

## THOMAS WOOLNER AND PAULINE TREVELYAN

### Letters to Ruskin's 'Monitress - Friend'

Thomas Woolner's life-size marble group of a mother teaching her child the Lord's Prayer, one of his most important works, still stands in the central saloon at Wallington Hall, Northumberland. His friends in the Pre-Raphaelite circle were delighted when in 1857 it was commissioned by Sir Walter Calverley Trevelyan and his wife Pauline. At last he was receiving the recognition he deserved. Indeed, as William Bell Scott said, the chance he had been given marked the 'beginning of his great success'.<sup>1</sup>

It was typical of Pauline Trevelyan (1816-66) that she should have been responsible for this necessary encouragement, just as she had done with Scott himself the year before by persuading her husband to let him paint eight large canvases for the new central saloon.<sup>2</sup>

The young Woolner (1825-92) had an attractive, if sometimes truculent and bumptious personality. His body was muscular, his hair thick and reddish, his expression alert. As one of the original seven in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, he also had several eminent friends among artists and writers. When his ambition to be a sculptor-poet, in the tradition of the Brotherhood's 'universal artistry', looked like foundering, he had emigrated to Australia to try his luck in the gold-fields, 'to get money to carry out his ideas in sculpture and do ideal works'.<sup>3</sup> By October 1854 he had returned; the gold had proved a snare, though he had had some modest success in making bronze portrait medallions of Australian worthies. Wisely he now proceeded to make medallions of his friends Carlyle, Browning and Tennyson, to attract some public notice; he also began a marble bust of Tennyson. Soon he received a commission, at the Queen's expense, to provide a statue of Bacon for the new Oxford Museum, with which as it happened the Trevelyan's were much concerned.<sup>4</sup> All the same he felt frustrated, and when Scott had sung the praises of the Trevelyan's, not only as unusual persons but patrons of the arts and close friends of Ruskin, he had appeared disinterested, saying that all people with titles were 'maggots in the wounds of us poor devils who have to fight the battles of life'.<sup>5</sup> Pauline, on hearing his, decided at once she must 'tame' him. And this she did.

Pauline also enjoyed gossip about new books and pictures, and Woolner was good at it. When he realized that she was determined to help him, he saw that she was well supplied with the kind of titbits she liked, particularly about Tennyson whom she admired greatly but had not met. She and Woolner were to keep up a long correspondence,