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A study of Tennyson's historical trilogy

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A STUDY OF TENNYSON'S HISTORICAL TRILOGY

BY

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PREFACE

The following work is the outgrowth of a seminar course in Victorian Poetry which was conducted at the University of Richmond by Dr. Lewis F. Ball. After doing some research in the Victorian Period, I found that scholars had comparatively neglected the drama of the nineteenth century.

Although Alfred Tennyson is not one of the great dramatists of English Literature, I feel that a study of his historic trilogy is worthwhile and beneficial. Probably we shall never understand completely the mystery of his turning to the form of the drama at the age of sixty-five. We can, however, recognize his growth and development in this field of literature and perceive his political fervor and religious opinions from the trilogy.

The purpose of this work is to present a study of Tennyson's trilogy demonstrating the degree of dramatic development he achieved.

I have also tried to determine the principal differences between the literary versions and the acting versions of those plays which were produced. I have spoken in some detail concerning his dramatic style and method and have done a fairly extensive study of sources. I have been unable to secure all of the sources listed in Hallam Tennyson's A Memoir for study and examination; a few of these works are extremely rare and are not to be found in this country

It is difficult to know the exact source from which any one part of Tennyson's drama came. The majority of the works which were used for background material are repetitious in content, some adding details where others omitted them. In cases where there have been several possibilities, I have had to use my own judgment. At all times I have tried to be correct and have tried to give the chief sources for the various points of his dramas.

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INTRODUCTION

Tennyson's historic trilogy endeavors to show the "making of England," as his son tells us.[1]

> He bestowed infinite trouble on his dramas, choosing these three great periods of 'Harold,' 'Becket,' and 'Mary,' so as to complete the line of Shakespeare's chronicle-plays, which end with the commencement of the Restoration.[2]

The trilogy is composed of Harold, Becket, and Queen Mary. Queen Mary was written during 1874 and 1875 and was published during the latter part of 1875.[3] Harold was written and published in 1876.[4] Becket was printed privately in 1879 and was published in 1884.[5]

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[1] Hallam Tennyson, A. Memoir, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), vol 2., p. 173.

[2] Ibid., p. 174, 3-11.

[3] Ibid., p. 176.

[4] Ibid., p. 186.

[5] Ibid., p. 193.

In Harold is seen the great conflict between Danes, Saxons, and Normans for supremacy, the awakening of the English people and clergy from the slumber into which they for the most part had fallen, and the forecast of the greatness of the composite race. In Becket is seen the struggle which continued for many centuries between the Crown and the Church. Tennyson depicts in Queen Mary the final downfall of Roman Catholicism in England and the dawning of the new age in which the freedom of the individual was asserted.[6]

All of Tennyson's work after 1842 is generally thought to show strong dramatic tendencies. Ulysses, Love and Duty, Lucretius, St. Simeon Stylites, Locksley Hall, The Northern Farmer, and The Grandmother, different as they are in style, are essentially dramatic monologues.[7] But not even these hints that Tennyson had a creative impulse not yet fully satisfied were clear enough to prepare the world for his attempt to conquer another form of art. Van Dyke claims that England was not willing to see him come out in the seventh decade of his life in a new character and take the stage as a dramatist. It must have seemed like a rash attempt to become the rival of his own fame,

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[6] Ibid., p. 173.

[7] Henry Van Dyke, The Poetry of Tennyson, (New York: Charles Schribner's Sons, 1907), p. 191.

for the first feeling of the public at his dramatic endeavor with Queen Mary was "undisguised astonishment," and with this some degree of displeasure was mingled.[8] This was probably due to the public's lack of fondness for surprises. It is a known fact that people usually shrink from the effort which is required for making new and candid judgments and fall back on stale and unreasonable comparisons, failing to render an unbiased criticism.

Maud had not been undramatic in a certain sense of the word, but no one seems to have thought of it in connection with the stage. One of its reviewers spoke of the plot as being so vague and so confused that a friend of his had risen from the reading uncertain whether the heroine was dead or alive. This seems to characterize Tennyson's dramas fairly well. The living soul of drama - action - is conspicuously absent from them, and events follow one another with deliberation, appearing to come and go just as Tennyson's mental phases must have come and gone.[9] Mr. Henry James makes a perfect statement of this characteristic:

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[8] Ibid., p. 192.

[9] Elisabeth L. Cary, Tennyson: His Homes, His Friends, and His Work. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1898), p. 212.

> With the poets who are natural chroniclers of movement, the words fall into their places as with some throw of the dice, which fortune should always favor. With Scott and Byron they leap into the verse a pieds joints /sic/, and shake it with their coming; with Tennyson they arrive slowly and settle cautiously into their attitudes, after having well scanned the locality. In consequence they are generally exquisite, and make exquisite combinations; but the result is intellectual poetry and not passionate—poetry which, if the term is not too pedantic, one may qualify as static poetry. Any scene of violence represented by Tennyson is always singularly limited and compressed; it is reduced to a few elements—refined to a single statuesque episode. There are, for example, several descriptions of tournaments and combats in the Idylls of the King. They are most beautiful, but they are all curiously delicate. One gets no sense of the din and shock of battle; one seems to be looking at a bas relief of two contesting knights in chiselled silver, on a priceless piece of plate.[10]

The trilogy was received respectfully, although it was received with dissatisfaction, because it was the work of a famous man. Van Dyke seems to feel that the public said in a tone of polite authority that Tennyson's plays were not quite as powerful as Shakespeare's, and not as melodious even as Oenone and the Lotus-Eaters.[11] Most critics agree that despite the dramatic defects of the three plays,

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[10] Henry James, Views and Reviews, (Boston: The Ball Publishing Company, 1908), p. 172, 12-34.

[11] Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 193.

they show some work of a careful study of sources, thoughtful delineation of character, and some amount of finished expression and versification. What they do lack is life and force.

The historical plays are the product of Tennyson's patriotism for England and his wholehearted contempt for Catholicism.[12] He was intensely patriotic, but more than that, he had an almost religious veneration for England itself, the physical England, the land and its people.[13] This is apparent in the dramas, but Tennyson's political interest is not, as in Shakespeare's plays, quickly superceded by the dramatic. Tennyson differs from Shakespeare, his ideal and his source of inspiration, in that he would not sacrifice the historic truth for dramatic effectiveness. Perhaps one reason for this is the fact that history was not as closely knitted together in Shakespeare's time as it was in nineteenth century England. Tennyson had to handle his themes with greater historical accuracy in order to label them "history." Regardless of the reason, Tennyson lost the heights of the dramatic by being what he conceived historically correct. It is this

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[12] Ibid., p. 195.

[13] Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, editors, British Authors of the Nineteenth Century, (New York: The W. H. Wilson Company, 1936), p. 612.

fact which accounts for the great abundance of technical dramatic difficulties in Tennyson's plays.[14]

The characters of the trilogy do not become alive and take the conduct of the play into their own hands, as Falstaff and the humorous characters of Shakespeare tend to do. In Queen Mary no single character arrests and dominates the reader's interest, and Mary only arouses pity and sympathy, without any greater tragic element. The hero of Harold might be described as being the Hamlet type of character, without quite being a Hamlet, more interested in his own impulses and inhibitions than in being the driving force of a play full of action and incident. Perhaps the most outstanding in interest and the most impressive character is Archbishop Becket in the play entitled Becket. He dominates each scene of importance from the beginning of the play, but there is *something* missing from his character, that little something which would make him more impressive. As thoughtful and accomplished as they are, none of Tennyson's characters are the product of his imagination which dominated and was the most characteristic of his genius.[15] Character delineation is not accomplished in the trilogy through the process of

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[14] Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 195.

[15] A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, editors, The Cambridge History of English Literature, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1917), vol. 13, p. 43.

action, but comes by means of description. This fact alone was enough to cause a considerable amount of adverse criticism from most critics of the drama.

The London Times affirmed that Tennyson's Queen Mary contained more "true fire" than anything since Shakespeare had laid down his pen.[16] This estimate was somewhat exaggerated, to say the least, and the same is inevitably true of the following statement by George Eliot: "Tennyson's plays run Shakespeare's close."[17] On the contrary, the trilogy contains very little of what might be termed fire or force. It is acclaimed that the merit of the plays in the theatre is distinctly less than in the library, and that they are primarily dramas for reading and not for acting. This is a consideration which is a debt of honor to Tennyson, for poets like Tennyson just do not make three such mistakes in succession. What intensity and power the plays do have makes them sometimes turbulent, harsh, and incoherent.[18] They would have done more if they had attempted less, for the reader becomes extremely conscious of their overloading upon reading them for the second time.

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[16] James, op. cit., p. 166.

[17] Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 195.

[18] Ibid., p. 194.

Tennyson's trilogy is considered historical tragedy. This term signifies tragedy that concerns not only individuals, but also political parties and warring classes of society. Its object is to trace the fate of individuals as it affects the fates of nations; to exhibit the conflict of opposing characters not for themselves alone, but as the exponents of those great popular forces and movements which play beneath the surface; to show that historical figures are not mere shadows on the screen of history, but human beings with passions like everyone else.[19] Tennyson chose the three periods of action for his trilogy with the design of touching the most critical points of England's long struggle, and he endeavored to develope the three plots so as to bring into prominence the vital issues of the strife. The characters of the plays are exhibited as the representatives of the different races, classes, and faiths which were contending for supremacy.[20]

The trilogy was written in an age which had more taste for higher drama and less passion for melodrama.[21] Tennyson

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[19] Ibid., p. 195.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Frederick Harrison, Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill, and Other Literary Estimates, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902), p. 40.

himself regarded the drama as one of the most humanizing of influences. He hoped that some day the State, or the municipalities, as well as the public schools, would produce great English historical plays so that they might form a part of the Englishman's ordinary educational curriculum.[22] This may possibly be a reason why Tennyson tried to be so accurate in his historic portrayals. His interpretations are generally accepted as being sound and worthy. This fact can also be attributed to his interest in England and the development of the freedom which he found in the English Constitution.[23]

The Memoir tells us that Tennyson had always taken the "liveliest interest" in the theatre and that he had written plays at the age of fourteen which were "extraordinary for a boy." This work further states that Tennyson knew that he lacked the intimate knowledge of the mechanical details necessary for the modern stage, although he had been a constant playgoer during his early and middle life. He is said to have mused over the characterization of the plays he saw, and to have criticized the incidents, scenic effects, situations,

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[22] Tennyson, op. cit., p. 174.

[23] Raymond M. Alden, Alfred Tennyson, How To Know Him, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1917), p. 33

and language of the actors, as well as the dramatic structure of the plays.[24] It would appear by this that Tennyson would have directed his attention away from the drama, for he knew that he was not gifted dramatically or very much in contact with the contemporary stage, however much and however critically he had attended the London theatres.[25] Tennyson did take this handicap seriously, as his son tells us that

> his dramas were written with the intention that actors should edit them for the stage, keeping them at the high poetic level; yet he did not always approve when they omitted those soliloquies and necessary episodes which reveal the character and, so to say, the mental action of a piece; nor did he speak favorably of some of the modern sensational curtains. He said that 'The public are often left poised on the top of a wave, and the wave is not allowed to break'; that this might be modern theatrical art, but is essentially opposed to the canons of true literary dramatic art: and that the theatric and the dramatic were always being mistaken the one for the other.[26]

Collaboration in the usual manner seems not to have occurred to him. He simply wrote his literary dramas according to literary tradition as he understood it and left the rest to whatever actor or editor fortune might provide.

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[24] Tennyson, op. cit., pp. 174-175.

[25] Phyllis Hartnoll, The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, (The Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 785.

[26] Tennyson, op. cit., p. 175, 4-16.

Just why Tennyson turned his attention to the drama at the age of sixty-five, knowing his many handicaps, is an unanswerable question. He had attained great fame as a consummate master of lyric and idyllic poetry and was the Poet Laureate of the Crown. What had he to gain? I personally feel that any attempt to present a plausible explanation would be mere speculation. There is one man who has ventured an answer, Montrose J. Moses. He states that Tennyson attempted the drama as a result of encouragement from Henry Irving and Macready, his friends.[27] While this may be true, it does not seem to be sufficient reason for Tennyson to risk his literary reputation.

Had Tennyson been fortunate and had he possessed a genuine dramatic instinct with an acquaintance with theatrical procedures, he might have created a new mould for the stage and thus made a name for himself in the form of the drama. The nineteenth century English stage offered no sound literary tradition for drama, no proper models to be followed. Instead of creating a new style and technique, Tennyson fell into the tradition of the closet drama as was written by

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[27] Montrose J. Moses, Representative British Drama, Victorian and Modern, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1919), p. 341.

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley, a type of drama which used the Elizabethan traditions and modified them by literary rather than theatrical considerations. Tennyson passed over whatever help he might have gotten from the work of Sheridan Knowles, Bulwer-Lytton, and his friend Browning, and went directly to Shakespeare's chronicle plays for his model.[28]

The choice of a form which Shakespeare himself had abandoned during his course of development, and which had been extinct from the stage for two hundred and fifty years, may be regarded as a step in the wrong direction. The most noticeable effect this choice produced on Tennyson's trilogy was in the area of expression. Tennyson attempted to write in a synthetic Elizabethan compound of the sixteenth century and standard poetic diction with a few modern touches now and then.[29] Howard's speech in Act IV, scene iii of Queen Mary is typical of this characteristic.

> Have I not seen the gamekeeper, the groom,
> Gardener, and huntsman, in the parson's place,
> The parson from his own spire swung out dead,
> And ignorance crying in the streets, and all men
> Regarding her? I say they have drawn the fire

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[28] Paull F. Baum, Tennyson, Sixty Years After, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1948), p. 214.

[29] Ibid., p. 215.

> On their own heads: yet, Paget, I do hold
> The Catholic, if he have the greater right
> Hath been the crueller.
> Paget Action and re-action,
> The miserable see-saw of our child-world,
> Make us despise it at odd hours, my lord.
> Heaven help that this re-action not re-act
> So that she come to rule us.
> Howard The world's mad.

Perhaps it was a passage similar to this which caused Henry James to make the following statement regarding Tennyson's style and verse:

> It [his verse] is poised and stationary, like a bird whose wings have borne him high, but the beauty of whose movement is less in great etheral sweeps and circles than in the way he hangs motionless in the blue air, with only a vague tremor of his pinions. Even if the idea with Tennyson were more largely dramatic than it usually is, the immobility, as we must call it, of his phrase would always defeat the dramatic intention.[30]

There is no wonder that Mr. James said that Tennyson's dramas were the least Tennysonian of all the author's works, and that to produce them, he had to cease to be himself.[31] He further asserted that had the trilogy been published unsigned, the public would have had great difficulty in pointing out the author.[32]

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[30] James, op. cit., p. 171, 8-17.

[31] Ibid., p. 166.

[32] Ibid., p. 168.

Tennyson very frankly fashioned his plays upon the model of the Shakespearian histories. He tried to give a general picture of the times, to reflect all of its leading elements and commemorate its salient episodes. From this point of view the trilogy becomes a progressive study in the development of England herself; England struggling and bleeding in the clutches of the Roman wolf is the heroine of the trilogy. This fact alone suggests a similarity to Shakespeare. It has been suggested by Hardin Craig that Richard II, Henry IV (both parts), and Henry V form a tetralogy presenting a progressive study in kingship.[33] Indeed there are many similarities between Tennyson's trilogy and Shakespeare's tetralogy. Tennyson knew his Shakespeare well. Richard II and Harold were rightful kings of England; both were dethroned and killed by a greater strength and power, Richard by Bolingbroke and Harold by William. Both plays have the same irony in that the rightful kings were dethroned, yet good came from each situation. Sir Pierce murdered Richard after Henry IV asked, "Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?' Four knights murdered Becket after Henry II asked, "Will no man free me of this

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[33] Hardin Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, (New York: The Citadel Press, 1948), pp. 124-153.

pestilent priest?' In part one of Henry IV there is a rebellion led by Hotspur and the Earl of Northumberland against the king; in Queen Mary there is a rebellion led by Sir Thomas Wyatt and others against the queen. The rebels were put down in both cases. In Henry V the young king claims the throne of France; in Harold the Norman leader claims the throne of England.

Tennyson presented the same voluminous list of characters as Shakespeare did; he made the division into acts merely arbitrary; he introduced low comedy interlocuters who talked in archaic prose; and whenever his fancy took him, he borrowed idioms and epithets from the Shakespearean vocabulary. The prose scenes are quasi-humorous and emulate the queer jocosities of Shakespeare very successfully.[34] But where Shakespeare took Holinshed and Plutarch and transferred them into immortal verse, adding dramatic strength and situation, Tennyson only embroidered cunningly the groundwork offered him by his sources, contributing no new material.

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[34] James, op. cit., p. 189.

CHAPTER I

QUEEN MARY

For the background of Queen Mary, Tennyson read Collier's Ecclesiastical History, Fuller's Church History, Burnet's Reformation, Foxe's Book of Martyrs, Hayward's Edward, Cave's P. K. Y., Hooker, Neale's History of the Puritans, Strype's Ecclesiastical Memorials, Strype's Cranmer, Strype's Parker, Phillip's Pole, Primitive Fathers No Papists, Lingard's History of England, Church Historians of England, Zurich Letters, and Original Letters and Correspondence of Archbishop Parker, in addition to Froude's History of England, Holinshed, and Camden.[35] That Tennyson "worked hard and unceasingly" during 1874 and 1875 on this drama is not difficult to understand if he read this list

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[35] Tennyson, op. cit., p. 176.

of books for his historical information.

The play itself is the story of Mary's five-year reign. There are forty-five speaking parts besides the marshalmen, Citizens, Pages, Lords, Officers, Peasants, Gospellers, Guards, and so forth. The first act opens with procession of Mary and Elizabeth entering Aldgate upon which Citizens comment. Scene ii presents Peter Martyr in Lambeth Palace urging Cranmer to flee from the hatred of the Catholics. Scene iii shows Father Bourne preaching at St. Paul's Cross; he is attacked by a mob that later turns upon some passing Spaniards. The French ambassador, Noailles, invites the Earl of Devon, Courtenay, to conspire with him against the queen. Scene iv finds Courtenay in a "Room in the Palace" trying to interest Elizabeth also in the conspiracy to prevent the "Spanish marriage" of Mary and Philip. Mary interrupts them and Courtenay leaves. After Mary exits, Lord William Howard enters and warns Elizabeth against any political arrangements with Courtenay; Gardiner interrupts them with a message from Mary.

The first four scenes are merely historical preliminaries, the main action not beginning until the fifth scene. This scene makes evident that Mary is in love with Philip and that she is determined to

marry him. Gardiner and Noailles warn her against such a marriage, but Simon Renard, the Spanish ambassador, flatters her into believing the marriage is appropriate. Off stage Mary's council approves of the union. The second act deals with the suppression of Sir Thomas Wyatt's conspiracy to remove Mary from the throne. It ends with Mary sending Howard, Courtenay, and Elizabeth to the Tower and condemning Dudley, Suffolk, and Lady Jane Grey to death.

Act III composes approximately a third of the entire play. This act reports the marriage, introduces Philip and Cardinal Pole, shows the English lords accepting Papal domination with various reservations, and ends with the parting of Mary and Philip. There is much "historical talk" in this act which is a serious defect to the drama. Act IV is occupied wholly with the martyrdom of Cranmer. Act V opens with the final parting of Mary and Philip, after which Philip instructs Feria, a Count in his attendance, to make overtures to Elizabeth. The remainder of the act is used to announce the war with France, to allow Cardinal Pole to tell of his recall to Rome on the charge of heresy, and to allow Mary to discover her true situation. The final scene in which Mary reviews her predicament is very dramatic, and is generally regarded as a remarkable achievement for Tennyson.

Tennyson used Thomas Fuller's Church History[36] for the details in Queen Mary regarding Sir Thomas Wyatt's rebellion and Mary's sickness and death. It is also possible that much of Tennyson's conception of Cardinal Pole came from this work. Probably Tennyson knew Fuller's Worthies of England,[37] but it is doubtful that this work could have furnished any information for the drama.

Burnet's Reformation furnished Tennyson with vivid details of Mary's false expectation of a child.[38] Tennyson also took his conception of Gardiner's character from Burnet. Burnet describes Gardiner as a man who "was quick of apprehension, had a great prospect of affairs, and had a close and artificial way of concealing his mind."[39] Burnet thought of Mary as a woman of a "strict and innocent life;" he was sympathetic towards her and blamed her severity and cruelty on the dictates of the Pope.[40]

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[36] Thomas Fuller, The Church History of Britian, (London: James Nichols, Publisher, 1842), vol. 2, pp. 385-402.

[37] Thomas Fuller, The History of the Worthies of England, (London: F. C. Rivington, Printer, 1811).

[38] Bishop Burnet, History of the Reformation of the Church of England, (London: J. F. Dove, Printer, 1820), vol. 3, pp. 457-459.

[39] Ibid., p. 502.

[40] Ibid., p. 581.

Foxe's Book of Martyrs was a very useful book for Tennyson in his preparation of Queen Mary. From this work Tennyson took his conception of Cranmer and some historical detail for Elizabeth. About one third of Act IV, scene iii, is directly from Foxe's description of Cranmer's renouncement of the signed articles.[41] Some scholars have been incorrect at this point, thinking that Cranmer's final speeches in the play came from James Anthony Froude's History of England.[42] Upon a study of the latter work it becomes very evident that Froude used the Book of Martyrs as his source.

Cranmer's martyrdom speech is recorded by Foxe as follows:

> 'O Father of heaven! O Son of God, Redeemer of the world! O Holy Ghost, three persons all one God! have mercy on me, most caitiff and miserable sinner. I have offended both against heaven and earth, more than my tongue can express. Whither then may I go, or whither may I flee? To heaven I may be ashamed to lift up mine eyes and in earth I find no place of refuge or succor. To Thee, therefore, do I run; to Thee do I humble myself, saying, O Lord, my God, my sins be great, but yet have mercy upon me for Thy great mercy. The great mystery that God became man, was not wrought for little or few offences. Thou didst not give Thy Son, O Heavenly Father, unto death for small sins

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41 William Byron Forbush, editor, Foxe's Book of Martyrs, (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1926), p. 248.

42 James Anthony Froude, History of England, (London: John W. Parker and Son, Publishers, 1860), vol. 6, p. 527.

> only, but for the greatest sins of the world, so that the sinner return to Thee with his whole heart, as I do at present. Wherefore, have mercy on me, O God, whose property is always to have mercy, have mercy upon me, O Lord, for Thy great mercy. I crave nothing for my own merits, but for Thy name's sake, that it may be hallowed thereby, and for Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ's sake. And now therefore, O Father of Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.[43]

Tennyson's adaptation follows:

> -- O God, Father of Heaven!
> O Son of God, Redeemer of the World!
> O Holy Ghost! proceeding from them both,
> Three persons and one God, have mercy on me,
> Most miserable sinner, wretched man.
> I have offended against heaven and earth
> More grievously than any tongue can tell.
> Then whither should I flee for any help?
> I am ashamed to lift up my eyes to heaven,
> And I can find no refuge upon earth.
> Shall I despair then?-- -- God forbid! O God,
> For thou art merciful, refusing none
> That come to thee for succor; unto thee,
> Therefore, I come; humble myself to thee;
> Saying, O Lord God, although my sins be great,
> For thy great mercy have mercy! O God the Son,
> Not for slight faults alone, when thou becamest
> Man in the flesh, was the great mystery wrought;
> O God the Father, not for little sins
> Didst thou yield up thy Son to human death;
> But for the greatest sin that can be sinned,
> Yea even such as mine, incalculable,
> Unpardonable, -- -- sin against the light,
> The truth of God which I had proven and known.
> Thy mercy must be greater than all sin.
> Forgive me, Father, for no merit of mine,
> But that thy name may be glorified,

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43 Forbush, op. cit., p. 248, 5-22.

> And thy most blessed Son's who died for man.
> Good people, every man at time of death
> Would fain set forth some saying that may live
> After his death and better mankind;
> For death gives death's last word a power to live,
> And like the stone-cut epitaph remain
> After the vanish'd voice and speak to men.
> God grant me grace to glorify my God.

Tennyson's adaptation of Cranmer's appeal is almost identical to his source; the blank verse rendering demanded but few changes. At this point Tennyson was not behind Shakespeare; he also incorporated into his work the very letter of his sources. This trait in itself is a sort of commentary on the differences of the two men as dramatists. When the reader finds in Tennyson's plays a streak of spontaneity and vitality, it is frequently discovered that the essential language of the original has been almost totally transferred by him. On the contrary when Shakespeare decided to appropriate passages, he usually overshadowed them by the richness and variety of his own fancy.[44]

Foxe stated that when Elizabeth left Woodstock, she left the following words scratched with her diamond on a window pane:

> Much suspected by me,
> Nothing proved can be. Quoth Elizabeth, prisoner.[45]

Tennyson used this incident in Act III, scene v.

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[44] Cary, op. cit., p. 219.

[45] Forbush, op. cit., p. 294.

From Neal's History of the Puritans Tennyson took his account of Dr. Bourne's preaching at St. Paul's when a riot took place.[46] This seems to be the only part of Neal's work which Tennyson used, but it is significant as it composes scene iii of Act I.

Tennyson used Strype's Ecclesiastical Memorials for no particular scene in his drama. I feel that his main use for this work was in deriving a general concept of the temper and character of the period.[47] It is not impossible that Strype could have offered some detail regarding Cardinal Pole and a few minor characters. From Strype's Cranmer Tennyson did not use a great amount of information. This work presents approximately the same view of Cranmer as the other sources Tennyson used; the one thing this work contributed beyond the other works was showing Cranmer's relationship to his associates.[48] Strype's Parker[49] also offers no apparent information for Queen Mary. This work is more concerned with the after-effects of Mary's reign.

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[46] Daniel Neal, The History of the Puritans, (London: Thomas Tegg and Son, Printers, 1837), vol 1, pp. 59-60.

[47] John Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1822), vol. 3, pp. 131-146.

[48] John Strype, Memorials of Thomas Cranmer, (Oxford: The University Press, 1840), vol. 2, pp. 549-565.

[49] John Strype, The Life and Acts of Mathew Parker, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1821).

Tennyson was indebted to Lingard's History of England for for his characterization of Courtenay and of Noailles. Lingard went into great detail regarding Courtenay's character and his relationship with Mary.[50] He also spoke of Noailles' character and painted him to be the scheming trouble-maker that Tennyson made him.[51] It is interesting to note that Lingard was sympathetic with Mary's character, allowing her cruelty to be the outcome of her religious fanaticism.

The Zurich Letters offered Tennyson no information for his drama. They possibly could have been helpful to a slight extent in revealing Peter Martyr's character.[52] The Correspondence of Matthew Parker[53] offered Tennyson no information which is apparent. Camden's Annales of Elizabeth[54] contributed to Tennyson's conception of Elizabeth, but the majority of the information this work contained was not within the bounds of Queen Mary.

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[50] John Lingard, A History of England, (Paris: Baudry's European Library, 1840), vol. 4, p. 319.

[51] Ibid., p. 334.

[52] Hastings Robinson, The Zurich Letters, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1842).

[53] John Bruce, Correspondence of Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1853).

[54] William Camden, Annales of Elizabeth, (London: Benjiamin Fisher, Printer, 1625).

The bulk of Tennyson's information came from a work previously mentioned, Froude's History of England. This work is very well written and is accurate in presenting the historical details of Mary's reign. Volume six was the principle volume used.

The first realization one receives upon reading Queen Mary from the critical point of view is that the play lacks the "din and shock" of life within and without. The second realization is that the play lacks the architectural quality needed to be a fine play. There is no adequate structure to bind together the incidents; so many episodes are sketched that Tennyson hardly could have developed them all.[55] The incidents which Tennyson chose to develope are those which bring out the pathos of Mary's private position, and not those incidents which would interest the reader or spectator with the march of public events.[56]

Tennyson's conception of Mary was much the same as Froude's. Froude was very sympathetic with the queen and said that "few men or women have lived less capable of doing knowingly a wrong thing."[57] The historian Hume had a very different conception of Mary's

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[55] James, op. cit., p. 191.

[56] Cary, op. cit., p. 214.

[57] Froude, op. cit., p. 527.

character which provides an interesting contrast; he said that "obstinacy, bigotry, violence, cruelty, malignity, revenge, tyranny, every circumstance of her character took a tincture from her bad temper and narrow understanding."[58] The Memoir states Tennyson's feelings toward Mary as sympathetic in every manner:

> He held that all allowance ought to be made for her, when, her high hopes for the Church and the kingdom having been rekindled and quenched, the clouds of youth gathered again into a settled gloom. Throughout all history, he said, there was nothing more mournful than the final tragedy of this woman who, with her deep longing for love, found herself hated by her people, abandoned by her husband: and harassed in the hour of death by the restlessness of despair.[59]

His total conception of Mary undoubtedly lowered the dignity of history for the sake of imagination and sentiment, although all other historical details appear to be firmly grounded.[60]

Tennyson seems to have thought that his reader would waive all condemnation for Mary and her bloody reign on the grounds of her sympathetic character. He does not fail to show how close the queen came to wrecking England, but he softens the hatred and horror of her

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[58] David Hume, The History of England, (Philadelphia: Edward Parker, Publisher, 1821), vol. 2, p. 560.

[59] Tennyson, op. cit., p. 178, 24-32.

[60] Cary, op. cit., p. 217.

[61] Ibid.

with a touch of human pity for her own self-wreck. Something of this can be seen from her highly pathetic speech in Act V, scene ii. Mary is sitting on the ground in a half-crazed state and describes herself as

> A low voice
> Lost in a wilderness where none can hear!
> A voice of shipwreck on a shoreless sea!
> A low voice from the dust and from the grave.

Perhaps this unhappy queen, the victim of her own intense and passionate delusions, has never had such justice done to her as in Tennyson's Queen Mary.[62]

The only passage in the play which reaches for the adjective "fire" used by The London Times is the passionate soliloquy of Mary in Act III, scene ii, when she feels what she supposes to be the intimations of pregnancy.

> He hath awakened, he hath awakened!
> He stirs within the darkness!
> Oh Philip, husband! how thy love to mine
> Will cling more close, and those blank 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 enemies - -
> He comes, and my star rises.
> The stormy Wyatts and Northumberlands
> And proud ambitions of Elisabeth,
> And all her fiercest partisans, are pale
> Before my star!
> His sceptre shall go forth from Ind to Ind!
> His sword shall hew the heretic peoples down!

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[62] Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 207.

> His faith shall clothe the world that shall be his,
> Like universal air and sunshine! Open,
> Ye everlasting gates! The King is here! --
> My star, my son!

It is interesting to compare Tennyson's conception of Mary's pregnancy with Hilda Prescott's conception of the pregnancy in her recent biography Mary Tudor.[63] Both conceptions are one and the same, and I feel that it is a mark in Tennyson's favor not to be contradicted by modern scholarship.

The other characters in the play are painted with inferior colors as compared with Mary, but some of them are definitely well drawn, or described, for Tennyson's gift lay in description.[64] Gardiner declares in Act III, scene iv, that Cardinal Pole

> has the Plantagenet face,
> But not the force made them our mightiest kings.
> Fine eyes -- but melancholy, irresolute --
> A fine beard, Bonner, a very full fine beard.
> But a weak mouth, and indeterminate--ha?

Philip is presented as a man of sensuality and egotism, a person with cold and cruel motives. Gardiner is a coarse and ferocious man; Cardinal Pole is a suave, timorous, selfish ecclesiastic. Sir Thomas Wyatt and Sir Ralph Bagenhall are brave, steadfast, and honest Englishmen. Cranmer shows sometimes moments of weakness and faltering,

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[63] Hilda F. M. Prescott, Mary Tudor, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, Publishers, 1953), pp. 286, 307-310.

[64] Baum, op. cit., p. 216.

but his deep faith, his humble penitance, and his heroic martyrdom well atone for his faults.[65] The character of Elizabeth is one of the best in the play; she has two or three good speeches with which to uphold her part. The reader is able to perceive courage, coquetry, and arrogance in her role.[66] Perhaps her greatest speech comes in Act III, scene v:

> Right honest and red-cheek'd; Robin was violent,
> And she was crafty-- a sweet violence,
> And a sweet craft. I would I were a milkmaid,
> To sing, love, marry, churn, brew, bake, and die,
> Then have my simple headstone by the church,
> And all things lived and ended honestly.
> I could not if I would. I am Harry's daughter.
> Gardiner would have my head. They are not sweet,
> The violence and the craft that do divide
> The world of nature; what is weak must lie;
> The lion needs but roar to guard its young;
> The lapwing lies, says 'here' when they are there.
> Threaten the child; 'I'll scourge you if you did it:'
> What weapon hath the child, save his soft tongue,
> To say 'I did not'?and my rod's the block.
> I never lay my head on the pillow
> But that I think, 'Wilt thou lie there tomorrow"'
> How oft the fallen axe, that never fell,
> Hath shock'd me back into the daylight truth
> That it may fall today! Those damp, black, dead
> Nights in the Tower; dead--with the fear of death
> Too dead ev'n for a death-watch! Toll of a bell,
> Stroke of a clock, the scurrying of a rat
> Affrighted me, and then delighted me,
> For there was life-- And there was life in death--
> The little murder'd princes, in a pale light,
> Rose hand in hand, and whisper'd, 'Come away!'

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[65] Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 207.

[66] Andrew Lang, Alfred Tennyson, (New York Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1901), p. 175.

Tennyson said the most difficult thing for him to do in Queen Mary was to give relief to its intense sadness.[67] One instance of his having done this successfully is Elisabeth's speech in Act III, scene v. Sir Henry Bedingfield comes to tell her of the King of Spain's desire for her to marry the Prince of Savoy and she says:

> I thank you heartily, sir,
> But I am royal, tho' your prisoner,
> And God hath blessed or cursed me with a nose--
> Your boots are from the horses.

Queen Mary was at least dignified in conception and of consistent elevation of purpose. Its main difficulties are its lack of following a more rigid form.[68] The play tends altogether to expansion, whereas a genuine dramatic subject should tend to concentration.[69] Certainly the morbid passions of Mary, the brief intervals of her lucid and energetic action, the gloom of her physical decay, and the despair of her moral desolation, together make up a picture of some merit, but I feel that it would be extremely difficult for a sincere and able-minded critic to praise Queen Mary as "close" to Shakespeare's genius.

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[67] Tennyson, op. cit., p. 179.

[68] Cary, op. cit., p. 222.

[69] James, op. cit., p. 183.

Robert Browning failed to find a fault with Queen Mary. The following is a copy of his letter in which he thanked Tennyson for sending him a gift copy of the play:

19 WARWICK CRESCENT, W.
June 30th, 1875.

My Dear Tennyson,

I thank you very much for "Queen Mary," the gift, and even more for "Queen Mary," the poem: it is astonishingly fine. Conception, execution, the whole and the parts, I see nowhere the shade of a fault, thank you once again! I am going to begin it afresh now. What a joy it is that such a poem should be, and be yours!

All affectionate regards to Mrs. Tennyson from

Yours ever, Robert Browning.[70]

It is easily understood why Froude should have complimented Tennyson's play; they practically wrote Queen Mary together. The following is an acknowledgement of his gift copy:

5 Onslow Gardens
May 7th, 1875.

My Dear Tennyson,

I cannot trust myself to say how much I admire the play. Beyond the immediate effect, you'll have hit a more fatal blow than a thousand pamphleteers and controversialists; besides this you have reclaimed one more section of English History from the wilderness and given it a form in which it will be fixed for ever. No one since Shakespeare

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[70] Tennyson, op. cit., p. 181.

> has done that. When we were beginning to think that we were to have no more from you, you have given us the best of all your works. Once more I thank you for having written this book with all my heart.
>
> Most truly yours, J. A. Froude.[71]

In 1875 when Queen Mary was published, Colonel Bateman bought an option on the play for its production, though he knew it would require drastic cutting and reconstruction. Tennyson was hesitant about handing over his work to the rough surgery which it was likely to receive from the Colonel's hands.[72] After the death of Bateman, Tennyson was even less inclined to trust his widow. Tennyson knew Henry Irving and liked him very much, and he was therefore more ready to discuss the alterations of Queen Mary for the stage with Irving than anyone else.[73] On October 28, 1876 Tennyson wrote to Irving:

> My dear Mr. Irvine /sic/ ,
>
> If Queen Mary is to be acted and if I am to alter her, I should like as soon as may be to know what the alterations are to be. I have begun other work and I should not like to be interrupted in it a few weeks later, when in the heat of it. So let me know.
>
> I send you Mr. Searle's markings and remarks. I think it's quite worth your while to overlook them, particularly as he told me that his arrangements

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[71] Ibid., p. 180.

[72] Laurence Irving, Henry Irving, The Actor and His World, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), p. 265.

[73] Ibid.

for the stage were in his day always a success.

I have altered the beginning of the Gate House scene—beginning in the first mention of Wyeth there as you wished—and also some two other passages to please myself. Mind, if Mrs. Bateman doesn't care to have the play acted, neither do I—but if it is to be acted, you must send me my instructions.

Yours ever,
Alfred Tennyson.[74]

Mrs. Bateman thought she had better persuade the impatient poet to undertake the revisions:

Lyceum Theatre
December 9th, 1876.

Dear Mr. Tennyson,

After reading over Mr. Searle's commentaries and comparing his suggestions with those formerly proposed by Mr. Knowles, Mr. Irving, and yourself last summer, I have thought best to write and ask if you will undertake the necessary curtailment yourself. It is always an onerous task to propose the alteration of beautiful language but the exigencies of the stage demand the play reduced in length and that it may not be longer than Hamlet (and it ought to be half an hour shorter) and not fuller of characters, Hamlet being well known to be the fullest "play on the stage." I should like to have this acting copy as soon as possible as I propose doing the play at Easter or a little before. You have evidently no confidence of our judgment in the matter and the conviction so crippled my ideas that unless you were to give me instructions to do what I really thought best with the certainty that I would respect your genius too much to do anything that was not demanded by the working of the stage business, I could not undertake it. . .

Yours most sincerely,
S. F. Bateman.[75]

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[74] Ibid., p. 266.

[75] Ibid., p. 267.

This appeal seems to have irritated Tennyson, but the letter brought the desired results. Tennyson answered Mrs. Bateman's letter on December 14th.

> Dear Mrs. Bateman,
>
> Why do you beat about the bush? If you have repented of your proposal freely made to me in the spring, would it not be better to say so at once? You know very well that I have always said one and the same thing, i. e., "let me know what changes you want making in Queen Mary and I will do my best to make them".
>
> Let me moreover remind you that the 5th of December has gone by.
>
> Yours most sincerely,
> Alfred Tennyson.[76]

Tennyson went to work on the play soon after this and sent the revised version to Mrs. Bateman in time for its production in the spring.[77]

On April 18, 1876 Queen Mary opened at the Lyceum Theatre in London under Mrs. Bateman's management.[78] Kate Bateman (Mrs. Kate Crowe) played the role of Mary Tudor and Isabel Bateman played the role of Elizabeth. Henry Irving played the part of Philip, although in the beginning Tennyson had wanted him to play the part of Cardinal Pole. It is said that Irving was

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid., p. 706.

able to create a convincing portrait of the bloodless Philip and perfectly characterized his coldly concentrated selfish purpose.[79] The play won high praise among Tennyson's intellectual friends. Hallam Tennyson, who took his father to see the play, wrote to his mother:

> Bath Hotel
> Arlington Street,
> Piccadilly,
> May 4th, 1876.
>
> My dear mama,
>
> J. H. Butcher and Eleanor and Lionel and the rest of us went last night to Queen Mary and enjoyed it-- Papa was very much pleased with Irving and Mrs. Crowe's acting and the play seemed to have paid and is to run for the season.
>
> We had a very merry journey up yesterday and in the evening I took Fanny and J. H. B. behind the scenes with papa and Mrs. Greville, and the sight of the actors in undress amused them. Mrs. Bateman gave us a toast of burgundy. Irving told us that he took one and a half hours to put on his wig for Philip.
>
> This morning we went to the Academy. Millais' picture of 'Over the Hills' is a good picture-- much rushland in front-- a dark hill--and a peep into a far land. After the Academy Irving had a few minutes conversation with papa about Q. M. and I fancy papa will go again tonight for the last act. . .[80]

Hallam Tennyson's estimate of the play appears to have been a trifle optinistic, for on June 17th. Mrs. Bateman wrote to Tennyson:

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[79] Ibid., p. 273.

[80] Ibid.

> . . . herewith I beg to enclose cheque for twenty-three nights performance of Queen Mary at £10 per night—beginning on the 18th of April and terminating on the 13th of May. . . . Had my purse been like that of Fortunatus I should have been only too glad to have kept the play on the boards to the close for the honour of the taste of British people, the dignity of the stage and the respect due to the greatest English poet. . . . And thus the term was twenty-three nights and not as I had hoped, the end of the season. . . .[81]

Thus ended Tennyson's Queen Mary on the English stage—a run of twenty-three nights and then retired forever. The play was staged in Melbourne, Australia, at the Melbourne Theatre-Royal with a Miss Dargon as Mary and had a long run. It was later reproduced at the Bijou Theatre in the same city and had a second long run.[82]

It is difficult to know precisely what alterations were made in the published edition of Queen Mary for its production on the stage. There is no published copy of the original acting edition available; the British Museum Catalogue does not list such an edition.[83] All probability is that Mrs. Bateman merely took a published edition and made such changes as were necessary and were recommended by Irving and Tennyson, striking through what was to be omitted and inserting notes

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[81] Ibid., p. 247.

[82] Hallam Tennyson, editor, The Works of Tennyson, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), p. 983.

[83] J. W. Edwards, editor, The British Museum Catalogue of Printed Books, (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1946), vol. 53.

containing the additions.

There is an acting edition of Queen Mary available,[84] but it is impossible that Henry Irving played his role from such a manuscript. There are several reasons for such an assertion. Hallam Tennyson stated in the Memoir that Tennyson wrote the following conclusion to the last act for the acting edition of the play in 1876:

(After Mary's speech ending "Help me hence.")

(She falls into the arms of Lady Clarence.
Alice. The hand of God hath help'd her hence.
Lady Clarence. Not yet.
(To Elizabeth as she enters.
Speak, speak, a word of yours may wake her.
Elizabeth. (kneeling at her sister's knee) Mary!
Mary. Mary! Who calls? 'tis long since any one
Has called me Mary, she,
There in the dark she sits and calls for me,
She that should wear her state before the world.
My father's own true wife. Aye, madam. Hark!
For she will call again.
Elizabeth. Mary, my sister!
Mary. That's not the voice!
Who is it steps between me and the light?
(Puts her arms around Elizabeth's neck.
I held her in my arms a guileless babe,
And mourn'd her orphan doom along with mine.
The crown! she comes for that! take it and feel it!
It stings the touch! It is not gold but thorns!
(Mary starts up.
The crown of thorns! Play not with holy things!
(Clasps her hands and knees.
Keep you the faith! . . . yea, Mother, yea, I come!
(Dies.

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[84] John M. Kingdom, editor, Queen Mary: Acting Edition, (New York: Robert M. DeWitt, Publishers, 1875).

Lady Clarence. She is dead.
Elizabeth. (kneeling by the body) Poor sister!
Peace be with the dead.
(Curtain.[85]

This is a much more dramatic conclusion for the play than that used in the published edition, yet Mr. Kingdom does not use it in his version of the play.

Mr. Kingdom excludes six of the characters who appear in the dramatis personae of the published edition; they are Edmund Bonner, the Bishop of London, Thomas Thirlby, the Bishop of Ely, Father Cole, Villa Garcia, and Soto, supporters of the Pope, and the Duke of Alva. This edition also prescribes very elaborate costumes for the play.[86] It is merely a copy of the regular published edition with the omissions enclosed in inverted commas. All oaths and exclamations with a religious emphasis and all conversations between lesser characters are omitted. Much of the long third act is cut, and all of the fourth act is cut except the last scene; this scene becomes the last scene of the third act. Tennyson's five act play thus becomes a four act play to be presented in three to three and a half hours.

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[85] Tennyson, op. cit., pp. 179-180.

[86] Kingdom, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

Tennyson had successfully supplemented Shakespeare's cycle of historical plays; Queen Mary served as an epilogue to the cycle. But it was not so much a stage play as it was the dramatic panorama of an age. The five acts of the play were divided into twenty-four scenes, and the whole play was substantially longer than the uncut Hamlet. It was obviously too long for presentation in its original form, especially in an age which was beginning to expect elaborate scenic display and insisted on the addition of a "curtain raiser."[87] Tennyson had also used an abundance of the soliloquy and dramatic narrations in order to give his poetic genius scope. The result was that the play had to be drastically cut, being reduced by more than half. Some of the more important and best drawn characters such as Cranmer, Cardinal Pole, Sir Thomas Wyatt, and Bishop Bonner had to be eliminated.[88]

In a critical record of the first-night productions at the Lyceum Theatre from 1871 to 1895, it is stated that in order to follow and understand the play as it was presented on the stage, the spectator should have a knowledge of history and be familiar with

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[87] Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 427.

[88] Ibid., p. 429.

the published edition of Queen Mary.[89] With the omission of Cranmer and Pole and the use of a merely episodical allusion to Wyatt's rebellion, it is not difficult to understand how the main chain of events in the drama could be hard to follow. Philip was on the stage in the second scene of the third act and the second scene of the fourth act only. The grief of the queen is said to have been lengthened out too far and that the interest of the spectator left when Philip left?[90]

Robert Browning wrote the following letter to Tennyson after seeing the production of the play:

19 WARWICK CRESCENT, W.
April 19th, 1876.

My Dear Tennyson,

I want to be among the earliest who assure you of the complete success of your "Queen Mary" last night. I have more than once seen a satisfactory performance of it, to be sure, in what Carlyle calls "the Private Theatre under my own hat," because there and then not a word was left out; nay, there were abundant "encores" to half the speeches: still whatever was left by the stage scissors suggested what a quantity of "cuttings" would furnish one with an after-feast.

Irving was very good indeed, and the others did their best not so badly.

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[89] Clement Scott, From "The Bells" to "King Arthur," (London: John Macqueen, 1896), p. 91

[90] Ibid., pp. 92-95.

> The love as well as aspiration for the author was conspicuous, indeed, I don't know whether you ought to have been present to enjoy it, or were not safer in absence from a smothering of flowers and deafening "tumult of acclaim," but Hallam was there to report, and Mrs. Tennyson is with you to believe. All congratulations to you both from
>
> Yours affectionately ever,
> Robert Browning.[91]

Surely there is sincerity in Browning's letter, along with some amount of accurate description dealing with the production of the play, but I feel that it would be fairer to Tennyson and fairer to the play if I concluded my discussion of Queen Mary with Henry James' final criticism:

> The great merit of Mr. Tennyson's drama, however, is not in the quotableness of certain passages, but in the thoroughly elevated spirit of the whole. He desired to make us feel of what sound manly stuff Englishmen of that Tudor reign of terror needed to be, and his verse is pervaded by the echo of their deep-toned refusal to abdicate their manhood. The temper of the poem, on this line, 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. I nevertheless venture to add in conclusion that Queen Mary seems to be a work of rare ability rather than a great inspiration; a powerful tour de force rather than a labour of love. But though it is not the best of a great poet's achievement, only a great poet could have written it.[92]

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[91] Tennyson, Memoir, p. 185.

[92] James, op. cit., p. 195, 17-33.

CHAPTER II

HAROLD

As a background for Harold, the second play of the trilogy, Tennyson "studied many recent plays" and reread Aeschylus and Sophocles.[93] His main sources for material were Edward Bulwer-Lytton's Harold, The Last of the Saxon Kings, a two-volume novel of the Norman Conquest, and Edward Augustus Freeman's three-volume History of the Norman Conquest.[94] Such a struggle as that between the Saxons, Danes, and Normans for supremacy should have provided an adequate subject for Tennyson's imagination, because the facts are not recorded in great detail by history. The eleventh century also provided two important figures, William and Harold, who were sufficiently complex for a splendid

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[93] Tennyson, Memoir, p. 188.

[94] Baum, op. cit., p. 219.

drama. Yet these advantages were dissipated or disregarded, and Tennyson became absorbed in the historical rather than the dramatic situation. He unfortunately chose again the chronicle play as his model.[95]

Harold contains twenty-two speaking parts besides "Earles and Thanes, Men-at-arms, Canons of Walthan, Fishermen, etc." Its five acts are divided into eleven scenes. The play opens in King Edward the Confessor's palace in London. The Court and people are watching with surprise a new comet which has appeared in the sky. The comet is immediately interpreted as a sign of war. The remainder of the scene is devoted to painting the character of Edward and introducing the secret rivalry between Harold and his brother Tostig for the Crown. Harold seeks leave to go on a hunting holiday in Normandy, but Edward, oppressed with an unexplainable foreboding, dissuades him; as a compromise he agrees to go on a fishing trip to Flanders instead. The following scene introduces the love affair between Harold and Edith, the king's ward. Aldwyth, the daughter of Alfgar and the widow of the King of Wales, spies on them and devises a scheme for stirring up the North against King Edward and then making the breach permanent

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[95] Ibid.

through a marriage with Harold.

Act II shows Harold shipwrecked on the shore of Normandy. He is captured and taken to William's palace at Bayeux, where his younger brother, Wulfnoth, is held as a hostage. Harold is threatened and cajoled into an agreement to assist William in the taking of the throne of England upon Edward's death. Harold swears on the jewel of St. Pancratius the oath he does not intend to keep, but he is tricked; in reality he swears the oath on all the bones of the Norman saints.

The third act brings Harold back to England and presents him at the bedside of the dying King Edward. Tostig has rebelled and fled to raise Norway against England. Edward names Harold as his successor and dedicates his ward, Edith, to a life of virginity in the hope of averting the vengeance of God for Harold's broken oath. After Edward dies, Harold is summoned to the North by the news of the landing of the Giant Harold Hardrada, King of Norway. Act IV presents Harold's marriage to Aldwyth in the hopes of receiving support from the Northumbrian forces which were led by her brothers. The Battle of Stamford Bridge follows, and the success of the English forces is reported by means of a messenger. In the midst of a banquet to celebrate the English victory, Harold is called South to defend the realm

against the invasion of William and his Norman army.

The Battle of Senlac takes place off stage in Act V, but it is dramatically reported by Stigand, the Saxon Archbishop of Canterbury, who describes the progress of the battle to Edith. Stigand's excited narration is interrupted by the yells of the two armies and the Latin hymns which are chanted by the canons of the Abbey of Waltham. In the final scene Edith and Aldwyth go onto the battlefield to look for the corpse of Harold. Upon finding Harold, Edith proclaims that she is his rightful wife and produces her ring as proof; she then falls on Harold's body and dies.

Tennyson followed Freeman's History of the Norman Conquest for the main chain of events in the play. It is difficult to decide just how much of Lytton's Harold was used. It is known that Tennyson and Bulwer-Lytton were somewhat hostile to one another.[96] I feel that this hostility and the fact that Lytton's work was "historical romance" instead of pure history must have decreased Tennyson's estimate of the work. However, Tennyson saw fit to write the following dedication to Lytton's son:

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[96] Charles Tennyson, op. cit., p. 208.

To His Excellency
THE RIGHT HON. LORD LYTTON
Viceroy and Governor-General

My Dear Lord Lytton, -After old-world records- such as the Bayeux tapestry and the Roman de Rou, - Edward Freeman's History of the Norman Conquest, and your father's Historical Romance treating the same times, have been mainly helpful to me in writing this Drama. Your father dedicated his 'Harold' to my father's brother; allow me to dedicate my 'Harold' to yourself.

A. Tennyson.[97]

Bulwer-Lytton frankly stated that his aim was to produce the greatest amount of dramatic effect at the least expense of historical truth.[98] Romance and history are conjoined in this work, and though in places the romance is heavily laid on, for long stretches it is quite subordinated to history.[99]

Tennyson undoubtedly took his conception of the superstitions of the reign of Harold from Lytton's work. Lytton and Tennyson both place strong emphasis on the false oath, but Tennyson mentions the jewel of St. Pancratius whereas Lytton merely says that Harold swore on a gold box, not knowing the contents. There is not as much

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[97] Horace E. Scudder, editor, The Poetic and Dramatic Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898), p. 622.

[98] Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Harold, The Last of the Saxon Kings, (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1861), vol. 1, p. v.

[99] Albert C. Baugh, editor, A Literary History of England, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), p. 1364.

emphasis placed on Edward's death in the novel as there is in the play. Both authors present the "fate" concept, but Tennyson developes his to a greater extent; this is the only apparent influence from the drama of Aeschylus and Sophocles, besides the messenger device. Lytton allows Edith only to come onto the battlefield to search for Harold's body; Tennyson used Edith and Aldwyth in the battlefield scene. Lytton uses "Sanguelac! Sanguelac!--the Lake of Blood!" as Edward's dying words; Tennyson adapted in Act III, scene i "Senlac! Sanguelac, the Lake of Blood!" as a part of Edward's speech immediately before his death.

Freeman's History of the Norman Conquest was printed in six volumes, but Tennyson used only a small part of the second volume. The death scene of Edward is taken almost exactly from this work, particularly Edward's speech describing his vision. Freeman's account goes as follows:

> . . when a green tree shall be cut away from the midst of its trunk, when it shall be carried away for the space of three furlongs from its root, when, without the help of man, it shall join itself again to its trunk, and shall again put forth leaves and bear fruit in its season. Then shall be the time when the woes of England shall come to an end.[100]

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[100] Edward Augustus Freeman, The History of the Norman Conquest of England, (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1873), vol. 3, p. 7, 3-9.

Tennyson's adaptation comes in Act III, scene i, as a proof that he was just as conscious of his blank verse in Harold as he had been in Queen Mary:[101]

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

Tennyson certainly inserted more drama and action in this speech than did his source; this is one of the most beautiful passages of the play, giving evidence that his poetic imagination had not left him in his old age.

Tennyson is original in his handling of Edith as he makes her the ward of King Edward. Neither Lytton nor Freeman treated her in this manner. Lytton did give emphasis to the love affair between Harold and Edith, but the wedding ring device was Tennyson's. Tennyson was original also in his method of handling the false oath. Freeman stated the various aspects of the legend regarding the oath, but he felt there

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[101] Baum, op. cit., p. 222.

was little truth involved; he labeled the box containing the bones of the Norman Saints mere legend and said nothing of the jewel of St. Pancratius.[102] Freeman also stated that Edith did not come to the battlefield on her own accord to find the mangled body of Harold, but that William requested that she come. The historian suggests that Aldwyth probably fled with her brothers for safety when she saw that the Battle of Senlac was going the wrong way.[103]

Along with the works of Freeman and Lytton, Tennyson could have very easily used Lingard's history of the early Saxon church[104] and Camden's collection of facts concerning the early Britains.[105] There is no proof that Tennyson used these sources, but it is evident that he knew them, and they would have contributed very much to his knowledge of the early English church.

The most striking characteristic of the play is its loosely constructed plot, but there is nothing ridiculous or unreasonable in

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[102] Freeman, op. cit., p. 165.

[103] Ibid., p. 341.

[104] John Lingard, The History and Antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon Church, (London: C. Lolman, Publisher, 1845).

[105] William Camden, Remains Concerning Britain, (London: John Russell Smith, Publisher, 1870).

Harold. Henry James described the play as being "weak, colorless, and tame."[106] I personally feel that this play has a great deal more merit dramatically than Queen Mary. The majority of the difficulties can be attributed to the form of the chronicle play.

The reader feels that Tennyson had learned something from his first experiences with the drama, and despite whatever faults Harold may have, it is not a bad play. At first glance there appears to be more coherence in Harold than in Queen Mary; this could be the result of the shortness of the play. Harold was constructed in such a manner as to reduce the episodic effect and give more continuity to the scenes, but the fact remains that the plot is loosely constructed in comparison with overall concepts of the drama.

Tennyson attempted to give Harold a more human interest by introducing a sympathetic love story and the story of a woman's jealousy. It appears that he also tried to give each scene a more definitely dramatic progression, though still avoiding the purely theatrical. The result was that the play was better adapted for the stage than was

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[106] James, op. cit., p. 197.

Queen Mary.

If Queen Mary served as an epilogue to the Shakespearean cycle of historical plays, then Harold served as a prologue and provided the first act of the long national struggle against the Papacy. The support which the Pope gave to William's claim to the English throne was an important factor in his success, and Harold must have seemed to Tennyson the first leader in a struggle which culminated with the disastrous reign of Mary. The chief problems which confronted England in Harold were vividly and imaginatively stated—to seek the unity of the Northern and Southern powers, to ensure the English succession, and to keep out the Norman power and its backer, the Papacy.[107]

The number of characters in the play and its moderate length prevented Tennyson from allowing any one of the characters except Harold to attain a great individuality. Henry James in speaking of the characters in Harold says:

> Mr. Tennyson, moreover, has not the dramatic touch; he rarely finds the phrase or the movement that illuminates a character, rarely makes the dialogue strike sparks. This is generally

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[107] Charles Tennyson, op. cit., p. 434.

> mild and colourless, and the passages that arrest us, relatively, owe their relief to juxtaposition rather than to any special possession of the Old Tennysonian energy.[108]

Tennyson's warriors are pleasant gentlemen, and his Harold is very much like anyone else with his mental and moral sophistication. Harold is presented as the patriot of England, but the defect of his dialogue, his reflective philosophy at critical moments, takes away from his splendor.

Tennyson obviously upholds Harold and all of Saxon England; all of the dramatic necessities of battles and great public scenes naturally point to him. The proving of Harold's spiritual honor and essential incorruptibility becomes a national matter in which the typical character of Tennyson's countrymen is involved.[109] Tennyson was evidently stirred to great patriotic depths by the character of his theme, but it is generally believed that he lacked the plasticity of mind and the reach of imagination to throw himself back into an age of alien standards and manners.[110] By remaining close to the historical inconsistencies of Harold's character,

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[108] James, op. cit., p. 202, 27-34.

[109] Cary, op. cit., p. 224.

[110] Ibid., p. 223.

Tennyson causes the reader to lose sympathy for the hero. Harold seems more inclined to falter and succumb than to succeed. The revelation in the final act of his secret marriage to Edith seriously endangers the reader's opinion of Harold; he is shown to be a man who would become a partner to bigamy. Tennyson thought that he had drawn Harold's character well, and he stated why he felt that Harold was a fit hero for a drama:

> No historical character unites more completely than Harold all the elements of dramatic effect. His military genius, his civil virtues, his loyal and fearless championship of England against the dominion of strangers; his liberality, which has for its perpetual monument his secular foundation at Walthan; 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 stature, his comely countenance, that mighty physical strength to which the picture of the Bayeux tapestry bears witness— all these things make Harold a man fit to stand as the central figure of a drama.[111]

The subject of the false oath is really the central matter of the drama. Tennyson handled the "oath scene" extremely well, and it is very effective dramatically. He used Wulfnoth and Malet to point out the different influences on Harold's decision— the appeals of country, ambition, love (for Edith and his brother), and

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[111] Tennyson, Memoir, p. 186, 5-15.

truth. William's speech in Act III, scene ii, is highly dramatic:

> Ay, thou has sworn an oath
> Which, if not kept, would make the hard earth rive
> To the very Devil's horns, the bright sky cleave
> To the very feet of God. . .

Both Harold and William are superstitious, but William's superstition is of a type that enables him to use religion as his tool; Harold's goes only far enough to make him tremble and to weaken his heart. The fierce sublety of the Norman is matched against the heroic simplicity of the Saxon, and craft triumphs.[112]

It is interesting to note the impression Edward Dowden received of Harold from Tennyson's play:

> Harold is no virgin, no confessor, no seer, no saint, but a loyal, plain, strongthewed, truth-loving son of England, who can cherish a woman, and rule a people, and mightily wield a battle-axe.[113]

Perhaps this is not too far distant from the impression Tennyson wished to convey.

Lady Aldwyth is a distracting figure throughout the play. She at first appears to be a masterful female of heroic temper, but

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[112] Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 196.

[113] Charles Wells Moulton, editor, The Library of Literary Criticism of English and American Authors, (New York: The Moulton Publishing Company, 1905), p. 98, 44-49.

she gradually is transformed into a person who is motivated by passion alone, rather than political intrigue.[114] Although she is a designing character and is hypocritical, she carries much of the movement of the play. Edith is presented as the heroine of the drama, and her transformation from girl to woman is somewhat remarkable for Tennyson.[115] She is a noble character who is the didactic element of Tennyson's imagination. Edith had a bad conscience about continuing on affectionate terms with Harold after his diplomatic marriage with Aldwyth. In her prayer for Harold's success in the Battle of Senlac, she hopes that heaven will not refuse to listen to her because she loves the "husband of another." In Act V, scene i, she says:

> O Thou that knowest, let not my strong prayer
> Be weaken'd in thy sight because I love
> The husband of another!

The reader feels real sympathy and respect for Edith throughout the play.

Most critics are agreed in the opinion that Tennyson failed to do William of Normandy the proper justice in Harold.

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[114] Baum, op. cit., p. 220.

[115] Morton Luce, A Handbook to Tennyson, (London: George Bell and Sons, Publishers, 1906), p. 409.

Tennyson dwells on William's cruelty and cunning, but says nothing of his finer qualities which enabled him to unite England in the 'composite race." William has only one good speech, and that is spoken over the fallen body of Harold at the end of the play; it is prophetic of the outcome of the Norman Conquest:

> Since I knew battle,
> And that was from my boyhood, never yet--
> No, by the splendour of God- have I fought men
> Like Harold and his brethren, and his guard
> Of English. Every man about his king
> Fell where he stood. They loved him: and, pray God
> My Normans may but move as true with me
> To the door of death. Of one self-stock at first,
> Make them again one people- Norman, English;
> And English, Norman we should have a hand
> To grasp the world with, and a foot to stamp it. . .
> Flat. Praise the Saints. It is over. No more blood!
> I am king of England, so they thwart me not,
> And I will rule according to their laws.

The piety and incompetence of King Edward as presented in the drama is true to history. Edward is a tired, old man who bewails the war clouds on the horizon, but he does not have the strength to do anything about the situation. He makes many references to the church and gives the impression that he is sincerely devout. In Act III, scene i Harold wishes that he were like Edward the Confessor:

> I would I were as hold and passionless as he!
> That I might rest as calmly! Look at him--
> The rosy face, and long, down-silvering beard,
> The brows unwrinkled as a summer mere.

Archbishop Stigand replies:

> Holy? ay, ay, forsooth,
> A conscience for his own soul, not his realm;
> A twilight conscience lighted thro' a chink;
> Thine by the sun.

In the works of Lytton, Freeman, and Tennyson the archbishop is rather skeptical of Edward's meek manner.

Tennyson's blank verse rises to heights in at least two places in Harold. One is the speech of Edward concerning his vision which I have already cited, and the other comes in the final scene of Act III when Wulfnoth laments his situation:

> Yea, and I
> Shall see the dewy kiss of dawn no more
> Make blush the maiden-white of our tall cliffs,
> Nor make the sea-bird rouse himself and hover
> Above the windy ripple, and fill the sky
> With free sea-laughter.

This is one of the best examples in the play of Tennyson's ability to to describe with beautiful poetry.

Tennyson called Harold his "tragedy of doom," and throughout the play he emphasized this motif. Hallam Tennyson quotes a review of Harold by Professor Jebb which appeared in The London Times on October 18, 1876, soon after the play was published:

> It becomes his [Harold's] avenging destiny. In his short career, it is what the inherited curse was to the house of Pelops. Harold can say in the true sense which Euripides meant, "My tongue has sworn, but my soul has not sworn." Nothing in the play seems to us finer than the contrast between Harold's own view of

> his predicament and the casuistry of the theologians who seek to reassure him. He has a foreboding that he must suffer the immediate doom of the defiled; but beyond that doom he looks up to that Justice which shall give him the reward of the pure in spirit.[116]

Tennyson followed his concept of fate with the scene of the comet, Harold's shipwreck and capture, the marriage and coronation of Harold and Aldwyth, and the great Battle of Senlac.

Why Harold was never produced is easily understood. The cost of producing a play in the nineteenth century could not have been very far behind the fabulous cost of the present day. Queen Mary had not been the success for which Mrs. Bateman had hoped, and certainly she was not willing to speculate thousands of dollars on Harold. Other producers must have thought approximately the same thing. I personally feel that had Harold been written and staged before Queen Mary, there would have been a strong possibility that the play's success would have assured Queen Mary of production. Becket had possibilities all of its own to insure its production, and thus the entire trilogy could have been staged. This opinion would probably be laughed down by the majority of Tennyson's critics, but I feel that it has some sound

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[116] Tennyson, Memoir, p. 186, 11-20.

ground upon which to stand. Harold is more compressed and much more in accordance with the traditions of the drama than Queen Mary. Action, plot, dialogue, continuity, and fulfillment of interest are better studied in Harold than in Queen Mary, and the play shows a definite improvement in dramatic technique.

Robert Browning saw fit to write another letter to Tennyson on the subject of drama, this time thanking him for his Christmas present of Harold:

19 WARWICK CRESCENT,
Dec. 21st, 1876.

My Dear Tennyson,

True thanks again for the best of Christmas presents, another great work, wise, good and beautiful. The scene where Harold is overborne to take the oath is perfect, for one instance. What a fine new ray of light you are entwining with your many colored wreath!

I know the Conquerer's country pretty well: stood last year in his Castle of Bonneville, on the spot where tradition is that Harold took the oath; and I have passed through Dives, the place of William's embarcation, perhaps twenty times: and more than once visited the church there, built by him, where still are inscribed the names of the Norman knights who accompanied him in his expedition. You light this up again for me. All happiness befall you and yours this good season and ever.

Yours affectionately,
R. Browning.[117]

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[117] Ibid., p. 189.

I think the following letter from G. H. Lewes is interesting in what it says about Tennyson's critics:

> The Heights, Witley,
> Godalming, 18th June, 1877.
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> My Dear Tennyson,
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> We have just read "Harold" (for the first time) and "Mary for the (fourth) and greatly wished you had been here to read certain scenes, especially that masterly interview between Harold and William, or the most pathetic close of "Mary." It is needless for me to say how profound a pleasure both works have given us—they are great contributions! and your wretched critics who would dissuade you from enriching literature with such dramas must be forgiven, "for they know not what they say." It is not however to carry the coals of applause to your Newcastle that I scribble these lines, but to enquire whether there is a hope of your being at Blackdown this summer and of our seeing you?
>
> Yours truly,
> G. H. Lewes.[118]

It is true that Tennyson received an abundance of adverse criticism concerning Harold, but I feel that he was successful in this drama. He attempted to portray the events of the Norman Conquest from the historical point of view, and that is what he did. Besides whatever difficulties the play may have from the dramatic standpoint, Tennyson succeeded in giving an accurate portrayal of the complex

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[118] Ibid., p. 192.

hostilities and the family feuds of the period. He accurately paints details of the rivalries among the sons of Godwin, the feud between the Godwins and the children of Alfgar, and the conflict between the native British and the invading Normans, as well as the opposing religious allegiances.[119]

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[119] Baum, op. cit., p. 219.

CHAPTER III

BECKET

Tennyson used as a background for Becket John Richard Green's Short History of the English People and Volume Six of Hurrell Froude's Remains. It is also known that he used the letters of Becket, the writings of Herbert of Bosham, and the works of John of Salisbury and Fitzstephen.[120] Bishop Lightfoot is said to have found out about Rosamund for him.[121] This play was to depict yet another stage in the battle between the English people and the Papacy. Tennyson refused to permit himself to hurry this work, for he was determined to give to it the very best of which he was capable, and there is no doubt that he had it in mind to provide a suitable part

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[120] Tennyson, Works, p. 986.

[121] Tennyson, Memoir, p. 193.

for Henry Irving.[122]

There are twenty-four speaking parts in Becket besides "Knights, Monks, Beggers, etc." The play opens with a prologue in which Becket and Henry play at a game of chess. After telling Becket that he is to be the next Archbishop of Canterbury, Henry speaks of Rosamund, whom he loves. Queen Eleanor is introduced into the action when she enters unexpectedly with Sir Reginald Fitzurse. Act I opens with a scene in Becket's house in London. Rosamund flees from the taunts of Fitzurse to the safety of Becket's house, as Becket had been appointed her ward by the king. Scene ii shows the growing enmity between Eleanor and Becket. In scene iii Becket refuses to sign articles which would take away power from the church, and by this action he incurs the wrath of the king and the nobles. The final scene of this act is a banquet scene in which Becket serves the beggars from the streets.

Act II presents King Henry and Rosamund with their son in a secret bower. As Becket and Henry do not agree on anything, Becket leaves for France and the protection of King Louis. In Act III Henry goes once more to the secret bower, but this time he is followed by his jealous queen and Fitzurse. The main action of this act comes in the final scene when Henry makes a trip to France to

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[122] Charles Tennyson, op. cit., p. 436.

plead for Becket's return, and Becket agrees to come again to England. In Act IV Eleanor finds the secret bower through the help of Rosamund and Henry's son, Geoffrey. The queen is about to stab Rosamund with a dagger when Becket arrives from France to save the young woman.

In Act V the queen tells Henry that she knows about his secret love for Rosamund. Becket, knowing that Rosamund is in great danger from the angry queen, takes her from the bower which is no longer secret and places her in the Godstow nunnery. Henry interprets this as an act of vengeance against himself, and in his anger calls for Becket's death. Four knights leave the king's chamber in search of Becket to murder him. John of Salisbury hears of the news and warns the Archbishop to flee again to France. The good man refuses to flee and goes to Canterbury Cathedral to pray; it is there that he is killed by the four knights and the play comes to an end.

Tennyson was indebted to Hurrell Froude for his translation of all the Becket correspondence, but beyond this there was little else in Froude's work that was of value to Tennyson for the play.[123] It was J. R. Green's Short History of the English People that offered

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[123] Louise Imogen Guiney, Hurrell Froude, Memoranda and Comments, (London: Methuen and Company, 1904), p. 132.

Tennyson his conception of Becket and Henry II. Green was one of the few historians of Tennyson's time who introduced the cultural and scientific aspects of the nation's life, satisfying those readers who wanted more than constitutional, military, and diplomatic history.[124] Tennyson naturally would have been attracted to such a source, but above this, Tennyson and Green were close friends.[125]

Green said that "all his researches into the annals of the twelveth century had not given him so vivid a conception of Henry II and his Court, as was embodied in Tennyson's Becket."[126] The play follows history closely, but Tennyson allowed his imagination more freedom in this play than the other plays of the trilogy. Green's description of Becket's death is very similar to the final scene of the play which takes place in Canterbury Cathedral. The account in the history goes as follows:

> After a stormy parley with him in his chamber they withdrew to arm, and Thomas was hurried by his clerks into the cathedral. As he reached the steps leading from the transept to the choir, his pursuers burst in, shouting from the cloisters. "Where," cried Reginald Fitzurse, in the dusk of the dimly lighted minster, "where is the traitor, Thomas

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[124] Baugh, op. cit., p. 1332.

[125] Charles Tennyson, op. cit., p. 436.

[126] Tennyson, Memoir, p. 193.

> Becket?' The Primate turning resolutely back: "Here am I; no traitor, but a priest of God," he replied; and again descending the steps, he placed himself with his back against a pillar and fronted his foes. All the bravery, the violence of his old knightly life seemed to revive in Thomas as he tossed back the threats and demands of his assailants. "You are our prisoner," shouted Fitzurse, and the four knights seized him to drag him from the church. "Do not touch me, Reginald," shouted the Primate; "pander that you are, you owe me a fealty;" and, availing himself of his personal strength, he shook them roughly off. "Strike! Strike!" retorted Fitzurse; and blow after blow struck Thomas to the ground.[127]

This is Tennyson's adaptation in Act V, scene iii:

> Fitzurse. Where is the traitor Becket?
> Monk. I am not he! I am not he, my lord.
> I am not he indeed!
> Fitzurse. Hence to the fiend!
> (Pushes him away.
> Where is this treble traitor to the King?
> De Tracy. Where is the archbishop, Thomas Becket?
> Becket. Here.
> No traitor to the King, but priest of God,
> Primate of England.
> (Descending into the transept.
> I am he you seek.
> What would you have of me?
> Fitzurse. Your life.
> De Tracy. Your life.
> De Morville. Save that you will absolve the bishops.
> Becket. Never, —
> Except they make submission to the Church.
> You had my answer to that cry before.
> De Morville. Why then you are a dead man; flee!
> Becket. I will not.
> I am readier to be slain than thou to slay.
> Hugh, I know well that thou hast but
> half a heart

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[127] John Richard Green, A Short History of the English People, (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1886), p. 135, 34-50.

To bathe this sacred pavement with my blood.
God pardon thee and these. . .

Fitzurse. . . . Seize him and carry him!
Come with us- nay- thou art our prisoner- come!. . .
(Fitzurse lays hold of the Archbishop.

Becket. Touch me not!. . . Thou art my man, thou art my vassal. Away!
(Flings him off. . .
Down!

Fitzurse. (advances with drawn sword). I told thee that I should remember thee!

Becket. Profligate pander!

Fitzurse. Did you hear that? strike, strike.
(Strikes off the Archbishop's mitre, and wounds him in the forehead. . .

Essentially the two passages are the same; Tennyson merely expanded the record of history and added what he thought necessary to give a dramatic effect. This is true of the rest of the play. Tennyson only left the path of history by inserting the Rosamund de Clifford legend. Green made no mention of Rosamund. One other point of variance between Becket and its principal source is the length of time Becket remained in France. Green stated that Becket was away from England for six years, but Tennyson makes his absence seem very short. This is not difficult to understand as Tennyson was trying to give his play unity of time.

If Tennyson is to be credited with a good Elizabethan imitation, Becket is the play. It is a laboriously prepared, carefully

planned, and skilfully written tragedy. Compared with the best that nineteenth century closet drama can show, Becket is a genuine masterpiece. It has everything a good tragedy should have, except the power of a great dramatic genius behind it.[128] The reader feels immediately upon reading the play that there are great forces at work, great dramatic forces, for Becket excells by far both Queen Mary and Harold. The play is composed of a capital subject with personal and political interests; it has a good love story, marked contrasts, plenty of action, and many fine passages that stir the emotions. It seems to have all of the elements of high tragedy, but there is something missing. Some say that this "something" is inner vitality and depth of feeling which must come from theatrical instinct, experience, and true dramatic conception.[128] This is probably a just criticism, although one hates to admit it after seeing the dramatic development Tennyson underwent between his first drama and his last.

Tennyson's choice of a man so emphatic, so elusive, so fit for great opportunity, so incapable of seeing more than one side of a question at one time provided a great character for a drama. History records the character of Becket as one of standing paradox.

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[128] Baum, op. cit., p. 224.

[129] Ibid., p. 225.

He was a man of audacity, strength, and forcefulness and attained success in everything he undertook. He was the son of an obscure London merchant, but he was the proudest and most accomplished of England's chivalrous youth. He studied theology at the University of Paris and was the favorite of Archbishop Theobald; he was the companion of the riotous King Henry, a skillful diplomat, and the best horseman and boldest knight of the court. He was the king's friend, but at the same time his relentless foe. Hallam Tennyson records his father's view of Becket as follows:

> Becket was a really great and impulsive man, with a firm sense of duty, and, when he renounced the world, looked upon himself as the head of the Church which was the people's 'tower of strength, their bulwark against throne and baronage.' This idea so far wrought in his dominant nature as to betray him into many rash acts; and later he lost himself in the idea. His enthusiasm reached a spiritual ecstasy which carried the historian along with it; and his humanity and abiding tenderness for the poor, the weak and the unprotected, heighten the impression so much as to make the poet feel passionately the wronged Rosamund's reverential devotion for him. . .[130]

It is precisely this character that Tennyson portrays in his drama, but he modifies things to a slight extent to suit himself.

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[130] Tennyson, Memoir, p. 195, 4-16.

There are some splendid passages of poetry in the play, but there are likewise many scenes which are episodic and throw small light on the transformation of Becket's character from courtier-priest to the domineering prelate.[131] When Henry came to the throne, he sought to break down all power against him. The church remained for a long while the only barrier in his path to an unlimited monarchy, and he resolved that this obstacle was to be removed. He placed his best friend and life long companion, Becket, in the Archbishopric of Canterbury, hoping to find in him a willing and skillful ally in the subjugation of the church to the throne.[132] Becket's rebellion and Henry's wrath form the plot of Becket.

Tennyson is very successful in his characterization in the drama. The experience he received from Queen Mary and Harold was very beneficial to him, although he was criticized severely by some critics for the character of Rosamund. Van Dyke says that the legend is not brought into the play by subtle weaving, but that it is "plumped" in solidly among the greater elements "to their disturbance." [133]

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[131] Moses, op. cit., p. 344.

[132] Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 199.

[133] Ibid., p. 204.

I do not totally agree with this. I feel that Tennyson could have used a more delicate hand in bringing the fanciful legend into the drama, and that he should have used it as an underplot, but I do not feel that he did the play any great damage by handling the story in the manner he did. Rosamund adds a great deal of brilliance to Becket in my estimation. The legend is written in a cultivated and serious style and is marked here and there by fragments of exquisite beauty. The duet in the opening of Act II is an excellent example:

> It is the wind of the dawn I hear in the pine overhead?
> No; but the voice of the deep as it hollows the cliffs of the land.
> 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?
> Love that is born of the deep coming up with the sun from the sea.
> Love that can shape or can shatter a life till the life shall have fled?
> Nay, let us welcome him, Love that can lift up a life from the dead.
> Keep him away from the lone little isle. Let us be, let us be.
> Nay, let him make it his own, let him reign in it--he, it is he,
> Love that is born of the deep coming up with the sun from the sea.

The character of Rosamund is sweet and innocent, and the reader feels real sympathy for her situation; but she is not without some passion. When Henry asks her what she would do if Becket excommunicated him,

she replies: (Act II, scene i)

> And I would creep, crawl over knife-edge flint
> Barefoot, a hundred leagues, to stay his hand
> Before he flashed the bolt.

When she challenges Eleanor in Act IV, scene i, to meet her before God, Rosamund is angry and unafraid:

> Strike!
> I challenge thee to meet me before God.
> Answer me there!

Tennyson delineates Eleanor as a proud, jealous, selfish, and discerning queen who would kill for her rights to the king. History records that Eleanor was a debonair queen and a gifted singer, and Tennyson does his best to produce this effect. He allows Eleanor to lift herself to distinction by possessing a light and reckless humor, despite her more calculating qualities. In the Prologue Eleanor sings:

> Over! The sweet summer closes,
> The reign of the roses is done;
> Over and gone with the roses,
> And over and gone with the sun.
>
> (Here; but our sun in Aquitaine lasts
> longer. I would I were in Acquitaine
> again— your north chills me.)
>
> Over! The sweet summer closes,
> And never a flower at the close;
> Over and gone with the roses,
> And winter again and the snows.

Henry is depicted as the wild and wicked man that he is said to have been by history, but Tennyson softened his cruelty somewhat in the play. Henry is said to have been an irreligious man, not only dissolute in life and cruel in temper, but also destitute of any sense of reverence.[134] Tennyson's Henry is not a religious man, but he is not so dogmatic as to think there is no good for other people in religion. The impression the reader receives is that Henry merely wanted to control and dominate religion, and did not want to destroy religion in England. He is the weaker of the more important characters in the play.

Tennyson gives the key to the interpretation of the play in the Prologue. The king and Becket are presented at a game of chess, and the king's mind wanders. He talks about various things, but Becket is intent upon the game and pushes steadily forward to win. Throughout the play Becket retains this same attitude of eager desire to do perfectly whatever he attempted. Henry is unable to understand this quality in his friend. Becket saw and understood this characteristic and knew the conflict into which the king's plan to make him Archbishop would plunge him. Becket resisted the promotion vigorously; he yielded and accepted the mitre after a message

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[134] Green, op. cit., p. 132.

from the death-bed of his old friend Theobald. From that moment he was another man. The idea of the Catholic Church as the visible kingdom of God on earth took possession of him. He was able to see that the political conflict in England depended upon the church, and despite his feeling of being unworthy, he believed himself called to be the champion of the church and the people.[135]

The interest of the drama is the conflict between Becket's resistance to royal commands and his great personal love for Henry as a friend. Henry's resolve to break the stubborn Archbishop is inflamed by the thought that Becket was once his dearest companion. Critics state that Tennyson never showed deeper insight into the elements of drama than he did by making the combat between divided friends the turning-point of Becket.[136] It is sometimes thought that Tennyson muffed some of his dramatic possibilities by not showing more of Becket before his role as Archbishop.[137] I hardly think Tennyson's failure to do so damaged the double play of worldly and ecclesiastical impulses in Becket's character.

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[135] Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 202.

[136] Ibid., p. 204.

[137] Cary, op. cit., p. 225.

The highlight of the play comes in the final scene. Tennyson was very successful in building the emotional tension to a peak. The reader knows beforehand that Becket is to be killed, and when death comes, it is something of a relief. The scene in the cathedral is full of strength and splendor. Even as the knights are killing Becket at the altar, he cries out:

> At the right hand of power—
> Power and great glory — for Thy church, O Lord—
> Into thy hands—

One testimony to the care which Tennyson lavished on Becket is the number of versions. There were two privately printed texts in 1879. The first tentative acting version was printed later in the same year, and three more acting versions were printed with the hopes of satisfying Henry Irving before 1882. The published edition was based on a revision of the first privately printed texts, and Irving's acting version and was published in December of 1884.[138]

Tennyson originally planned to use a sonnet as the Prologue to Becket, but during his revising he saw fit to replace the sonnet with a scene of several spoken parts. The following is a copy of the unpublished sonnet:

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[138] Baum, op. cit., p. 321.

> Old ghosts whose day was done before mine began,
> If earth be seen from your conjectured heaven,
> Ye know that History is half-dream— ay even
> The man's life in the letters of the man.
> There lies the letter, but it is not he
> As he retires into himself and is:
> Sender and sent-to go to make up this,
> Their offspring of their union. And on me
> Frown not, old ghosts, if I be one of those
> Who make you utter things you did not say,
> And mould you all awry and mar your worth;
> For whatsoever knows us truly, knows
> That none can truly write his single day,
> And none can write it for him upon earth.[139]

Perhaps all will agree that Tennyson did the best thing when he chose something else for his prologue.

In 1879 Tennyson finished Becket and asked Irving to produce it. Irving realized the play's dramatic possibilities and the splendid part for himself, although he declined it.[140] It is not difficult to understand why Becket would appeal to Irving; the play's dominant recommendations are its great power in one character and its pictorial pageantry, both of which offered Irving ample scope for color and display.[141] His reason for declining the play was, Tennyson wrote, "that it was magnificent, but it would cost him £3,000 to mount it and

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[139] Tennyson, Works, p. 987.

[140] Irving, op. cit., p. 364.

[141] Moses, op. cit., p. 343.

he couldn't afford the risk."[142] Irving could possibly have been afraid that Tennyson would not submit to the drastic cutting which an acting version would require. Not wishing to lose Tennyson's goodwill or his option on the play, Irving encouraged him to write a shorter play for the Lyceum. Tennyson waited with "patient insistence" the production of the play. Irving had hoped to arrange an actable version of it while on his first American tour, but he was not able to do so.[143] Partly in disgust, Tennyson published Becket in 1884 in order to complete his trilogy.

Tennyson's dedication of the play read:

> Mr. Dear Selborne,
>
> To you, the honoured Chancellor of our own day, I dedicate this dramatic memorial of your great predecessor;--which, altho' not intended in its present form to meet the exigencies of our modern theatre, has nevertheless, for so you have assured me, won your approbation.
>
> Ever yours, Tennyson.[144]

There is no way of knowing to what extent Tennyson believed what he said, but I am more inclined to think that he was honest in his claim for the play. In 1879 Hallam Tennyson had written to Irving that "My father feels that so many alterations are needed to fit Becket for the stage

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[142] Irving. op. cit., p. 364.

[143] Ibid., p. 437.

[144] Tennyson, Memoir, p. 198.

that he would rather not publish it first and he would sooner that these alterations should be made for you under your guidance than of others."[145] As Becket was no nearer to production in 1890 than it had been in 1879, Tennyson accepted an offer from Lawrence Barrett, with Irving's approval, to do the play; Mr. Barrett died before signing the contract. Irving was then able to study Barrett's version of the play, which gave him a lead as to how to set about its rearrangement.[146]

A few days before Tennyson's death, Irving was able to send his acting version to him. The cuts were very drastic, but Tennyson gave them his approval and resignation.[147] It is recorded that Tennyson pleaded for the restoration of one of his favorite characters, Walter Map, (Act II, scene ii, and Act III, scene iii), who had fallen to Irving's scissors.[148] It is interesting that the passages to which Tennyson clung most dearly were passages of purely historical documentation. This fact tells us that the old poet still had not

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145 Irving, op. cit., p. 554.

146 Charles Tennyson, op. cit., pp. 521-522.

147 Irving, op. cit., p. 555.

148 Baum, op. cit., p. 226.

learned the essential difference between the historical and the dramatic. After adding a speech which Irving had requested to the character of Becket, Tennyson gave his final blessing to the play.

The anthem speech which was written for Irving came at the end of the Northhampton scene, Act I, scene iii. The speech is recorded in the Memoir as having been thus:

> The voice of the Lord is in the voice of the people.
> The voice of the Lord is on the warring flood,
> And He will lead His people into peace!
> The voice of the Lord will shake the wilderness,
> The barren wilderness of unbelief!
> The voice of the Lord will break the cedar-trees,
> The Kings and Rulers that have closed their ears
> Against the Voice, and at their hour of doom
> The voice of the Lord will hush the hounds of Hell
> In everlasting silence.[149]

During Tennyson's last days he was very much concerned with the rehearsals of Becket. Irving wrote:

> One of the most touching incidents which I remember occurred while he was on his death-bed. He turned to the physician, Dr. Dabbs, who told me of the incident, and said: 'I suppose I shall never see Becket.' 'I fear not,' said the doctor. 'They did not do me justice with The Promise of May', said the dying poet, 'but Irving will do me justice in Becket.'[150]

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[149] Tennyson, Memoir, p. 197, 4-13.

[150] Moses, op. cit., p. 343, 42-46.

Tennyson probably cared more that his play should be worthily presented to the public than that he himself should see it.[151]

It was on account of the failure of Irving's production of King Lear that he pressed on with the preparation of Becket, for he needed new material. Irving had at his side an essay on Becket by J. A. Froude while he was studying the role of Becket. This essay served mainly as an aid to stage management.[152] Miss Ellen Terry was engaged to play the role of Rosamund de Clifford. With Tennyson's approval, Irving engaged Dr. C. Villiers Stanford to write the music for the play. Stanford had previously written oratorios for several of Tennyson's poems, notably The Ballad of the Revenge, and his knowledge of church music is said to have fitted him "admirably to mingle the threatrical and the Gregorian in an effective accompaniment to the play."[153]

Becket was produced for the first time on February 6, 1893, some four months after Tennyson's death (October 5, 1892) and on Irving's fifty-fifth birthday.[154] The play's reception by the

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151 Irving, op. cit., p. 555.

152 Ibid.

153 Ibid., p. 556.

154 Ibid., p. 707.

first night audience must have been rapturous. "The public who had been waiting since early morning at the pit and gallery, could not contain themselves; and even the more staid portions of the house lost their reserve."[155]

> The actor Terriss played the part of Henry Plantagenet with his usual robust force. Ellen Terry contrived to lighten the essentially masculine conflict with Rosamund's tenderness. Genevieve Ward made what little she could of Eleanor's absurdities. But all of these characters were dwarfed beside the simple grandeur of Irving's interpretation of Becket. He lifted the romantic poem to the level of tragedy.[156]

At the end of each act Irving was called again and again for additional bows, and at the end of the play he made a brief speech in which he said that "it had been for him and for his whole company a very great labor of love to add one more laurel to the brow of the Master, who was so lately with them."[157]

The acting version differed from the literary version in several ways. The Dramatis Personae of the acting version of the play omitted six characters: Bishop of Hereford; Hilary, Bishop of

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[155] Bram Stoker, Personal Reminiscences of Henry Irving, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1902, vol. 1, p. 242.

[156] Irving, op. cit., p. 556, 33-39.

[157] Ibid., p. 557.

Chichester; Jocelyn, Bishop of Salisbury; Walter Map; De Broc of Saltwood Castle; and John of Oxford.[158] The acting version also names Becket first in its list of characters, while Henry is named first in the literary version. The acting version reverses the events in the prologue and divides it into two scenes; instead of having the play open with Becket and Henry at a game of chess, Irving thought it more appropriate to introduce the action with the appearance of Eleanor and Fitzurse. The majority of the omissions in the prologue consist of Eleanor's lines.

In Act I, scene i, approximately half of the dialogue between Becket and Herbert is omitted. There are a few other changes and omissions in this scene including most of Becket's soliloquy. Only a few lines are left out of scene ii. An entirely new, short scene appears next in the acting version as scene iii; scene iii of the literary version thus becomes scene iv of the acting version. Almost one-half of this long scene is omitted, and it closes with the new speech for Becket which I have previously mentioned. This speech is recorded differently in the acting version than it is by the ~~Memoir.~~ Irving saw fit to cut the speech so that it would be spoken as follows:

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158 Alfred Tennyson, Becket: A Tragedy In a Prologue And Four Acts, (London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1904), p. 3.

> The voice of the Lord is the voice of the People!
> The voice of the Lord will hush the hounds of Hell,
> That ever yelp and snarl at Holy Church,
> In everlasting silence.[159]

The whole of scene iv of the literary version is omitted from the acting version.

Act II has only one scene, which is composed of the first scenes of Act II and Act III of the literary version. The duet at the beginning is omitted and many of the speeches are shortened. Scene ii of Act II in the literary version therefore becomes scene i of Act III in the acting version. In this scene King Louis speaks before Henry enters; this is a reversal of the procedure in the literary copy. Most of this scene is omitted, and before its close, the dialogue switches to that of Act III, scene iii, of the literary version. Much of the dialogue of this portion is cut because of the omission of Walter Map. Act III, scene ii of the literary version remains the same for the stage version and is almost complete, but to this scene is added a part of Act IV, scene i of the literary version. Scene iii of the acting version consists of the second scene of Act IV in the literary version. The second half of this scene is almost wholly omitted.

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[159] Ibid., p. 26.

Act V of the literary version thus becomes Act IV of the acting version. About one-half of scenes i and iii is omitted, and two-thirds of scene ii is cut. Both versions end in a similar manner, but the acting version leaves out many of the concluding lines; it closes with the following lines:

> Becket. Into thy hands, O Lord- into thy hands! —
> De Brito. The traitor's dead and will arise no more.

The critics of the day who had read the published edition of Becket were astonished that Irving could produce such an effective play from the "dramatically unpromising material" with which he had to work.[160] It is evident that Irving sincerely wanted to please Tennyson with his production, and it is believed that Hallam Tennyson's letter meant more to him than the laudatory criticism which reached the magazines and newspapers. A copy of the letter follows:

> Farringford,
> Freshwater,
> Isle-of-Wight,
> February 9th, 1893.
>
> My dear Mr. Irving,
>
> As more than one dramatic critic has said- Becket is a great play: and yours is a noble piece of acting, fine in conception and in execution. Ellen Terry could not play more beautifully or be more inspired as Rosamund; Genevieve Ward is a

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[160] Irving, op. cit., p. 557.

> powerful element. The putting on of the play and the way in which each individual actor appreciates his part are truly delightful. We are most grateful for all the care and munificence of the production. May you have all the success that you desire.
>
> Yours very truly,
> Tennyson.[161]

Irving's biographer states that Irving became slightly pontifical after his role as Becket.[162] Irving told Mrs. Walter Pollock that no play or character had influenced him as much as Becket. When she asked him if this included older plays and greater poets, Irving reaffirmed his statement. "'You know,' said Mrs. Pollock, 'that people talk of your having made the play.' Irving protested, 'No, no, the play made me. It changed my whole view of life.'"[163] Another proof of Irving's high regard for Becket and Tennyson is a letter he wrote to Hallam Tennyson:

> We have passed the fiftieth performance of 'Becket,' which is in the heyday of its success. I think that I may, without hereafter being credited with any inferior motive, give again the opinion which I previously expressed to your loved and honoured father. 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

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[161] Ibid., p. 599.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Ibid.

> 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 with 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 in it.[164]

Irving was summoned to Windsor by Queen Victoria to give a performance of the play by her "noble Poet Laureate" in the Waterloo Chamber in March, 1893. The occasion was the visit of the Empress Frederick of Germany, who recorded the queen's words in her diary:

> March 18th, 1893
> Windsor Castle:
>
> . . . . 'It is a very noble play' she told Irving. 'What a pity that old Tennyson did not live to see it. It would have delighted him as it has delighted us.'[165]

Becket played to crowded and enthusiastic audiences until the end of June; it was at this time that Irving left for Canada to take a vacation in preparation for an American tour. Becket was first played in America in St. Paul, Minnesota. It next held a five-week engagement in Chicago where the first three or four nights brought in

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[164] David Patrick, editor, Chambers' Cyclopaedia of English Literature, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1938), vol. 3, p. 542, 12-30.

[165] Irving, op. cit., p. 561.

receipts of over $4,000.[166] Irving opened in New York at Abbey's new theatre with Becket as the first play on the bill to be presented. The opening night was a gala affair; the receipts amounted to over $6,000.[167]

The cost of producing Becket was £4,723 11s. 2d.,[168] but Irving made his investment yield a small fortune.[169] The play was staged 112 times during its first season in London, and 308 times in all (London 147, the provinces 92, and America 69).[170]

The critics lavished two types of criticism upon Becket. The following criticism by George Henry Lewes stands as an example of one type:

> The play is instinct with dramatic life, and is as various as Shakespeare, and (unlike Shakespeare) nowhere is there any fine writing thrust in because it is fine, and because the poet wanted to say the fine things which arouse in his mind. Prophecy has been called 'the gratuitous form of error' by my better half, so I ought to be chary in prophecy; yet I have no hesitation in saying whatever the critics of today may think or say, the critics of tomorrow will unanimously declare Alfred Tennyson to be a great dramatic genius.[171]

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[166] Ibid., p. 562.

[167] Ibid., p. 563.

[168] Moses, op. cit., p. 344.

[169] Irving, op. cit., p. 562.

[170] Baum, op. cit., p. 321.

[171] Moulton, op. cit., p. 98.

William Archer wrote a criticism for the Theatrical World in 1894 which stands as an example of the other type:

> There is no rule that it does not break, no formula that it fails to set at nought. It is rambling, disjointed, structureless; its psychological processes take place between the acts; it overrides history for the sake of an infantile love-interest; its blank verse is 'undramatic,' and its humour is— well, unsophisticated. In short, it is nothing that it ought to be, and everything that it oughtn't. Literally everything: for it is most of all what it oughtn't to be— a success.[172]

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[172] Moses, op. cit., p. 344, 13-19.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

It is possible now to look back over the historical trilogy and form some conception of Tennyson's idea of what made a drama. He must have thought that a succession of short scenes detached from the biography of a historical character was sufficient. Tennyson's drama is simply dramatised chronicle without an internal structure; he merely took his material in pieces as history presented it and worked it into individual scenes. Although his dramatic style had little in the way of shape, his poetic style was rich. From Queen Mary to Harold to Becket there is a real and genuine development. Tennyson was becoming more and more efficient in the handling of passion and humor through dialogue, which is the characteristic of a good dramatist. Had he become

interested in the form of the drama earlier in life or had he lived longer, he might be remembered as the great English dramatist of the nineteenth century.

In the preceeding chapters we have seen Tennyson's development as a dramatist, but a study of his historical trilogy would not be complete unless some observations concerning Tennyson's attitudes toward marriage, democracy, and church and state were made. Although the trilogy is not primarily concerned with these social ideas, they are very apparent throughout the work.

It is evident in Harold that Tennyson had a high standard with regard to marriage, even though he did allow his hero to be a bigamist. In fact this is what adds poignancy to his tragedy. Harold's marriage to Edith is not clearly presented and appears to have been what we would term common law marriage. Tennyson thought that marriage was spiritual and not physical, something of the Miltonic conception, and that the marital state was necessary for the advancement of humanity.[173] Tennyson was against marriage for diplomatic or political reasons, and although in Act III, scene i, he allows Edith to urge Harold to marry Aldwyth for such reasons,

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[173] William Clark Gordon, The Social Ideals of Alfred Tennyson, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1906), p. 86.

> If this be politic,
> And well for England—and for her—
> Care not for me who loves thee,

in Act V, scene i, he lets Harold state the unfortunate results of such a marriage:

> I married her for Morcar—a sin against
> The truth of love. Evil for good, it seems,
> Is oft as children of the good as evil
> For evil. . .

Mary's plea for her marriage to Philip in Queen Mary was a plea of policy. In Act II, scene ii she says:

> If it might please God that I should leave
> Some fruit of mine own body after me,
> To be your king, ye would rejoice thereat,
> And it would be your comfort, as I trust.
>
> . . .
>
> Moreover, if this marriage should not seem
> Before our own High Court of Parliament,
> To be of rich advantage to our realm,
> We will refrain, and not alone from this,
> Likewise from any other.

Tennyson rejected such a motive for marriage in his own mind, and he did not fail to show Mary's miserable condition when the marriage failed to be successful. Henry's marriage of policy to Eleanor in Becket likewise proved to be unhappy.

The essential freedom of the soul was one of the fundamental postulates of all of Tennyson's thinking; he would not

permit the divine right of any convention, law, or ruler to annihilate that freedom.[174] Something of this ideal is seen in Act V, scene iv. of Queen Mary when the crowd passes the palace in London; the Third Voice says:

> What am I? One who cries continually with sweat and tears to the Lord God that it would break down all kingship and queenship, all priesthood and prelacy; to cancel and abolish all bonds of human allegiance, all the magistracy, all the nobles, and all the wealthy; and to send to us again, according to his promise, the one King, the Christ, and all things in common, as in the day of the first church, when Christ Jesus was king.

Tennyson's conception of freedom was highly democratic. He felt that royalty should be restricted in their actions so that the highest good for all could be achieved. The ruler and people could thus work together—"one for all and all for one, one soul."[175]

Queen Mary talked of loving her people and being loved by them, but this love was never a reality. She defied her council, her people, and her parliament in order to carry out her own plans. Her downfall is partly explained in Act III, scene i by the words of Bagenhall:

> We have no men among us. The new Lords
> Are quieted with their sop of Abbeylands,

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[174] Ibid., p. 82.

[175] Harold, Act II, scene iii.

> And ev'n before the Queen's face Gardiner buys them
> With Philip's gold. All greed, no faith, no courage.

The manner in which Tennyson handled William the Conqueror, Henry II, and Mary shows to some extent that he disfavored the abuse of royal power, and that he favored honesty, purity and the truth in ruler and court.

Tennyson looked upon the church as one of the great institutions of organized society. "He studied it with care and sympathy, and wrote of it with wisdom and power."[176] His portraits of priests, friars, abbots, monks, and clergymen are not such as to inspire any special confidence in the efficiency of the church. He seemed to believe in the total good of the social institution, although he did not fail to see the corruption of its many parts.[177] Needless to say, Tennyson's approach to religion was entirely the Protestant point of view; he had nothing but contempt for Roman Catholics. This fact is quite evident throughout the entire trilogy and is thought by many to minimize the overall appeal of the plays.

In Act II, scene iii of Queen Mary, one of Sir Thomas Wyatt's men says:

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[176] Ibid., p. 152.

[177] Ibid., p. 170.

> I know not my letters; the old priests taught me
> nothing.

In Act III, scene iv, Tennyson forces Cardinal Pole to say of the English Church:

> She seethed with such adultries, and the lives
> Of many among your churchmen were so foul
> That heaven wept and earth blushed.

Cranmer speaks the following in Act IV, scene ii:

> Against the huge corruptions of the Church,
> Monsters of mistradition. .

Tib, one of the low comedy characters, is permitted to say in Act IV, scene iii:

> Ay, Joan; and Queen Mary gwoes on a-burnin'
> and a-burnin', to get her baaby born; but all
> her burnin's 'ill never burn out the hypocrisy
> that makes the water in her. There's nought
> but the vire of God's hell ez can burn out that.

In Act I, scene i of Harold, Edward says of priests and churches in Saxon England:

> Your priests,
> Gross, worldly, simoniacal, unlearned!
> They scarce can read their Psalters, and their churches
> Uncouth, unhandsome, while in Norman-land,
> God speaks thro' abler voices, as He dwells
> In statlier shrines.

In Act III, scene ii Harold says:

> But a little light!—
> And on it falls the shadow of a priest;
> Heaven yield us more! for better, Woden, all
> Our cancell'd warrior-gods, our grim Walhalla,
> Eternal war, than that the Saints at peace,
> The Holiest of our Holiest one, should be
> This William's fellow-tricksters;—better die
> Than credit this, for death is death, or else
> Lifts us beyond the lie.

And in the same scene Harold declares:

> The Lord was God and came as man—the Pope
> Is man and comes as God.

In Act V, scene i, Harold has contempt for the Norman Saints because they tricked him, and he has contempt for Rome because Rome is on William's side:

> This memory to thee! —and this to England,
> My legacy of war against the Pope
> From child to child, from Pope to Pope, from age to age,
> Till the sea wash her level with her shores,
> Or till the Pope be Christ's.

One very apparent fault with Becket is the Archbishop's view of Rome and the clergy. The reader would naturally expect Becket to have respect for the clergy and the imperial character of Rome, but the Archbishop appears to look upon them much the same as Tennyson did in his own life. This is also true of the other characters of the play. Tennyson was subtle in some instances in his attacks on the Catholics, but for the most part he was direct and

straightforward. I think that Tennyson was framing the characters of Becket with mock heroic pride; there is no proof, however, of such a statement.

Tennyson has the Pope's almoner, Philip de Eleemosyna, suggest treachery to Becket when the king is urging Becket to sign the articles against the freedom of the church. In Act I, scene iii, he whispers in Becket's ear that the Pope wants him to commit the sin:

> Cannot the Pope absolve thee if thou sign?

In the same scene Becket declares:

> This Almoner hath tasted Henry's gold,
> The Cardinals have fingered Henry's gold,
> And Rome is venal ev'n to rottenness,

and names Gilbert Foliot, the bishop of London, "a worldly follower of the worldly strong."

In Act II, scene ii, Becket's faithful friend, Herbert of Bosham, a devout cleric and a sensible man, is made to drivel:

> Thee, thou holy Thomas!
> I would that thou hadst been the Holy Father.

Becket complacently replies:

> I would have done my most to keep Rome holy,
> I would have made Rome know she still is Rome--
> Who stands aghast at her eternal self

> And shakes at mortal kings—her vacillation,
> Avarice, craft—O God, how many an innocent
> Has left his bones on the way to Rome
> Unwept, uncared for. Yea—on mine own self
> The King had had no power except for Rome.
> 'Tis not the King who is guilty of mine exile,
> But Rome, Rome, Rome!

In the same scene Walter Map, who launches many sarcasms at the Roman Church throughout the play, says:

> If you boxed the Pope's ears with a purse,
> You might stagger him, but he would pocket the purse.

On the other hand, in Act I, scene i, Tennyson allows Becket to say:

> The people know their church a tower of strength,
> A bulwark against Throne and Baronage,

and in scene iv of the same act:

> The Church is ever at variance with the Kings,
> And ever at one with the poor.

Tennyson, the voice of Victorian England, was thoroughly conventional in his ideas and methods. Nineteenth century love of good manners and concern for the individual were manifested in the poet. The historical trilogy can be labeled an outgrowth of the age in this respect. Although Tennyson was at his best when his genius for music and painting in language was all that was required of his subject, the trilogy stands as a monument to his rich and varied poetic ability.

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VITA

Robert Claudius Markham was born in Old Hickory, Tennessee, on January 10, 1931. His family moved five times during the first ten years of his life. They lived a short while in Atlanta, Georia, and then moved to Bowling Green, Kentucky. After living a few years in Richmond, Virginia, and Seaford, Delaware, the family settled in Martinsville, Virginia. There he graduated from the Martinsville High School in June of 1948. After working a year, he entered Bluefield College in Bluefield, Virginia. Upon receiving the Liberal Arts Certificate from that institution in 1951, he entered the University of Richmond and received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Richmond College in June of 1953. Immediately following graduation he enrolled in the graduate school and completed the residential requirements of the English Department in June of 1954.