

Like "Pythagoras' Comparison of the Universe
with Number": A Frost-Tennyson Correlation

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FLEISSNER, R.F.
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R. F. FLEISSNER

"Keats got Tennyson going and Tennyson got
Matthew Arnold going and they got us all going."

C. 14

Robert Frost, from an unpublished lecture at the New School
for Social Research as preserved by G. Taggard,
in the Dartmouth College Library.

WITH the possible exception of Hardy, Tennyson was Robert Frost's favorite Victorian poet. Whatever direct influence Tennyson had on Frost, the two lyrics that seem to reveal the closest relationship are Tennyson's "The Hesperides" and Frost's "The Gold Hesperidee." Purely from a metrical standpoint, Tennyson's lyric may appear to have no real similarity to Frost's poem. The apparent looseness of Tennyson's rhyme scheme hardly resembles Frost's tight structure—or at least so it at first seems. From a numerological perspective, however, there is more than meets the eye. A thematic approach to the subject of number should reveal a comparable anagogical quality in each poem as vital as is the basic connection between numerology and religious writings, a "mystical" significance which has part of its origin in the just proportions of aesthetics.

In a previous paper,¹ I have examined the linkage of "The Hesperides" to Coleridge, "Kubla Khan" in particular, with regard to the reference to number in both works. Though Tennyson's debt to Keats was, to be sure, more pronounced than his various homages to Coleridge, echoes of Coleridge are evident as well. We should expect a poet imbrued with the temptation of the lotus, as Tennyson was (save in "Ulysses"), to express some debt to DeQuincey and Coleridge, both addicts of a similar drug. In "The Hesperides," the "melody o' the Lybian lotusflute" conjures up memories of Coleridge's Abyssinian dulcimer; the allusion to "cedarshade" four lines further on connects with the "cedarn cover" of "Kubla Khan"; the