

A HAPPY HOUR WITH SIR EDWIN ARNOLD.

By CLEMENT SCOTT.

SIR EDWIN ARNOLD'S eyes twinkled when I gravely informed him that he was a dear and valued friend of mine, many years before we ever met in the old editorial offices of the *Daily Telegraph* in Fleet Street. I have seldom seen a look even of surprise on the mobile face of this delightful optimist; never in my life one of anger. Few of us who study character have met a man of genius with such an enviable disposition, such courtesy and grace of manner, or one gifted with such an incessantly sunny nature. Most of us have our dark hours of depression. We are changeable, moodish, sometimes roaring with laughter, often down in the dumps, but never for one instant have I seen a dark cloud overshadow Edwin Arnold's bright and attractive countenance. One of the best talkers I have ever met, full of illustration and anecdote, now taking you with him into the old world of heroes in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, now quoting Horace by the dozen stanzas, now taking you into dream or fairy land with some Indian legend or Persian poem, never at fault for quip or crank or for encouraging laughter that holdeth both its sides. Still, good as he is as a talker he is equally good as a listener. He never snubs anyone of inferior talent and with less well-stored learning than himself. In fact he encourages them, and brings out with rare art the best of all they know. I have often envied the schoolboys at King Edward's School, Birmingham, and the students of the Poonah College in India, who had the privilege of being taught, and, what is of more consequence of being encouraged by such a master,—of arts—as this remarkable man and healthy poet.

For of this I am perfectly confident, that the career of many a boy at a public school is absolutely ruined, his prospects blighted, and all his ambition dashed to the ground by being crushed day by day, and hour by hour, by an unsympathetic nature. I can recall to this hour the agony I endured when I was a schoolboy at Marlborough, when I found myself in the form of some young master who might

be an excellent tutor to others, but the worst possible guide for me. With a sympathetic master I would rise at once to the top of the form, my Latin verse and prose, and occasionally an English poem or essay, would be sent up to the head master for approval, but with promotion would come another form, another master, and I found myself hectored, bullied, laughed at, scorned and pointed out to my schoolfellows as a champion idiot. Without conceit I knew in my heart I was not quite an idiot. Indeed I could prove it by the fact that when the unsympathetic master went away and his place was temporarily taken by some new hand from Oxford or Cambridge, out I came from the rank again, I could stand up to translate without fear or trembling, and I never missed a line of repetition. All that I wanted was encouragement. I became a mule when I was kicked. The cruelty that some masters unintentionally practice upon nervous boys is beyond all human conception. If Sir Edwin Arnold had come to Marlborough as a master instead of to Birmingham when he left University College, Oxford, he would have lightened and brightened many of our dull and disappointed little lives. How we should have welcomed him to the Sixth Form Debating Society! How he would have enlivened the inevitable discussions about the value of game laws, the necessity of capital punishment, and the relative iniquity of Charles the First and Oliver Cromwell! What a joy it would have been to read Homer with him, to hear him translate a speech of Demosthenes, or to turn a book of the *Georgics* or the *Aeneid* into English verse!—almost as great a joy to us as one day when we were summoned to the Adderley Library to hear the great Professor Conington "give us a construe." In reality he rolled off one of the *Georgics* into admirable verse, preparatory no doubt to one of his famous published translations.

It is natural for me to talk of Marlborough in connection with Edwin Arnold, for it was here that he became my friend of friends, long before I ever met

him in the flesh. I have taken him with me to the Savernake Forest and reposed with him many a lovely summer afternoon under the King or Queen Oak in this enchanting paradise of sylvan scenery. He has been with me down the Bath Road over the downs to Fyfield and Manton, hiding in many a copse and thicket of nut-groves. He has been near me on a bank when we were watching a cricket match on the wind-swept table-land, which in my days was called the "first eleven." But he was my companion not, as I say, in the flesh, but in the shape of a book of poems, chiefly love-poems; his first book, I should imagine, after he had won the Newdigate with "Belshazzar's Feast," a poem very far above the average of Oxford prize poems, and one that Henry Irving and Clifford Harrison often recite in public to this day.

In addition to our school societies for debating, reading, history, and Shakespeare, and so on, we had select and private poetry reading societies of our own in our studies, and in one of them, I remember, we managed, without detection, to sit up half the night brewing coffee and spouting poetry in schoolboy fashion. Of course Tennyson was our acknowledged chief. He had no rival. He thrilled us with *Maud* and solaced our boy-friendships with *In Memoriam*. How well I remember a reading of *Maud* given us by the now Archdeacon Farrar, when he had just come up to Marlborough as a junior master after taking his degree at Cambridge! By the way, Edwin Arnold and Frederic William Farrar were school-fellows at King's College, London, before one went to University College, Oxford, and the other to Trinity College, Cambridge. But even in the "fifties," between 1852 and 1859, we schoolboys who loved poetry had many a discussion as to Tennyson's successor in the Laureateship. Some were for Matthew Arnold—*Sohrab and Rostum* was our special favourite—some were for Coventry Patmore, and we were never tired of quoting the *Angel in the House*. I don't think we knew very much about Browning in those days, but we had a partiality for William Morris, and loved his *Defence of Guinevere* because, in the first place, he was a Marlborough boy, and, in the next, he had painted the fresco in the Union at Oxford on which our young æsthetic eyes had often been fastened. We were all Pre-Raphaelites, and were swayed by mediævalism. Our

favourite painters were Holman Hunt, Arthur Hughes, Dyce and Ford Madox Brown. We spent our pocket-money on the early numbers of *Once a Week*. In our set we were desperately Anglican in religion and invariably in love.

So Edwin Arnold used to be our modern love-poet, and we went about quoting:—

"Somewhere there waiteth in this world of ours

For one lone soul, another lonely soul;
Each chasing each through many weary hours,

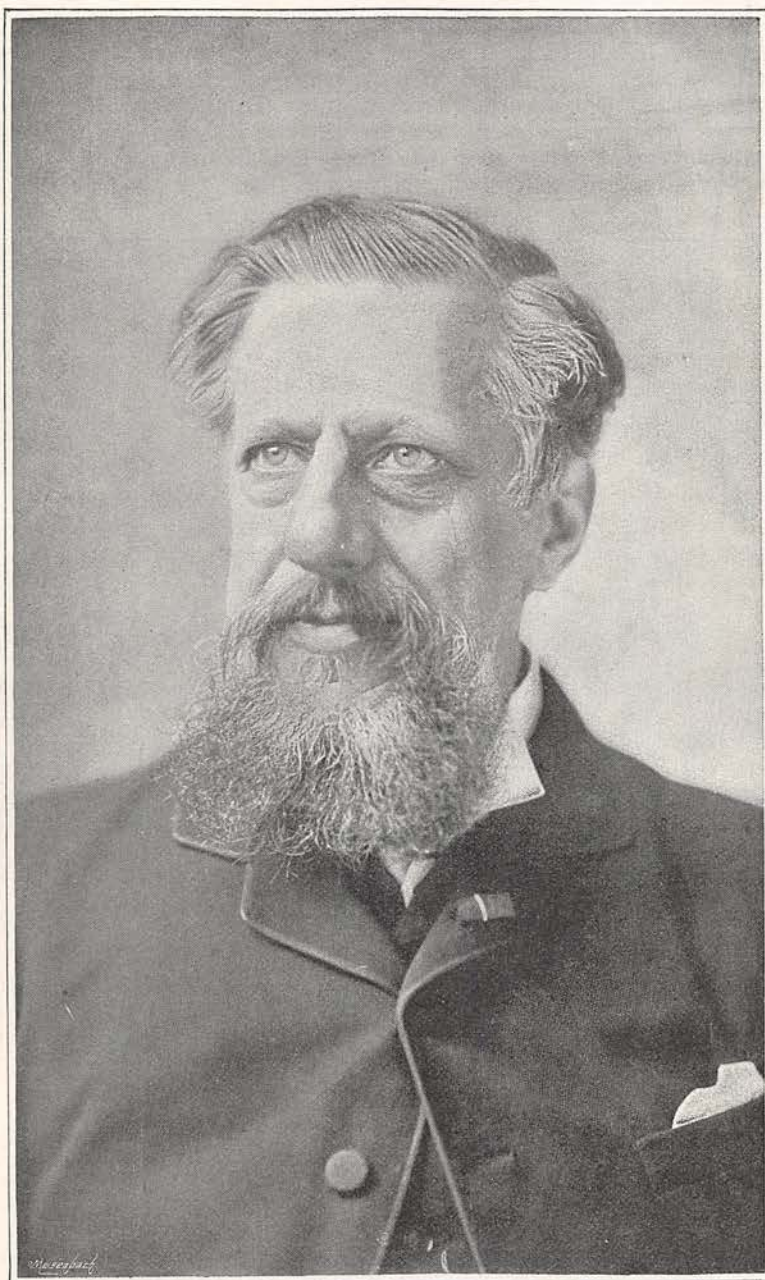
And ending sadly in a common goal!"

We thought, like Sophie Arnould, "Oh, le bon temps quand j'étais malheureuse!" Schoolboys of a romantic turn of mind always think like that. They are happiest when they are sad.

But what a changed existence for the young poet from the time that I cut the leaves of his first book of poems at school to the hour when I met him in the editorial sanctum in Fleet Street!

He had won the Newdigate, taken an excellent degree, been appointed to the second Mastership of the English division of King Edward's School, Birmingham, and from there passed on to India, where he was appointed Governor of the Sanscrit College at Poonah, and afterwards a Fellow of the University of Bombay.

Sir Edwin's face glows with animation when he talks of his beloved India, to which he gave his heart and life for so many honourable years, for he is sportsman as well as student. He has tales to tell of tiger-slaying and pig-sticking in the jungle, and feats with the gun after quail in the marshes. He makes you roar with laughter over an incident in his Indian career, when he, the mild-mannered, courteous, and gentle Edwin Arnold, who could not use a harsh word to a living soul, was compelled, after strong warning, to thrash an obstinate servant who would not leave his compound when he was dismissed; and elected to starve himself to death, as he considered he had a right by his religion to do, on the doorstep of a bungalow. The assault was proved by the native. The prisoner, Edwin Arnold, was duly fined by the resident magistrate, who, after the sentence, whispered to the accused, "And now, old friend, come in to luncheon, Mrs. — is waiting anxiously to see you." And never before have I heard such graphic and appalling stories as Sir Edwin can tell of the Indian Mutiny of 1857! Cawnpore I have seen, but the slaughter-ground of men, women,



SIR EDWIN ARNOLD, K.C.S.I.

Photo by Sarony, New York.

and children is to-day turned into a rose-garden, and the fatal well is surmounted by a marble angel. Lucknow I have visited, but the Residency, where John Lawrence fell, is a smiling paradise in a wilderness of flowers. I have sat and watched and tortured my imagination standing at the fords to which the Cawnpore fugitives were decoyed; saw the place where Delafosse swam to his safety, and have entered the square ambuscade outside Lucknow, into which the rebel enemy

or gentler mood, he rolls off without reflection and with faultless memory some legend from the *Hitopadesa*, the *Gita Govinda*, or best of all the *Mahābhārata*—poems of rare loveliness, which are recited day by day throughout India by the public story-tellers, sitting cross-legged on the ground with a crowd of animated listeners around them.

What a delight it must be to be familiar with the language in which these books are written. "I have only to take down



Photo by A. H. Cade, Cornhill, Ipswich.

JACQUES HALL, SIR EDWIN ARNOLD'S COUNTRY SEAT AT BRADFIELD, ESSEX.

were decoyed and shot to fragments by our maddened soldiery.

But Sir Edwin Arnold can fill the scenes with life and colour, and can recite, as he talks almost in verse, a kind of Homeric legend of the heroism, the self-denial, and the more than bravery of those awful times. I have never heard such brilliancy of description, such animation of utterance, such a poetic glow of language and imagery as falls from Edwin Arnold's lips when he puts his mind back to the days of the Indian Mutiny, or when, in softer

a black-lettered volume," says Sir Edwin, "and on any careless hour I can translate into prose or verse some of the most delightful romances on the earth." As Sir Edwin recites on and glows more and more with the recital, I see dancing before my eyes a dozen operas and a hundred dramas in the shell. There to a certainty are the pearls, and the shells only require opening. But the fascination of the speaker is too dazzling to be resisted. From the gold and silver and ruby mines of Eastern legend have come the *Light of*

Asia, and the Indian song of songs *Pearls of the Faith*, and *With Sadi in the Garden* are at least a dozen more delightful books scented with the lotus blossom and precious as pearls or jewels.

One can scarcely be surprised at a man of so ardent and enthusiastic a nature accepting as a solemn duty years ago a call to the then "new journalism." For a call it was; and in Edwin Arnold's opinion, as important a summons as the one whispered to any young minister, no matter of what religion. I read the other day of the strange circumstance that connected the name of Thomas Mozley with the great *Times* newspaper. He was a clergyman of the established Church, and his eye fell upon an advertisement, offering a post of leader-writer to an important paper. He answered it; his services were accepted; and Mozley, of the *Times*, became one of the most brilliant newspaper essayists of our time. Exactly the same thing happened to Edwin Arnold. He had come home with his wife from India on a holiday, glad of the peace and restfulness of Old England after the scenes of horror they had gone through. Sir Edwin has often told us how, sitting fishing in a punt in one of the upper reaches of the Thames, his eye fell on an advertisement in the *Athenæum*, again asking for a leader-writer. Only this time the paper was the *Daily Telegraph*, and the post was not exactly one of comfortable ease to an active man who had been his own master, professor, a ruler of men and boys, a dweller in the comparative luxury of Eastern cities. This was Edwin Arnold's call. Should he accept it or not? Should he give up India at once and for ever for London? As is ever the case the good wife decides. No doubt she looked back on India and its scenes with sorrow, though, as good women ever will, silently but uncomplainingly; thought probably of the necessary separation from her children, gazed upon the exquisite Thames scenery, and decided the best course for the man she loved. Thus Edwin Arnold the poet, the scholar, the Sanskrit professor, the tutor and the essayist, took a walk down Fleet Street, and became one of the "young lions" of Peterborough Court.

Indeed if this historic term "young lions" was meant as a reproach, it was one singularly misapplied. There was as much scholarship and culture among those "young lions" as in the select cage of any *Saturday Review* ever published. I fear the sneer was one more of jealousy

than contempt. A brave den of young lions it was at any rate. The gentle amiable Thornton Hunt, beloved by his companions, and whose name is never mentioned to this day by any one who knew him without an affectionate allusion; George Augustus Sala, prince of special correspondents, bright, clever, and witty writer, a born journalist if ever there was one in the world; Frank Lawley, an Oxford graduate, a civil servant and diplomat, who knows, and knew, more about sport than any man of his time; Beatty Kingston, marvellous linguist, delightful musician, untiring, honest and indefatigable worker, ever the cheeriest of companions, and the most unselfish of men; little, quaint, whimsical, bright-eyed Jeff Prowse, a pocket genius, a worshipper of giants, and, because he was weak and ill-starred, a passionate devotee of cricket, a miniature poet, a rare humorist—was he not the old man Nicholas in *Fun?*—and one of the sweetest and gentlest natures I have ever met. But why should I go over all the brilliant list and tell once more of the gifted McDonnell, of the clever Herbert Stacke, of E. L. Blanchard, learned in the story of the theatre and dramatic lore! These were among the young and old lions of the *Daily Telegraph* when Edwin Arnold entered the den. But watching over them, noting them, encouraging them, detecting by marvellous instinct their relative capacity, was that most remarkable man, my ever-regretted friend, Mr. J. M. Levy, who, like Delane and Douglas Cook, was born with an extraordinary editorial power. None of these three men ever wrote, but they knew exactly the difference between good writing and bad; between what is effective and what commonplace; and like skilful surgeons, when a proof was before them they put their pencil on the weak spot. No man living has a greater respect and admiration for the wonderful sagacity of the founder of the *Daily Telegraph*—inherited even with stronger force by his gifted son, in that he knows men and the world better—than Sir Edwin Arnold, who never failed to recognise the strict discipline of the office or to yield to the good counsels of his honoured chief.

*Eheu! fugaces, Postume, Postume,
Labuntur anni.*

Years glide away, and are lost to me, lost to me! Many of the old guard have gone under, but the muster is not yet complete. A man of Sir Edwin Arnold's temperament can never grow old. He

has, and ever must have, a young heart. He thinks and believes that on the whole the good things and the bad things in this life are fairly apportioned, and that no one has much right to grumble be he prince or pauper, millionaire or hard-working journalist. He thanks God for the happiness and health that have been granted him, and he does not fear the end or future, whatever they may be. With him, as with

brought out, the true English spirit he must have revived in all these long years of leader-writing, with one everlasting tune on his harp—"Be of good courage! Ye shall overcome the world!" A man's life, hard as it may be, is not in vain when he has these good things to his account. I don't believe Edwin Arnold ever wrote a word that he would wish blotted out for ever. I know for myself,



THE PORCH AT JACQUES HALL.

Photo by A. H. Cade, Cornhill, Ipswich.

the dreamers and thinkers in the East, Death is a white-robed angel with a lily or lotus in its hand, a messenger not of terror, but of ease and sweet forgetfulness. The last chapter with him is ever headed "Nirvana, a Rest." A man with such a mind, so full of hope, such an enemy to the cowardice of despair, cannot but do good to his fellow creatures. Think of the courage that he must have inspired, the despair he must have routed, the manliness he must have

that when weary with overwork, occasionally despondent, vexed and harassed in a life that has misrepresentation as its doom, I hear with delight the cheery voice of Edwin Arnold chatting with our mutual friend, John M. Le Sage, or some other member of the staff, in the editorial sanctum, I am soothed with his practical optimism, and go out into the world again, after meeting him even in business hours, with braced nerves and a lighter heart!