

The article in the Westminster Review appeared in the October number. We do not know who wrote it, but the author was animated by the spirit which depricated England's war-policy. He, as did most of the reviewers, began with high praise of Tennyson, whom he put in the highest order of poets; then having done himself that honor, he proceeded to unburden his mind. He was deeply offended but wanted to be just in his criticism. He began as he did because he feared

he might not do justice to the poet on account of "that optical law by which an insignificant object if near, excludes very great and glorious things that lie in the distance." He is sure that, "Even in the light of the most reverential criticism, the effect of 'Maud' cannot be favorable to Tennyson's fame. Here and there only it contains a few lines in which he does not fall below himself. With these slight exceptions he is everywhere saying, if not something that would be better left unsaid, something that he had already said better; and the finest sentiments that animate his other poems are entirely absent. We have in 'Maud' scarcely more than a residuum of Alfred Tennyson; the wide-sweeping intellect, the mild philosophy, the healthy pathos, the wondrous melody, have almost all vanished and left little more than a narrow scorn which piques itself on its scorn of narrowness, and a passion which clothes itself in exaggerated conceits. ----We wish to forget it as we should wish to forget a bad opera. Its tone is throughout morbid; it opens to us the self-revelations of a morbid mind, and what is presents as a cure for this mental disease is istelf only a morbid conception of human relations.

No where in the article is there revealed any notion of the dramatic character of the poem. The sentiments expressed by the hero are taken as the author's own. He does not doubt Tennyson's meaning; and he is as violently opposed to the poet's purpose as he is sure that he understands it. His naivete is shown in the following comment on the verse

technique employed: "It is impossible to suppose that, with so great a master of rhythm as Tennyson, this harshness and ruggedness are otherwise than intentional; so we must conclude that it is a devise of his art thus to set our teeth on edge with his verses when he means to rouse our disgust by his discriptions; and that writing of disagreeable things, he has made it a rule to write disagreeably. These hexameters, weak in logic and grating in sound, are undeniably strong in expression, and eat themselves with phosphoric eagerness into our memory, in spite of our will." The reviewer's disgust is revealed in every paragraph; but it is his understanding that is at fault. We can hardly blame him when he thinks the poet wants to recommend war as the immediate curative for unwholesome lodging of the poor, adulteration of provisions, child-murder, and wife-beating. We can pass over very briefly the critic's comments on the various parts. Few of them he regards as worthy of commendation. "The first lines of any beauty in the poem are those in which he describes the 'cold and clear-cut face,' breaking his sleep, and haunting him 'star-sweet on a gloom profound.'" (Sec. III). He thinks the poet is railing at the coal-mine owners when he speaks of the grandfather who 'crept from a gutted mine master of half a servile shire'. Tennyson's aunt made the same mistake*. Concerning the entire section (Sec. 9), we find

---

*Memoirs, Vol. 1, p. 407.

this interesting remark: "In the denunciations we have here of new-made fortunes, new titles, new houses, and new suits of clothes, it is evidently Mr. Tennyson's aversion, and not merely his hero's morbid mood that speaks; and we must say, that this immense expenditure of gall on trivial social phases, seems to us intrinsically petty and snobbish." But what follows is still more interesting: "The gall presently overflows, as gall is apt to do, without any visible sequence of association, on Mr. Bright, who is denounced as -

'This broad-brimm'd hawker of holy things,
Whose ear is stuft with cotton and rings.'

Hope is expressed that in a second edition these lines may be omitted! The critic cannot take the matter so complacently as did a former one; and he shames the Laureate by quoting some lines of his which were written in a more gracious mood. A scant measure of praise is awarded Sec. XI.; the hero's rapture when he is accepted is called "a silly out-burst;" and Sec. XVII., which Tennyson so greatly loved, is denominated "some very fine lines." The garden song he mentions as "the invocation which has been deservedly admired by every critic: Still it is very inferior, as a poem of the Fancy, to the "Talking Oak."

The reviewer has found in the entire poem but four portions worthy of praise. All the rest is commonplace or positively bad. In summing up the entire matter he thinks it may be possible "to allegorize all this into a variety of edifying meanings; but it remains true, that the ground

notes of the poem are nothing more than hatred of peace and the Peace Society, hatred of commerce and coal-mines, hatred of young gentlemen with flourishing whiskers and padded coats, adoration of a clear-cut face, and faith in War as the unique social regenerator. Such are the sentiments, and such is the philosophy embodied in 'Maud;' at least for plain people not given to allegorising."

The Saturday Review, which from its beginning was "the most influential and most energetic of weekly papers,"* made its first appearance Nov. 3, 1855. In that first number appeared four reviews three of which still make interesting reading though not on account of the wisdom or critical acumen which they display. The writers discussed were Archdeacon Anthony Grant of St. Albans, Heinrich Heine, James Gordon Bennett, and Alfred Tennyson. Bennett is given the endearing appellation of "scoundrel" while Tennyson is accused of being blood-thirsty for creating a hero who wanted war for some peculiarly selfish purposes. The foundation for the accusation is found in the following lines:

"And as months ran on, and rumor of battle grew,
It is time, it is time, O passionate heart, said I,
(For I cleaved to a cause that I felt to be pure and true,)
It is time, O passionate heart and morbid eye,
That old hysterical mock-disease should die."

We are told that "to the hero of 'Maud' himself, the justice of the war is only a parenthesis between more real motives.

---

*Haney, "Early Reviews of English Poets" p. XLI.

The relief of the passionate heart and morbid eye is his first object. What he wants is not a just and necessary war, but war in itself - war, as a cure, first, for the Mammonism of a nation which has still enough of the spiritual left in it to produce and honor a great poet, and secondly, for the hysterical mock-disease of a heart-broken and, one must add, guilty man."

After discussing the glorification of war as a remedy for the canker of peace, the reviewer turns to the wholly selfish reason which he has discovered. "That which has escaped notice is the consilience between the two passages - that in which war is called to cure the vices of a nation, and that in which it is called in to cure a broken heart - and the connection of both with the general philosophy of Mr. Tennyson's poems. -- To rely on external sensations instead of internal efforts for a moral cure, is natural to that character which, whether dramatically or otherwise, is presented to us throughout Mr. Tennyson's poems. ---Let the hero who has compromised a woman's character by his selfishness, and killed her brother, try a more natural mode of regaining peace of mind than that of shedding more blood and inflicting more misery on the world. This is the better course - it is also more poetical. To wage 'war with a thousand battles and shaking a hundred thrones,' in order to cure a hypochondriac and get rid of the chickory in coffee, is a bathos." A blood-thirsty poet indeed who would create a character selfish

enough to plunge his country into terrible war simply to mend a broken heart! No wonder the Laureate was nettled by such captious remarks and silly comments. The critic, however, atoned for much in a final word of comment: "His works are perhaps the most exquisite intellectual luxury the world ever enjoyed."

A few prominent periodicals failed to review the poem or even mention it. Among this number were the Gentleman's Magazine and the North British Review. Littell's Living Age copied the review which appeared in Blackwood's and so helped to extend the bad influence of Mr. Aytoun's article. The Quarterly Review did not mention the poem till Octover, 1859* when it was reviewed in connection with the then newly published "Idylls" and the poet's earlier volumes.

The review just mentioned is interesting for two reasons: first, it was written by no less a man than W. E. Gladstone: and second, though four years had passed since the appearance of "Maud," it showed no evidence of a change of popular opinion concerning the poem. We have in the article the same misconception of the Laureate's purpose, the old failure to see the dramatic character of the work. The thread of the story is given with the remark that "it may all be good frenzy, but we doubt its being good poetry." There is complaint

---

*In the "Memoirs" the review is mentioned as having appeared in 1855, and the error has been copied by many commentators.

of "a somewhat heavy dreaminess, and a great deal of obscurity." The hero and heroine are regarded as too nebulous by far, reminding one of "the boneless and pulpy personages by whom, as Dr. Whewell assures us, the planet Jupiter is inhabited." Mr. Gladstone considered "Maud" as the least popular and least worthy of popularity among the Laureat's more considerable works. Of the entire review, one half is devoted to a condemnation of Tennyson's supposed glorification of war. In it is expressed an opinion which at the time came to be almost universal, - an opinion echoed by the French critic, Taine, and which was held to for a long time even by Tennyson's friends. We are told that, "Mr. Tennyson's war poetry is not comparable to his poetry of peace. Indeed he is not here successful at all: the work of a lower order than his demands the abrupt force and the lyric fire which do not seem to be among his varied and brilliant gifts." It should be remembered that the "Charge of the Light Brigade" was published in the volume with "Maud," and many saw immediately what time has since confirmed, that this lyric is superb war poetry. Almost twenty years later (1878), Mr. Gladstone came to see that his entire conception of "Maud," as here given, was erroneous; and, as will be noticed later, he publicly recanted.

A few English periodicals of note, such as the Spectator, and the National Review were not available for examination by the writer of this paper; but all the great reviews have been consulted. There were of course, minor publications, each of limited influence, but altogether having much to do

in directing public opinion. These, very naturally, followed the lead of the more reputable journals; and soon were firmly established in the minds of the Laureate's readers opinions which it has taken fifty years to eradicate.

Here is perhaps the proper place to note the attitude of American reviewers toward the poem. The three periodicals whose files are available for reference are the Knickerbocker Magazine, the National Magazine and the North American Review. In the last only is there a notice of special merit.

The Knickerbocker gave only a brief editorial notice (Nov. 1855, Vol. 46, p. 525.), the larger part of which we quote: "We confess to not a little disappointment in the perusal of this anxiously-expected work of Tennyson's. It certainly is not equal to his reputation, and will not, we think, increase the number of his admirers. We quite hold with our contemporary, 'The Albion Weekly Journal, who says: "Maud" is a morbid, misanthropical, autobiographical, episodical tale, relieved by gushes of genuine and exquisite poetry. The prevailing sentiment is, indeed, so gloomy, that it may not incorrectly be set down as the production of Tennyson's earlier muse, localized in its graver passages to suit the aspect of the times - as they are seen through his own peculiar medium of thought - and polished here and there with that delicate and finished grace in which experience has made him a master.' The best thing in the volume is the following which will find thousands of new readers in these pages,

although it was originally contributed to the Knickerbocker, ten years ago." Then follows the stanzas that appeared in the "Tribute" in 1837. It seems that Tennyson followed a suggestion offered by Milnes in a post script to the *letter mentioned earlier. It read: "You know your contribution will be at your disposal to do what you like with when the book is sold, i. e. in a year or so." Quite naturally the poet offered it to an American periodical, for perhaps no copy of the Tribute had then found its way across the water.

The review just quoted, while wrong on almost every point, has one suggestion of interest, - that the work was perhaps the product of the poet's earlier muse. Another American reviewer came to the same conclusion. We are not sure that the publication of the stanzas as mentioned was responsible for this, though this is possible.

No review of "Maud" appeared in the National Magazine though there was a facetious reference to it in a humorous review of an imaginary book entitled a "Pilgrimage to Harlem," by James Augustus Pilgarlique.** For this supposed work, the author's mother-in-law furnishes an introduction and occasional verses. The reviewer quotes a stanza of doggerel which he thinks is quite Tennysonian, comments on in mock-sobriety, then follows with the stanza from "Maud" which

---

*Memoirs, p. 157.

**National Magazine, Nov. 1855, p. 422.

begins:

"A voice from the cedar tree -"

The reviewer then says: "In the versification, both poems are on a par; in indistinctness, and thus giving more play to the reader's fancy, we think the Laureate excels; but in conveying knowledge to the mind, which, to be sure, is but a secondary affair, he must evidently yield to the lady. Mrs. Dowdenny, however, has something to write about, which cannot be said of Mr. Tennyson, and therefore we are content, if Queen Victoria insists upon it, that he shall still be the Laureate."

A year later there appeared in the same magazine a very appreciative article on Alfred Tennyson, by R. H. Stoddard. The closing paragraph reads: "Alfred Tennyson is one of the most poetical, is not the most poetical of English poets. Not the greatest, I grant, for he is neither Shakespeare nor Milton, but certainly the sweetest and purest. I love all that he has written, except 'Maud.' I wish he had not written that."*

The dislike expressed here remained with Stoddard as long as he lived. In **1881 he had the same and much more to say in disparagement of it. Indeed, he seemed to feel almost an aversion for the poem. He could not enjoy anything morbid; and over-mastering passion when divorced from sanity was especially displeasing to him. He says in his later

---

*National Magazine, Nov., 1856, p. 415.

**North American Review, Vol. 133, pp. 82 - 107

article: "That he (Tennyson) was eighteen years over 'Maud' proves tenacity of purpose, but not wisdom of intention: if he had been eighteen hundred years over it he could never have made it a good poem. I wish it could be blotted out of his writings, - wish it so heartily that I would even give up the garden song, which is the only noble thing in it. We do not want a nineteenth century 'Hamlet;' and if we did, it is not to Tennyson that we should look as its creator."*

The North American published Oct. 1855 the most satisfactory review of "Maud" which appeared on this side the Atlantic. We have Dr. Van Dyke's word that it was written by Edward Everett Hale.** The article is characterized by the sanity that we find everywhere in that author's writings. He was then a vigorous young minister of Worcester, Mass., and already his many-sided nature was keenly alive to whatever important things were being done. He was sincere in his appreciation of the Laureate's work, and spoke out frankly his opinions. He believed that envy was responsible for much of the hostile criticism. He wrote: "We are certain we have heard unkind things said of 'Maud' which would never have been said had Mr. Alfred Tennyson been a plain D. C. L." Of the poem itself, he wrote: "There is no doubt that this poem is a charming rosary, strung of beads, very unlike one another, of playful, or sad, or meditative

---

*North American Review, July 1881, Vol. 133, p. 106.

**"Poetry of Tennyson" p. 360

poetry, always poetry, and always natural, fresh, true and new. Have we - if we study our rights carefully, - have we any right to ask more than this?" Has any one promised us that 'Maud' shall have a beginning, middle, and end? Has any one promised us that it should have a finished denouement?" Evidence is given us that the reviewer did not understand the lesson intended, but he did enjoy the poetry. One of the most interesting things written about the poem is his guess at its private history. He supposed it had been begun early and was intended to be a longer and more elaborate work, but the author grew tired of it and laid it away. "Time passed and he became Laureate. One and another occasional poem were at last to be published. Once more he drew out 'Maud' and was really surprised to find how exquisite were some of its best passages, - and wondered if he could do so well now. 'Certainly they are worth publishing,' we imagine him saying to himself, - and so there is hurried on a clumsy postscript about the Russian war, and the whole is sent to press." The interesting thing is not that he failed to see the artistic unity of the poem but that he did guess that it had been developing for a long time in the poet's mind and that the war passages of the concluding section was an after thought.

Bayard Taylor reviewed the poem for the New York Tribune. His review is not available for consultation, but in a letter to J. T. Field he said; "There are delicious things in the book but it is not an advance on Tennyson's former books, neither a falling off, and perhaps we should not

ask more."*

The writers for the periodicals, to be sure, were not the only ones who had their say. Many, angered at what they thought was an attack on certain industries, wrote indignant letters to the Laureate. An anonymous poet published a coarse travesty called "Anti-Maud." Another, probably Mr. W. L. Thornton** of the India Office, in a volume entitled "Modern Manicheism, Labor's Utopia, and other Poems" vindicated peace which he thought had been so rudely attacked.

It is not surprising that all this adverse criticism should greatly vex Tennyson, conscious as he was of the rare beauties of the poem. He was the more provoked because the slashing was done anonymously, and he could not know who were guilty of it. In a letter to Dr. Mann, he insisted that all literary criticism should be signed with the name or at least with the initials of the writer. He thought that England could never have a good school of criticism while the reviewer remained anonymous and irresponsible. He made up his mind to read with forbearance, but in time came to be so sensitive that he refused to read that which could only disturb him with its injustice. Members of his family took pains to clip the objectionable articles from the periodicals before they went into his hands. The poem was cherished by the author as an injured, defenseless child is cherished by its tender-hearted, mother. His desire was ever to set right the mind of the public toward the work; but no one so much as he disliked a

---

*"Scudder's "Life and Letters of Bayard Taylor" Vol. 1, p. 305.

**Arthur Waugh, "Alfred Tennyson,' p. 144

cold analysis of a work of art. That seemed too much like impeaching the intelligence of the reader. He chose rather to read the poem to those who might understand and then teach others. His reading was wonderful and seldom failed to win the hearer.

There were many, however, who needed no help to understand the poem. They declared the critics to be all wrong and loyally defended the poet. Mrs. Browning wrote to her friend Mrs. Jameson: "People in general appear very unfavorably impressed by this poem, very unjustly, Robert and I think."* That was in August, and in September they were greatly impressed with the beauty of the work, when in company with Rosetti they heard Tennyson read it. Ruskin wrote of the stupid and feelingless misunderstandings of "Maud" and expressed his sincere admiration throughout.** George Brimley and Henry Taylor were no less appreciative. The Reverend William Jowett, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, wrote: "I want to tell you how I admire 'Maud'. No poem since Shakespeare seems to show equal power of the same kind or equal knowledge of human nature. No modern poem contains more lives that ring in the ears of men. I do not know any verse out of Shakespeare in which the ecstasy of love soars to such a height."*** Tyndale bought the volume on his way to

---

*"Tennyson, his Homes, his Friends and his Work, p. 162

**Memoirs, Vol. 1, p. 411

***Memoirs, Vol. 1, p. 400

the theater one evening. He read it between the acts of the performance, continued it outside in the street, and had reached the end before he got home. He found it not less charming than interesting.* Our own poet Lowell in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton (Aug., 11, 1855) said: "Joy and sorrow are sisters surely, and very like each other, too, or else both would not bring tears as they do equally. And this reminds me of Tennyson's 'Maud' which I think wonderfully fine - the antiphonal voice to 'In Memoriam.' I tried to read it aloud, but broke down in the middle in a subdued passion of tears."** Sidney Dobell was anxious to plead for the excellence of the poem; and the same can be said of the Rev. G. G. Bradley, Dean of Westminster. The former went so far as to prepare notes for a reply to the unfriendly criticism which the magazines were printing.

In Dr. Mann, Tennyson found an enthusiastic champion. His essay, "Tennyson's 'Maud' Vindicated" deserves a fuller discussion than can be given here. It appeared in 1856, and has been mentioned as the most important of the early discussions of the poem. Unfortunately, however, it is not available for this present study. The fact that the Laureate gave it his approval and prefaced his many readings of "Maud" with a long quotation from it, is sufficient testimony to its merits. It would be interesting to compare it with the one review

---

*"Alfred Tennyson." - Lyal, p. 86

**"Letters of J. R. Lowell" Edited by C. E. Norton, Vol. 1, p. 235.

(Fraser's) which showed clear insight into the poet's meaning, and see to what extent, if any, it is indebted to that review for the ideas expressed therein. Unfortunately the author of the review did not dwell to any considerable length upon the poet's meaning; and we find little evidence of its setting many readers right. Dr. Mann's essay, however, was largely expository, and, employed as it was by the Laureate, has had much to do in the final vindication of the poem.

The attitude of the general public can be judged fairly well. The sales of the volume show that it provoked a great deal of interest even if it was not sympathetic interest. It was from the proceeds of the sale that the poet bought Farringford.* We have but to look into Notes and Queries for the latter half of the year 1855 to see that many were reading intelligently and asking pertinent questions, and very many indeed were entranced by the wonderful music. One, writing long years afterward about how it impressed him, said: "We can remember how puzzled was the common world around when amid all the blarings and tragic voices of the war there came this burst of absolute meloday in the midst of the wildness of passionate ravings ,-----we can well recollect the confusion and surprise of a youthful mind eagerly rushing at the new poem, to make out what this conjunction meant, stripping off the rind, lingering over the exquisite songs

---

*Memoirs, Vol. 1, p. 412

and sweetness, then going back in simplicity to try again those long, rugged, fierce musings which hedged it about.--- We plunged into the rough waves of versification outside that enchanted isle of song and story, with a sort of horror and terror as at the risk of our life."* Though, as we see, the effect was not wholly infelicitous, it was quite other than what the poet intended to produce.

The failure to understand the Laureate's message is sufficient explanation of its reception. An effect such as is described above is precisely the one which the poem should have upon a healthy emotional nature in the full vigor of youthful enthusiasm when the moral purpose that sets all in order is not seen. It is like living in a wonderland which exists without law and where terror and exquisite enjoyment succeed each other without logical sequence. The poem is one that appeals to young hearts, or to hearts that keep ever youthful. No wonder it was not enjoyed by those in whose hearts the volcanic fires smouldered deep under the ashes of prosy conventionalities, or by those who want to subject everything to rational analysis and refuse admiration where no unifying law is found. Youth can enjoy and not understand. Mystery provokes wonder; and wonder joined with confidence in the intelligence whose rationale is not understood results in worship and adoration. When, however, there

---

*Blackwoods, Vol. 152, p. 758.

is the endeavor to reduce everything to the commonplace, and when at the same time failure results and that supreme confidence is wanting, disgust only can follow. To such minds, the failure to understand makes the highest art seem irrational and unworthy of respect.

But why was the Laureate's message not understood? Three reasons may be assigned: The people expected something different from the poet; the form of the poem was not well-known and presents some inherent difficulties; and lastly, there was, as has already been mentioned, the erroneous belief that Tennyson was a champion of the Crimean War.

When men have formed definite opinions concerning an individual, it is very disconcerting to have those opinions suddenly overturned. For more than twenty years Tennyson had been before the people; his character and work had been studied with enthusiasm, and men of letters felt that they had bounded his genius and put it into its proper class. He was the poet of idyllic ease and grace; his power to blend sense and sound into glorious harmony was incomparable; his ability to sound the depths of tranquil passion was marvelous. But what did all this riot of madness and fine frenzy mean? They could not understand it, and very naturally, showed resentment. It was with them much as it would be with the astronomers if the planet Neptune whose course, though observed only in part, has been computed and mapped out, should suddenly swing far away into a new and larger orbit. No

well-behaved planet must do that; and there would be strong resentment for the liberty thus taken. New computations and tables would have to be made out, and all sorts of difficulties would be encountered. The literary star-gazers resented keenly what seemed to them the gyrations and lawless movements of a body whose every variation they had dared to predict.

One of the very interesting things about "Maud" is that it is Tennyson's earliest serious endeavor to express himself in any form of dramatic art. His desire to succeed as a dramatist grew as the years went by; but when compared to his other successes, his achievements with the drama proper may be regarded as failures. With one peculiar dramatic art-form, however, he did achieve the highest success. It was a new literary kind, - the dramatic monologue. Browning, it is true, had been employing that art-form for almost fifteen years; but a knowledge of Browning was at that time limited to a very small circle of readers. No one thought of him as Tennyson's only great rival. No reviewer of "Maud," so far as we have been able to discover, thought him worthy of mention or considered his favorite literary-kind in connection with the Laureate's new poem. Only one of them (Blackwood's) spoke of "Maud" as a dramatic monologue. Tennyson had long before done some apprentice work of this kind, his "May Queen" being a good example; but nothing had thus far been evolved quite like "Maud." The poet said: "No other poem (a monotone with plenty of change and no weariness) has been made into a drama where successive phases of passion in one person take

the place of successive persons."*

We are, however, especially concerned with the difficulties which this form of literature presents. They may be briefly enumerated: (1) There is no scenery nor stage-setting. All knowledge of environment must be gathered from the speaker. (2) The monologue must begin with startling abruptness; and the reader has to continue some distance before he gathers what the beginning means. (3) The speaker must reveal his own character, - not directly of course, but by his emotions, his review of his own conduct, and his opinions of those with whom he has to deal. (4) He must also set forth the other characters. This is for the poet a grave difficulty. The reader views these characters through a medium which is by no means transparent or colorless, hence misconceptions arise. (5) The poet says nothing in propria persona; and the devices to which he must resort in order to reveal his purpose are more difficult than those of the ordinary drama.

The knowledge which readers now have of the dramatic monologue has made some of the difficulties of comparatively small moment. The complaint which Fraser's reviewer made is amusing: "Why make the brother merely a disgusting 'snob triumphant'? Why make the young lord a mere fool? If it is only that the hero's jaundiced eye mistakes them for such,

---

*Notes to Temple edition of "Maud" p. 250.

why not justify the poor fellows in some way"? Of course no one now thinks of charging the poet with the opinions of his hero unless the problem as worked out makes that charge necessary. On this very point, however, practically all the reviewers were at fault.

The great injustice of the critics was due in a large measure to this failure to understand the dramatic character of the poem. The hero's words were thought to portray the feelings of the bard respecting certain industrial and political questions. England was at war with Russia because she feared the steady advance of the Slavs which, like a slow but resistless glacier, has long threatened to overwhelm much of Europe. The conquest of the Moslems by Nicholas would mean the addition of Turkey to the Russian Empire, and Constantinople would become a Russian stronghold. England could not permit that, for it is too nearly the key to her route to India. Her Eastern possessions would be threatened with attack. Then, too, the Czar was deemed a despot and held responsible for the failure of Hungary in her struggle for independence. He must, therefore, be punished. England's main purpose in the war was to guard her own interests; but many Englishmen thought the sacrifice too great for all the good that would come out of it. Was not the civilization of the Slavs far better than that of the Moslems? To champion the cause of the unspeakable Turk was to champion the cause of barbarism. The opposition to the war had been strong before

the beginning of hostilities. When, however, the nation was once committed to a course, the feeling of loyalty caused that opposition to melt away. But the winter of 1854 - 55 was one of terrible suffering for British soldiers as well as their allies; and a storm of wrath broke out at the way affairs had been managed. The old doubts as to the justice of England's cause revived; and while few who harbored those doubts were ready to brave the charge of being disloyal, they nevertheless found great pleasure in decrying anything that looked like a glorification of the war-spirit. They would not condemn the War; but with refined hypocrisy would most heartily condemn anything that idealized the spirit that prompted it. They thought that the hero of "Maud" spoke Tennyson's own thoughts, that the poem was written to promote the war spirit, so they poured out their wrath upon it.

With these things in mind, we can hardly regard it surprising that the reception of "Maud " was so unfavorable. After all, marked originality in any kind of art meets with tardy recognition. The critics have nothing in its class with which to compare it. It must slowly win its way among the more conventional things. Tennyson's originality is nowhere more in evidence than in this poem. Both subject and treatment were bold and unconventional. How naive seems Stedman's charge that the Laureate here surrendered the joy of art in an effort to produce something that should at once catch the favor of the multitude.* That was of all things

*"Victorian Poets"

just what he did not do. Such misconception of the poet's purpose is no longer possible, for the old causes which made it possible have disappeared. At least it is so for those who refuse to accept without question shelf-worn opinions. Some of those concerning "Maud" do indeed yet survive. Error always dies hard. That is because it is rooted in ignorance and nourished by prejudice; for knowledge comes slowly and painfully, and prejudice dies out only with the generation that cherishes it. What we mean is that those misconceptions could not be conceived in this later day, though many of the old brood yet survive.

An examination of the recent criticism of the poem would yield most interesting results, but it hardly falls within the scope of this paper. Only enough need be said to indicate what might be expected. Many volumes of criticism have appeared but only too few show independence of judgment. Many of them are but compilations of early and erroneous notions. This is seen clearly when one begins to look through them for information on any single mooted question. They misdirect and instil prejudices which are not easily eradicated. But fortunately there are always a few who do not like opinions ready made. They go to the masterpieces for the pure joy of it, as the child plays in the sunshine. Their praise is the natural expression of their enjoyment and not because it is their business to praise. They are the few whose opinions are of worth to the world.

It is interesting to see how Tennyson has endeavored to set himself and his favorite poem right in the eyes of such people. Mention has already been made of Gladstone's change of opinion. It came after he was under the spell of Tennyson's reading. He saw his error and endeavored to atone for it. He wrote: "I can now see, and I at once confess that a feeling, which had reference to the growth of the war-spirit in the outer world at the date of that article (Quarterly Review 1859) dislocated my frame of mind, and disabled me from dealing even tolerably with the work as a work of the imagination. --- I have neither done justice to it in the text with its rich and copious beauties of detail, nor to its great lyrical and metrical power. ---Tennyson's power of execution is probably nowhere greater."*

At least two of the Laureate's American students also heard him with profit. The first was Dr. Wm. J. Rolfe, who enjoyed that favor late in the sixties. Without reserve he pronounced the poem a masterpiece. When, therefore, he read in the early edition of Dr. Van Dyke's "The Poetry of Tennyson" the statement that the "Princess" and "Maud" were "two splendid failures," and found also an unsatisfactory discussion, he was displeased. He sought to convince Dr. Van Dyke of his error but failed. However, the latter, when he visited England, bore a letter of introduction to the Laureate from his friend. He, also, was fortunate enough to hear the

---

*Gladstone's "Gleanings," Vol. II

**Related in a lecture by Dr. Rolfe, University of

poet read his favorite poem; and in describing his experience, he has given one of the best interpretations of the poem to be found. Only a sentence or two can be given: "It was love as a vital force, love as a part of life, love as an influence - nay, the influence which rescues the soul from the prison, or the madhouse, of self and leads it into the larger saner existence. This was the theme of 'Maud'. And the poet's voice brought it out, and rang the changes on it, so that it was unmistakable and unforgetable - the history of a man saved from selfish despair by a pure love."* In the next edition of his work Dr. Van Dyke paid full tribute to the poem.

It is too much to expect that critics will ever entirely agree in their estimate of "Maud." To many persons, the treatment of anything that is morbid or unwholesome is forbidding. Others will find in it evidence that the author is ever ready to "interpose a false atmosphere between the reader and actual life."** Still others like Morton Luce will insist in spite of all comments and explanations that it is Tennyson's "finest poetry and worst poem." One thing, however,

---

Ill., July 4, 1906. --- Dr. Rolfe also stated that while he was walking in the garden with the poet they discussed Tennyson's treatment of madness. The poet contended that his delineation was stronger than that of Shakespeare because the hero of "Maud" was more consistent than Hamlet. Dr. Rolfe, for that very reason, considered it weaker.

*Century Magazine, Vol. 23, p. 539

**Lewis E. Gates, "Studies and Appreciation" p.69

can be said with confidence, that those who have studied it most carefully find in it the loftiest poetry. What wonderful power is shown in bringing about harmony of matter and manner. Our sympathy is poured out freely for a character who, if not unsympathetic is at least misanthropic. We are made to feel with him, and for the time, his world is our world. Arthur Waugh pronounces the work "one of the most vivid and artistic poems in the language."* Stopford Brooke will find many to agree with him in the belief that "it is the loveliest of Tennyson's longer powms," a work "divinely beautiful" and only not quite perfect.** Human utterance was never diviner than in some of the lyrics. The poem will be read and loved long after all the words in disparagement of it are forgotten.

---

*"Alfred, Lord Tennyson," p. 151

**"Tennyson, His Art and Relation to Modern Life." Chapter IX.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Reviews:

Athenaeum, 1855, pp. 893 - 895

Blackwood's Magazine, Vol. 78, pp. 311 - 321

" " Vol. 80, pp. 365

" " Vol. 152, pp. 758 - 759

Edinburgh Review, Vol. 102, pp. 498 - 519

Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 52, pp. 264 - 273

Knickerbocker Magazine " 46, p. 525

Littell's Living Age, Vol. 47, pp. 51 - 59

" " " Vol. 215, pp. 295 - 306.
563 - 586.

National Magazine, Vol. 7, pp. 421 - 422

North American Review, Vol. 81, pp. 544 - 546

Quarterly Review, Vol. 106, pp. 460 - 465

Saturday Review, Vol. 1, pp. 14 - 15

Westminster Review, Vol. 64, pp. 596 - 601

Annual Register,
1855, "Stanzas." (The Germ of "Maud.")

Stopford A. Brooke, Tennyson, His Art and Relation to Modern Life. G. P. Putnam's Sons, London and New York, 1894

Elizabeth L. Carey, Tennyson, His Home, His Friends and His Work. G. P. Putnam's Sons, London and New York, 1898

Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 56, pp. 69 - 75

F. W. Farrar, Men I have Known, pp. 1 - 41, New York, 1897

Lewis E. Gates, Studies and Appreciations. The Macmillan Company, London and New York, 1902

W. E. Gladstone, Gleanings of Past Years. Vol. 2. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

Edward Everett Hale, Tennyson's Place in Poetry. The Dial. Vol. 14, pp. 101 - 102

J. L. Haney, Early Reviews of English Poets. The Egerton Press, Philadelphia, 1904

T. W. Higginson,, A Morning with Tennyson. Critic. Vol. 21, pp. 239 - 240

R. H. Hutton, Literary Essays, pp. 361 - 438. The Macmillan Co. London and New York, 1892

Charles Kingsley, Tennyson. Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 42, pp. 245 - 253

W. S. Lilly, The Mission of Tennyson. Littell's Living Age, Vol. 213, pp. 227 - 243

J. R. Lowell, Letters of J. R. Lowell. Edited by C. E. Norton, Harper & Bros. N. Y. 1893.

Morton Luce, Handbook to Tennyson's Works.
Geo. Bell and Sons, London, 1895

Alfred Lyall, Alfred Tennyson.
The Macmillan Co. London, 1902.

H. W. Mabie, A Review of the "Memoirs."
Atlantic Monthly. Vol. 80, pp. 577 - 589

J. R. Mann, Tennyson's "Maud" Vindicated, an Explanatory Essay.
Jerrold & Sons. London, 1856

Mrs. Gerald Porter, William Blackwood and his Sons, their Magazine and Friends. Vol. 3.
Wm. Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh and London, 1897

Anna T. Ritchie, Alfred Tennyson,
Harper's Magazine, Vol. 68, pp. 21 - 41

Richard H. Shepherd, The Genesis of Tennyson's "Maud".
North American Review.
Vol. 139, pp. 356 - 361

E. C. Stedman, Tribute to the Poet-Laureate.
Critic, Vol. 21, p. 209

Alfred Tennyson.
Scribners. Vol. 8, 100-107, 160-170

Victorian Poets. Boston, 1876

R. H. Stoddard, Alfred Tennyson,
National Magazine, Vol. 9, 408 - 415

A Study of Tennyson.
North American Review. Vol. 133, pp. 82 - 107

John A. Symonds, Recollections of Lord Tennyson.
Century Magazine. Vol. 24, p. 32 - 37

Bayard Taylor, The Poetry of Tennyson.
International Review, Vol. 4, pp. 397 - 418

Life and Letters, Edited by Horace Scudder.
Houghton Mifflin & Co., Boston, 1884

Hallam Tennyson, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, A Memoir by his Son.
The Macmillan Co. London and New York, 1897

Henry Van Dyke, The Voice of Tennyson.
Century Magazine, Vol. 23, pp. 539 - 544

Tennyson. Encyclopedia Americana

The Poetry of Tennyson. Third Edition.
Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1898

Introduction to "Poems by Tennyson,"
Athenaeum Series. Ginn & Co.,
Boston, 1903.

Wilfred Ward, Talks with Tennyson.
The Critic, Vol. 29, pp.
46 - 47

Arthur Waugh, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, A study of His Life and Work.
U. S. Book Co., New York, 1892