

## TENNYSON AND DR. ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE.

BY JAMES ROBERTSON.

Tennyson occupies a large portion of 'Allingham's Diary,' and therein are given many clear glimpses of the poet's home life and conversation. The poet was larger in mind than Carlyle and both Spiritualism and Evolution were received by him with a welcome spirit. Readers of Tennyson can see at a glance how open he was to the reception of the thought of the biologists. As early as 1844, when Robert Chambers' 'Vestiges of Creation' appeared, he was keenly interested, and got his publishers to forward him a copy. He had gathered from the talk about it that it came nearer an explanation of the Cosmos than anything before it. He trembled as he cut the leaves, but, alas, satisfaction did not come from its perusal. When Chambers got hold of the great spiritual truths—when he had faced the phenomena which brought home to him that his loved ones who had died were still near him—all his previous conceptions became changed. He wrote that Spiritualism had redeemed multitudes from atheism and agnosticism by making it clear that there was a non-material universe, whose inhabitants could mingle with us. S. C. Hall, in his 'Retrospect of a Long Life,' tells us that as he was returning one night from a séance at Newton Crosland's (at which Robert Chambers had been present) Chambers told him that Spiritualism had entirely changed his opinions and views concerning immortality, and that because of this he had burned a manuscript on which he had been occupied for years, namely, 'A History of Superstition. Tennyson had more than a distant sympathy with Spiritualism. It was a subject about which he knew a great deal, while Frederick Tennyson, whose poetic genius was somewhat eclipsed by his great brother, was an outspoken Spiritualist. Articles by Frederick appear in the old 'Spiritual Magazine,' while he was a frequent correspondent to the pages of 'The Medium and Daybreak,' and contributed freely to all objects associated with the movement.

Gerald Massey has told me that all the family were Spiritualists, and once when I asked him what book Tennyson had referred to when writing him a commendatory letter, he said: 'It was my little book, "Concerning Spiritualism."' I do not think that Allingham, who was not himself favourable to the subject, had any idea how familiar the poet was with it. Allingham was Collector of Customs for some years at Lynington, which was conveniently near to Tennyson's home in the Isle of Wight, so he was a frequent visitor. Tennyson was a student of science, and once showed Allingham a paper by Sir William Crookes on 'Four Kinds of Matter,' solid, liquid, gaseous and another which is imperceptible to the senses (sometimes called 'Ether'). He said: 'I believe we never see matter, what we count the material world is only an appearance.' There is little doubt but that he was familiar with the scientist's study of the phenomena of Spiritualism, which had appeared some years before this date (1880). Once he said to Allingham: 'If I ceased to believe in any chance of another life, and of a Great Personality somewhere in the universe, I should not care a pin for anything. . . Two things I have always been firmly convinced of—God, and that death will not end my existence.'

Allingham was the neighbour of Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace while Wallace was resident at Godalming. He tells about sitting under a tree and conversing with the great naturalist on Spiritualism, apparitions, mediums, &c. Wallace said to him that probably about one person in ten is a medium, and spoke with unqualified praise of the books and writers on the Spiritualistic side. William Howitt, Professor de Morgan, Professor Barrett and F. W. H. Myers were all discussed. 'He gave an account,' says Allingham, 'essentially Swedenborgian, of the state of spirits in the next world.' On Allingham's next visit to Tennyson a few days afterwards he told him all about his conversation with Dr. Wallace, and that he, Wallace, was a thorough-going believer in Spiritualism. Allingham, as I have said, had no place into which he could fit such a belief. He had heard from Robert Browning all about D. D. Home and what Browning called his tricks, which he readily believed, but which belief Mr. Myers satisfactorily proved had no basis. He had often conversed with

Mrs. de Morgan, witnessed table-tilting, and heard raps, which he designated tiresome nonsense, so that what he heard from Dr. Wallace was not likely to affect his strong bias against the subject. Tennyson, who knew all about Dr. Wallace's books on Natural Selection and Tropical Nature, was anxious to see him, and got Allingham to bring him over with him on his next visit. Dr. Wallace deals briefly with the interview in his Autobiography, where he says it took place in 1886 or 1887, but Allingham's Diary is more likely to be correct, and he places the date as November 7th, 1884. They had a long talk on Tropical Nature, the poet asking him (reading from a poem) if he had produced a correct picture of some tropical scenes. They then went to the study, where Dr. Wallace gave details of table-rapping, &c., giving his own experiences and those of other people. When Wallace was asked why the spirits so often gave foolish and misleading answers, he replied, 'Yes, as might be expected; that only proves them to be human beings.'

Wallace continued explaining that it was absurd to suppose matter could move itself. The phenomena were manifestly governed by an intelligence like our own. The means of communication between the unseen world and ours were few and difficult. Tennyson put it, 'A great ocean pressing around us on every side, and leaking in by a few chinks.' Tennyson had great praise for Dr. Wallace's work on Tropical Nature, and remarked, 'You have said something very bold about matter. I think matter more mysterious than spirit. I can conceive in a way what spirit is, but not matter,' to which Dr. Wallace responded, 'I conceive matter not as a substance at all, but as *points of energy*, and that if these were withdrawn matter would disappear.' Tennyson agreed with what Dr. Wallace said, as it was something like his own notion. Some months later, when Allingham was walking with Tennyson, the subject of Dr. Wallace's visit again became the conversation. Tennyson said, 'It is a very strange thing that, according to Wallace, none of the spirits that communicate with men ever mention God or Christ,' to which Allingham responded, 'I always felt that the Deity was *infinitely* above us, another step will bring us no nearer.' Tennyson had evidently been much impressed with his interview with Wallace, as he kept saying, 'Wallace says that the system he believes in is a far finer one than Christianity. It is eternal progress.' There is much else in the 'Diary' of deep and abiding interest. Allingham afterwards met with Browning and told him about his neighbour Wallace, and how he had arrived, as it were, at the opposite goal from Darwin on what are called supernatural questions—Darwin at last believing almost nothing, Wallace almost everything. I have shown enough to make evident that the book contains many gems of thought. Allingham himself was a poet of too fine a strain for popularity, but he was in every way full of charm, and loved by all with whom he came in contact. Rich as his poetry is, perhaps this Diary will bless the world more than anything else he has penned. He was for long the editor of 'Fraser's Magazine,' succeeding Froude in that position.