

## CHAPTER I.

### THE "ENOCH ARDEN" VOLUME, WITH NOTES BY MY FATHER.

Spedding, the calm philosopher, glowed with delight, and said "Enoch Arden" was the finest story he had ever heard<sup>1</sup>, and was more especially adapted for Alfred than for any other poet.

*Letter from Thomas Woolner to Mrs Tennyson.*

1864.

My father was always an enthusiast for Italian freedom. Hence the great event of the year at Farringford was Garibaldi's visit. My mother wrote in April :

We went to the Seelys of Brooke to pay our respects to Garibaldi. A most striking figure in his picturesque white poncho lined with red, his embroidered red shirt and coloured tie over it. His face very noble, powerful, and sweet, his forehead high and square. Altogether he looked one of the great men of our Elizabethan age. His manner was simple and kind.

A. and I went out to fix a spot in our garden where the Wellingtonia should be planted by him (given to A. by the Duchess of Sutherland, and raised by her from a cone that had been shot from a tree three hundred feet high in California). Poor Philip Worsley's<sup>2</sup> poems had just arrived—the thought of

<sup>1</sup> Adelaide Procter wrote a poem on a similar subject, but this my father did not know until after "Enoch Arden" had been published.

<sup>2</sup> The author of the well-known translation of the *Odyssey*.

him, dying of consumption in the lodging near the bay, mingled strangely with the feeling of this moment and the sounds of welcome as Garibaldi passed thro' the village to Farringford. People on foot and on horseback and in carriages had waited at our gate two hours for him. Some rushed forward to shake hands with him. He stood up and bowed. A. and I and the boys were in the portico awaiting his arrival. On entering the house Garibaldi admired the primroses with which the rooms were decked, and liked the view of our park, and said to A., "I wish I had your trees in Caprera." A. and he went up to A.'s study together, and they talked on politics, A. advising the General not to talk politics in England. They repeated Italian poetry to each other.

He told A. that he "could never doubt his country—that he loved her." "*She* never alters!" he said. "Next to God I never cease to have faith in *her*." We introduced Garibaldi to Sir Henry Taylor<sup>1</sup> and to other friends. It was pleasant to see how his face lighted up when he recognized his old acquaintance Mrs Franklin (wife of Colonel Franklin stationed here): and he greeted the Colonel warmly too. Mrs Cameron wanted to photograph Garibaldi, and dropped down on her knees before him, and held up her black hands, covered with chemicals. He evidently thought that she was a beggar until we had explained who she was.

Then we went to plant the Wellingtonia. A. had the large screen put up to protect Garibaldi from the cold east wind. Several strangers were there, and when the tree was planted they gave a shout. On going away Garibaldi shook hands with all and kissed the boys. A. was charmed with his simplicity, but thought that in worldly matters he seemed to have the "divine stupidity of a hero." A. also saw Mazzini, and was

<sup>1</sup> Henry Taylor wrote of Garibaldi's visit to Farringford :

"And there was he, that gentle hero, who,  
 By virtue and the strength of his right arm,  
 Dethroned an unjust king, and then withdrew  
 To tend his farm.

To whom came forth a mighty man of song,  
 Whose deep-mouth'd music rolls thro' all the land,  
 Voices of many rivers, rich or strong,  
 Or sweet or grand."

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GARIBALDI.

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struck with his keen intellectual face, and quoted with approval what he had said, "Nothing in this world is so contemptible as a literary coterie."

My father wrote then to the Duke of Argyll :

MY DEAR DUKE,

Did you hear Garibaldi repeat any Italian poetry? I did, for I had heard that he himself had made songs and hymns: and I asked him, "Are you a poet?" "Yes," he said quite simply, whereupon I spouted to him a bit of Manzoni's great ode, that which Gladstone translated. I don't know whether he relished it, but he began immediately to speak of Ugo Foscolo and quoted, with great fervour, a fragment of his "I Sepolcri," beginning with "Il navigante che veleggio," etc. and ending with "Delle Parche il canto," which verses he afterwards wrote out for me: and they certainly seem to be fine, whatever the rest of the poem may be. I have not yet read it but mean to do so, for he sent me Foscolo's *Poesie* from London; and in return I sent him the "Idylls of the King," which I do not suppose he will care for. What a noble human being! I expected to see a hero and I was not disappointed. One cannot exactly say of him what Chaucer says of the ideal knight, "As meke he was of port as is a maid"; he is more majestic than meek, and his manners have a certain divine simplicity in them, such as I have never witnessed in a native of these islands, among men at least, and they are gentler than those of most young maidens whom I know. He came here and smoked his cigar in my little room and we had a half hour's talk in English, tho' I doubt whether he understood me perfectly, and his meaning was often obscure to me. I ventured to give him a little advice: he denied that he came with any political purpose to England, merely to thank the English for their kindness to him, and the interest they

had taken in himself and all Italian matters, and also to consult Ferguson about his leg. Stretching this out he said, "There's a campaign in me yet." When I asked if he returned thro' France he said he would never set foot on the soil of France again. I happened to make use of this expression, "That fatal debt of gratitude owed by Italy to Napoleon." "Gratitude," he said; "Hasn't he had his pay? his reward? If Napoleon were dead I should be glad, and if I were dead he would be glad." These are slight chroniclings, but I thought you would like to have them. He seemed especially taken with my two little boys.

As to "sea-blue birds" &c. defendant states that he was walking one day in March by a deep-banked brook, and under the leafless bushes he saw the kingfisher flitting or fleeting underneath him, and there came into his head a fragment of an old Greek lyric poet, "ἀλιόρφυρος εἶαρος ὄρνις," "The sea-purple or sea-shining bird of Spring," spoken of as the halcyon. Defendant cannot say whether the Greek halcyon be the same as the British kingfisher, but as he never saw the kingfisher on this particular brook before March, he concludes that in that country at least, they go down to the sea during the hard weather and come up again with the Spring, for what says old Belon :

"Le Martinet-pescheur fait sa demeure  
 En temps d'hiver au bord de l'océan,  
 Et en esté sur la rivière en estan,  
 Et de poisson se repaist à toute heure."

You see he puts "esté," which I suppose stands for all the warmer weather. Was not the last letter in *The Field* written by yourself?

Ever, my dear Duke, with all kind things from myself and wife to the Duchess,

Yours, A. TENNYSON.

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VISIT TO BRITTANY.

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We are sorry not to have seen you at Farringford in the time of flowers ; let us know when you can come. I hope the Queen is well and able to enjoy this fine weather.

Just before the publication of "Enoch Arden" we made a pilgrimage into Brittany, where we unearthed many wild "Enoch Arden" stories and ballads. The Breton sailors are fine, simple, religious fellows, many of whom join the Iceland fishery and the French navy. My mother wrote :

There are many pleasant things in our pleasant journey to think of, not the least those weird stones<sup>1</sup>. Carnac owes much less to them than we expected: the Morbihan district interested us much more. Mont St Michel, the old churches, and the Bayeux tapestry, to say nothing of our drives about the country, were very interesting too. From Quimper to Morlaix is wild Wales in miniature. We did not see as much as we ought to have done of the Western and Northern coasts. We drove by a road near the coast, not on the coast, having foolishly omitted to get a good map in Paris, and not having been able to find one afterwards. The people we found very uncommunicative, and, as far as we could discover, totally ignorant of the past history of their country, and of the Arthur legends. We went to Lannion on purpose to see Keldthuen (where Arthur is said to have held his court) and Avalon: but Keldthuen we found a moated and not ancient chateau, and tho' our driver showed us Avalon, the sailors declared it was not Avalon.

Nevertheless the hostess of the Hôtel de l'Europe at Lannion somehow discovered who my father was, and proclaimed everywhere that he was the poet of "notre grand roi Arthur."

The joy of my father in heroism, whether of a past age or of the present, and his delight in celebrating it, are more than ever apparent throughout this volume of

<sup>1</sup> The dolmens and cromlechs.

1864. He was especially happy when writing of his "Old Fisherman." In these "Idylls of the Hearth"<sup>1</sup> he had worked at the same vein which he opened in his 1842 poems.—Here he writes with as intimate a knowledge, but with greater power, on subjects from English life, the sailor, the farmer, the parson, the city lawyer, the squire, the country maiden, and the old woman who dreams of her past life in a restful old age.

He said that, excepting the poems suggested by the simple, old-world classical subjects, he had mostly drawn his scenes in England, because he could not truly pourtray the atmosphere of foreign lands. He added that he thought *Romola* a mistake; because George Eliot had not been able to enter into the complex Italian life and character, however much she might have studied them in books.

Sixty thousand copies of "Enoch Arden" were sold in a very short time, and after this he was not infrequently called "The Poet of the People," a title which could not but be appreciated by one who wrote :

Plowmen, shepherds have I found, and more than  
 once, and still could find,  
 Sons of God and kings of men in utter nobleness  
 of mind.

Indeed, judging by the countless letters from all conditions of men all over the world, and from the many translations into foreign languages, this volume—which contained, besides "Enoch Arden," "Aylmer's Field," "The Grandmother," "Sea Dreams," "The Northern Farmer," "Tithonus," "The Sailor Boy," "The Flower," the "Welcome to Alexandria" and the "Dedication"—is, perhaps with the exception of "In Memoriam," the most popular of his works.

<sup>1</sup> The first title in the proof-sheets of the "Enoch Arden" volume.

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HIS LOVE FOR THE SEA.

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“I can always write when I see my subject whole,” he said; but he was fastidious in his choice of subjects, which were selected according to his mood. It took him only about a fortnight to write “Enoch Arden,” within a little summer-house in the meadow called Maiden’s Croft, looking over Freshwater Bay and toward the downs. In this meadow he paced up and down, making his lines; and then wrote them in his MS book on the table of the summer-house, which he himself had designed and painted.

He loved the sea as much as any sailor, and knew all its moods whether on the shore or in mid-ocean. He loved it for its own sake and also because English heroism has ever been conspicuous on ship-board: he felt in himself the spirit of the old Norsemen. This delight in the sea more especially comes out in such poems as “Enoch Arden,” “Ulysses,” “The Revenge,” “The Voyage,” “The Sailor Boy,” “Sea Dreams,” “Maud,” “Break, break,” and “Crossing the Bar,” and I remember well his glory in having made these lines in “Boadicea”—

Fear not, isle of blowing woodland, isle of silvery  
 parapets!

Thine the liberty, thine the glory, thine the deeds to  
 be celebrated,

Thine the myriad-rolling ocean, light and shadow  
 illimitable;

and,

Roar’d as when the roaring breakers boom and blanch  
 on the precipices.

His MS notes written for me on “Enoch Arden” are as follows: “‘Enoch Arden’ (like ‘Aylmer’s Field’) is founded on a theme given me by the sculptor Woolner. I believe that this particular story came out of Suffolk, but something like the same story is told in Brittany and elsewhere.”

Englishmen living in the tropics often assured him that, in his description of the isle, the splendours of those regions were faithfully depicted; also the sense of weariness which weighs upon an Englishman doomed to live long among them. On the lines which follow—

Once likewise, in the ringing of his ears,  
 Tho' faintly, merrily—far and far away—  
 He heard the pealing of his parish bells,

he wrote: "Mr Kinglake told me that he had heard his own parish bells in the desert on a Sunday morning when they would have been ringing at home: and added, 'I might have had a singing in my ears, and the imaginative memory did the rest.'"

About the line

There came so loud a calling of the sea,

he observed: "The calling of the sea is a term used, I believe, chiefly in the Western parts of England, to signify a ground swell. When this occurs on a windless night, the echo of it rings thro' the timbers of the old houses in a haven."

His similes in "Enoch Arden," he said, were all such as might have been used by simple fisher-folk, quoting this as one of the tenderest (he thought) he had written:

She heard,  
 Heard, and not heard him; as the village girl,  
 Who sets her pitcher underneath the spring,  
 Musing on him that used to fill it for her,  
 Hears and not hears, and lets it overflow.

Among many stories as to the effect of "Enoch Arden" on the uneducated, I will quote one.

A district visitor was distributing tracts among a large meeting of some poor folk to whom she had



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A POEM FOR THE PEOPLE.

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lately read part of "Enoch Arden." "Thank you, ma'am," one old lady said, "but I'd give all I had for that other beautiful tract which you read t'other day (a sentiment which was echoed by the others), it did me a power of good." This pleased him; he "was glad to have done any good to anyone."

The opening lines of "Aylmer's Field" unfold the moral of that poem. The sequel describes the Nemesis which fell upon Sir Aylmer Aylmer in his pride of wealth. My father always felt a prophet's righteous wrath against this form of selfishness; and no one can read his terrible denunciations of such pride trampling on a holy human love, without being aware that the poet's heart burnt within him while at work on this tale of wrong.

He notes that "Tithonus" had been begun years ago, at the same date that "Ulysses" was written, and that Professor Jebb's translation of the poem into Latin hexameters was a work of real genius.

About the "Northern Farmers," old and new style, my father writes: "Roden Noel calls these two poems 'photographs,' but they are imaginative. The first is founded on the dying words of a farm-bailiff, as reported to me by a great uncle of mine when verging upon 80,— 'God A'mighty little knows what He's about, a-taking me. An' Squire will be so mad an' all.' I conjectured the man from that one saying."

"The 'Farmer, new style' (in 'The Holy Grail' volume), is likewise founded on a single sentence, 'When I canters my 'erse along the ramper (highway) I 'ears propuppy, propuppy, propuppy.' I had been told that a rich farmer in our neighbourhood was in the habit of saying this. I never saw the man and know no more of him. It was also reported of the wife of this worthy that, when she entered the *salle à manger* of a sea bathing-place, she slapt her pockets and said, 'When I married I brought him £5000 on each shoulder.'"

My father was fond of telling stories of this kind in Lincolnshire dialect. The three following are examples :

A housemaid, who was born in the fen country, and accustomed to drink the strong fen water, went to Caistor on the Wolds, famous for its splendid springs. However, she soon gave warning for this reason—"She liked Caistor, but could not abear the watter, for that taasted o' nowt [nothing]." Another story was of a Lincolnshire farmer coming home on Sunday after a sermon about the endless fires of hell and talking to his wife—"Noä, Sally, it woän't do, noä constitootion cud stan' it." A third was of a Lincolnshire minister praying for rain: "O God, send us rain, and especially on John Stubbs' field in the middle marsh, and if Thou doest not know it, it has a big thorn-tree in the middle of it."

The Lincolnshire dialect poems are so true in dialect and feeling, that when they were first read in that county a farmer's daughter exclaimed: "That's Lincoln labourers' talk, and I thought Mr Tennyson was a gentleman."

"The Flower<sup>1</sup>," one of the shorter poems in this volume, is described in the manuscript notes as "an universal apologue." On the subject he quoted: "In

<sup>1</sup> To *J. B. Selkirk*.

FRESHWATER, I. W.

DEAR SIR,

Accept my best thanks for your volume of Essays, one of which I had read before, in the *Cornhill* I think. The world, and especially the schools of our younger poets, would be none the worse for lending you an attentive ear. I may remark that you have fallen into a not uncommon error with respect to my little fable "The Flower," as if "I" in the poem meant A. T. and "the flower" my own verses. And so you have narrowed into personality an universal apologue and parable. I once had a letter from a stranger asking whether Christianity were not intended by it. You see by this that I have more than dipt into your book.

Pray believe me yours in all sincerity,

A. TENNYSON.