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Colby Library Quarterly

In addition to the facsimile of the first edition, the library exhibited *A Christmas Carol* as published in Boston by Estes & Lauriat in 1882. Why exhibit this edition? The title-page is autographed “Edward Robinson”; he was the father of the poet Edwin Arlington Robinson. Also included in the centenary exhibition was a copy of G. K. Chesterton’s essay on “Dickens and Christmas” inscribed “Ruth Robinson from Uncle Win. Christmas, 1908.” Uncle Win was, of course, Edwin Arlington Robinson; his niece, Mrs. William Nivison, to whom the Colby Library is indebted for these books.

TWO WORDSWORTH LETTERS

By Alice Pattee Comparetti

THE Colby College Library has recently acquired two original letters by William Wordsworth. The first of these was written from Rydal Mount in 1820, an interesting year in the poet’s life, a year which he commemorated in the title of a group of poems, *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent, 1820*. The letter refers to an affair of business, and is interesting both in the glimpse it gives us of the practical side of the man of letters, and in the fact that it was written by a great poet. The handwriting is, in itself, an exciting reality. We quote the letter here, because it has never been published:

Rydale Mount
Monday 16th [October] 1820

Dear Sir,

I do not like to let the land at the rent proposed by Bewsher, because I think it would affect the letting of the whole next year.

I prefer its being retained in my hands, and let as meadow when the grass is fit to cut. As the crop will be
taken off those fields the incoming farmer shall have an allowance accordingly.

I am afraid the Blacksmith’s shop is likely to lie idle.

I remain, dear sir,

Very sincerely yours

WM. WORDSWORTH

The second letter was written in December, 1840, and is highly interesting for its report of two incidents of moment. One of these was an alarming accident which befell Wordsworth and his son John in November, 1840. Other letters* of November and December describe the accident, which, he says, “might have been fatal, but through God’s mercy we escaped without bodily injury.” About three miles beyond Keswick, on the Ambleside Road, on a narrow, steep, and winding slope, their carriage was violently struck by the descending mailcoach. The coachman had seen them at forty yards’ distance, but never slackened his pace; instead, he drove furiously down the hill, throwing Wordsworth’s horse and gig back through a gap in a wall, the stones tumbling about them as they fell.

The second incident in this letter becomes a part of literary history. Wordsworth recounts testimonies frequently received from men “who live by the labor of their hands,” that they have read and appreciated his poetry. This must have been highly gratifying to the poet who, in his *Lyrical Ballads*, had proposed as his object the choice of “incidents and situations from common life,” and the relation or description of these “in a selection of language really used by men,” thus hoping “a species of poetry would be produced . . . well adapted to interest mankind permanently.” As all students of the famous Preface know, “humble and rustic life was generally chosen,” because Wordsworth hoped that, through his efforts, humble and rustic people might become interested in poetry. The letter, a three-page holograph, shows how successful he was:

* See De Selincourt, *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, the Later Years*, pp. 1050-7.
My dear Sir

Accept my thanks for your letter, and the enclosed verses, which were read in this house, by us all with pleasure, and I may say that as a composition they do the Author no little credit. I need scarcely add, that it cannot but be gratifying to me to learn that my endeavours have been felt in the way which you allude to, and especially among the Class to which the person who has thus given vent to his feelings belongs.

You will be pleased to learn that I frequently receive testimonies from Individuals who live by the labour of their hands, that what I have written has not been a dead letter to them; and for this reason chiefly, I shall propose to my Publisher to print the *Excursion* in double column, so that it may circulate as cheaply as can be afforded.

The peril which my son and I incurred was even more formidable than the accounts of the newspapers represent. Thro’ the mercy of God my Son escaped without injury, and I only slightly hurt.

With the united kind regards of Mrs W[ordsworth] and my Daughter to yourself and Mrs Hook

I remain, my dear Sir

faithfully your obliged

WM WORDSWORTH

Rydal Mount
Dec. 7th, [18]40

I do not know who the Mr. Hook is, to whom the letter was written.

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OTHER RECENT ACCESSIONS

ECONOMICALLY speaking, one of the cheapest, but from the point of view of the literary historian one of the most significant, volumes recently to come to the Colby Library is a one-volume edition of Henry Fielding's