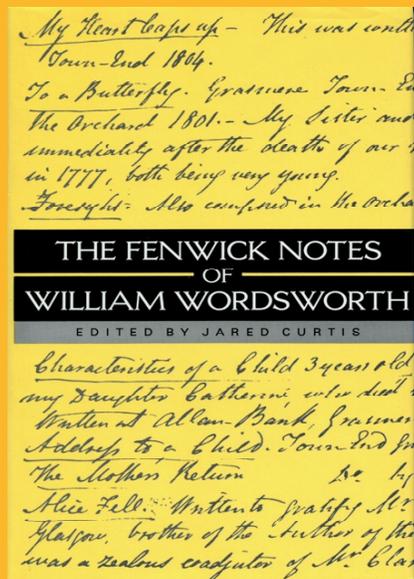


The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth

edited by Jared Curtis

a revised
electronic
edition



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Introduction

1

Most readers of Wordsworth are familiar with the Fenwick Notes to his best known poems. We all recall the account Wordsworth gave in his note to *We are Seven* of the walking tour he took with his sister Dorothy and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, when *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was conceived and composed—‘the most remarkable fact in my own poetic history and that of Mr. Coleridge’. But this and the few other familiar notes make up only a part of a much larger enterprise. The handwritten notes fill 180 leaves of a bound notebook, a labour of several months in the first half of 1843 when Wordsworth reviewed his life’s work by turning over the pages of the most recent six-volume edition of his *Poetical Works* (that of 1841) and the one-volume collection called *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* (1842). For each of approximately 350 poems in these volumes Wordsworth dictated to his friend Isabella Fenwick¹ what came to mind as relevant to the reader’s understanding of the circumstances of composition, the historical context, and the poet’s intention.

Two recent tours with family and friends provided impetus for his composing the notes at this time. The first was in the summer of 1840 when Wordsworth, his wife Mary, their daughter Dora, Isabella Fenwick and her niece, and Edward Quillinan and his elder daughter Jemima,

1 Isabella Fenwick (1783–1856) was the daughter of Nicholas Fenwick, of Lemmington Hall, Edlingham, near Alnwick in Northumberland, and his wife Dorothy Forster, who was the first cousin of Henry Taylor’s step-mother. Taylor’s tribute to his cousin’s mind and character and his account of her relations with the Wordsworths are found in his *Autobiography of Henry Taylor* (2 vols; London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1885) I, 52–8, 333–9, and II, 55–9.

travelled through the Duddon valley, visiting scenes Wordsworth had known from his days at Hawkshead School and written of in *The Prelude*, *The Excursion*, *The River Duddon*, and in a number of descriptive poems centered on Black Combe, the mountain rising west of the Duddon Sands. The second tour included his visits to Tintern Abbey in the Wye valley, and to Alfoxden and the Quantocks just before and after his daughter Dora's marriage to Edward Quillinan in the spring of 1841. This latter 'pilgrimage' as Mary Wordsworth called it, seems especially to have renewed his sense of the immediacy of the past.² A few days after the second leg of this tour with Wordsworth and his family, Isabella Fenwick wrote to Henry Taylor of their visit to 'Wells, Alfoxden, &c.':

He was delighted to see again those scenes (and they were beautiful in their kind) where he had been so happy—where he had felt and thought so much. He pointed out the spots where he had written many of his early poems, and told us how they had been suggested.

His recollection, she reported, of 'what his sister, who had been his companion here, was then and now is, seemed the only painful feeling that moved in his mind'.³

But there were other motives prompting his decision to compose the notes. From the first appearance of various 'memoirs' soon after the deaths of his friends Charles Lamb and Coleridge in 1834 and 1835, Wordsworth was increasingly dismayed by the inaccuracies and unfairness of publications by Thomas De Quincey, Thomas Allsop, Henry Nelson Coleridge, Joseph Cottle, James Gillman, and Thomas

² In *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) Stephen Gill has given a concise and moving account of WW's last decade, taking particular notice of these origins of the Fenwick Notes (pp. 400–23). MW commented on the pilgrimage to Alfoxden in a letter to Susan Wordsworth, 15 May 1841 (*MWL*, p. 245).

³ 20 May 1841; quoted in *Autobiography of Henry Taylor*, I, 338.

Noon Talfourd, to name the chief offenders.

Wordsworth wrote to Joseph Henry Green, the executor of Coleridge's estate, in mid-September 1834 to complain of De Quincey's first (of four) articles on Coleridge in *Tait's Magazine*,⁴ urging Green to take steps to 'put a check upon communications so injurious, unfeeling, and untrue'.⁵ In a letter to Edward Moxon, 10 December 1835, Wordsworth reluctantly acknowledged the appropriateness of Moxon's publishing Lamb's lively and colourful letters, though he had himself selected and severely edited those he contributed, and complained with some bitterness about the 'speedy' publication of Coleridge's letters in Thomas Allsop's *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge* (1836) and of the indiscretion of Henry Nelson Coleridge in publishing *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (1836) while the persons Coleridge 'talked' of were still living.⁶ In a letter to Henry Crabb Robinson, 1 November 1836, Wordsworth expressed his misgivings about Joseph Cottle's 'disingenuous[ness]' in preparing his *Early Recollections; Chiefly Relating to the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* for the press (1837), and in the same letter he reacted to Robinson's warning that Coleridge's *Literary Remains* (the first volume, edited by Henry Nelson Coleridge, appeared in 1836) would inevitably contain references to Wordsworth's 'tragedy' by telling him, partly in jest, to 'say nothing about it, lest destruction [of the manuscript of *The Borderers*] should follow'.⁷ On 17 May 1838 Wordsworth wrote to Daniel Stuart, publisher of the *Morning Post*, correcting the statement made by James Gillman in his *Life of Samuel Coleridge* (1838) that Wordsworth was employed by the *Morning Post*, with Coleridge and

4 September, October and November 1834 and January 1835 issues.

5 *LY*, II, 740.

6 *LY*, III, 134–5; *HCR Correspondence*, I, 315; 20 December 1835.

7 *LY*, III, 312–14.

About the Text

The text of the notes is transcribed from the manuscript of the Fenwick Notes in the Wordsworth Library, Grasmere. This leather-bound notebook (DC MS. 153) was copied from Isabella Fenwick's notes by Dora Wordsworth Quillinan and Edward Quillinan in July and August 1843. For an account of the occasion for composing the notes and their intended use see the Introduction.

My purpose in this edition is to present a reading text of the notebook that retains as much of its informal appearance as is possible in print. Accordingly I have kept indigenous linguistic features like spelling, punctuation, abbreviations, and visual features like paragraphing and superscripts, and have emended the text only where clarity or consistency break down and where scribal errors occur. For example, local spellings have been preserved while what appear to be misspellings have been corrected. As they provide some of the informal character of the manuscript notes, ampersands have not been expanded. However, for clarity of presentation, underlined characters have been converted to italics throughout. The copyists' habitual abbreviations ('w^h.' for 'which', for example) have been retained, though any that might not be obvious are expanded in the editorial notes. Double quotation marks ("...") in the manuscript have been retained.

Occasionally the copyist used initials to represent personal names, a practice Wordsworth himself often followed in his letters and published works. Where the context does not make the reference clear, the full name is given in the editorial notes.

As explained in the introduction, it is not clear that any of the corrections and additions to the notebook, by the Quillinans and in a

The Fenwick Notes

My Heart leaps up— This was written at Grasmere **Town-End** 1804.

To a Butterfly. Grasmere Town-End. Written in the Orchard 1801.—My Sister and I were parted immediately after the death of our Mother who died in 1778, both being very young.

Foresight. Also composed in the orchard Grasmere Town-End.

Characteristics of a Child 3 years old. Picture of **my Daughter Catherine**, who died the year after. Written at Allan-Bank, Grasmere 1811.

Address to a Child. Town-End Grasmere. 1806.

The Mother's Return D^o. by Miss Wordsworth. 1807

Alice Fell. 1801. Written to gratify M^r. Graham of Glasgow, brother of the Author of the Sabbath. He was a zealous coadjutor of **M^r. Clarkson**, and a man of ardent humanity. The incident had 

Manuscript Notes

1778 MW revised in pencil from 1777 and EQ noted opposite, March 1778.

MW inserted dates 1806...1807...1801 in pencil

[2]

happened to himself, and he urged me to put it into verse, for humanity's sake. The humbleness, meanness if you like, of the subject, together with the homely mode of treating it, brought upon me a world of ridicule by the small critics, so that in policy I excluded it from many editions of my poems, *till it was restored* at the request of some of my friends, in particular my son inlaw *Edward Quillinan*.

Lucy Gray. Written at *Goslar* in Germany in 1799. It was founded on a circumstance told me by my Sister, of a little girl, who not far from Halifax in Yorkshire was bewildered in a snow-storm. Her footsteps were traced by her parents to the middle of the lock of a canal, and no other vestige of her, backward or forward, could be traced. The body however was found in the canal. The way in which the incident was treated & the spiritualising of the character might furnish hints for contrasting the imaginative influences which I have endeavoured to throw over common life with *Crabbe's* matter of fact style of treating subjects of the same kind. This is not spoken to his disparagement; far from it; but



Editor's Notes

- 1 *My heart leaps up when I behold* Probably composed 26 March 1802.
Town-End See Glossary.
To a Butterfly ('Stay near me—do not take thy flight!'). Composed 14 March 1802.
Foresight Composed 28 April 1802.
my Daughter Catherine Catherine Wordsworth. The Wordsworths moved to Allan Bank in June 1808. Catherine was born in September of that year and the family moved to the Rectory in June 1811; Catherine died at the Rectory 5 June 1812. However, as Reed points out, the manuscript drafts from which WW drew for this poem must date after December 1812 (*Chronology: MY*, p. 677). WW may have conflated the time of composition with the time of the incident.
Address to a Child, During a Boisterous Winter Evening. By a Female Friend of the Author DW composed the poem between 28 November and around 5 December 1805, and showed it to WW when he returned home about 6 December. WW inserted lines 34–6 in late 1814 before publishing it with his own poems in 1815.
The Mother's Return; By the Same Perhaps composed 5 May 1807. 'D°' is 'Ditto'.
Alice Fell; Or, Poverty Robert Grahame was a solicitor in Glasgow. James Grahame (1765–1811), his brother, was a poet and dramatist whose *The Sabbath, A Poem*, was published in 1804, and whose *Poems* appeared in 1807.
Clarkson See Glossary.

2 *till it was restored* EQ's pencil note reads, 'see Coleridge's Biog. Lit'—that is, STC's expressed view that this and several other poems in the same 'homely mode' would have been 'more delightful in prose' (*Biographia Literaria*, Chapter 4).

Lucy Gray; Or, Solitude Probably composed between 6 October 1798 and 23 February 1799.

Edward Quillinan See the Introduction and Glossary.

Goslar See Glossary.

Crabbe See Glossary.

3 *Alfoxden* See Glossary.

We are Seven. Goodrich Castle The ruins of Goodrich Castle are at Ross, Herefordshire, on the east bank of the Wye, a few miles north of Tintern Abbey. See WW's note to *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* on p. 123 for his discussion of the differences between adult and childhood conceptions of death.

Salisbury Plain A large tract of chalk upland north of Salisbury in Wiltshire, on the road from London to Bristol.

Vale of Clwydd See WW's reference to this walking tour in his note to *Peter Bell*, p. 34. See also the Glossary entries for Calvert, with whom he began the tour, and for Jones.

Coleridge See Glossary.

In the Spring of the year 1798 The walking tour with STC and DW, during which *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was planned, actually took place in mid-November 1797 (see Chronology: *EY*, p. 210 and n. 37; Moorman, I, 346–9; *LB* [Owen], pp. vii–viii).

Linton Usually spelled Lynton. West of Alfoxden along the Bristol Channel, a few miles east of Porlock. The Valley of Stones, or Valley of Rocks as it is now called, is twelve miles west of Lynton on the coast of Bristol Channel. In a surviving fragment of a letter DW described the place as 'A valley at the top of one of those immense hills which open at each end to the sea, and is from its rocky appearance called the Valley of Stones' (DW to Mary Hutchinson?, November 1797; *EY*, p. 194).

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