

Coleridge Cottage, Clevedon.

BY LADY ELTON.

SOME few years ago a suggestion was made that what had been known for more than sixty years as Coleridge's Cottage in old Church Road, where he spent his honeymoon in 1795, and on leaving which he wrote the lines commencing "Low was our pretty cot," was not after all the residence of the poet, but Glen Cottage in East Clevedon. The arguments in favour of the cottage originally designated as "Coleridge Cottage" are as follows.

In 1795, according to Cottle (the Bristol publisher), whose "Reminiscences of Coleridge and Southey" I have by me, "The situation," to use his own words, "was particularly eligible. It was in the *western* extremity, not in the centre of the village; there was also a small garden with several pretty flowers, and 'the tallest rose tree' was not failed to be pointed out which 'peeped at the chamber window,' and which has been honoured with some beautiful lines."

I must mention that Cottle had ridden down from Bristol to Clevedon to see the newly married couple, but later in the same year, 1795, Mr. Coleridge appears to have found "the neighbours a little too tattling and inquisitive," and decided, for other reasons besides, to take up his abode on Redcliffe Hill, at Mrs. Fricker's house. In March, 1796, he moved to Oxford Street, Bristol, where presumably David Hartley, his son, was born on 20th December, 1796, as a letter from Tom Poole congratulating him on the birth of Hartley, and dated

December 26th, 1796, is addressed to S. T. Coleridge, Oxford Street, Bristol. Now with regard to the village of Clevedon, in 1795 it consisted of a few cottages on the road that leads to the old church, in fact the "western extremity" of the place. East Clevedon was a bare little valley, with at most one or two houses, so the neighbours could hardly have been complained of.

The late Sir Arthur Hallam Elton contributed the following passage to the Clevedon Guide Book about 1877, he says, "Coleridge Cottage may be deemed to be the homestead lying at the western edge of Clevedon village as it was in 1795, with its few houses and scanty population, its old stone cross at the foot of the hill, and its parish stocks safe for the keeping of drunkards." Sir Arthur adds, in reply to a suggestion that Coleridge's Cottage was close to the old parish church, "In all local traditions, possession is an awkward obstacle to get over, and Coleridge's Cottage has, to say the very least of it, the best of half a century to guarantee its claim."

Sir Arthur goes on to say that at the bazaar at Clevedon Court for the funds for completing Christ Church in 1838 (only four years after the poet's death), a drawing of Coleridge Cottage was sold. Cottle himself was still alive, and brought out his second edition of reminiscences in 1847. In Sir Arthur Elton's privately published Memoir of his sister Mary, the drawing sold at the bazaar at Clevedon Court in 1838 is mentioned. In a letter from Mr. Stanley Hutton that appeared in the *Bristol Times and Mirror* a few years ago, he makes the following remarks: "The most convincing proof to me, however, is that Coleridge, or Myrtle Cottage (as it was occasionally called) is the real one, lies in the fact that I have seen a lithograph executed by George Davey, who was in business in Broad Street, Bristol, from 1833 to 1847, entitled 'Coleridge Cottage, Clevedon,' bearing his imprint and that address. Thus the print proves two things, first that the cottage was known at that time as Coleridge Cottage, and the

date shows the print was executed sixty years ago. Further, when comparing the print with an up-to-date photograph, I found conclusive proof that it was one and the same cottage, from the fact that the oven, a feature I believe in Somerset cottages, appears in exactly the same spot in both illustrations." This was evidently the same drawing as was sold at the bazaar in 1838, and Sir Arthur has faced the page with an up-to-date photograph in his book of reminiscences. It seems hardly possible that a mistake could have been made as to the identity of the cottage at that time, considering that Sir Abraham Elton was alive at the time of the bazaar, and had been acquainted with Coleridge when residing at Clevedon. I have referred to the birth of Hartley Coleridge, as most biographies give Clevedon as his birth-place, but this is evidently not the case. The passage I have quoted referring to the birth is from a post-card, written in 1910 by Mr. Ernest Coleridge, and sent by Professor Leonard (Bristol University) to me, in reply to my suggestion that possibly the idea of East Clevedon Cottage having been the residence of the late poet arises from the fact that Mrs. Coleridge had returned to Clevedon for the birth of her son, and gone to another house; this, however, judging by Mr. Ernest Coleridge's remarks, could not possibly have occurred.

In conclusion, after careful review of the whole question, it is not too much to say that no trustworthy evidence has been produced to show that Coleridge, during his stay in Clevedon, ever lived in any other cottage than the one in old Church Road. The faithful Cottle would never have permitted a lithograph of the wrong house to be sold in Bristol during his lifetime without contradiction. Cottle died in 1850. Nor would my great-grandfather, Sir Abraham Elton and his son, who were both well acquainted with the poet, have sanctioned the sale of the same drawing at the Clevedon Court bazaar in 1838.