

“In Memoriam” — XXVII

Alfred Lord Tennyson

I envy not in any moods
The captive void of noble rage,
The linnet born within the cage,
That never knew the summer woods:

I envy not the beast that takes
His license in the field of time,
Unfetter'd by the sense of crime,
To whom a conscience never wakes;

Nor, what may count itself as blest,
The heart that never plighted troth
But stagnates in the weeds of sloth;
Nor any want-begotten rest.

I hold it true, whate'er befall;
I feel it, when I sorrow most;
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.

Alfred Lord Tennyson was the most popular and—by a considerable measure—the most admired of the Victorian poets. He was equally admired for his mastery of poetical narrative and poetical verse forms, especially the suave musicality of his well-furnished lines. Most of all, perhaps, he was admired for his ready access to philosophical thought in a vein which could be easily transposed to memory and used as a courage-booster or a valedictory hymn in the day-to-day of British Empire. Perhaps there is no better-known line of the Victorian Age than his “Better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all”, which has sustained many a romantic in the trials and tribulations of match-making and the ardours of youthful love.