

## EARLY INTERCOURSE OF THE WORDSWORTHS AND DE QUINCEY.

BY DE QUINCEY'S BIOGRAPHER.

WITH HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED LETTERS.



DE QUINCEY, it will be remembered, tells us that he owed to the reading of the "Lyrical Ballads," and especially to the study of the "Ancient Mariner," the unfolding of his mind. His early instructive preconception in favor of English literature over that of the ancients—familiar as he was with that—was confirmed by his youthful devotion to Wordsworth and Coleridge. The "Lyrical Ballads" were published in 1798, and De Quincey, we learn, read them in the following year, while still only a mere schoolboy. His admiration for the two great poets henceforth amounted to a passion. He was on the outlook for everything, however trifling, from their hands. Nor did he, in spite of the peculiarity of his circumstances in some of the immediately succeeding years, miss much. His pilgrimages to the places most closely associated with the poets are well known; his anonymous gift of a considerable slice of his patrimony, through Joseph Cottle of Bristol, to Coleridge, to enable him comfortably to complete the work on which he was understood to be then engaged, suffices to attest De Quincey's sincerity and his firm belief in their greatness, and their power to give to English literature contributions in which future generations would find delight and profit. And all this on the part of a schoolboy, while as yet, in influential quarters, Wordsworth and Coleridge were only tabooed and laughed at. His first journey to Wordsworth's neighborhood, with the intention of calling on the poet, and then his retreat in an access of shyness and self-distrust, he has himself described in characteristic style in his "Autobiographic Sketches" and elsewhere.

His determination to devote all his powers to awaken the public to the value and significance of the protest of the authors of the "Lyrical Ballads" against eighteenth-century artificiality, and the return of the authors to simplicity, nature, and reality, speaks for his self-denial as well as for his insight: for, in these days, little profit or even fame seemed

to lie in that direction. So little encouragement did he get for his attempted poetic proselytism at Oxford that he came at last to cease speaking of poetry altogether to anybody; and even from friends and those who might have been regarded as in some degree sympathetic he met with unexpected rebuffs. In the notes of De Quincey's "Conversations" by Richard Woodhouse, which Dr. R. Garnett was privileged recently to give to the public,<sup>1</sup> we find the following under date of September 28, 1821:

The Opium-Eater was formerly (and he is still) a great admirer of Wordsworth. So much was he so, that he would not even bring himself to mention his name in Oxford, for fear of having to encounter ridiculous observations or jeering abuse of his favorite, who was laughed at by most of the Oxonians. Of this he felt himself so impatient that he forbore even to speak upon the subject. Meeting one time with Charles Lamb, who, he understood, had praised Wordsworth's poetry, he was induced to mention the poet's name, and to speak of him in high terms. Lamb gave him praise, but rather more qualified than the Opium-Eater expected, who spoke with much warmth on the subject, and complained that Lamb did not do Wordsworth justice; upon which Lamb, in his dry, facetious way, remarked, "If we are to talk in this strain, we ought to have said grace before we began our conversation." This observation so annoyed the Opium-Eater that he instantly left the room, and has never seen Lamb since.

"This anecdote," said Hessey, "the Opium-Eater told me himself, along with some others of a similar tenor, in exemplification of points in his own character. He told it with much humor, and was quite sensible how ridiculous his conduct was; and he will be glad to see Lamb again, who, he supposes, will have long since forgotten or forgiven the circumstance."

But it is evident that as regards his Wordsworth propaganda, De Quincey soon learned to some extent to combine the harmlessness of the dove with the cunning of the serpent, and carefully to diagnose and discriminate those with whom he was brought into contact, before unveiling his idol.

So great was Wordsworth's influence that

<sup>1</sup> "Confessions of an English Opium-Eater," with notes, etc. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.

no doubt it determined the spirit of some of De Quincey's earlier writings. The following may be regarded as supporting this view :

We talked about his (De Quincey's) articles on Pope, Shakspeare, and Goethe, in the seventh edition of the "Encyclopedia Britannica." On my telling him how much pleased I had been to find my own preconceived notions of Goethe confirmed by his high authority and by the good reasons he gave for such an opinion, he went pretty fully into the whole question of the nature of Goethe's genius. Among other things he mentioned that Wordsworth, who was apt to take extreme opinions upon such subjects, regarded Goethe as little better than a quack. Wordsworth, he said, never read books, but somehow or other "Wilhelm Meister" had fallen in his way, and he had gone through it, till he came to the scene where the hero, in his mistress's bedroom, becomes sentimental over her dirty towels, etc., which struck him with such disgust that he flung the book out of his hand, would never look at it again, and declared that surely no English lady would ever read such a work.

This is the very spirit of De Quincey's review of "Wilhelm Meister" which so disconcerted Carlyle when he read it in that bookseller's shop.

But assuredly De Quincey because of discouragements did not cease to work vigorously for the cause he had espoused. His earlier writings are studded with striking quotations from Wordsworth; their authorship veiled, that prejudice might be, in some degree, disarmed. Such services to literature would entitle a man to great indulgence even if afterward he did fall into what some would call personalities and ill-judged revelations in relation to one of those concerned. If De Quincey needs that indulgence, his friends may boldly claim it for him; and in estimating justly his later unfortunate relations to Wordsworth the earlier intercourse should be, in our opinion, clearly borne in mind to relieve and brighten it. It was his loyal reverence for Wordsworth and admiration of his poetic genius that first led him to the Lakes, and afterward drew him to settle there; and Wordsworth at the time regarded him with exceptional affection and feelings of gratitude. He had written to Wordsworth as early as July, 1803, while he was residing with his mother at The Priory, Chester, after his sad time in Greek street, Soho, and his reconciliation with her friends, and just before he proceeded to Worcester College, Oxford. Wordsworth at once replied at considerable length, although he was on the eve of that memorable tour in Scotland with his sister and Coleridge—a tour all the details of which have been fortunately preserved for us in Miss Wordsworth's journals, which the late laborious and sympathetic Principal Shairp

presented to the public, very carefully edited and annotated, some years ago. We are enabled to give in full that remarkable letter, heretofore unpublished.

"GRASMERE, NEAR KENDAL,  
WESTMORELAND, July 29, 1803.

"DEAR SIR: The very unreasonable value which you set upon my writings, compared with those of others, gave me great concern. You are young and ingenuous, and I wrote with a hope of pleasing the young, the ingenuous, and the unworldly above all others; but sorry indeed should I be to stand in the way of the proper influence of other writers. You will know that I allude to the great names of past times, and above all to those of our own country. I have taken the liberty of saying this much to hasten on the time when you will value my poems not less, but those of others more. That time, I know, would come of itself, and may come sooner for what I have said, which at all events I am sure you cannot take ill.

"How many things are there in a man's character of which his writings, however miscellaneous or voluminous, will give no idea! How many thousand things which go to making up the value of a practical moral man, concerning not one of which any conclusion can be drawn from what he says of himself or others in the world's ear! You probably would never guess from anything you know of me that I am the most lazy and impatient letter-writer in the world. You will perhaps have observed that the first two or three lines of this sheet are in a tolerably fair legible hand, and now every letter from A to Z is in complete rout, one upon the heels of the other. Indeed, so difficult do I find it to master this ill habit of idleness and impatience, that I have long ceased to write any letters but upon business. In justice to myself and you, I have found myself obliged to mention this, lest you should think me unkind if you found me a slovenly and sluggish correspondent.

"I am going with my friend Coleridge and my sister upon a tour into Scotland for six weeks or two months. This will prevent me from hearing from you as soon as I could wish, as most likely we shall set off in a few days. If, however, you write immediately, I may have the pleasure of receiving your letter before our departure; if we are gone, I shall order it to be sent after me. I need not add that it will give me great pleasure to see you at Grasmere if you should ever come this way.

"I have just looked over what I have written. I find that towards the conclusion I have been in a most unwarrantable hurry; espe-

cially in what I have said about our seeing you here. I seem to have expressed myself absolutely with coldness. This is not my feeling, I assure you. I shall indeed be happy to see you at Grasmere if you ever find it convenient to visit this delightful country. You speak of yourself as being very young, and therefore may have many engagements of great importance with respect to your worldly concerns and future happiness in life. Do not neglect these on any account; but if, consistent with these, and your other duties, you could find time to visit this country, which is no great distance from your present residence, I should, I repeat it, be very happy to see you.

"Believe me to be, dear sir,

"Yours very faithfully,

"WILLIAM WORDSWORTH."

Surely this is in every way characteristic. The reserve, which suggests slowness to receive praise, as well as the desire to appreciate it fairly; the fear lest excess of admiration for his writings should produce one-sidedness, and lead to disregard of the merits of others on the part of his young correspondent; the severe sense of duty to which all else is to be subordinated; and the honest, friendly mentorship not unbecomingly assumed towards one so young—all bespeak the author of "The Excursion." De Quincey, it is evident, wrote on receipt of this letter a reply, which did catch Wordsworth before he left for Scotland. In it the poet had been informed of De Quincey's early entry on life at Oxford—a fact which, as will be seen from the next letter, dwelt on his mind. On his return home Wordsworth wrote again.

It will be admitted that this letter is a somewhat singular one from a man who had absolved himself from writing any save "business letters"; clearly showing that he regarded his correspondent as an exceptional person.

"GRASMERE, March 8, 1804.

"MY DEAR SIR: Your last amiable letter ought to have received a far earlier answer. I have been indeed highly culpable in my procrastination. It arrived just before we set off on our Scotch tour, and I am so sadly dilatory in matters of this kind, that unless I reply to a letter immediately, I am apt to defer it till the thought becomes painful, taking the shape of a duty rather than a pleasure, and then Heaven knows when I may set myself to rights again by doing what I ought to do. While I am on this subject I must, however, say, what you will be sorry to hear, that I have a kind of derangement in my stomach and digestive organs which makes writing painful to me, and, indeed, almost prevents me from holding correspondence with anybody; and this (I mean

to say the unpleasant feelings which I have connected with the act of holding a pen) has been the chief cause of my long silence.

"Your last letter gave me great pleasure; it was indeed a very amiable one, and I was highly gratified in the thought of being so endeared to you by the mere effect of my writings. I am afraid you may have been hurt at not hearing from me, and may have construed my silence into neglect or inattention. I mean in the ordinary sense of the word. I assure you this has by no means been the case; I have thought of you very often, and with great interest, and wished to hear from you again, which I hope I should have done had you not, perhaps, been apprehensive that your letter might be an intrusion. I should have been very glad to hear from you, and another letter might have roused me to discharge sooner the duty which I had shoved aside.

"We had a most delightful tour of six weeks in Scotland: our pleasure, however, was not a little dashed by the necessity under which Mr. Coleridge found himself of leaving us, at the end of something more than [a] fortnight, from ill health; and a dread of the rains (his complaint being rheumatics) which then, after a long drought, appeared to be setting in. The weather, however, on the whole, was excellent, and we were amply repaid for our pains.

"As most likely you will make the tour of the Highlands some time or other, do not fail to let me know beforehand, and I will tell you what we thought most worth seeing, as far as we went. Our tour, though most delightful, was very imperfect, being nothing more than what is called the short tour, with considerable deviations. We left Loch Ness, the Falls of Foyers, etc., etc., unvisited.

"By this time I conclude you have taken up your abode at Oxford. I hope this letter, though sent at random partly, will be forwarded, and that it will find you. I am anxious to hear how far you are satisfied with yourself at Oxford; and, above all, that you have not been seduced into unworthy pleasures or pursuits. The state of both the universities is, I believe, much better than formerly in respect of the morals and manners of the students. I know that Cambridge has greatly improved since the time when I was there, which is about thirteen years ago. The manners of the young men were very frantic and dissolute at that time; and Oxford was no better or worse. I need not say to you that there is no true dignity but in virtue and temperance, and, let me add, chastity, and that the best safeguard of all these is the cultivation of pure pleasures—namely, those of the intellect and affections. I have much anxiety on this head, from a sincere concern in your welfare, and the melancholy retrospect which

forces itself upon one of the number of men of genius who have fallen beneath the evils that beset them. I do not mean to preach; I speak in simplicity and tender apprehension, as one lover of nature and of virtue speaking to another. Do not on any account fail to tell me whether you are satisfied with yourself since your migration to Oxford; if not, do your duty to yourself immediately; love nature and books; seek them, and you will be happy; for virtuous friendship, and love, and knowledge of mankind must inevitably accompany these, all things thus repeating their influence in their due season. I am now writing a poem on my own earlier life. I have just finished that part in which I speak of my residence at the university. It would give me great pleasure to read this work to you at this time, as I am sure from the interest you have taken in the *L. B.* that it would please you, and might also be of service to you.

"The poem will not be published these many years, and never during my lifetime till I have finished a larger and more important work to which it is tributary. Of this larger work I have written one book and several scattered fragments. It is a moral and philosophical poem; the subject, whatever I find most interesting in nature, man, and society; and most adapted to poetic illustration. To this work I mean to devote the prime of my life and the chief force of my mind. I have also arranged the plan of a narrative poem. And if I live to finish these three principal works, I shall be content. That on my own life, the least important of the three, is better than half completed — *viz.*: four books, amounting to about two thousand five hundred lines. They are all to be in blank verse. I have taken the liberty of saying this much of my own concerns to you, not doubting that it would interest you. You have as yet had but little knowledge of me, but as a poet's friend, I hope, if we live, we shall be still more nearly united.

"I cannot forbear mentioning to you the way in which a wretched creature of the name of Peter Basley has lately treated the author of your favorite book, the '*Lyrical Ballads.*' After pillaging them in a style of plagiarism I believe unexampled in the history of modern literature, the wretch has had the baseness to write a long poem in ridicule of them, chiefly of the '*Idiot Boy,*' and, not content with this, in a note annexed to the same poem, has spoken of me *by name* as the *simplest* — *i. e.*, the most contemptible — of all poets. The complicated baseness of this (for the plagiarisms are absolutely wholesale) grieved me to the heart for the sake of poor human nature; that anybody could combine (as this man in some way or

other must have done) an admiration and love of these poems with moral feelings so detestable hurt me beyond measure. If the unhappy creature's volume should ever fall in your way, you will find the plagiarism chiefly in two poems, one entitled '*Evening in the Vale of Testeway,*' which is a wretched parody throughout of the '*Tintern Abbey,*' and the other the '*Ivy Hut,*' also on the '*Truest Fay,*' and some others.

"I must now conclude, not omitting, however, to say that Mr. Coleridge and my sister were much pleased with your kind remembrances of them, which my sister begs me to return. Mr. C. is at present in London, sorry I am to say on account of the very bad health under which he labors. Believe me to be, dear sir,

"Your very affectionate friend,

"W. WORDSWORTH.

"P. S.—Do not fail to write to me as soon as you can find time."

A careful scrutiny of the catalogues of the British Museum Library in the hope of finding Peter Basley's volume was unsuccessful, and especially disappointing inasmuch as excerpts could no doubt have been gleaned from it, amusing and instructive in several ways.

It will be admitted, we think, by every reader whose opinion is worth anything, that the disappearance of this last letter of Wordsworth's or the withholding it from the public would be nothing short of a great general loss. And this not only on account of the lofty morality and the tender concern it shows for the welfare of the young men of the day, but for the expression it gives of what is most distinctive and characteristic of Wordsworth — his sobriety, his economy, his reserve of sympathy, and his calm wisdom.

In the end of 1807 De Quincey met Coleridge at the Hot Wells, Bristol, and learned from him that, owing to his having to lecture at the Royal Institution in the coming winter, he was in some difficulty in finding an escort for his wife and children to the North, where they were to visit Wordsworth, and be taken in charge by Southey. De Quincey agreed to be their escort.

Mrs. Coleridge was accompanied by her two sons, Hartley, aged nine, and Derwent, about seven; and her beautiful little daughter Sara, about five.

They safely reached Grasmere in about the usual time demanded for such stages in those days. De Quincey says that when at some distance he saw the cottage and recognized it as that of which he had previously gained a glimpse from Hammerscar, on the opposite side of the lake, he was seized with something

of the old panic, which did not quite leave him till he was involved in the bustle of helping Mrs. Coleridge and the children out of the carriage and advancing to the door to intimate their arrival.

Never before or since [he confesses] can I reproach myself with having trembled at the approaching presence of any creature born of woman, excepting, only for once or twice in my life, woman herself. But through the little gate I pressed forward; ten steps beyond it lay the principal door of the house. To this, no longer clearly conscious of my feelings, I passed on rapidly; I heard a step, a voice, and like a flash of lightning I saw the figure emerge of a tallish man, who held out his hand with the most cordial expressions of welcome.

And so Wordsworth passed him to advance and receive Mrs. Coleridge, and he had time to observe the quaint beauty and simplicity of the cottage, with its diamond-paned window, and its shrubberies, and profusion of roses, before he was ushered into the family parlor—somewhat dark through the luxuriance of vegetation, but not so dark as to prevent his seeing two ladies, who had just apparently entered it. One of these was Miss Wordsworth, the only sister of the poet, who in many ways owed so much to her. She is thus described by De Quincey:

Her face was of Egyptian brown—rarely in a woman of English birth had I seen a more determinate gipsy tan. The eyes were not soft, nor were they fierce or bold; but they were wild and startling and hurried in their nature. Her manner was warm, even ardent, her sensibility seemed constitutionally deep; and some subtle fire of impassioned intellect apparently burned within her, which being alternately pushed forward into a conspicuous expression by the irresistible instincts of her temperament, and then immediately checked, in obedience to the decorum of her sex and age and her maidenly condition (for she had rejected all offers of marriage out of pure sisterly regard to her brother and his children), gave to her whole demeanor and to her conversation an air of embarrassment, and even of self-conflict, that was sometimes distressing to witness.

On the third morning after their arrival in Grasmere De Quincey found all the family prepared for an expedition across the mountains. A common farmer's cart was brought to the door. "Such a vehicle I had never seen used for such a purpose," says De Quincey, "but what was good enough for the Wordsworths was good enough for me; and, accordingly, we were all carted to the little town or large village of Ambleside—three and a half miles distant. Our style of traveling occasioned no astonishment; on the contrary, we met a smiling salutation wherever we appeared

—Miss Wordsworth being, as I observed, the person most familiarly known of our party, and the one who took upon herself the whole expense of the flying colloquies exchanged with stragglers on the road."

It may be well to remind the reader that Dorothy Wordsworth was nearly two years younger than the poet, the only girl in a family of five. Her mother died when she was little more than six years old, and the children were separated. Dorothy did not permanently rejoin William till she was four-and-twenty. She kept house for him in Dorsetshire and Somersetshire, and afterward at the Lakes, remaining after Wordsworth married, and on till the end of her life. Wordsworth said that he "did not believe her tenderness of heart was ever surpassed by any of God's creatures, her loving-kindness had no bounds." Her genius was so remarkable that no estimate can be formed of her share in the work of William. He fully recognized it.

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;  
And humble cares, and delicate fears;  
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears,  
And love, and thought, and joy.

De Quincey spent the latter portion of the year 1808 at Oxford, and towards its close returned to Grasmere. He remained as a guest under Wordsworth's roof at Allan Bank (for this was before the days of the more stately Rydal Mount, now so associated with the memory of the poet) for some months, and then returned to London, with a view to keeping terms at the Middle Temple in order to pass for the bar. This plan does not seem to have entered so deeply into his serious purposes, however, as to prevent him making arrangements before leaving in February, 1809, to return and occupy the Townend Cottage, which Wordsworth had just quitted, and to which De Quincey dedicates so effective an apostrophe in one of his essays, beginning "Cottage immortal in my remembrance." Now it was that he did Wordsworth the service of revising and editing his famous "Convention of Cintra" pamphlet.

In a budget of Wordsworth's letters we find a comparatively large number bearing on this "Convention of Cintra" pamphlet, attesting the care with which De Quincey had done his work. Wordsworth is surprised at the felicity of some of the emendations; "all," he says, "are improvements." Miss Wordsworth writes: "Soon you must have rest, and we shall all be thankful. You have indeed been a treasure to us while you have been in London, having spared my brother so much anxiety and care. We are very grateful to you." And Wordsworth himself hopes that De Quincey may soon

be at Grasmere, where he may think of the pamphlet labors in quiet, "as a traveler thinks of a disagreeable journey which he has performed, and will not have to repeat."

De Quincey's biographer says: "He agreed with Wordsworth in the main on this great question, which was then stirring Europe; and, instead of devoting his whole time in London, with prudent forecast, to the endeavor to open up avenues for himself to communicate to the world some of his many ideas, as more practical and less devoted spirits might have done, he patiently revised and edited Wordsworth's pamphlet, adding an appendix, which the author declared was 'done in a most masterly manner,' as well he might.

"Between Dorothy Wordsworth and De Quincey it is clear that a great liking sprang up—a relation of sympathy and mutual appreciation; so that to Dorothy after this time was delegated the chief burden of correspondence.

"When De Quincey had resolved to settle in the Lake District, Dorothy was his 'guide, philosopher, and friend' in matters pertaining to household affairs, such as De Quincey could not be presumed fully to understand.

"We have many records in the letters before us of her zeal and untiring interest in discussion of the most desirable colors in carpets and curtains, and of the best styles of furniture. She finds a good reason for preferring mahogany to deal for bookshelves in the consideration 'that native woods are dear; and that in case De Quincey should leave the country, and have a sale, no sort of wood sells so well at second hand as mahogany.' But in spite of such preoccupations, she does not fail to enliven her letters by reference to more liberal interests, as this will show:

"The weather is now very delightful, and it is quite a pleasure to us to go down to the old spot, and linger about as if we were again at home there. The garden looks fresh and very pretty, in spite of the cruel injury done to the trees by Atkinson's unruly ax. If you had not lately been so happy in the enjoyment of a beautiful country and the society of your own family, we should have much regretted your absence. Yesterday I sat half an hour musing by myself in the moss hut, and for the first time this season I heard the cuckoo there. The little birds, too, our old companions, I could have half fancied were glad that we were come back again, for it seemed I had never before seen them so joyous on the branches of the naked apple trees. Pleasant indeed it is to think of that little orchard which, for one seven years at least, will be a secure covert for the birds and undisturbed by the woodman's ax. There is no other spot which we may have prized year

after year that we can ever look upon without apprehension that next year, next month, or even to-morrow, it may be deformed and ravaged. You have walked to Rydal, under Nab Scar? Surely you have? If not, it will be forever to be regretted, as there is not anywhere in this country such a scene of ancient trees and rocks as you might have there beheld—trees of centuries' growth inrooted among and overhanging the mighty crags. These trees, you would have thought, could have had no enemy to contend with but the mountain winds, for they seemed to set all human avarice at defiance; and indeed, if the owners had had no other passion but avarice, they might have remained till the last stump was moldered away; but *malice* has done the work, and the trees are leveled. A hundred laborers, more or less, men, women, and children, have been employed for more than a week in hewing, peeling bark, gathering sticks, etc., etc., etc., and the mountain echoes with the riotous sound of their voices. You must know that those trees upon Nab Scar grow on uninclosed ground, and Mr. North claims the right of *lopping* and *topping* them—a right which Lady Fleming, as lady of the manor, claims also. Now Mr. North allows (with everybody else) that she has a right to fell the trees themselves, and he only claims the boughs. Accordingly he sent one or two workmen to lop some of the trees on Nab Scar. Lady Fleming's steward forbade him to go on; and in consequence he offered five shillings per day to any laborers who would go and work for him. At the same time Lady Fleming's steward procured all the laborers he could, also at great wages, and the opposite parties have had a sort of warfare upon the crags—Mr. North's men seizing the finest trees to lop off the branches and drag them upon Mr. North's ground; and Lady Fleming's men being also in an equal hurry to choose the very finest, which they felled with the branches on their heads to prevent Mr. North from getting them, and, not content with this, they fell those also which Mr. North has been beforehand with them in lopping, to prevent him from receiving any benefit from them in future. O my dear friend! is not this an impious strife? Can we call it by a milder name? I cannot express how deeply we have been affected by the loss of the trees (many and many a happy hour have we passed under their shade), but we have been more troubled to think that such wicked passions should have been let loose among them. The profits of the wood will not pay the expenses of the workmen on either side! A lawsuit will no doubt be the consequence, and I hope that both parties will have to pay severely for their folly, malice, and other bad feelings."

This is in every way the honest expression of the feelings of a poet and devout lover of nature.

For nearly two years after De Quincey's settlement in the Lake District he was almost a daily visitor at Wordsworth's. During the latter part of 1809 and the greater part of 1810 Coleridge was also there; and their many interminable conversations and discussions may be imagined. We know that Wordsworth, from the self-contained and self-sufficing nature of his genius and temperament, was not a person to answer well to certain demands of social sympathy. De Quincey says that never after the first year or so of introduction had he felt it possible to draw the bond of friendship closer with Wordsworth. Coleridge said that he never met a man with less of femininity of character than Wordsworth. But if the attractions towards Wordsworth failed, that of Dorothy and the children grew. Of the little hapless Catherine, he tells us, "She noticed me more than any other person, excepting, of course, her mother." De Quincey was a favorite with all the children, who formed an unailing link between him and their elders. Every one of Miss Wordsworth's letters shows the hold that De Quincey had on their hearts. In one letter Dorothy writes:

"When your friend Johnny came from school last night his mother said to him, 'Here is a letter from'—'From Mr. De Quincey,' he replied; and with his own ingenuous blush and smile, he came forward to the fireside with a quicker pace, and asked me to read the letter, which I did with a few omissions, and leveling the language to his capacity; and you would have thought yourself well repaid for the trouble of writing it if you could only have seen how feelingly he was interested. When all was over he said: 'But when will he come? Maybe he'll tell us in his next letter.' He is learning 'Chevy Chase,' and hopes, with some pride, to be able to repeat it to you when you come home. He is made up of good and noble feelings. He is the delight of everybody who knows him. All his playmates love him. Last night, when he had finished his prayers, in which he makes a petition for his good friends, he said, 'Mr. De Quincey is one of my friends.' Little Tom has been poorly and looks ill. He often lisps out your name, and will rejoice with the happiest at your return. I must remind you of a promise which you made to Johnny to buy him a new hat. Let it be a black, if you have not already bought one of another color."

In a later letter she says:

"There was perfect joy in the house over your sweet letter to Johnny. But here I must tell you that, in reading the letter to him, we omit that part after the description of the car-

riage, where you say you will buy one for him and Sissy. My dear friend, I believe you are serious, because you have said so to Johnny, but I earnestly hope that you will be prevailed upon not to buy it. We should grieve most seriously that so much money should be expended for a carriage for them when they are completely happy and satisfied with their own, which answers every purpose of the other. What matter if it is a little harder to pull? (Johnny often says that it is very hard up hill.) It is the better exercise for them."

This last portion about the carriage and the desirability that the children should learn hardness through pulling the old one is deliciously Wordsworthian.

In June, 1812, little Catherine Wordsworth died. De Quincey has in his "Recollections" preserved for us some faint reflection of the deep and sad impressions produced on him by that event. He tells us how he was haunted with illusions of the child's appearance in his walks and musings for some time afterward. In the notes of De Quincey's "Conversations" to which we have already referred, we have the following passage which has a bearing here, and also attests a vein of hypersensitive, if not superstitious, imagination in De Quincey:

He mentioned having had a presentiment, on leaving his residence for a visit to London some time back, that he should never again see a little child of Wordsworth's, who was afflicted and had but the use of one of its sides. It was a sweet little girl, about three years old, and the Opium-Eater was much attached to it. One night, while he was here, he heard a dog howling dismally at his door in the evening; it howled three times, and the Opium-Eater with some curiosity waited to hear the fourth howl, but in vain; the dog passed on and was silent. This happened on some particular day, either Christmas or New Year's Eve (which was named by him to Taylor), and he noticed the time particularly. The effect was so vivid upon the Opium-Eater's sensations that he at once began to consider which of all the persons he knew and loved might most probably be in trouble or dying at that time; and he thought that this little child was the most likely one of whom he might expect to receive ill news. He waited with some anxiety for the post on the day on which intimation of anything that might have occurred at home at the period he had noted would reach him in due course. He listened to the postman and heard him in the street, but he passed by his door without knocking. However, he received in the course of the day by the second post a letter sealed with black wax. It was from Miss Wordsworth (Wordsworth's sister), who, knowing how partial he had been to the child, had written to him to apprise him of its death.

The paralysis which deprived little Kate of the use of one of her sides was due to the fall for which the girl Green was blamable.

The following letter from Miss Wordsworth may be taken as indirect testimony to the truthfulness of De Quincey's "Autobiographic Sketches" in several aspects. Miss Wordsworth wrote to him:

"JUNE 5, 1812.

"MY DEAR FRIEND: I am grieved to the heart when I write to you, but you must hear the sad tidings.

"Our sweet little Catherine was seized with convulsions on Wednesday night at a quarter before ten or half-past nine o'clock. The fits continued till a quarter after five in the morning, when she breathed her last. She had been in perfect health, and looked unusually well; her leg and arm had gained strength, and we were in full hope. In short, we had sent the most delightful accounts to her poor mother. It is a great addition to our affliction that her father and mother were not here to witness her last struggles, and to see her in the last happy weeks of her short life. She never forgot Quincey. Dear innocent! she now lies upon her mother's bed, a perfect image of peace. This to me was a soothing spectacle after having beheld her struggles. It is an unspeakable consolation to us that we are assured that no foresight could have prevented the disease in this last instance, and that it was not occasioned by any negligence or improper food; the disease lay in the brain; and if it had been possible for her to recover, it is much to be feared that she would not have retained the faculties of her mind.

"We have written to my brother, and he will proceed immediately into Wales to impart the sad intelligence to my sister. You will be pleased to hear that Mary Dawson<sup>1</sup> has been very kind in her attentions to us. We are all pretty well. John has been greatly afflicted, but he has begun to admit consolation.

"The funeral will be on Monday afternoon. I wish you had been here to follow your darling to her grave.

"God bless you!

"Yours affectionately,

"D. WORDSWORTH."

This letter was immediately answered by a request for further particulars, and we find De Quincey writing again to Miss Wordsworth on June 21 as follows—his mind concentrated on little Kate and on all things associated with her:

"SUNDAY EVENING, June 21.

"MY DEAR FRIEND: I thank you much for your long and most affecting letter. One passage troubled me greatly; I mean when you speak of our dear child's bodily sufferings. Her father and I trusted that she had been insen-

<sup>1</sup> De Quincey's servant in charge of his cottage.

sible to pain—that being generally the case, as I believe, in convulsions. But, thank God! whatever were her sufferings, they were short in comparison of what she would have had in most other complaints, and now at least, sweet love, she is at rest and in peace. It being God's pleasure to recall his innocent creature to himself, perhaps in no other way could it have been done more mercifully to her, though to the bystanders for the time few could be more terrible to behold. How much more suffering would she have had in a common fever from cold; and what anguish to us all if she had called upon our names in delirium, and fancied that we would not come to her relief! This I remember witnessing at my father's bedside on the morning when he died. I was but a child, and had seen too little of my father to have much love for him; but I remember being greatly affected at hearing him moan out to my mother a few minutes before he died, 'O Eliza, Eliza! why will you never come to help me to raise this great weight?'

"I was truly glad to find from your account of her funeral that those who attended were in general such as would more or less unaffectedly partake in your sorrow. It has been an awful employment to me the recollecting where I was and how occupied when the solemn scene was going on. At that time I must have been in the streets of London; tired, I remember, for I had just recovered from sickness—but cheerful, and filled with pleasant thoughts. Ah! what a mortal revulsion of heart if any sudden revelation should have laid open to my sight what scene was passing in Grasmere Vale! On the night June 3-4 I remember, from a peculiar circumstance which happened in the room below me, that I lay awake all night long in serious thought, but yet as cheerful as if not a dream were troubling any one that I love. As well as I recollect, I must have been closing my eyes in sleep just about the time my blessed Kate was closing hers forever! Willingly, my dear friend, I would have done this. I do not say it from any sudden burst of anguish, but as a feeling that I have ejaculated in truth and sincerity a thousand times since I heard of her death. If I had seen her in pain I could have done anything for her, and reason it was that I should, for she was a blessing to *me*, and gave me many and many an hour of happy thoughts that I can never have again.

"You tell me to think of her with tender cheerfulness; but, far from that, dear friend, my heart grows heavier and heavier every day. More and more her words, and looks, and actions keep coming up before me; and there is nobody to whom I can speak about her. I have struggled with this dejection as much as I



can; twice I have passed the evening with Mr. Coleridge, and I have every day attempted to study. But after all I find it more tolerable to me to let my thoughts take their natural course than to put such constraint upon them. But let me not trouble you with complaints, who have sorrow enough to bear of your own, and to witness in others.

"Yesterday I heard from Mr. Wordsworth and was grieved to hear of Mrs. Wordsworth's state of mind, but I knew that it could not be otherwise. She would have borne her loss better, I doubt not, if she had been upon the spot. As it is, this great affliction would come upon her just when her mind would be busiest about thoughts of returning to her children. I think of her often with greatest love and compassion.

"This afternoon I was putting my clothing and books into the trunk. Whilst I was about it I remembered that it was the 21st of June, and must therefore be exactly a quarter of a year since I left Grasmere, for I left it on Sunday, March 22; this day thirteen weeks, therefore, I saw Kate for the last time. The last words which she said to me (except that perhaps she might call out some words of farewell in company with the rest who were present) I think were these:

"The children were speaking to me all together, and I was saying one thing to one and another to another, and she, who could not speak loud enough to overpower the other voices, had got up on a chair, and putting her hand upon my mouth she said, with her sweet importunateness of action and voice, "Kinsey! Kinsey! what a bring Katy from London?" I believe she said it twice; and I remember that her mother noticed the earnestness and intelligence of her manner, and looked at me and smiled. This was the last time that I heard her sweet voice distinctly, and I shall never hear one like it again! God bless you, my dear friend!

"Ever yours,

"T. DE QUINCEY.

"N. B.—Mary Dawson would surely suppose that, as a mark of respect to your family, I should wish her to get mourning at my expense. If she has not done this, pray tell her that I particularly desire it may be done. I forgot to mention it before.

"I shall leave London not earlier than Tuesday, nor later than Wednesday. I have been detained in a way I could not prevent. How soon I get to Grasmere will depend on the accidents of meeting conveyances, etc. I trust I shall find you all well.

"I wrote a second letter to you last Monday, June 15."

Not long after this De Quincey received a letter from Wordsworth, bearing news of another bereavement, the close of the letter being most tender and touching in its simplicity of pathos. The following letter from De Quincey to his sister embodies it.

"GRASMERE, SUNDAY NIGHT,

"January 3, 1813.

"MY DEAR SISTER: Your letters having lain some days at the post, and James having come round by London, they did not reach me so soon as you may have calculated. I wrote to Coleridge by last Friday morning's post begging him to forward, under cover to Westhay, whatever letters he could furnish for Sicily and Malta.<sup>1</sup>

"I have now, with sadness of heart, to inform you that dear little Thomas Wordsworth died of the measles on Tuesday, the 1st of last month. He was seized with them the Thursday before, and had none but favorable symptoms until about eleven o'clock on the Tuesday morning, after which he grew rapidly worse, and died about five in the evening. I was met at Liverpool, on my road home, by a letter from Wordsworth written the same night to inform me of the event, in which he writes:

"His sufferings were short, and I think not severe. Pray come to us as soon as you can. My sister is not at home. Mrs. Wordsworth bears her loss with striking fortitude, and Miss Hutchinson is as well as can be expected. My sister will be here to-morrow.

"Most tenderly and lovingly, with heavy sorrow for you, my dear friend,

"I remain yours,

"W. WORDSWORTH."

"Unfortunately I did not receive this letter till the very night of the child's funeral, which (though I loved him tenderly, dear child!) I was thus unable to attend."

In matters literary and poetical Wordsworth was glad to be aided by De Quincey's judgment after some degree of disparity of taste and sentiment must have become manifest more or less to both. In February, 1814, we find Wordsworth writing to De Quincey during one of his visits to Somersetshire, consulting him about an added stanza in "Laodamia," which now appears in the poem and ends with the fine line,

While tears were thy best pastime—day and night,

and requesting him to be more detailed in the expression of his opinion on certain poems and on the Preface than he had been—his opin-

<sup>1</sup> These were letters of introduction for a friend of De Quincey's.

ions, as it would appear, having been studiously general about the said Preface, and a request made for copies of the earlier draft of it. This leads Wordsworth to say that he wished De Quincey had mentioned *why* he had desired the *rough* copies of the Preface to be kept, as the request had led him to apprehend that something therein might have appeared to him better or more clearly expressed than in the after draft, adding, "I should have been glad to receive suggestions accordingly."

Things might have gone on in this way for an indefinite period, De Quincey's attachment to the children and his love of their foibles and quaint ways counteracting the coldness and severity which were growing on Wordsworth, and making themselves more and more felt in his intercourse with De Quincey. Of course people need not hope to cultivate the acquaintance of opium-eaters, and profit by their learning and large discourse, and not have a good deal to put up with now and then; and opium-eaters need not hope to find great poets always abounding in gaiety and good spirits to atone for and to compensate their own lack of goods in that particular line of exchange. De Quincey says Wordsworth was rude sometimes even in his way of declining a friendly aid.

In Mr. J. R. Findlay's "Recollections," under date of the 2d March, 1855, we read:

Talking of Wordsworth's "Guide to the Lakes," De Quincey said that on its original publication he offered an account of the origin and character of the language of the Lake District which unlocked all its peculiar nomenclature; but Wordsworth, who never liked to be obliged to anybody for anything, declined it in his usual haughty and discourteous manner, and it was ultimately published in a Kendal newspaper.

Certainly in his self-absorption Wordsworth was somewhat indifferent sometimes to the feelings or the whims of others, as when in his impatient haste he ran the buttery knife through the uncut leaves of one of Southey's tomes, leaving the impress of his impetuosity all too manifest on its pages. But there might have been no open rupture if De Quincey had not married the woman he did marry. Margaret Simpson was only a small "statesman's" (or yeoman-farmer's) daughter, and made no pretension to culture or to intellect. But from all we can learn of her she ought to have attracted Wordsworth's regard as "a woman of a steady mind," like his own Margaret in "The Excursion." De Quincey celebrates her patient practical tact, and her devoted sympathy and helpfulness to him in many ways. She lives in the "Confessions" as M.—his Electra. He writes:

For thou, beloved M., dear companion of my later years, thou wast my Electra! and neither in nobility

of mind nor in long-suffering affection, wouldst permit that a Grecian sister should excel an English wife. For thou thoughtest not much to stoop to humble offices of kindness, and to servile ministrations of tenderest affection—to wipe away for years the unwholesome dews upon the forehead, or to refresh the lips when parched and bated with fever; nor, even when thy own peaceful slumbers had by long sympathy become infected with the spectacle of my dread contest with phantoms and shadowy enemies, that oftentimes bade me sleep no more!—not even then didst thou utter a complaint or any murmur; nor withdraw thy angelic smiles, nor shrink from thy service of love more than Electra did of old. For she, too, though she was a Grecian woman, and the daughter of the king of men, yet wept sometimes, and hid her face in her robe.

With the casuistry of love, he finds opportunities to celebrate the devotion of his wife in many relations. He acknowledges of the earlier period of his married life in Westmoreland, "Without the aid of M. all records of bills paid, or *to be paid*, must have perished; and my whole domestic economy, whatever became of political economy, must have gone into irretrievable confusion." And again, when he has been led by the fantasy of inviting a painter to reproduce the interior of his Grasmere cottage, with all its surroundings in these evil days,—ruby opium-decanter and all,—to refer to the personal appearance of his wife, he exclaims, "But no, dear M., not even in jest let me insinuate that thy power to illuminate my cottage rests upon a tenure so perishable as mere personal beauty; or that the witchcraft of angelic smiles lies within the empire of any earthly pencil."

The Wordsworths took no notice of her. De Quincey, it would appear, condescended to beg of them to do so, with no satisfactory result, leaving in De Quincey's mind a rankling sense of wrong. We can read between the lines that the good and wise Dorothy endeavored to play the peacemaker, but unsuccessfully; for we have proof that she visited Mrs. De Quincey so long as she was in Grasmere, though probably in a half underhand way, and did many a little service to the children hiddenly. When De Quincey went the second time to Edinburgh in 1828, to make an attempt to settle there and to prepare the way for the advent of his family,—though the comfort and the company at Professor Wilson's, where he staid, did not, we fear, add to his energies in practical matters,—we find Dorothy writing in the following strain of friendly and helpful interest, and, on the assumption of mutual sympathy still strong, tendering advice which was acted on:

"RYDAL MOUNT,

"Thursday, November 16.

"MY DEAR SIR: A letter of good tidings respecting Mrs. De Quincey and your family

cannot, I am sure, be unwelcome; and besides, she assures me that you will be glad to hear of my safe return to Rydal after a nine months' absence. I called at your cottage yesterday, having first seen your son William at the head of the schoolboys — as, it might seem, a leader of their noontide games; and Horace among the tribe, both as healthy looking as the best, and William very much grown. Margaret was in the kitchen, preparing to follow her brothers to school, and I was pleased to see her also looking stout and well, and much grown. Mrs. De Quincey was seated by the fire above-stairs with her baby on her knee. She rose and received me cheerfully, as a person in perfect health, and does indeed seem to have had an extraordinary recovery, and as little suffering as could be expected. The babe looks as if it would thrive, and is what we call a nice child. . . .

"Mrs. De Quincey seemed on the whole in very good spirits, but, with something of sadness in her manner, she told me you were not likely very soon to be at home. She then said that you had at present some literary employments at Edinburgh, and had, besides, had an offer (or something to this effect) of a permanent engagement, the nature of which she did not know, but that you hesitated about accepting it, as it might necessitate you to settle in Edinburgh. To this I replied: 'Why not settle there for a time, at least, that this engagement lasts? Lodgings are cheap in Edinburgh, and provisions and coals not dear. Of these facts I had some weeks' experience, four years ago.' I then added that it was my firm opinion that you could never regularly keep up to your engagements at a distance from the press, and said I, 'Pray tell him so when you write.' She replied, 'Do write yourself.' Now I could not refuse to give her pleasure by so doing, especially being assured that my letter would not be wholly worthless to you, having such agreeable news to send of your family. . . .

"I do not presume to take the liberty of advising the acceptance of this engagement or of that, only I would venture to request you well to consider the many impediments to literary employments to be regularly carried on in limited time at a distance from the press in a small house and in perfect solitude. You must well know that it is a true and faithful concern for your interests and those of your family that prompts me to call your attention to this point; and if you think that it is a mistake, you will not, I am sure, take it ill that I have thus freely expressed my opinion.

"It gave me great pleasure to hear of your good health and spirits, and you, I am sure, will be glad to have good accounts of all our

family, except poor Dora, who has been very ill — indeed, dangerously ill; but now, thank God, she is gaining ground, I hope, daily. Her extreme illness was during my absence, and I was therefore spared great anxiety, for I did not know of it till she was convalescent. I was, however, greatly shocked by her sickly looks. They improve, however, visibly, and she gains strength and has a good appetite. Whenever weather permits she rides on horseback. My brother's eyes are literally quite well. This surely is a great blessing, and I hope we are sufficiently thankful for it. He reads aloud to us by candlelight, and uses the pen for himself. My poor sister is a little worn by anxiety for Dora, but in other respects looks as well as usual. . . .

"I cannot express how happy I am to find myself at home again after so long an absence, though my time has passed very agreeably, and my health been excellent. I have had many very long walks since my return, and am more than ever charmed with our rocks and mountains. Rich autumnal tints, with an intermixture of green ones, still linger on the trees.

"My brother and sister do not know of my writing, otherwise they would send their remembrances. Make my respects to Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Wilson, and

"Believe me, dear sir,

"Yours affectionately,

"D. WORDSWORTH.

"P. S.—Excuse a very bad pen and haste.

"*One o'clock Thursday*: I have been at Grasmere and again seen your wife. She desires me to say that she is particularly anxious to hear from you on her father's account. The newspaper continues to come directed to my brother, though, some time since, my brother wrote to request that it might not. The new editor, no doubt, however, wished to continue the connection with you; but we think that it would be much better that Mrs. De Quincey should write to order it not to be sent, at least until your return to Grasmere, especially as at present you are not likely to contribute anything to the paper. She agrees with me in thinking it right so to do, and will write to the editor unless you order to the contrary. Perhaps you will write yourself. Pray mention this matter when you next write to her."

In after years De Quincey unburdened himself on the subject of his grievance against Wordsworth in the following strain, which, however, he did not reprint from the magazine in which it appeared.

To neither of us [that is, neither to himself nor to Professor Wilson], though at all periods of our

lives treating him with the deep respect which is his due, and, in our earlier years, with a more than filial devotion, nay, with a blind loyalty of homage which had in it something of the spirit of martyrdom, which for his sake courted even reproach and contumely, yet to neither of us has Wordsworth made those returns of friendship and kindness which most firmly I maintain we were entitled to have challenged.

. . . Let me render justice to Professor Wilson as well as to myself; not for a moment, not by a solitary movement of reluctance or demur, did either of us hang back in giving that public acclamation which we by so many years had anticipated; yes, we singly—we, with no sympathy to support us from any quarter. The public press remains, with its inexorable records, to vouch for us that we paid an oriental homage, homage as to one who could have pleaded antique privilege and the consecration of centuries, at a time when the finger of scorn was pointed at Mr. Wordsworth from every journal in the land; and that we persisted in this homage at a period long enough removed to have revolutionized the public mind, and also long enough to have undermined the personal relations between us of confidential friendship. Did it ask no courage to come forward, in the first character, as solitary friends, holding up our protesting hands amidst a wilderness of chattering buffoons? Did it ask no magnanimity to stand firmly to the post we had assumed, not passively acquiescing in the new state of public opinion, but exulting in it, and aiding it, long after we had reason to think ourselves injuriously treated? Times are changed! It needs no courage, in the year of our Lord 1839, to discover and proclaim a great poet in William Wordsworth; it needed none in the year 1815 to discover a frail power in the French Empire, or an idol of clay and brass in the French emperor!

And then, after having maintained for Wordsworth an "unimpeachable integrity," he goes on to say that there are cases of wrong for which the conscience is not the competent tribunal, and thus sums up the whole matter:

The case of a man who for years has identified himself closely with the domestic griefs and joys of another, over and above his primary service of giving him the strength and encouragement of a profound literary sympathy, at a time of universal scowling from the world; suppose this man to fall into a situation in which, from want of natural connections and from his state of insulation in life, it might be lent him by a family having a known place and acceptance, and what may be called a root in the country, by means of connection, descent, and long settlement. To look for this might be a most humble demand on the part of one who

had testified his devotion in the way supposed. To some it might. But enough. I murmur not; complaint is weak at all times; and the hour is past irrevocably and by many a year, in which an act of friendship so natural, and costing so little (in both senses so priceless), could have been availing. *The ear is deaf that should have been solaced by the sound of welcome call, but you will not be heard; shout aloud, but your "Ave!" and "All hail!" will now tell only as an echo of departed days, proclaiming the hollowness of human hopes.* I, for my part, have long learned the lesson of suffering in silence, and also I have learned to know that wheresoever female prejudices are concerned, *there* it will be a trial more than herculean of a man's wisdom if he can walk with an even step and swerve neither to the right nor to the left.

In confirmation of this we find the following in a contemporary letter by one who was not likely to assume knowledge when he had it not:

You will doubtless read the last "Tait's Magazine." It contains the first of a series of articles by De Quincey on Wordsworth. Poor De Quincey had a small fortune of eight or nine thousand pounds, which he has lost or spent, and now he lets his pen for hire. You know his articles on Coleridge. Wordsworth's turn has come now. At the close of his article he alludes to a killing neglect which he once received from the poet, and which embittered his peace. I know the facts, which are not given. De Quincey married some humble country girl in the neighborhood of Wordsworth: she was of good character, but not of that rank in which Wordsworth moved. The family of the latter never made her acquaintance, or showed her any civilities, though living comparatively in the same neighborhood. *Hinc ille lacrimæ.* When you read De Quincey's lamentations, you may thus better understand them.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Sumner knew the facts, but he did not know them all. If he had done so, it is scarcely possible but he would have made an exception in favor of Dorothy Wordsworth, who certainly made Mrs. De Quincey's acquaintance and paid her many civilities, and did her many friendly services, though we are afraid not with the full countenance of those of Rydal Mount.

A very sorry ending to an interesting and elevating friendship, begun in heroic devotion on the one side and with high respect and admiration on the other.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Sumner to George Hillard, January 23, 1839.—*Memoir of Sumner.*

H. A. Page.

