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Terry L. Meyers

William & Mary, tlmeyer@wm.edu

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NOTES

Several Letters by Tennyson and his Family

Terry L. Meyers

In the years since Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon edited Tennyson's letters (1981-1990), I have been able to acquire for my collection several letters by Tennyson and by other members of his family. I print those here, along with some other material relating to Tennyson.

In the case of one previously published letter, November 18, 1853 (*Letters*, II, 75), I am able to add new information about the context as well as several corrections to the text. Lang and Shannon print the letter from Tennyson's draft in the Tennyson Research Centre, but the letter as mailed is available in William Knight's *Memoir of John Nichol, Professor of English Literature in the University of Glasgow*. Knight quotes extensively from one of John Nichol's classmates at the University of Glasgow in 1853, Alexander Mackennal, to set the occasion of the letter.

In the letter Tennyson expresses his pleasure at not having been elected Rector of the University. Mackennal explains the circumstances fully, that as a protest against the Conservative Club at Glasgow, Nichol and others formed a Liberal Club, and, somewhat irregularly, moved to propose Tennyson as Rector. Mackennal implies a letter to Tennyson explaining the awkward position he was being placed in and a letter in reply (yet to be located):

Fearing that the Conservative Club might do with the Laureate as they had done with the Duke [of Argyll in the 1852 election; i.e. as opponents, and in violation of custom, approach him, ask him to withdraw, and publish his reply], we explained the etiquette of the position to Tennyson, and asked him to communicate with no one until the election was over. He wrote, in guarded language, intimating that, if it were practicable, he would rather we withdrew him; and Professor Lushington, his brother-in-law, in equally guarded language, concurred with the suggestion. (Knight, 1896, p. 120)

Mackennal goes on to explain that Tennyson came close to being elected, but that votes by a professor and the Principal tipped a tie vote by the 'nations' of students and insured the continuation, as would normally have been anticipated by custom and courtesy, of Lord Eglinton. (Many years later

Tennyson cast this incident as a refusal to be the nominee of any party with a political affiliation, and cited it when the Conservative Club at Glasgow was seeking to nominate him in 1880.¹)

The actual recipient of the letter is indicated by neither Mackennal or Knight, but Mackennal or even John Nichol (who organized the Liberal Club) seems more likely than Appleby Stephenson, as tentatively suggested by Lang and Shannon; Stephenson is earlier identified as Appleby Stephenson, MD (*Letters*, II, p. 60), concerned somehow with the selection of the Rector at the University of Edinburgh and not likely to have been associated with Glasgow's student Liberals.

As printed by Knight, the letter differs from the draft in several accidentals and in the several phrasings that follow. In the first sentence of the letter, Tennyson's wording varies slightly: 'I have just returned from a visit in Kent and received yours of the 16th, wherein you inform me that the Earl of Eglinton has been re-elected Lord Rector of your University.' And in the penultimate sentence, Tennyson corrects a seemingly strange reference in the draft to his 'personal appearance' by emphasizing the desirability of a Rector able to come to Glasgow easily: 'to raise to the honour of your Lord Rectorship some other who would not only gratify you by his presence at Glasgow, but, it may be, delight and elevate you by his oratory.' In the only other changes from his draft Tennyson changes 'that office' to 'that high office' and 'feel a kind of relief' to 'felt a kind of relief.'

*

The next letter, March 15, 1853, is from Emily Tennyson, seeking a recommendation for a possible nurse for Hallam Tennyson, born August 11, 1852:

Mrs Alfred Tennyson presents her compliments to Mrs Larkin and requests she will do her the favour to say if she consider her late nurse Chappel capable of undertaking the sole management of a child seven months old. Mrs Tennyson also begs to be informed if she left Mrs . Larkin for any fault, whether she is perfectly cleanly good-tempered, honest truthful and in every respect well principled, whether she is a skillful needlewoman[.]

Chapel House
Twickenham
Middlesex
March 15th²

¹ Lang and Shannon flesh out the circumstances of the 1880 invitation in their notes to several letters (*Letters*, III, 189-191).

² The same day Emily Tennyson wrote in similar terms to a Mrs. Scholfield. In the end she was able to hire 'an excellent nurse ... Frances Gandy' (Thwaite, 258, 657n).

The next letter, by Tennyson himself, is endorsed on the verso 'Received direct from Miss Wright Wrangle Vicarage Lincolnshire--cousin of Mr Tennyson's May 19/72 GB [?].' Although the handwriting in the closing is hard to read, Tennyson doubtless sent this letter to Henrietta Wright, his wife's aunt, married to the Rev. Richard Wright. Three and half lines are so heavily blacked out that I have not been able to recover what Tennyson wrote--they doubtless concern details of his wife's delivery of Lionel (March 16, 1854), details that someone apparently felt were too personal to preserve outside the family.³

March 29
'54.

My dear Madam

Many thanks for your kind congratulatory letter. I waited to answer you till I could give you a satisfactory account of Emily. This I am now able to do. After 8 days or (I think) 9 of considerable suffering & sleeplessness [unreadable text]. She sends her best love to yourself & your family[.]

believe me dear Mrs Wright [?]

Yours very truly

A Tennyson

*

My collection includes an envelope edged in black and addressed by Tennyson to Richard Hewitt Esq / Edingley / Southwell / Notts and postmarked from Yarmouth (January 3, 1868). I have not been able to discover who Richard Hewitt might be (nor his nephew, AW Hewitt-Watts, who has endorsed the envelope). Lang and Shannon include no letter by Tennyson dated January 3, 1868, but it is possible (though not probable, I think) that a letter they do include, dated January 1, 1868 and apparently thanking an unidentified stranger for the gift of a pipe, might have been addressed to Hewitt.

*

The following letter is written by Emily Tennyson on stationery with the return address embossed. The recipient of it and her other letter below is the prolific and Christian writer Elizabeth Rundle Charles (1828-1896).

³ I am grateful to a number of colleagues and friends for their efforts in various ways to recover these words. The most that can be gathered is that the lines appear to mention a sudden cry of happiness or of nervousness.

Aldworth
Blackdown
Haslemere
July 4th 1870

Dear Mrs Charles,

May we have the pleasure of seeing you on Thursday the 7th? I should have requested this earlier but that so many guests have offered themselves I have not been able to offer you a bed before with any certainty[.]

With Tillys love & our kind regards believe me very truly yours
Emily Tennyson⁴

*

The next letter is from Hallam Tennyson to the Revd. William Fox (Curate at Brightstone Village, Isle of Wight), with whom Tennyson enjoyed viewing fossils. Tennyson was ill with gout the entire winter and into the spring. The address is printed in silver Old English.

Telegraph Office, 3, Miles

Aldworth,

Haslemere,
Surrey.

Oct 20/88

Dear Mr Fox

Alas my Father has another relapse and the journey is postponed indefinitely. He is very ill.

Thanks for the trouble which you have taken in the matter.

Yr Try
Hallam Tennyson

*

I am indebted to Mark Samuel Lasner for confirming the recipient of the next letter--Frederick Andrew Inderwick (1836-1904), a lawyer and antiquarian. The paper is thinly edged in black and has Tennyson's address printed in Old English type:

⁴ Lady Tennyson records in her journal the arrival on July 6 of 'Mr[s]. Charles' (her husband, Andrew Paton Charles, had died in 1868) (See *Lady Tennyson's Journal*, 307). 'Tilly' is Tennyson's sister Matilda (1816-1913).

Farringford,
Freshwater,
Isle of Wight.
June 26. 1892

My dear Sir

My best thanks are due to you for your interesting volume & kindly dedication. I have unfortunately mislaid your letter & forgotten your direction, so I commit this to the care of your publishers.

believe me

Yours very truly
Tennyson.⁵

*

The following letter is written by Lady Tennyson on mourning paper with the printed address of Aldworth, Haslemere, Surrey crossed out:

Farringford
Nov 18 1893

My dear Mrs Charles,

We are very much distressed to know of your cataract & to think that we have, however unwittingly, asked for that which may have harmed the poor eyes.

but grateful are we for what you have done however painful the thought of having caused you to do it.

The Reminiscences are delightful & we shall thankfully accept your permission to insert the Devonshire one. Of Farringford, I fear the <illeg.> memoir will be already too full.

Hallam & I have indeed reason to be thankful for all the love & reverence expressed for him from all parts of the world. America & Canada have, we think a very deep insight into both among their greatest men.

He would much have valued what you yourself say.

With best wishes from us both and renewed thanks believe me

⁵ Mark Samuels Lasner also identifies the volume as Inderwick's *The Story of King Edward and New Winchelsea: The Edification of a Medieval Town* (London: Sampson, Low, 1892) a copy of which is inscribed 'Alfred, Lord Tennyson from the author 1892' and which is in the Tennyson Research Centre, City of Lincoln Library. The Tennyson collection holds two other volumes by Inderwick inscribed to Tennyson in January 1891 and May 1890. See Campbell, *Tennyson in Lincoln*, I, 61.

Most sincerely yours
Emily Tennyson ⁶

*

It seems impossible not to propose that the following note (on half a sheet of stationery obscurely embossed in its upper left corner) was written to Coventry Patmore (1823-1896), with a date of March 1 or 2, 1849, in reply to Tennyson's famous letter (*Letters I*, 297-98) asking Patmore to look into Tennyson's having misplaced the manuscript of *In Memoriam*. However, no evidence supports this and it might well be a note to Francis Turner Palgrave or, possibly more likely, to the jurist William Frederick Pollock (1845-1937), to whom Tennyson addressed a remarkably similar letter (*Letters, II*, 438),⁷ one time regretting not being able to attend a dinner of the Apostles in 1866. I cannot date this letter.

Dear P. Many thanks. AT.

*

The next letter, also undateable, is written on a half sheet of letter paper folded and partially pasted so the flap with Tennyson's signature and return address closes the note written on the other side. A note also appears on the verso, not, I believe, in Tennyson's hand: 'before 12.'

My dear Sir

I am sorry to find you are out--I will call again on Monday.

A Tennyson

R.S[.]

Burlington House.⁸

William and Mary College, Virginia

⁶ November 18 on the date was first written as 17. Mrs. Charles contributed to *The Memoir* her account of Tennyson's visit to her uncle's home near Plymouth in 1848 (I, 276-279). In her autobiography she briefly mentions her visit, on the morning of April 26, 1867, to Farringford 'here (after many years we saw the poet Tennyson again and his wife, and he took us over his gardens and fields.' She addressed one of her poems, 'Two Meanings of Fame,' to Tennyson to commemorate the visit (*Our Seven Homes*, p. 174 and note.)

⁷ The present letter would rival that letter as what Lang and Shannon call 'Tennyson's shortest poem' (II, 438n)

⁸ The Royal Society was housed at Burlington House from 1858.

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