Persons of Importance in Tennyson’s Life

(The length of each of these sketches does not reflect comparative merit or importance. They are mainly intended to show how Tennyson’s friends relate to him and his interests at different stages of his life. Those of whom sufficient is deemed to be given incidentally in the Chronology, and well-known authors such as Robert Browning, Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot, and Thackeray, are excluded.)

Joseph Williams Blakesley (1808–85) entered Corpus Christi, Cambridge, in 1827, became an Apostle, moved to Trinity, and won the Chancellor’s Medal in 1831. T thought that his clearheadedness and integrity qualified him to be Lord Chancellor. At Trinity he became a fellow in 1831 and a tutor in 1834. He was one of the original members of the Sterling Club. Ordained early, he won much esteem as vicar of Ware (a college living) from 1845 to 1872; he was a canon of St Paul’s from 1863, and Dean of Lincoln from 1872.

William Henry Brookfield (1809–74) was born in Sheffield, and entered Trinity College in 1829 as a sizar, to compensate his parents for having sacrificed his articles to a Leeds solicitor. A witty and amusing conversationalist and raconteur, he soon made many friends, including T and Arthur Hallam, Thackeray and A. W. Kinglake. Though not a member of the Apostles, he was on very good terms with most of them, and retained their friendship. He became President of the Cambridge Union. After graduating in 1832, and acting as tutor to Lord Lyttelton’s eldest son, he was ordained to the curacy of Maltby (1834). An eloquent preacher, he moved to Southampton (1836), where he met his future wife, then to London (1838), where he served at St James’s, Piccadilly, from 1840 to 1843, when he was given charge of St Luke’s, Berwick Street. In 1841 he married Julia, daughter of Charles Elton and cousin of Arthur Hallam. He was
an early member of the Sterling Club, a friend of the Carlyles, and a favourite at Lady Ashburton's parties. He became an Inspector of Schools in 1848.

Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–79), born in Calcutta, was the least beautiful of seven rich, eccentric, half-French Pattie sisters (one of whom married Henry Thoby Prinsep, a distinguished civil servant who returned from India in 1843, and leased Little Holland House in 1850). Her husband Charles Hay Cameron (1795–1880) was a fine scholar, who had been a legal member of the Supreme Council in Calcutta and a Royal Commissioner in Ceylon. She had a commanding personality, but was so kind and generous that T forgave her whatever inconvenience she caused him. She was, Agnes Weld wrote, 'almost the only woman outside his relations whom he called by her Christian name, and who called him in turn by his'. T was the attraction which brought the Camerons to the Isle of Wight in 1860. Profuse in her gifts and correspondence, she idolized the poet Henry Taylor even more. She took up photography with great enthusiasm in 1863. Such was her artistic perception that, although she was self-taught, she had great success in portraiture; her more allegorical subjects are outdated. The Cameron and Tennyson boys were about the same age, and on good terms, their activities including participation in plays. (Mrs Cameron had installed a theatre at Dimbola.)

Aubrey de Vere (1814–1902) was, like his father Sir Aubrey de Vere of Curragh Chase, County Limerick, a poet and dramatist. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, and attracted by Wordsworth's poetry. He became a friend of Newman and Manning, and joined the Catholic Church in 1851. His prose writings are devoted chiefly to contemporary Irish affairs, literary criticism, and reminiscences. 'To my mind the friend of Tennyson's whose saintliness most completely had his sympathy was Aubrey de Vere', wrote Wilfrid Ward. Their friendship was 'almost lifelong, and showed Tennyson at his very best in conversation'.

Frederic William Farrar (1831–1903), son of a Bombay chaplain, was sent at the age of three to Aylesbury, where he remained under the care of two maiden aunts until he became a boarder at King William's College, the Isle of Man. (With these contrasting