

CHAPTER I

HARDWICK DRUMMOND RAWNSLEY

Family and Early Years

Originally, the Rawnsley family came from Ravenslawe Cliff near Halifax, in Yorkshire. The name Rawnsley is thought to be a corruption of Ravenslawe. For four generations, the family was connected with the wool trade as woolcombers or woolstaplers at Bradford, until Thomas Rawnsley, who was born in 1755, and whose father was a friend of Wesley, moved to Bourne in Lincolnshire. There he married Deborah Hardwicke. Thomas has been described as an intelligent, courteous, gifted man, with a lively mind. He was reputed to be a great conversationalist, full of wit and wisdom.

In 1789 Thomas Hardwicke Rawnsley, his fourth son was born. Eventually he went to Eton, as a King's Scholar, where he had a reputation as a pugilist and was remembered for the daring feat of taking a header from Windsor Bridge on Sundays, even when the river was in flood. From Eton he went to Exeter College, Oxford, where he was elected a Reynold's Scholar. Later, he became the much loved Rector of Halton Holgate, near Spilsby. Dr. George Clayton Tennyson was Rector of the nearby parishes of Somersby and Bag Enderby from 1808-1837. A great friendship developed between the two men and their families. When the eldest son of the Rawnsleys became ill at the age of three months, Dr. Tennyson walked seven miles on a cold winter's night to give support and advice because this was their first child, while he, at that time, had the experience of eight sons.

Often Dr. Tennyson would stay at the Halton Holgate rectory, in order to rest, so that he could return home refreshed to carry on the arduous task of teaching his large family. The wife of Dr. Tennyson was Elizabeth Fytche, the daughter of the Rector of Louth. Their family consisted of George, who died in infancy;

Frederick, who outlived the Laureate; Charles, the sonnet writer and Mary, who became Mrs. Kerr. On the 5 August 1809, Alfred, who was to become the Poet Laureate, was born a few minutes before midnight. He was not expected to live and was hurriedly baptized in the plain little font at Somersby.

As the family was growing to be too many for the Rectory, a move was made to the Old Manor House, where in later years the brothers Edward, Horatio, Arthur and Septimus were born, together with sisters Cecilia, who became Mrs. Lushington; Emily, the beloved of Hallam, afterwards Mrs. Jesse; and Matilda who never married. Later Dr. Tennyson entrusted Thomas Rawnsley with the guardianship of his sons after his death, the future Laureate being one of them. This warm friendship with the Tennysons was very special for the Rawnsley family and later had a particular influence on Hardwicke.

Thomas Rawnsley had two sons of his own, Edward and Robert Drummond Burrell, who was the youngest, being born in 1817 and was usually called Drummond. Both sons took Holy Orders. Drummond was educated at Laleham and Rugby, where Dr. Arnold was Headmaster. Next he went to Brasenose College, Oxford, becoming a fellow of Magdalen. He was a vigorous and enthusiastic scholar, of sturdy build with keen, dark eyes. In 1843 he married Catherine Ann Franklin, the eldest daughter of Sir Willingham Franklin, a judge of the Supreme Court of Madras. On his death by cholera in 1824, which was followed within a few months by the death of his wife, their daughter Catherine became the ward of her father's brother, Sir John Franklin, the Arctic explorer, whose sister, Mrs. Selwood, looked after her. Drummond became vicar of Shiplake-on-Thames, after having worked in Hertfordshire and Hampshire. Two sisters and a brother, Willingham, were born. On the 28 September 1851 Hardwicke Drummond and his twin sister, Frances Anna, were born at the Vicarage. Later, another sister and four more brothers followed. Hardwicke or Hardie, as he was called by the family, was a delicate and sickly child. Often his mother felt he would not live. That he did so seems to have been due to the devotion of his

She felt that any part she played in smoothing away difficulties and making arrangements was amply rewarded in what proved to be a happy and successful marriage. Hardie's old nurse gave an account in a letter to him written much later, of the wedding morning.¹

"I know I dress Mrs. Tennyson and she look very pruttay and nise and very happy, she wear a grey silver dress and sumthing whit on her sholders and a whit nise straw bonnet and whit ribben and veil. She look very nise. She told me the wedding had been put off for 10 years. She went away in a dark dress, it was a very quiet wedding. Mr. Tennyson look very noble and happy and was well dress. He went into the gargen and got her sister flowers and give to her when I had dress her, she was so place and look so happy; it was your Mother's doing that they was mead happy."

Alfred wrote a poem for Drummond Rawnsley to mark the occasion, which gives a delightful picture of life at Shiplake. In a note written as a preface to the poem, Tennyson asked that it should not be published until he gave permission or until he died. The first verse is as follows:-

To the Vicar of Shiplake
Vicar of that pleasant spot,
Where it was my chance to marry,
Happy, happy be your lot
In the Vicarage by the quarry
You were he that knit the knot.*

When Hardie was ten years old in 1861, Thomas Hardwicke Rawnsley, his grandfather died. He was succeeded as Rector of Halton Holgate by his son Drummond, Hardie's father. This meant that the family had to leave their much loved home at Shiplake.

¹Canon Rawnsley's brother, Willingham Franklin Rawnsley was a page boy at the wedding and has written, "All that I can remember of the ceremony was walking to the Church from the Vicarage close by, with my elder sister Mary, Mrs. Percy Chaplin, each of us adorned with a sprig of syringa which we call orange flower. My sister Margaret, Mrs. D. Arden, though very young, was present, but the second bridesmaid was Jenny Elmhirst, eldest daughter of my Aunt Sophy."

* Appendix 1

The boy was so sad that he wrote a poem based on the form of Hood's I remember, I remember - twenty five stanzas in all. Perhaps it was not considered to be great poetry, but was notable for the powers of observation shown by the young poet. Later he felt that the impressions made on him by his surroundings at Shiplake stayed with him for life. In particular he recalls the reaches of the Thames; the poplar-aits; the rose bushes on the lawns which sloped to the river; the picturesque mills at Shiplake and Sonning; the scent of back waters; the sound of bells across the water; the chalk cliffs and violets. It was an idyllic childhood, shared with the Barings, Edens and Tennysons. An enjoyable feature of the children's lives had been the holidays spent with the grandparents at Halton Holgate, where there were ponies to ride, fish to be caught, birds and flowers to be searched for and watched. Hardie developed a deep love of the countryside and its beauty, which had a great influence on him throughout his life. After the move to their new home, holidays were spent at Skegness, where they had a family home. All day long they played barelegged on the sands during the summer and came to know the Lincolnshire countryside intimately, with its marshes, windmills, cornfields, clouds and wonderful sunsets.

Not all of the delightful childhood was spent out of doors in country pursuits and play. His father was a good classical scholar, having a good knowledge of Virgil, and taught his family Latin and Greek. He also had an extensive knowledge of English literature and in the winter evenings he read aloud to them and led them to enjoy this activity. In addition, every year Drummond visited Tennyson at Farringford. On his return there was much talk of the poet and his work. Whenever a new volume of poems was produced, a presentation copy was sent to Drummond, who read the poems to the assembled family in such a way that, although the children did not always understand the thoughts expressed, they left a lasting impression upon them. Frequently Tennyson would send new poems in manuscript form for the family to discuss and criticize. For Hardie, this experience had the effect of developing his talent for expressing himself in poetic form, on every possible occasion.