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## The Diary of Lady Lindsay

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## THE DIARY OF LADY LINDSAY

The following entry appeared in the Diary of Lady Lindsay, wife of Sir Coutts Lindsay; both of them met the Leweses regularly at musical evenings etc. The entry is published by kind permission of the Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, and by courtesy of Lord Tennyson and Lincolnshire Library Service.

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March 23rd 1880

I have this afternoon returned from a visit to the Priory, my first since the death of Mr. Lewes. I found everything but little changed; the hostess, looking paler and more worn, perhaps, and wearing a black and white cap, received me in her accustomed corner; the room was the same, a few visitors sat in the old places; I missed George Lewes and his cheery voice. Mr. Tennyson came in; I had never made his acquaintance before; I had a long talk with him, which pleased me much. He was full of the fact that Ruskin abused him for saying that a crushed daisy blushes red, i. e. that it then shews the lower side of the petals. Mr. Ruskin had called this "a sentimental fallacy"; Mr. Tennyson averred that Mr. Ruskin had no knowledge of daisies. Now ensues a long conversation about flowers, in which our gentle-voiced hostess joined, too learnedly somewhat, as it appeared to me, to please Tennyson, who (I thought) was rather desirous to be amused than instructed. But perhaps he found some difficulty in understanding her, for Mrs. Lewes scarcely raised her voice above a whisper, and several times during his visit he repeated abruptly: "I am deaf, I am very deaf".

Of course, nobody talked about books, except indeed that the little pamphlets of the day with caricatures of Gladstone were mentioned and one of them was

shewn to Tennyson, who acknowledged himself a liberal in creed, but, at the present moment, owing to the critical state of political affairs, inclined to conservatism. It has often struck me that, whereas it is allowable to talk to an artist about his pictures, and artists among themselves seldom talk of anything else, whilst a musician loves to argue about music, provided he be not pestered to play or sing, it is the lowest depth of bad manners, when conversing with a great literary light, to allude to his works, past, present or future. Perhaps I should say present and future only, for a delicate allusion to past triumphs is allowable, nay, acceptable. But why on earth are we told that it would be an unpardonable offence to ask "George Eliot" if she has begun a new novel, when we may enquire of Rubinstein as to his new opera; or, why should not Mrs. Lewes ask Tennyson what is the subject of his new poem, when Watts may request Millais to shew him his unfinished picture?

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