William Wordsworth: His Life, Works and Influence by G. M. Harper

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mechanic works out some problem which may lead to an improvement in an engine' (p. xxxiii).

But our immediate point is not whether Leslie Stephen or Dr Durham or neither is right. Our point is that it is unscholarly to dispense with investigation and simply assume the meaning of a technical term, especially when on that assumed meaning a more or less revolutionary thesis is based; it is worse when, on the same basis, an acknowledged scholar like Leslie Stephen, whose authority is not to be controverted by a mere assumption, is bluntly accused of malice. And Dr Durham's Notes give us not the slightest help to investigations of this nature, an omission of capital moment. He must imitate the thoroughness of his predecessors and supply much more detailed evidence for the truth of his views before he claims authority for 'vindicating the Age of Anne from false charges.'

Dr Durham's work as an editor is seen to most advantage in his excellent Bibliography; to which we can only object that the titles of the books are sometimes too severely clipped. His Notes are generally helpful, but, as we have tried to show above, very seldom in what is after all the main issue, the study of literary theory. We should like, however, to have been told if Welsted ever did get the 'Opportunity of publishing some Thoughts, I have by me, on Dramatic Writing' (p. 377), for their absence from the Bibliography is not conclusive, as Dr Durham's system omits all publications after 1725, and Welsted lived on to 1747. We are told the source of the 'long quotation' which begins on page 62, but there is nothing either in the text or the Notes to indicate where the quotation ends. It extends to 'the Profitable' (p. 72).

Dr Durham deserves our thanks for carefully reprinting several interesting treatises in a handy and easily accessible form. But we regret we cannot regard this volume as a satisfactory addition to the series, nor at all endorse the statements made on the publisher's cover that Dr Durham's 'is a constructive work marked by a scholarship and a knowledge of his subject which inspires his readers with a confidence in the justice of his conclusions.'

H. B. CHARLTON.

MANCHESTER.

William Wordsworth: His Life, Works and Influence. By G. M. HARPER. 2 vols. London: John Murray. 1916. 8vo. xi + 892 pp.

Mr Harper's *Wordsworth* has appeared at the right moment: *felix opportunitate natiuitatis*. At no time has the fame of Wordsworth stood so high as it does at present. Never before has the twofold character of his genius been so clearly realised: the strain of the *Cuckoo* and the *Lines above Tintern* so plainly seen to be inseparable from that of *The Happy Warrior* and the Sonnets of Liberty and Independence, with such poems as *Michael* and *The Ruined Cottage* for the connecting link between them.

To the many who, under the present storm, have found refuge and strength in the 'healing power' and the unshaken courage of the great poet, these records of his 'life and influence' will be of enthralling interest. Not that Wordsworth has hitherto been so ill-served in this matter as is sometimes supposed. The *Memoirs* published by his nephew, the late Bishop of Lincoln, immediately after his death—if allowance be made for the author's manifest desire to press a free and inspired genius into the service of a particular creed and a particular Church system, and for his suppression of vital facts which might have interfered with the general acceptance of his pious portrait—have considerable value: if only because they quote freely from the best record of a great poet's daily life which has ever been given, the *Journals* written by Dorothy during the seminal years of Alfoxden and Grasmere. Professor Knight again, both by his *Life* and still more by his publication of the *Journals* and family letters, laboured stoutly in the cause. Finally, in M. Legouis' *Jeunesse de Wordsworth* we have a literary and biographical study of the growth of the young poet's mind which is altogether beyond price.

Mr Harper, himself a pupil of M. Legouis, is loud in praise of his master's work. And this is the more generous as, in retracing the ground of *La jeunesse*—especially that crucial part of it which covers the year spent by the poet in revolutionary France—he was manifestly and consciously working at a disadvantage. On the whole, however, it must be said that he has shown much skill and judgment in meeting this and other difficulties and that, as an account of the *whole* life of the poet, no book approaches this in excellence. And if in what follows it is necessary to lay stress upon what seem the weaker spots in Mr Harper's performance, this, which is the deliberate opinion of the reviewer, must be constantly borne in mind.

The defects of the book may be reduced to two: an insufficiency in the author's treatment of the new and exceedingly important matter which he has brought to light concerning Wordsworth's youth; and the immoderate stress he lays upon the 'fossilisation,' the narrowing of intellectual and political sympathies, which befell him long before he reached old age.

The former matter is something of a long story. Mr Harper has discovered—or, if not that, he is the first writer explicitly to recognise—a fact which goes to the very root of Wordsworth's character as it was in the crucial period of its growth. During his sojourn in France, the young poet fell in love with a girl who seems to have lived in the neighbourhood of Blois and by her had a daughter, Caroline, who must have been born either in 1792 or the following year: in the latter case, after the father's enforced return to England, which took place certainly not later than the middle of January 1793, and probably in December 1792. He remained in constant correspondence, and probably in occasional communication, with the mother, Annette Vallon, until 1802, when he visited Calais, shortly before his own marriage, apparently with the express purpose of meeting both

mother and daughter¹. He provided some kind of a dowry on Caroline's marriage, which was planned for 1815 but which, owing to the untimely reappearance of Napoleon at the critical moment, did not actually take place until the following year; and at the earlier date he had arranged to be represented at it by his sister Dorothy and his wife's sister, Sara Hutchinson. His last recorded sight both of mother and daughter was on a visit to Paris, in company with his wife and Crabb Robinson, in 1820.

These are the facts, so far as Mr Harper brings definite evidence on the matter. He suggests—but it is merely a surmise—that marriage may have been prohibited by Annette's parents, who are thought to have been royalists and who, if so, may not unnaturally have disliked to see their daughter united to a struggling, unknown foreigner who was also a republican and a protestant, if not a free-thinker or an 'atheist.' But whether the marriage was proposed before, or after, the original fault had been committed, whether the objection to it came also from the side of Wordsworth's family or no, whether indeed it was ever proposed at all—these are matters of pure conjecture; or rather, if they are known to anyone now living, the knowledge has been studiously withheld from the world at large.

No man with a decent respect for human frailty, or a just knowledge of his own weakness, will dream of passing judgment upon Wordsworth for the original fault. What it really concerns us to know is: What was the spirit in which he met the obligations which his own act had brought upon him? what sacrifices did he make with a view to shielding mother and child from some at least of the evils for which he—in part, at least, and probably for the greater part—was responsible? Were the obstacles to marriage in very deed insurmountable? or did he allow himself to be put off by difficulties which courage and resolution might have broken down?

To none of these questions does Mr Harper give even the semblance of an answer. The fault is not his. It must be thrown back upon the author of the original *Memoirs* of Wordsworth's life, who seems to have deliberately suppressed all the facts bearing upon this episode of his uncle's history and to whom much information, now in all probability lost beyond recovery, must have been accessible. It is possible, indeed, that he may have been acting under instructions either from Wordsworth himself, or from his widow. If so, he was undoubtedly in a cruel position. But the plain truth is that, if all the crucial facts of the poet's life were not to be published, no *Memoirs* ought to have been written at all. In these cases, it is a question of all, or nothing. And the publication of the *Memoirs*, without any mention of what for at least ten years must have been a main factor in the life of the poet and of his whole bearing towards the outer world, is a peculiarly flagrant example of the insincerity, the wholesale betrayal of the first elements of candour, which has been the bane of biography in this country from

¹ The sonnet, 'It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,' then written, is addressed to Caroline.

the beginning. Carlyle made a noble protest against this evil practice in his review of Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. But the biographers have continued to follow it and readers have continued to accept, and even to applaud, it from that day to this.

That the Bishop of Lincoln was well aware of the facts, is perfectly certain. Knowing what we now know, it is impossible to read what he says of the poet's residence in France without seeing this at a glance: 'Wordsworth's condition in France was a very critical one: he was an orphan, young, inexperienced, impetuous, enthusiastic, with no friendly voice to guide him, in a foreign country, and that country in a state of revolution; and this revolution, it must be remembered, had not only taken up arms against the monarchy and other ancient institutions, but had declared war against Christianity. The most licentious theories were propounded; all restraints were broken; libertinism was law. He was encompassed with strong temptations; and although it is not the design of the present work to chronicle the events of his life except so far as they illustrate his writings, yet I could not pass over this period of it without noticing the dangers which surround those who in an ardent emotion of enthusiasm put themselves in a position of peril without due consideration of the circumstances which ought to regulate their practice¹.'

If this is not a hint, and a pretty broad one, that Wordsworth's 'practice' was 'licentious,' it is mere idle talk. The wonder is that we were all so blind as not to see this long ago. To put ourselves off with the plea that it is merely a clerical amplification of the 'war against Christianity declared by the Revolution' and accepted at that time (though in no aggressive sense) by the poet, is to do an injustice to the Bishop's head. His head was in the right place. Whether the same thing can be said of his heart, is another matter. Can it be honestly maintained that it was candid to speak of the poet 'entering on his mission and his ministry²' when the biographer was all the time concealing facts which would have caused many persons—most unjustly, no doubt, and absurdly—to deny his claim to any mission or ministry whatsoever?

It may be said that the Bishop explicitly disclaims the title of 'biographer'; that, in a rather embarrassed 'introductory chapter,' he pleads that his uncle's works are his true life, and that it would therefore be 'a superfluous and presumptuous enterprise to encroach upon their province and to invade the biographical eminence on which his Poems stand³.' Accordingly, it is not as a biography but as *Memoirs*—as 'a biographical commentary on the Poet's works'—that the Bishop wishes his volumes to be judged.

This, no doubt, is the excuse with which the Bishop, who was otherwise a man of very scrupulous conscience, strove to satisfy himself. But can it be reckoned satisfactory? Can it be denied that his words meant one thing to himself, who was in the secret, and were bound to

¹ *Memoirs*, I, pp. 74–5.

² *Ib.* p. 2.

³ *Ib.*

mean quite another to his readers, who were not? And, with no desire to bear hardly upon a man who was plainly under a dire temptation to baulk the truth out of respect both for the living and the dead, it is difficult to acquit him of prevarication: a prevarication all the more insidious, because it is executed with consummate skill.

All these mists are dispelled by a few plain words from Mr Harper. And, so far, nothing could be better. The disappointing thing is that, having found the truth, he should show so little desire to make use of it. This incident in Wordsworth's life is a new fact to him, but it is nothing more. It may flit across his pages from time to time, under date of letters received from Annette; but, to judge from these volumes it had no more influence than the man in the moon upon the poet's life. That it should have any bearing upon his character, or leave any trace upon his way of thought and, very possibly, upon his subsequent actions, seems never to have crossed the mind of his biographer. Yet this surely is the one thing that matters.

It may be objected that, by the reticence of those concerned and the spite of time, all such traces are now irrecoverably lost. And, if details only were in question, that is unfortunately too true. But, after all, details are only signs and symbols; it is the spiritual process, and not the word or deed which brings it to our sight or hearing, that ultimately counts. Given, then, the facts as brought to light by Mr Harper; given also our knowledge on the one hand of Wordsworth's nature as revealed in his life and written word and, on the other, of the manner in which a spirit, deep and noble as his, habitually works; is it impossible that we should frame to ourselves some notion of what this unhappy love-story ought to mean in our judgment of his character, of what it meant to the man himself during the years when it was a vital part of his experience, of the mingled joy and sorrow which he was daily called upon to face? At any rate, to fail in that attempt is better than never to have made it; and it will be something to have recognised the problem, even though any full solution of it is no longer within reach.

The first thing to strike us in the whole story is the passionate strain it reveals in the nature of Wordsworth: a strain which has often been spoken of, but of which, until these facts were made known, it was hard to offer any tangible proof. Full of self-reliance and plunged in a whirlpool where the old landmarks had been swept out of sight and the old canons had lost much of their restraining power, it may readily be believed that a youth of this nature, conscious of his own purity of motive, should without questioning have surrendered himself to a passion which seemed to hold 'so much of heaven' and which could not be stifled without certain pain alike to himself and to another, without possible starvation to all that was best and deepest in her heart as well as in his own.

It was this, doubtless, that gave Wordsworth so deep a sympathy with those who had fallen victims to their own passions and to others'. It was with the consciousness of this behind him that, in the first flowering-time of his genius, he wrote such poems as *The Thorn* and

The forsaken Indian Woman, as *Ruth* or that 'Somersetshire Tragedy,' the story of which was told to the present writer more than forty years ago, but which inexplicable scruples on the part of the poet's representatives still withhold from publication. Frankly, there has been too much prudery in the handling both of Wordsworth's life and of his poems. It is devoutly to be hoped that an end may now be put to it for ever.

Of the published poems above mentioned, *Ruth* is by far the most significant, though we must not exclude the possibility that, as Mr Harper suggests, a poem of a very different sort, *Vaudracour and Julia*, is a pale reflection, with the parts inverted, of the story of William and Annette. *Ruth*, however, is a poem apart. Not only is it conceived throughout in a more idealising temper than any of the earlier poems in question; but, under a now transparent veil, it gives us the spirit of the youthful poet as it was when he stood face to face with the Revolution. In the 'youth from Georgia's shore'—the

Youth to whom was given
So much of earth, so much of heaven,
And such impetuous blood

—it is impossible not to see a darkened image of Wordsworth himself, as we now know him: wilful, passionate, in deep though half unconscious revolt against 'the meagre, stale, forbidding ways Of custom, law and statute'; more 'kindled' than 'restrained' by the keenly felt forces which surrounded him not only 'in earth and heaven, in glade and bower,' but also, and still more, in the field of heroic action which daily unrolled itself before his eyes:

Before him shone a glorious world,
Fresh as a banner bright, unfurled
To music suddenly.
He looked upon the hills and plains
And seemed as if let loose from chains,
To live at liberty¹.

This is one side of the picture: the passionate upheaval of a strong nature, stirred to its depths by a first love and a first intuition of the miracles to be wrought by human brotherhood; an upheaval which made a new heaven and a new earth for the youth who, from this double experience, learned for the first time the full meaning of the claim that 'man is born free' and recognised at the same moment that it was his lot to witness, perhaps to aid in, the stoutest blow ever struck for the recovery of that birthright.

The other side of the picture is no less significant. It is the sleepless self-control which, when once the first sweep of the storm was passed, enabled him to stand firm against every prompting of weakness from within and every discouragement that the wreck of his civic hopes might but too easily have fastened upon him from without. It was

¹ The Bishop of Lincoln, who knew the truth from the first, was not slow to point out the resemblance. *Memoirs*, I, p. 73.

always evident that, through the fiery trial of the Revolution and the Napoleonic tyranny, he kept a saner judgment, as well as a more heroic temper, than any man in this country, probably than any save a very small remnant in the whole of Europe. We now know that, during the first half of this period, his inner life must have been one of constant struggle both against vain remorse for what he had done rashly in the past and against fresh outbreaks of the same passionate impulse in the present.

With a deep and brooding nature like his, this is none the less certain because it is only to be divined. There are, however, various recorded facts which cannot be fully explained unless the insistent pressure of this personal sorrow and this personal struggle is present to our mind. Who has not felt that the poet's own account of the discouragement and weariness which fell upon him after his return from France needs some further explanation? And is not this supplied, when we know that, over and above his very just cause of public sorrow and public indignation, he was also suffering under a cruel personal bereavement and an abiding consciousness of wrong done by himself, however unintentionally, to others? The former motive is not to be belittled—to do so would be to misunderstand some of the deepest springs of his nature—but it requires the addition of the other motive—or rather, complication of motives—before the facts can be adequately explained.

One of the worst consequences, which commonly follow from such acts as Wordsworth had been hurried into, he had the courage to foresee and to avert. That is the secrecy which most men observe upon such subjects, and which is none the less degrading because it is too often accepted as a duty. From this degradation Wordsworth saved himself by making no secret of the matter. During the first years, he seems to have erred, if at all, on the side of telling too many people rather than too few. His uncles knew it; Dorothy knew it; her friend Jane Porter, Mrs Marshall, knew it; the Clarksons knew it; Mrs Wordsworth and eventually her sister Sara knew it; and at a later time, when all but the most scrupulously honest man would have taken pains to keep silence, Crabb Robinson was informed of it. With all these people, and possibly a good many more, in the secret, it had manifestly ceased to be any secret at all. Few things could be more honourable to Wordsworth than this.

There are other consequences which it was perhaps harder to foresee, and certainly harder to ward off. A man who has once been betrayed into an act of which he repents, especially when his mistake is in part due to over-confidence, may easily lose nerve for the future. Against the more obvious forms of this danger it is clear that Wordsworth was on his guard. In the ordinary affairs of life, there is no sign that he ever lost faith in himself, or ever shrank from shouldering the responsibilities which the day's task brought before him. His stalwart disregard of what other men might say or think of him was among the first things to strike the keen, but none too friendly eye of

Carlyle, when the two men met some ten or twelve years before the elder's death.

In more insidious shapes, however, it is not so clear that he escaped the timidity which the consciousness of a weak spot in his own armour might too naturally bring upon him. Was this the reason why he never published that *Apology for the French Revolution*, 'by a Republican,' into which he had breathed so much of the thoughts and feelings that sprang from his personal contact with the greatest event of modern times? Was it the reason, or among the reasons, why he hastily dropped those schemes for a periodical *Philanthropist*, which was to be the mouthpiece of 'that odious class of men called democrats, of which I shall for ever continue'? Was it the reason why even *The Prelude* was never published until after his death?¹ Finally, was it one of the reasons for the reaction which came over him before he had well reached middle age and which, however disproportionate the bulk assigned to it by Mr Harper, is still a thing to be reckoned with in any estimate of his life?

It is impossible to say for certain. All these things may have been due not to the dread of consequences, but to a purely constitutional shrinking from publicity, a 'delight in privacy and quiet',² with which any specific apprehensions may have nothing to do whatsoever. And, in the last instance cited, it is manifest that such apprehensions must have worked in a far more indirect and subtle manner than in the others. Still, in the light of our present knowledge, it is hard to resist the suspicion that they did count for something, that—in the earlier cases mentioned—they may even have turned the scale in favour of that guarded silence which, so far as his public utterances went, he maintained upon these matters to the end. And the first of these reticences at any rate it is impossible not to regret. It may be perfectly true, as Mr Harper says, that publication of the *Apology* might have altered the whole subsequent tenor of his life; that it might have turned him into the 'man of strife' that Milton became, with his eyes open, during the score of years in which he might naturally have looked to reap the chief harvest of his genius. It may be perfectly true that, from the peculiar bent of his genius, Wordsworth might have suffered, even more than Milton may have expected to suffer, from the sacrifice. But it is equally true that it rested solely with him to continue the strife, or to hold his hand directly the first blow had been delivered. The main thing was to declare himself, even if it were only to have done with it for ever. And, after all, something—much even—is due to courage and conviction.

Did Wordsworth make any effort to break down the barriers which parted him from Annette? did he do all that was humanly possible to

¹ It is clear that the real *Prelude* was thrown into the waste-paper basket, and that what we have is merely a revision (carried out in 1839). In the Books called *Residence in France*, the revision, both from political and personal motives, is likely to have been particularly unsparing. See Harper, II, p. 407.

² Letter to James Tobin, March 6th, 1798.

provide for her and the child? These are questions which are vital to a true judgment of his character. They are also questions to which, with our present knowledge, it is impossible to glean more than hints and fragments of an answer.

It has sometimes been said that he returned from France because his family, alarmed for his safety, cut off the supplies. For this belief, as Mr Harper points out, there is no authority. His original biographer—and he, so far as we know, is our only warrant in the matter—merely says that, being ‘riveted to the spot by a mysterious spell,’...‘he was obliged by circumstances to return to England.’ This ‘mysterious’ phrase may cover pressure from Annette’s family just as well as from his own. And the incidents related in *Vaudracour and Julia* may be thought to lend colour to this alternative conjecture. It is, however, no more than a conjecture; though, if true, it would seem to supply a more urgent reason for his departure. Yet a third explanation is offered by a statement, which Mr Harper quotes, made by ‘an old Republican, named Bailey,’ to the effect that he had ‘warned Wordsworth that his connection with the Mountain’—rather the Girondins—‘rendered his situation perilous; and the poet decamped with great precipitation.’ This seems to agree with the account suggested by *The Prelude*; it is perhaps the most likely explanation of all.

There is, however, strong ground for believing that, in spite of the barriers set up by the war, he contrived to return to France in the autumn of 1793, doubtless for the sake, or in the hope, of once more seeing Annette. The evidence for this, as Mr Harper points out, is a statement made by Wordsworth himself to Carlyle (about 1840), to the effect that he witnessed the execution of Gorsas (Oct. 1793): a matter of fact about which he can hardly have been mistaken. Whether Carlyle misunderstood his words, is of course another matter. The suggestion, put forward by Mr Harper, of a later visit (1799) rests upon a manifestly wrong date (1799 for 1790) given by Wordsworth to Miss Fenwick. The mention of Robert Jones, as his companion on this occasion, puts the matter beyond doubt¹.

On the other question—what did he do for the support of mother and child?—we are left still more completely to conjecture. The one certain fact is that, as in duty bound, he made some provision for Caroline on her marriage. This appears from a letter of Dorothy’s to Mrs Clarkson (Dec. 31, 1814), in which occurs the sentence: ‘The journey to France will be very expensive, which we can ill afford, and the money would be better spent in augmenting my niece’s wedding portion.’ But that tells us nothing as to the amount. Again, from a comparison of Wordsworth’s income with his expenditure during the years preceding his marriage, Mr Harper infers that the difference was sent to Annette; and it may be hoped that he is not mistaken. And with these two indications—one of them, it must be admitted, rather hazy—our knowledge comes to an end. If any further records exist in

¹ Wordsworth’s *Prose Works*, ed. Grosart, III, p. 34.

private hands, it is to be hoped they will be published without more delay. The policy of concealment has broken down, as it was bound to do; and in justice to a great memory, if for nothing else, it is necessary that the whole truth should now be made known.

So much for what seems to be the first main defect of Mr Harper's valuable book: the indifferent use he has made of the new facts which he has discovered relating to Wordsworth's youth. We now turn to the other questionable point in his survey, his treatment of the poet's old age.

It must at once be admitted that, so far as the practical questions of the time went, Wordsworth ceased to live after the fall of Napoleon; that, as Crabb Robinson wrote to Dorothy (Feb. 1826), half playfully and in the character of an imaginary critic of the future, he 'survived to the fifth decennary of the nineteenth century, but appears to have died in 1814, as far as life consisted in an active sympathy with the temporary (temporal?) welfare of his fellow creatures. He had written heroically and divinely against the tyranny of Napoleon, but was quite indifferent to all the successive tyrannies which disgraced the succeeding times'.¹ And there is no generous and open spirit but must bitterly regret that this was so. The more true this is, however, the more disproportionate does the space devoted by Mr Harper to this part of his subject—more than 150 pages²—appear to be. Under his hands, the poet is as long in dying as Clarissa or Lieutenant Lefevre. And, even if there were nothing to be said on the other side, this is surely to give a very false impression of the man's life as a whole. It is to be judged not by his blank years, but by his years of vision and insight: not by what he failed to do, but by what he did.

In fact, however, there is much to be said on the other side: many qualifying circumstances, both political and personal, which have to be taken into account.

Mr Harper—possibly from a natural unfamiliarity with the course of things in Europe and England—is far too apt to talk as though, in the political movement of the time, all the good were on one side and all the bad upon the other. It is perhaps a consequence of this that he habitually speaks of the 'party of progress' as though it were one and indivisible; as though Rousseau and Godwin, Paine and Thelwall, Brougham and Bentham had all spoken with one voice and all worked for the same ends. Nothing, in fact, could be more ludicrously unlike the truth. And, if Wordsworth was ever drawn to one or all of these men by one side of their doctrine, it by no means follows that he was bound to accept the whole system of any one of them; still less that, if he could have acted with any one of them, he could have acted with all of them together. So far, however, as all the Englishmen in this list may be taken to stand for any one range of ideas, is it not obvious that

¹ A few years later he expressed the same reproach, very delicately, in a letter to Wordsworth himself.

² This, however, is as nothing to the Bishop of Lincoln, who devotes nearly the whole of his second volume to this period.

this range was a very narrow, and comparatively unfruitful, one? one, moreover, with which even at the height of his revolutionary fervour—much more, in the years of his creative energy—he must have been at least as much out of sympathy as in?

Let us for a moment attempt to put ourselves in his place, as he stood at the parting of the ways during the crucial months which saw the fall of Napoleon and the restoration of the Bourbons. One era of history was closed; another was about to open. Into the struggle now ended he had thrown his whole heart and his whole genius. Under the most favourable circumstances, it would have been hard enough for him to make face to the new scene which lay before him. And the circumstances were, in fact, as unfavourable as it was possible for them to be. It was with the Whigs and the Radicals that he ought to have ranged himself; for, with all their imperfections, it was they who in the main represented the forces of the future, the forces with which he himself had sympathised before the issue was confused by the appearance of Napoleon. But the Whigs and the Radicals had put themselves out of court. In the struggle against Napoleon they had not merely been half-hearted; they had, for the most part, been actively hostile to the national cause, which was also the cause of liberty and of Europe. The man who had staked everything upon that cause would have been more than human, if he had not regarded them with the deepest suspicion.

Nor was this all. Even apart from their subservience to Napoleon, their ideals were such as a man like Wordsworth could not possibly have accepted. They were hostile to the local liberties and the local traditions which he valued beyond all things. They cared for nothing in the life of the country but the development of its industries. And they were pure, not to say blatant, individualists. Even to the present moment we are still suffering from the completeness of their triumph. Wordsworth himself would have added yet another grievance, that they were none too friendly to the Church: a grievance which we may perhaps translate into the wider and less sectarian statement that the inner and spiritual life of the country, which to him was all-important, to them counted for little or nothing.

Such was the gulf which parted Wordsworth from the men who, at that moment, stood for the cause of freedom and of progress. Is there much wonder that he was loath to cross it? The only alternative, however, was to range himself boldly with the borough-mongers and coercionists, with the Holy Alliance and the reaction: with Liverpool and Sidmouth, with Metternich and Ferdinand VII: in other words, with those whose chief aim was to bar the way against the Revolution which he had once applauded, and to trample upon those smaller nationalities—it might be the Basques, it might be the Italians—whose struggles, so long as they were directed against Napoleon, had called forth his whole-hearted admiration. And this alternative he promptly proceeded to adopt. Ought he not to have seen that, whatever his differences with Brougham and Cartwright, they were as nothing, for the practical purposes which determine action, to those which parted him from the

men of the Regency and the Restoration? that anything in the world was better than to put himself in the same galley with George IV and Francis II, with Frederick William of Prussia, with the two Ferdinands of Spain and of Naples? Yet, however sharply he might blame their isolated acts, this was precisely what he did.

Enough has been said to show that the question was by no means so simple as Mr Harper supposes; and that, whatever course Wordsworth had chosen, some of his deepest instincts were bound to suffer cruelly both before and after the decision. So much for the political difficulties; we now pass to the more personal aspect of the question.

Mr Harper insists strongly upon the intellectual and moral deterioration which came over Wordsworth during the last thirty years or so of his long life. It may be doubted whether his estimate is correct: whether he has not made too much of straws—themselves not always proved for certain—which float upon the surface, and overlooked the silent movement of the deep current flowing beneath.

As to the presence of these alleged limitations the evidence is curiously conflicting. The two best accounts of the poet in his old age are those of Carlyle and Mill, both of which are quoted by Mr Harper. The former loudly asserts their presence; the latter, more quietly but none the less firmly, denies it. Now, of the two, it is surely clear that Mill was the better witness. His mind was better balanced and better trained; and, even if there had been no political or religious difference to put him on his guard, he was certainly not the man to give way to uncritical or ungrounded admiration. Carlyle on the other hand, as all his published utterances go to show, was the most grudging of observers. Beyond the charmed circle of Germany and his own family, it is doubtful whether he ever found pleasure in praising. His first impulse, on coming across any man of mark, was, too plainly, to pick holes. One after another, he met nearly all the noted Englishmen of his day; and Southey, saved perhaps by his comparatively modest reputation, was the only one to escape his tooth. It may be questioned whether even Goethe would have stood the ordeal of a personal interview. To Wordsworth—partly, it would appear, out of jealousy for the fame of his beloved Germans—he seems to have been especially prickly. ‘Richter could have put him in his signet-ring’ is the sapient verdict found in one of his Journals; and the elaborate portrait in the *Reminiscences* bears obvious traces of the same preoccupation. The portrait is brilliant in the last degree; but unfortunately it is taken through a crooked lens.

Mill’s portrait is far less of a literary triumph; but it bears the stamp of truth on every line. Now the first thing to strike this young man in Wordsworth was ‘the extensive range of his thoughts and feelings,’ the width and balance of his judgment and ‘the extreme comprehensiveness and philosophical spirit which is in him. He seems to know the pros and cons of every question; and when you think he strikes the balance wrong, it is only because you think he estimates erroneously some matter of fact.’ Mill was also ‘much pleased with the universality of his relish for all good poetry, however dissimilar to

his own, and with the freedom and simplicity with which every person about him seemed to be in the habit of discussing and attacking any passage or poem in his works which did not please them.' It is especially curious—for the two men met at the moment when the Reform Bill was a burning question (1831)—that Mill is careful to note that 'he talks on no subject more instructively than on states of society and forms of government.' There is not much of the intellectual fossil, or the domestic tyrant, in all this. Yet these are the two characteristics upon which Mr Harper seems most concerned to insist.

Mr Harper is disposed to attribute much of the 'narrowness' of Wordsworth's later years to his loneliness; to the fact that, after his return from Germany, he lived as a 'recluse.' The same complaint has often been made against Rousseau; and with about as much reason in one case as in the other. In truth, this is one of the phrases which pass glibly from mouth to mouth, until it occurs to someone to ask what meaning, if any, lies behind them. How much does any man, once settled in life, really 'mingle his mind,' as Johnson said, with any of those beyond the walls of his own home? A few rare spirits, with a genius for the exchange of thought, may keep the approaches open for converse of this kind—the only kind that counts—to the very end. But with most men over thirty or so it is an affair from the lips outward, and little more; it can hardly leave any trace upon their inner growth. And if this is true of men with no very strongly marked vocation, still more is it true of those whose life is given to some absorbing intellectual occupation, the first condition of which is solitary thought and study; and most of all is it the case with a man like Wordsworth or Rousseau, who has an intense spiritual experience to store up and deliver to the world. Such men are from their very nature—as both Carlyle and Harriet Martineau saw and said of Wordsworth—'solitary, isolated, impregnable'; and, however genial they may be when friendly intercourse chances to come their way, it is hard to believe that their inner life is touched in any marked degree by such chances, or that anything but loss could follow from deliberate attempts to multiply or create them. The everyday occasions of life, the common duties of the home and of ordinary good-fellowship, are enough to keep the heart open and active. And when that is once assured, all else counts for little or nothing.

After all, who can think of Wordsworth as anything but the 'recluse of Grasmere and Rydal? and how would it have been possible for him to be what he was, or to do what he did, in any surroundings substantially other than those which he deliberately chose and which became one with him, as he with them?

In Wordsworth's case, it is further to be remembered that opportunities of meeting his intellectual equals—or as nearly such as his country had to offer—were much greater than is perhaps commonly supposed. Quite apart from his pretty frequent visits to London, there were Coleridge, Southey and the Clarksons within the reach of a stout walk; and at a later time, Arnold and Miss Martineau, Mrs Fletcher

and Lady Richardson, almost at his door; not to mention the visitors whom every summer brought in constantly growing numbers to the Lakes. And with what scorn would he have treated the suggestion that even these had more to teach him than the statesmen and cottagers of the country-side, or the children for whom, as they clung to his cloak and trousers, he cut switches from the hedge.

Mr Harper is rather severe upon the 'circle of adoring women' who lovingly guarded him and who, as the biographer seems to think, did him no good by their admiration. On this there are two things to be said. In the first place, this—or rather, the risk of this—is the price a man has to pay for the home ties he has created: ties which, in this as in other cases, were never a matter of choice, but of obligation. And in the eyes of most men, the loss, even at the worst, is small indeed in comparison with the immeasurable gain. In the second place, it may well be doubted whether the adulation was either as intense, or as damaging, as Mr Harper supposes; and whether, assuming that it was so, a few more dinner-parties, or a few more talks with Charles Lamb and Tom Poole, could have done anything to mitigate its effects. Mrs Wordsworth certainly seems to have been able to hold her own against her husband; and if there were moments when he would have wished her admiration to be more demonstrative, I do not think we need at once jump to the conclusion that his 'appetite had grown by what it fed on' from the other two ladies' hands. The evidence of Mill, quoted above, is clearly against any such construction; and a better witness than Mill it would be difficult to find.

On a review of the whole matter, it may readily be admitted that, comparatively early in middle life, a certain stiffness came over the whole being of Wordsworth; and that, after his forty-fifth year, he was little accessible either to new ideas or to new forms of poetical inspiration: and this, at a time when, if not new ideas, at least new applications of them were certainly not lacking, and when England, not for the first time in her history, had become 'a nest of singing birds.' Even so, it must be remembered that his considered judgment first of Shelley—we must take leave to forget Trelawney's rattling anecdote—and then of Tennyson was strongly, and with much insight, in their favour. It must be remembered also that his almost total inability to read set up obstacles against the entry of new thoughts and new forms of utterance which it is not easy to overrate: a fact which must also be borne in mind when we are tempted to criticise his dependence upon the 'adoring circle of women.'

But is there not something more behind? Can we resist the conclusion that in this arrest of growth, so far as it existed, there were physical causes at work? and that, if, with some notable exceptions, his creative impulse ceased at forty-five, that was because his physical frame, his vital energy, were early worn out? The passionate life of his early years, the intense concentration of his creative period, would seem to have taken more out of him than he or others were aware of. And, when we come to consider the matter, nothing could be more natural or

more likely. Few men have ever crowded so much intensity of effort as he did into the years from 1792 to 1814. And it is small wonder that the strain, of which there is abundant evidence in Dorothy's Journal, should have broken him down at an age when many men have their best work not behind them but before. Something of the same kind may be traced in Shakespeare, with whom, however, it took a different form and ended in a far earlier death. And if this be the true explanation, it is clear that the talk of narrowness and fossilisation is largely out of place and that all blame, awarded on such grounds, is inconsiderate and unjust.

That Wordsworth was touched by reaction in political matters, it would be idle to deny. To one who had seen the Revolution with his own eyes and was, moreover, so deeply out of sympathy with the ideals proclaimed by the reformers of his own country, that was natural, though regrettable, enough. But there are things which go even deeper than politics. And, in this inner region, who can believe that he ever broke with his own past? Is it conceivable that the man who wrote the *Lines above Tintern* could ever have forced his own thoughts about God within the four corners of a Church formulary, or that the poet of the *Cuckoo* and the *Daffodils* could ever have lost the vision which they brought him in his prime?

It is to be wished that Mr Harper had laid more weight upon these and kindred considerations. In default of this, his book—in many respects so valuable and so obviously a labour of love—seems to do scant justice to a great memory, and consequently to leave an impression which he himself can hardly have desired.

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LONDON.

Thomas Hardy. By HAROLD CHILD. (Writers of the Day.) London: T. Nisbet and Co. 1916. 8vo. ix + 120 pp.

'Unhappy the man' says the proverb 'whose fame is bigger than his means,' and many penny lanterns have been extinguished by the splutter of contemporary laudation. That Thomas Hardy is a true luminary is revealed, if in no other way, by the imperturbability of his flame. The Johnsons, Abercrombies, Hedgcocks, and Duffins, have been unable by their united effort to perturb the bright and increasing glow of his reputation, and he has found a real exponent—to our mind—in Harold Child, who has devoted 120 pages as an Introductory Chapter to the Novels in a series which has not, so far as we know, been so well served before, and in which we see that studies are all but due upon Galsworthy, Mrs Humphry Ward, and Edith Wharton.

If asked as to the subject of Hardy's novels, one would perhaps be inclined to say that Love and the Wessex Soil are the themes of which he is fondest. One of Hardy's special contributions to the spirit of the age is his exploration of the unnoticed, forgotten, myriads of dull