

AN INTRODUCTION BY CHARLES DICKENS

In the introduction to **Legends and Lyrics—First Series**, Charles Dickens recounts his intriguing discovery and subsequent correspondence with Miss Mary Berwick, an unrecognized talent whose heartfelt poem caught his eye in 1853 while he was overseeing submissions for the weekly journal **Household Words**. Berwick, unknown to Dickens, turned out to be a pseudonym for Adelaide Anne Procter, the eldest daughter of Dickens' old friend, the literary figure Barry Cornwall. Dickens describes this unexpected revelation, which occurred in December 1854, as a testament to Adelaide's honesty, independence, and dignity. Unwilling to have her work published based on personal connections, she had chosen to submit her poems under an alias, hoping they would be judged purely on their own merit.

This anecdote serves dual purposes: it commemorates the late Miss Procter, given Dickens' close ties to her family and elucidates the story behind her adoption of a pseudonym for her literary endeavors. Dickens admires Procter's integrity, refusing to leverage personal relations, and preferring fair judgment of her work alongside contributions from unknown writers.

Dickens further outlines Adelaide Anne Procter's biography, noting her early inclination toward poetry, her linguistic aptitude, and intellectual curiosity. Born in London on October 30, 1825, Procter demonstrated a remarkable memory and rapid understanding from a young age, showing interest in Euclid's problems as a child before mastering French, Italian, and German as she grew older. Before her contributions as Miss Berwick, some of Procter's poems had appeared in the **Book of Beauty** and, aside from limited other publications, much of her work was featured in **Household Words** or **All the Year Round**.

Legends and Lyrics encapsulates Procter's entire poetic output, published posthumously to both honor her memory and to respond to the public's positive reception. Through this introduction, Dickens not only pays homage to a respected and beloved friend and writer but also sheds light on the nuanced ethics and internal struggles of literary publication in Victorian England.

