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**RECOLLECTIONS OF E. M. ARNDT,**

THE POET-PATRIOT OF GERMANY.

BY W. H. I. BLEEK, PH.D.

[1870]

THE unity with which the Germans arose to meet the great danger which threatened them last summer was astonishing to the world around,—at all events, to those who had not followed the gradual working of the national mind. To those observers who only saw the continual rivalries and dissensions of the different States, and their jealousy of the one strong Power which alone could be their leader,—who remembered how in former days, France, when fighting German Powers, had always found allies in Germany itself,—it was incomprehensible that the very people who four years ago had been at war with Prussia should now without hesitation join her in combating the common foe. This feeling of a common national cause, in the light of which every foreign, and particularly every French, aggression is considered as a *casus belli* by all German lands, in so far as they possess any political independence, has been aroused and stimulated by the joint efforts of poets, historians, political and other writers; but by no one has it been represented with such intensity as by ERNST MORITZ ARNDT, and no one, therefore, has become so deservedly the representative prophet of German unity as the author of the German Fatherland Song. It is, therefore, but natural that attention, out of Germany should just now turn to him, and that in more than one English Review we should find some notices of his life. It is not my intention here to relate his history, or to give an account of his influence as an author and politician; but it may have some interest for the reader to hear what by my own personal experience I have known of him.

For more than thirty years, Arndt was one of the most intimate and constant friends of my parents, and to us children he was one of the most impressive characters. As he was almost a quarter of a century older than my father, and nearly sixty years of age when we first went to Bonn, it is only as a fine old man that I can remember him; but he retained a high degree of youthful strength and freshness to the last. I see him still before me,—a middle-sized, strongly-built figure, somewhat stooping in the last years of his life; a fine head, with white hair and whiskers, meeting beneath the chin; a healthy colour, bright eyes, easily lighted by pleasant friendly welcome or in angry remonstrance; a firm mouth, and a strong voice, which could never be lowered to a whisper. He was one of the manliest of men, and retained his powers of mind and body to an exceptionally advanced age. Not long before our last meeting (when nearly ninety years of age), he had been seen up in the apple trees in his garden; and a long journey of fifty or sixty miles had recently been performed by him on foot. Neither his eyesight nor his hearing failed him, and his grasp of the hand was still vigorous. To this unimpaired bodily strength was joined a mind as clear in its purposes and as enthusiastic as ever. He was, as regards this latter quality, younger than many of us; yet it was for no vain fancies that he strove, but clear objects. It was his tenacity of purpose, the faithfulness of his inner life—his adherence to the best ideas which he could conceive—which mainly distinguished him, and gave to his character its marked originality. To all this was added a wide experience, rendered highly interesting by intercourse with a multitude of different distinguished persons, by accurate observation, and by travels in different countries at an early age. He was a most cheerful companion, full of anecdotes, which he could relate most tellingly; but the background of his character,—his hatred of lying, frivolity, and loose-mindedness—was always clearly perceptible. In his words he neither minced matters nor spared persons, however powerful they might be. But he could discriminate; and whilst blaming them for wrong or foolish actions, he could yet understand and appreciate their good qualities. It was only occasionally that his patriotic feelings obscured his judgment. He could rarely hear the name of Alexander von Humboldt mentioned without complaining that he had no patriotism; and in support of this he would generally end with an account of Humboldt's having used his influence with the King on behalf of some Frenchmen who had been convicted of actions directed against the safety of the Prussian State. This and similar proofs which he believed he had of Humboldt's want of patriotism, he used to recite, and would become quite angry at any praise bestowed upon the great philosopher, who (as well as Napoleon) was born in the same year with himself, and whom he did not long outlive. There can be no question that Arndt was a good hater, as he was an ardent friend and lover; and to us of the younger generation, who could not quite realize the reasons and causes of his hatred and his love, he may sometimes have appeared prejudiced; but his honesty of purpose, his straightforward carrying out of a few simple principles which were ingrained into his whole being, elevated even what might otherwise be narrow and old-fashioned.

A peasant's son,—he was not ashamed of his origin, but rather prided himself upon it, and regretted only lest any of the good, strong qualities of the peasant should have been lost by him. How often did we see him at work in the orchard which lay before his house, or meet him coming up from the Rhine, in a peasant's blue linen blouse, with a broad old-fashioned, shadeless cap upon his head. He would then kindly address us, and tell us to be brave. This orchard (which extended from the brook that runs along the high road to Coblenz to his house) was a delightful wilderness, and, as such, distinguished from all neighbouring properties. The brick house, one of the earliest erected in the Coblenz Strasse, was built by his orders, and was very simple and substantial. A quaint old German inscription on a marble stone over the door invoked a blessing upon the house. The sitting-room looked upon the Rhine, which flowed about a hundred paces distant. To this river Arndt had also to pay tribute; for, his youngest son (whom I can still remember as a play-fellow near my own age) was drowned, as a boy, when bathing there,—a grief which cast a lasting gloom over the deeply feeling father. Arndt's own study was



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in unison with Arndt's own character not to be appreciated by him, whilst the King's main faults appeared to Arndt to be a certain narrowness of view, and an inability to rouse himself to a bold and courageous course of action. Arndt said that the King had always to be pushed into any bold measures by the energy of his Ministers.

It was only after the death of Fredrick William III. that the prohibition against lecturing was removed by his successor, who, as Crown Prince, had always shown himself to be the friend of Arndt, and who used to visit him when he came to Bonn. In many other ways, also, the new King showed his friendship; but nothing could compensate Arndt for twenty years of enforced inactivity. He was then already more than seventy years old, and before long we not unfrequently read in the catalogue of lectures to be held, that Professor Arndt, on account of extreme old age, would not lecture. One of his courses of lectures I was, however, fortunate enough to be able to attend. It occupied one academical hour (*i.e.*, three-quarters of an hour) every week, during one semester or half-year. It was very interesting to hear the old man expound his views of comparative history,—I believe that the subject was the Comparative History of Peoples. The remarks upon the character and the evolutions of the different nations were accompanied by effective sketches of their leading men, interspersed with much personal anecdote. Some of this might be of dubious authority,—for Arndt was not exactly schooled to historical criticism, in the same manner that a pupil of Professor Ranke's would have been; but much curious and otherwise inaccessible information had been gained by Arndt during his stay in the capitals of Northern Europe, and in his intercourse with the leading people there. His language was outspoken, and many of his remarks would not bear repetition before a mixed audience. Among these was, for example, his analysis of the character of the Empress Catharine II., and his account of how from a virtuous German Princess she became, at first through no fault of her own, what she is now chiefly known to us in history. One anecdote, however, relating to the origin of the present Imperial family of Russia, may be given here. The Empress Elizabeth desired that her destined successor, the Grand-duke Peter (afterwards Peter III.), should have a son and heir. But, unfortunately, his wife (the said Princess Catharine) only gave birth to a still-born daughter. The wrath of the Empress was feared, and the attendants at once obtained a boy just born from the foundling house. This happened to be a Finnish child, and he afterwards became the Emperor Paul.

The revolutionary movements of 1848 naturally met with little sympathy from Arndt, although he was a strong defender of the rights of the people. Revolutions, he acknowledged, were occasionally necessary and salutary; but he considered that it was a bad thing for a nation if it was frequently obliged to have recourse to them. But the movement of 1848, which had commenced in France, was rather wild in its nature and indefinite in its aspirations; and it was connected with the humiliation of a King who had always shown himself to be Arndt's friend, and who, however vacillating and unpractical in his plans and doings (and Arndt did not blind himself to these grave faults), was well-intentioned, and capable of high and noble ideas. Yet the unification of Germany, which was one of the chief aims of the national movement of that year, was too much identified with Arndt's whole being, to allow of his remaining inactive. He was elected as one of the deputies to the first (and, as yet, the only) Parliament of the whole German nation in which almost all German lands were represented—those under Austrian as well as under Prussian sovereignty, and all the minor States, and even such as were still connected with foreign States in personal union, namely, Schleswig-Holstein, Lauenburg, Luxemburg, and Limburg. At Frankfort-on-the-Maine, in the Paulskirche, Arndt was one of these representatives of the German nation. He rarely spoke; but he generally was seen leaning against a pillar of the church, "as a faithful old German conscience," he used to say. From that assembly Arndt was sent with a number of other deputies to offer the crown to the King of Prussia as Emperor of Germany. I happened to be in Berlin at the time (April, 1849), and well remember the arrival of the deputies, and their drive through the Leipziger Strasse, we students cheering them; but the reception on the part of the population was, on the whole, a cool one. I had then occasion to go and see Arndt, on behalf of an old friend (with whose husband he had stayed in old days, when hiding under an assumed name from the wrath of Napoleon)—to tell him that a room was prepared for him. I found him with the other deputies (amongst whom were most of the leading characters of Germany) in a hotel "Unter den Linden." He was naturally somewhat excited, and asked me to tell Mrs. R. that he would come and see us all when he could; but that he could not come and stay with us, as the deputies had determined to remain all together, in order to be ready for eventualities.

As is well known, the King, at the last moment, declined the offered crown,—and the union of all the German lands (exclusive of Austria), which appeared to be so near then and so easily achieved, was indefinitely deferred, and is now only achieved as the result of great wars. But, looking back upon these times, it appears to me probable that the Imperial Crown, as the symbol of German union, would have had to be defended by wars, even more extensive in character than those which we have seen within the last half dozen years; and subsequent events soon showed that the then King had by no means the firmness which would have been requisite to carry him victoriously through such trials. Even Arndt had soon to admit that it was a wise thing on the part of Frederick William IV. to refuse a crown which he would have been unequal to defend with the sword. But the immediate result of the refusal was that the Unionists (the constitutional liberal German party) were defeated; and that everywhere reactionary movement and particularism lifted up their heads. It was then that Arndt wrote his poem *Ihr Könige*



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"Erbebt! erkennt die Zeit, die Gott der Herr gemacht!  
Wollt länger ihr im Stolz erblinden,  
So haut euch Gott aus allen Winden—  
*Ihr Könige, gebt Acht!*—  
Die deutsche Acht und Aberacht."

Gloomy days indeed were coming for all patriotic minds, when the imbecility of the Prussian Ministry led to the humiliating day of Olmütz, and when reactionary measures were almost everywhere employed to curb the natural progress of liberal institutions, and to suppress the tendency towards a union of the German nation.

With all his loyalty, and, in fact, just on account of it, Arndt felt it bitterly, and although it did not break his heart (as it did that of his friend Dahlmann), although he still kept up the hope of better times, he yet felt too sorely not to express himself strongly.

It was at a time when these reactionary movements were at their height, that I was one night, with Arndt, at the *Doctorschmaus* of a friend who had that day taken his degree as doctor of philosophy. The present Crown Prince of Prussia was then a student at the University, and about a dozen other German Princes were also at Bonn. My friend had, on account of the important official position of his father, as well as his own social talents, been very intimate with this assemblage of Princes, and had, as a matter of course, invited them to his *Doctorschmaus*, and, as far as I remember, almost all had come, accompanied by their governors. There were also a number of professors, and a few other young friends of the newly-made doctor. We all sat at a long table, in one of the rooms of the Golden Star Hotel. Towards the end of the evening, Arndt rose, and sang a song of the old "*Landsknecht*." It was the first time that I had seen him do such a thing; and I shall never



forget the loud, though somewhat hoarse, voice of the singer, who was already more than eighty-three, and the manner in which he there sang this thoroughly democratic song, which was evidently displeasing to some of the aristocratic guests, although only one or two had the bad taste to interrupt him, and thereby to irritate him into a stronger repetition of the most striking portions of the song.

Before two years had passed, I was on my way to South Africa, and it was only when ill-health sent me home, in 1859, that I saw him again a few times. I found that he still took the liveliest interest in all that I could tell him, and particularly wanted to hear all about Sir George Grey, and whether he was not only an able politician, but also a good, true man, and one who had high aims and interests at heart. I had asked him to give me, for Sir George Grey, a copy of the poem "*Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland*," written in his own hand. In a few days he brought this to me, and explained how it differed in some respects from the usual version, but that he had given us his own original lines. This precious relic is still in Sir George Grey's hands. A few months later, when, with two sisters, I had taken refuge in the south of France, to escape from the cold of the European winter,—we heard from our mother how Germany had celebrated Arndt's ninetieth birthday on the 25th December 1859. Numerous gifts from corporations and individuals, from friends and acquaintances, from many who had never seen him, and even from some who did not disclose their names, streamed in upon him, brought either by congratulatory deputations or sent by post. Numerous letters, and, I believe, 200 telegrams from all parts of Germany, from Kings down to students, poured in upon the aged man. My mother had been the greater part of the day at his house, and her description of the day's events was very interesting, but unfortunately I have not now her letter to refer to. A few weeks later, on January 29, 1860, our mother wrote to us as follows: "To-day, about noon, our dear old faithful friend Arndt has gently fallen asleep. You know how, on his birthday, he was inundated with congratulations and gifts. He seemed to have got happily over all this, and he was not to be prevented in every case from sending answers, in such a manner that he daily took from ten to eighteen letters to the Post Office. I saw him but little during these last weeks, as he was very much occupied. But he is said to have been particularly cheerful and lively, and in several parties (in the circles both of nearer and of more distant friends) to have been in the highest spirits. Thus also at F.'s (I believe it was his last evening out), where he is said to have been especially charming, talking much regarding death and eternity, and in so beautiful a manner that I believe L. (a daughter of the house) noted it down. Already on the 19th instant, however, Mrs. Arndt mentioned in the Nähverein (sewing meeting) that her husband was not quite well. On the 21st instant, she was to have come to me to the reading (of her brother Schleiermacher's letters), but about noon she sent me word that she did not like to leave her husband. On Sunday (January 22), he was a little feverish; but he would not see a doctor. Mrs. Mendelsohn saw him on that day; he was lying on the sofa, but conversed very cheerfully with her, and could not be prevented from bringing downstairs a poem, and reading it aloud to her. That night, however, he had a violent attack of fever with shivering fits, in consequence of which Siegerich (one of the sons) prevailed upon his mother to send at once for the doctor. On Tuesday, Arndt wished me to go to see him on his sick-bed, and spoke to me in his usual affectionate and animated manner. During these days he suffered much pain from a paralytic attack (Hexenschuss) in the back, which pain, however, soon ceased. Afterwards, it is true, he groined and sighed often, talked a good deal, and was during the last two nights, and even in the day time, haunted by feverish fancies, in which his poetical nature and childlike pious mind found expression. Yesterday evening Dr. Velten expressed his fear that paralysis of the lungs might occur, which was indeed the case in the course of the night. Towards noon (on the following day), the breathing became fainter and fainter, and about twelve o'clock his eyes closed of themselves, and he had breathed his last. A quarter of an hour before I had been there with Mrs. F., and left in order to send a telegraphic message to Trier, to Karltrév, (the eldest son), to whom I had already written of his father's illness. Mrs. Arndt had herself written to prepare Nanna (the only daughter, then at Kiel, in a very delicate state of health); and the change for the worse, which came on so very quickly, early this morning, was at once telegraphed there. Dr. Velten calls the illness a gastric fever; the over-irritation of the nervous system having probably caused him to succumb more quickly. During these latter days I have been frequently in the house, also again this afternoon and evening. Dear Mrs. Arndt is, in her quiet way, sweetly grateful, and even glad, that he has not had a long illness to go through. Leubold (another son) and Siegerich have helped her faithfully in nursing him; and this morning, about 10 o'clock, Roderich also arrived from Cologne. They think that his father still recognized him and uttered his name. The real heavy hours are yet to come for the dear wife. Just now it gives her some comfort to show us all the beloved countenance, a fine sight, with the magnificent forehead. Professor Schaaffhausen was also there, and requested to be allowed in the interest of science to take a cast of the face."

Then, in a letter dated January 31, my mother wrote as follows:



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Then, in a letter dated January 31, my mother wrote as follows:

"As you may imagine, great sympathy is felt throughout the town (for Arndt's family), as also near and far. It is to-day eight days since he sent for me to his bedside and desired to be left alone with me. I thought at first that he wished to tell me something about his wife. But he only said, as he has often done since your father's death: 'You must keep up bravely, have good courage, and live long on account of those belonging to you.' \* \* \* \* \* With that he gave me his faithful hand, and grasped mine as firmly as ever. \* \* \* \* \* Mrs. Arndt keeps up with her naturally strong character, but she keenly feels it all. His dear remains look beautiful, as he lies there in his velvet coat, with a laurel wreath (made by your sisters and F.'s girls) round his white head, many other beautiful wreaths covering him. Mrs. Arndt likes to gaze at him, and to show him to those who wish to impress the beloved features once more upon their memory. Karltrév arrived last night from Trier; and the burial is to take place to-morrow. The Rector and Senate (of the University) have undertaken the arrangement of the funeral. From Nanna, also, a letter has been received; she is somewhat better. Were she in good health, she would be the best support of her mother. The poor old lady will have still to live through many hard and bitter experiences."

When I visited Bonn last year, I found Mrs. Arndt very infirm, although still keeping up bravely. Only one son was with her,—her two eldest having died since her husband's death, as well as her daughter, who outlived her father but a few months. Mrs. Arndt's own death took place this year (1870). She lived to the last in Arndt's house, which, as well as the garden, looked quite as of old. They were however purchased by a national subscription soon after Arndt's death, so as to be preserved in remembrance of him. A magnificent statue, by Afinger, is placed on the "Alte Zoll;" it faces the Rhine, that noble river which Arndt had so strongly vindicated as Germany's stream—not her frontier.