Farringford*

LADY RITCHIE

One autumn, when everything seemed happy at home, Mrs Cameron took me with her to Freshwater for a few delightful weeks, and then, for the first time I lived with them all, and with kind Mrs Cameron, in the ivy-grown house near the gates of Farringford. For the first time I stayed in the island, and with the people who were dwelling there, and walked with Tennyson along High Down, treading the turf, listening to his talk, while the gulls came sideways, flashing their white breasts against the edge of the cliffs, and the poet's cloak flapped time to the gusts of the west wind.

The house at Farringford itself seemed like a charmed place, with green walls without, and speaking walls within. There hung Dante with his solemn nose and wreath; Italy gleamed over the doorways; friends' faces lined the passages; books filled the shelves, and a glow of crimson was everywhere; the great oriel drawing-room window was full of green and golden leaves, of the sound of birds and the distant sea.

The very names of the people who have stood upon the lawn at Farringford would be an interesting study for some future biographer: Longfellow, Maurice, Kingsley, the Duke of Argyll, Locker, Dean Stanley, the Prince Consort. Good Garibaldi once planted a tree there, off which some too ardent republican broke a branch before twenty-four hours had passed. Here came Clough in the last year of his life. Here Mrs Cameron fixed her lens, marking the well-known faces as they passed: Darwin and Henry Taylor, Watts and Aubrey de Vere, Lecky and Jowett, and a score of others.

NOTE

Lady Ritchie (1837–1919), born Anne Isabella Thackeray, was a daughter of W. M. Thackeray and was herself the author of novels and memoirs. She married Richmond Ritchie, a senior civil servant who was knighted in 1907. Farringford is a Georgian country house (now a hotel) at Freshwater on the Isle of Wight; the Tennysons moved there from Twickenham in November 1853, at first leasing it and later purchasing it with the profits from *Maud*.

* *Records of Tennyson, Ruskin and Browning* (London: Macmillan, 1892) pp. 43–4.