A Study of the Relation of Jeffrey and Gifford to Wordsworth and Byron

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FLORENCE MARY SMITH, A. B., 1899

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

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OF Master of Arts

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The Relation of Jeffrey and Gifford to Wordsworth and Byron.

Much has been said concerning the attitude of the early reviewers toward contemporary literature. The purpose of this discussion has been to collect some of this varying testimony, gathered from the years since the bitterness of the rivalry has ceased, and to compare it with the original purpose, as expressed by the reviewers and as shown in their writings, and the contemporary criticism of the friends of the authors.

The discussion has been limited to two reviews, The Edinburgh and The Quarterly and almost entirely to those articles of Jeffrey and Gifford dealing with Wordsworth and Byron.

The contemporary criticism, though too prejudiced to be considered as a fair basis of modern judgment, yet indicates the author's position at the time. Wordsworth disregarded his critics; Southey, himself a reviewer, refused to write for The Edinburgh in spite of better pay, because he was opposed to Jeffrey in "every principle of taste, morality and policy." He expressed no malice against Jeffrey, but attributed the latter's opposition to "the habit he (Jeffrey) has acquired of taking it for granted that the critic is by virtue of his office, superior to every writer whom he chooses to summon before him."

1. Southey's Correspondence, v.3, p.127.
2. Ibid v.3, p.123.
Of *The Quarterly* Southey also complains because of the liberties taken by its editor. Sir Walter Scott, friendly to both journals and moving spirit in the originating of *The Quarterly*, in suggesting Gifford as an editor makes charges as severe as those of Gifford's most bitter opponents. "Gifford will be admirable at service but will require, or I mistake him much, both a spur and a bridle... But he has worth, wit, learning, and extensive information,—is the friend of our friends in power and can easily correspond with them; is in no danger of having private quarrels fixed on him for public criticism." But these estimates are so clearly influenced by friendship or lack of friendship towards the critics, that they are not fair as a basis of judgment, and must be disregarded for opinions of a later and less prejudiced period.

In 1830 in *The North American Review* W.H. Everett makes severe criticism of articles directed against American authorship, where he speaks of the "tone of criticism...as very strongly marked by bad feelings, bad taste and bad policy." Later he speaks of the "cold-hearted flippancy which has always been one of the leading traits in the style of this, in many respects, valuable journal." (Edinburgh Review). According to the same writer a "tone of insolent and contemptuous levity" prevails.2

In a later volume of the same magazine Prescott accuses the reviewers of being men of little previous preparation and

continues his accusations as follows:

"Instead of a conscientious discussion and cautious examination of the matter in hand, we too often find an attempt to stimulate the popular taste by picquante gallyes of wit, by caustic sarcasm, or by a pert dashing confidence, that cuts the knot it cannot readily unloose. Then, again, the spirit of periodical criticism would seem to be little favorable to perfect impartiality. The critic, shrouded in his secret tribunal, too often demeans himself like a stern inquisitor, whose business is rather to convict than to examine. Criticism is directed to scent out blemishes instead of beauties. "Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur" is the bloody motto of a well-known British periodical, which under this piratical flag has sent a broadside into many a gallant bark that deserved better at its hands...We shall find amidst abundance of shrewd and sarcastic observation, smart skirmishes of wit, and clever antithesis, a very small infusion of sober, dispassionate criticism, the criticism founded on patient study and on strictly philosophical principles."

In volume 61 of the same journal, late enough for the animosities aroused by the English critics to have changed to a saner judgment, another American writer makes equally strong accusations.

"But although containing papers of the greatest merit, their general tone has been too much that of the partisan.

Being political as well as literary journals, their judgments of authors have often been determined by considerations independent of literary merit. In criticism they have repeatedly violated the plainest principles of taste, morality and benevolence. "Public opinion reverses the dicta of self-constituted literary tribunals: indeed it changes the tone of the tribunals themselves."

An English review of the work of Jeffrey and of Gifford is equally severe. Jeffrey is estimated as a man of versatile talents without the slightest self-distrust, with a confidence too pretentious in view of the fact that he assumed to teach poets and thinkers how to write and to think, but left behind no critical principles. He is credited with being plausible rather than profound, a man of expedients rather than of principles, changing position easily, and thus brilliantly avoiding the consequences of his blunders. His lack of earnestness and depth was a serious failing, for "Profound and earnest feelings, sentiments of awe, wonder and reverence, a mind trained to habits of contemplation on man and the universe, were needed in the critic who would do justice to Wordsworth and Coleridge."

For Gifford, the critic finds still less excuse. He is said to have all of the bad qualities of his time, to be fierce, dogmatic, bigoted, libellous, unsympathizing, being distinguished for malice and abusive personalities, and altogether one of the worst critics of modern times.²

² Westminster Review, v.38, p.36.
A later critic in the same periodical says:

"There is much that is plausible, even true in his reviews of Scott, Wordsworth, and others; but it is in general quite irrelevant to the poems ostensibly under consideration. He contradicted the theories of poetical criticism announced in the prefaces of Wordsworth, Southey or Coleridge, as he would have controverted the opinions expressed by any preceding speaker in the Speculative Society, simply as an exercise of dialectic ingenuity. Their poetry...he does not appear to have felt or understood, or made any effort to feel or understand".

"In literature the Edinburgh Review even under Jeffrey slowly and imperceptibly conformed to the taste of the age; it assuredly did not lead it."

Leigh Hunt, who certainly cannot be accused of prejudice in favor of the critics, speaks in very moderate terms of their attacks on him as deserved, blaming himself for the Feast of Poets. More reliance, then, can be put on his estimate of Gifford, whom he accuses of writing commonplaces, "Yet this is the man who undertook to despise Charles Lamb, and to trample on Keats and Shelley. "His review spared neither age nor sex as long as he lived. What he did at the first out of a self-satisfied incompetence, he did at last out of an envious and angry one, and he was, all the while, the humble servant of power, and never expressed one word of regret for his inhumanity."

"Readers in these kindlier days of criticism"

2. Ibid v.58, p.115.
4. Ibid v.1, p.239-245.
(1849-1850) he says, "have no conception of the extent to which personal hostility allowed itself to be transported in the periodicals of those times. Personal habits, appearances, connections, domesticities, nothing was safe from misrepresentations, begun perhaps in the gaiety of a saturnalian license but gradually carried to an excess which would have been ludicrous had it not sometimes produced tragical consequences."

Of more recent reviewers Leslie Stephen is among the most severe. He says that few of the articles of the early critics would have any chance at acceptance today, and that the majority were padding, manufactured by the critic out of the article before him. Of Jeffrey he says, "it must be admitted that his ridicule strikes pretty much at random. He picks out Southey, certainly the least eminent of the so-called school of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Lamb, as the one writer of the set whose poetry deserves serious consideration: and, besides attacking Wordsworth's faults, his occasional flatness and childishness, selects some of his finest poems, e.g. the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" as flagrant specimens of the hopelessly absurd." In addition, Mr. Stephen accuses Jeffrey of being a follower of the fashion rather than a leader in it, and of being connected with a journal which was used to put forth liberal ideas with flippancy and superficiality. ²

Gosse in his recently published book speaks of the Quarterly and Edinburgh as being "often smart, sometimes witty, rarely sound," with a style pompous and diffuse. Jeffrey, he says was severe but in his criticism on the "Excursion" showed good sense though he could never appreciate the finer qualities of poetry, still he did good work where he was not prejudiced.

Saintsbury and Gates are more moderate in their criticism. The former says of Jeffrey that he keeps his eye on the point, does not preach, never blusters and splashes at random, "he neither opens up undiscovered (continents) countries, nor provokes and stimulates to the discovery of them. His strength lies in the combination of a fairly wide range of sympathy with an extraordinary shrewdness and good sense in applying that sympathy. "But however much he may sometimes seem to carp and complain, however much we may sometimes wish for a little more equity and a little less law it is astonishing how weighty Jeffrey's critical judgments are after three quarters of a century: which has seen so many seeming heavy things grow light. There may be much that he does not see: there may be some things which he is physically unable to see: but what he does see, he sees with a clearness, and co-ordinates in its bearings in other things seen with a precision which are hardly to be matched among the fluctuating and diverse race of critics."

1. Gosse, English Literature, v.4, p.97-98.
2. Saintsbury, Essays in English Literature, p.126.
3. Ibid. p.135.
Gates says of Jeffrey, "Jeffrey ranges with the same un- faltering step over diverse fields of knowledge. He seems equally sure of himself of in dealing with politics, history, fiction, poetry and philosophy... A little careful study of Jeffrey's work will usually show that he has had nothing startlingly novel to say on any of these questions...

Jeffrey's mastery of his subject is like the successful barrister's knowledge of his brief; he is sure to know whatever he needs to know in order to carry the matter in hand triumphantly through... The intellectual interest preponderates in his critical work, and his discussions often seem, particularly to a reader of modern impressionistic criticism, hard, unsympathetic, searchingly analytical, repellingly abstract and systematic. He is always on the watch, he never lends himself confidingly to his author and takes passively and gratefully the word and the image his author suggests. He never loiters or dreams."

Mr. Saintsbury says "The Edinburgh, whatever it pretended to be, was violently partisan, unhesitatingly personal, and more inclined to find fault, the more distinguished the subject was." Of Jeffrey's relation to Wordsworth he says that in spite of a large amount of poor material in Wordsworth's poetry it is in the first place quite clear that the twentieth ought to have saved him from Jeffrey's claws: in the second, that the critic constantly selects the wrong things

2. Saintsbury p.103.
as well as the right for condemnation and ridicule, and in the third that he would have praised or at any rate not have blamed in another, the very things that he blames in Wordsworth." Though Mr. Saintsbury does attribute to Jeffrey the ability to appreciate parts of Wordsworth even while sneering at the very finest passages in the partly admired poems, his final estimate of Jeffrey is that, "His strength lies in the combination of a fairly wide range of sympathy with an extraordinary shrewdness and good sense in applying it."  

Of Gifford Mr. Saintsbury says, "It was apparently impossible for him...to regard the author whom he was criticizing, the editor who had preceded him in his labors, or the adversary with whom he was carrying on a polemic, as anything but a being partly villainous, who must be soundly scolded, first for having done what he did, and secondly to prevent him from doing it again."  

Mr. Bagehot praises The Edinburgh for opposing "timorous acquiescence in the actual system" and says that if "Jeffrey was not a great critic he had, what many critics have wanted, the art of writing what most people would think good criticism. He might not know his subject, but he knew his readers."  

Mr. Prothero says of Jeffrey: "The secret of his success, both as an editor and a critic, is that he made The Review the expression of the Whig character both in its excellences

2. Ibid, p.133.
and its limitations. A man of clear discriminating mind, of cool and placid judgment, he refused to accept the existing state of things, was persuaded that it might be safely improved, saw the practical steps required and had the courage of his convictions. He was suspicious of large principles, somewhat callous to enthusiasm or sentiment, intolerant to whatever was incapable of precise expression. His intellectual strength lay not in the possession of one great gift, but in the simultaneous exercise of several well adjusted talents. His literary taste was correct, but it consisted rather in recognizing compliance with accepted rules of proved utility than in the readiness to appreciate novelties of thought and treatment. Hence his criticism though useful for his time has not endured beyond his day. It may be doubted whether more could be expected from a man who was eminently successful in addressing a jury."

Mr. Waugh, a very recent writer, estimates both Jeffrey and Gifford with more kindness: Jeffrey, as a man of quick perception on the surface, frankly sincere, both in his enthusiasm and dislikes, and, often as he was mistaken, never moved by petty prejudice or personal pique: Gifford, as being "scholarly, thorough and honorable." 2

A study of these criticisms, which, with the exception of one of the American reviews, from its nationality unprejudiced, may be considered far enough from the time under discussion, to have no trace of party bitterness, indicates the style of

the chief accusations against the early critics. The reviews are accused of:

1. Political bias in criticism.
2. Personal prejudice.
3. Lack of critical study and rules.
4. Following rather than guiding public taste.
5. Unwarranted cruelty. Slashing, not criticising.
6. Levity and sarcasm.

Jeffrey is accused of being:

1. Versatile, but without distrust in his own talents.
2. Desirous of convicting rather than examining.
3. Plausible rather than profound.
4. Prejudiced.
5. Without permanent critical principles.
6. Unappreciative of the finer qualities of poetry.

More sympathetic critics have called attention to his intellectuality, and his aptitude for analysis as making him seemingly hard and unsympathetic, also to the fact that his prejudices did not draw him into the wild personalities of some other critics.

Gifford, on the other hand, meets with little sympathy from any source. He is regarded as:

1. Dogmatic.
2. Bigoted.
3. Fierce in personal attacks.
4. Unsympathizing.
5. Self-satisfied.
6. Incompetent.
7. The servant of power.
The aim of this paper is to test the truths of these accusations in the cases of Wordsworth and Byron who were subjected to much of the early criticism.

Before passing judgment on the critics, it is only fair to see in some measure, the general critical attitude of the day. Standards of criticism were largely based upon the past, and could not be completely in sympathy with innovations in poetic lines. The time was judicial and dogmatic. In any age, also, there is a temptation whether on the part of writer or critic to let public taste govern judgment. Even if the accusation is true that The Edinburgh followed rather than led public taste, and, were it true, it would certainly indicate a failure to perceive the real purpose of a review, yet too much cannot be made of it in this case, since deference to public opinion is clearly stated as one of the purposes of the periodical. In the advertisement to the first number, the following appears: "it seems unreasonable to expect that the Public should be interested by any account of performances, which have never attracted any share of its attention", "But the Conductors of The Edinburgh Review propose to carry this principle of selection a good deal farther, to decline any attempt at exhibiting a complete view of modern literature and to confine their notice in a great degree, to works that either have attained, or deserve a certain portion of celebrity. As the value of a publication conducted upon this principle, will not depend very materially upon the earliness of its intelligence,
they have been induced to prefer a quarterly to a monthly period of publication, that they may always have before them a greater variety for selection, and be occasionally guided in their choice by the tendencies of public opinion."

Later Jeffrey says, "Wherever, a work, therefore, is very popular, and where the general public opinion of its merits appears to be substantially right, we think ourselves at liberty to leave it out of the chronicle, without incurring the censure of neglect or inattention."

Though the modern reader may not on this account excuse the general severity of early criticism, yet he will discover that this severity is not against individual authors merely, but is one of the critical canons of the earlier reviewers, as the motto of The Edinburgh Review bears witness. Light is thrown on this side of the question by an early letter of Jeffrey to Horner.

"Walter Scott has in a manner offered to do Godwin's "Life of Chaucer", and, as he understands the subject, and hates the author, I have a notion he will make a good article of it. We must abate something of our general asperity; but I think we should make one or two examples of great delinquents in every number."^2

Here Jeffrey seems to indicate that the good of the poet required a certain amount of blame.

The previous statements seem to prove, in the minds of

the reviewers themselves, that there is truth in the accusations of following public taste and of lacking a critical formula.

In many of the criticisms quoted, the statements are too general, massing, under one broad conclusion, criticisms that apply only in the case of individual authors. Especially does this seem to be true when Jeffrey's criticisms of Wordsworth are viewed in the light of the previously quoted estimates of Jeffrey.

As far as I have been able to find, there seems to be neither political bias nor personal prejudice in the relation of the two men. Substantially the same statements as to lack of personal opposition are made by Jeffrey in the preface to his collected work, by Crabb Robinson in his diary, and by Lord Cockburn in his life of Jeffrey. The latter relates a meeting between the two, where, though Wordsworth is far from cordial, Jeffrey certainly showed no personal unfriendliness. Crabb Robinson says that Coleridge told of a visit he received from Jeffrey, in which the latter expressed admiration for Wordsworth, and stated that Wordsworth had been attacked in the review, simply because the errors of men of genius ought to be exposed.

If Jeffrey's word can be trusted, his opposition to Wordsworth is not personal. Nor can this statement be attributed to a change of heart in Jeffrey's later writings, for in 1804 he writes to Horner in a private letter which could not have been intended to smooth matters over or to win him friends.

"I meant no contempt to Wordsworth by putting him at the head of the poetical firm." /1

Much truer, in Wordsworth's case, is the accusation of unwarranted cruelty and sarcasm to which Jeffrey pleaded guilty in the preface to the republished edition of his essays. The truth of this is emphasized by the fact that Jeffrey wrote no criticisms of Wordsworth's poems until 1807, but took occasion to make flings at Wordsworth and the Lake School through his reviews of Southey and Crabbe. in fact, it is probable that Jeffrey rated Crabbe above his own estimate of the poet, to lower the latter. The reviewer said in a letter to Horner:

"I thank you for liking Crabbe, though the wretch has monstrous faults. ...I have overpraised him a little, but I think I have marked the distinction between him and Wordsworth." 2

All critics unite in agreeing that Jeffrey did not appreciate Wordsworth; some averring, however, that his estimate of the poet was altogether faulty and unsympathetic; others that he has more the modern idea, not appreciating the mysticism and idealism of the writer. In the light of these statements it is interesting to compare Jeffrey's critical articles with the estimates of Wordsworth's personal friends, and with those of later critics. Only in his criticisms of a few of the lyrics and two or three of the tender little ballads does Jeffrey differ. His treatment of "The Ode on Intimations of Immortality" is no worse than that of modern critics who interpret it literally, and he makes no statement of criticism against "The Excursion", which, if couched in sympathetic language is


2 Ibid v.2, p.131.
any more severe than those of Wordsworth's most intimate friends.

Only two classes of Wordsworth's critics will be used in the comparison. The estimate of Wordsworth's poetry has undergone three periods of change in the last century: first, the early period of severe criticism, marked by the attacks of contemporary reviewers; next, a period of undue and undiscriminating praise, and lastly, in the last quarter of a century his poetry has been received with a saner appreciation and a more discriminating criticism. My purpose is to compare with the statement of the first class of critics those of Wordsworth's friends who wrote at the time, showing how they estimated Wordsworth in much the same way that Jeffrey did, only with sympathy rather than severity; and also, omitting those critics of the second class who were in some cases as insane in their worship as the earlier ones were in their hate, to show how many of the later admirers of Wordsworth write of him in the same way that Jeffrey and Gifford did.

In his article on the "Excursion" Jeffrey says in his criticisms of Wordsworth that Wordsworth is profuse and wordy, does not understand where to limit himself, is not a critic of his own ink, and does not profit by others' criticism but is sincere in following a false system of poetry which he might have avoided by more contact with men, though mistaking zeal in teachings for poetical inspiration. An outgrowth of this is the unlucky habit of debasing pathos with vulgarity. Such, stripped of the brilliancy and hardness of their setting, are Jeffrey's criticisms on Wordsworth. With the ex-
ception of the last, there is none that would not be accepted by most critics of Wordsworth's work. The first two would be accepted with no opposition.

In spite of the fact that Wordsworth often improved his poetry by later revision, yet he seemed to have no keen sense of what was poetical and what was not. Crabb Robinson says, "but on my gently alluding to the line, "Three feet long by two feet wide" and confessing that I dared not read them aloud in company he said, "They ought to be liked."

The truth or falsity of Wordsworth's system of poetry is not fully settled, yet many critics will agree with Jeffrey that had he not had a system to defend he might have been more poetical in a larger amount of his work. Where he is most poetical, he is last bound by his theories. We, too, feel with Jeffrey that meditation upon a subject even by as contemplative a mind as Wordsworth's does not constitute poetry and that Wordsworth lacks inspiration just at these points. Jeffrey's criticism of vulgarity is undoubtedly too strong. He misses the point of Wordsworth's theory; for common life under Wordsworth's treatment is often pathetic, sometimes common-place, never vulgar.

The opening lines of Jeffrey's criticism on "The Excursion" may well be compared with criticisms from the same poem from Crabb Robinson's diary. It will be noticed at once that both critics, the kind and the severe, emphasize the falsity of the theory as well as its influence on the practice.

Crabb Robinson's Diary, May 9, 1815.
"This will never do! It bears no doubt the stamp of the author's heart and fancy but unfortunately not half so visibly as that of his peculiar system. His former poems were intended to recommend that system, and to bespeak favour for it by their individual merit; but this, we suspect, must be recommended by the system—and can only expect to succeed where it had been previously established. It is longer, weaker and tamer than any of Mr. Wordsworth's other productions; with less boldness of originality, and less even of that extreme simplicity and lowliness of tone which wavered so prettily, in the Lyrical Ballads, between silliness and pathos. We have imitations of Cowper and even of Milton here; engrafted on the natural drawl of the Lakers—and all diluted diluted into harmony by that profuse and irrepressible wordiness which deluges all the blank verse of this school of poetry and lubricates and weakens the whole structure of their style."

There is close agreement between that and the following—

"I could only look into the preface... It is a poem of formidable size, and I fear too mystical to be popular,... But it will draw on him the imputation of dullness possibly; still it will I trust strengthen the zeal of his few friends."

or later criticism of October 13,

"The wisdom and moral character of the work are beyond anything similar that I am acquainted with; and the spirit of the poem flags much less frequently than might be apprehended. There are passages which run heavily, tales which are prolix,

and reasonings which are spun out, but, in general, the narratives are exquisitely tender.

In the diary for January 3, 1815 the final estimate is given:

"Perhaps after all "The Excursion" will leave Mr. Wordsworth's admirers where they were. Each will be furnished with instances of excellence and deformity to strengthen his own persuasions. Certainly I could wish for a somewhat clearer development of the author's opinions, for the retrenchment of some of the uninteresting interlocutory matter, for the exclusion of one tale, the angry and avaricious and unkind woman, and curtailments in most of the other narratives. But with these deductions from the worth of the poem, I do not hesitate to place it among the noblest works of the human intellect: and to me it is one of the most delightful. What is good is of the best kind of goodness, and the passages are not few which place the author on a level with Milton."

Both Jeffrey and Crabb Robinson, both the adverse and the friendly critic, agree concerning the faults of the poem. Crabb Robinson sees the beauties and even the hard hearted Jeffrey agrees that it shows some of the "heart" of Wordsworth, agrees that it has imitations of Milton. Were Jeffrey not bound to criticize, he might appreciate.

Other friends of Wordsworth gave much the same estimate. Lamb was more enthusiastic, as he always was with relation to his friend. Coleridge criticized both the diction and the characters of "The Excursion" in much Jeffrey's terms, at the
same time that he accused Jeffrey of great unfairness in attacking Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, without promulgating another theory or even having some critical principles as a basis of authoritative criticism.

Southey said in one of his letters:

"Have you read "The Excursion" and have you read the collection of Wordsworth's other poems in two octavo volumes? If you have not there is a great pleasure in store for you. I am no blind admirer of Wordsworth, and can see where he has chosen subjects which are unworthy in themselves, and where the strength of his imagination and of his feeling is directed upon inadequate objects. Notwithstanding these faults, and their frequent occurrence, it is by the side of Milton that Wordsworth will have his station awarded him by posterity." 2

Matthew Arnold, a critic of a later period, makes much the same comment:

"The Excursion" and "The Prelude" his poems of greatest bulk, are by no means Wordsworth's best work. His best work is in his shorter pieces, and many indeed are there of these which are of first-rate excellence. But in his seven volumes the pieces of high merit are mingled with a mass of pieces very inferior to them; so inferior to them that it seemed wonderful how the same poet should have produced both...Work altogether inferior, work quite uninspired, flat and dull, is produced by him with evident unconsciousness of its defects, and he presents it to us with the same faith and seriousness as his best work." 3

2. Southey's Life & Correspondence, v.4, p.95.
Jeffrey's treatment of "The White Doe", cruelly as it is stated, is not far from the generally accepted idea. Leslie Stephen, a devoted Wordsworthian, said of the poems:

"The White Doe" is one of those poems which make many readers inclined to feel a certain tenderness for Jeffrey's dogged insensibility, and I confess that I am not one of its warm admirers." Crabb Robinson said at the time of its publication "It is not the happiest of his narrative poems!"

"The Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" is severely criticised by Jeffrey, but he says nothing worse than does John Morley who is an admirer of Wordsworth's genius and of his poetry. Jeffrey closes his review of the lyrical ballads with the statement, "And then the volume is wound up with an "Ode"... This is beyond all doubt the most illegible and unintelligible part of the publication."  

John Morley says that this poem is "contrary to notorious fact, experience and truth. It is a beggarly conception no doubt, to judge as if poetry should always be capable of a prose rendering but it is at least fatal to the philosophic pretension of a line or a stanza, if, when it is fairly rendered to prose, the prose discloses it as nonsense, and there is at least one stanza of the great "Ode" that this doom would surely await." In this case, also, an early friend of Wordsworth had expressed the same opinion as Jeffrey, and the later friendly critic, Southey had written to a friend concerning the lyrical ballads, "There are certainly some pieces there

2 Crabb Robinson's Diary, v.1, p.485.
4 John Morley, Studies in Literature, p.47.
which are good for nothing (none, however, which a poor poet could have written) and very many which it was highly injudicious to publish... The "Ode upon Pre-existence" is a dark subject, darkly handled... The Sonnets are in a grand style."

Jeffrey's penetrating genius that will cause him to select at once the salient points in the weakness of Wordsworth's poetry has not corresponding appreciation of the beauties of Wordsworth's style. In spite of this, he gives as illustrations the best of selections from the longer poems. In regard to the simple ballads and lyrics, however, he is absolutely at a loss. He cannot see the beautiful simplicity of some of them as is shown by his treatment of the Lucy poems."

Jeffrey's earliest criticism was the most unpenetrating and most different from the best critical estimate of Wordsworth. Only the blundering Jeffrey could say "By and by we have a piece of namby-pamby 'to the small celandine'... and the ditty is wound up with a piece of babyish absurdity."

The same criticism speaks of "The Ode to Duty" in which the lofty vein is unsuccessfully attempted." It is interesting to note that the lines most criticised in the last poem are omitted in Wordsworth's revision.

The point most arousing Jeffrey's wrath in this part is not the poetry, but what he calls Wordsworth's "system", and he feels that Wordsworth does "always write good verses when by any accident, he is led to abandon his system." This severe condemnation closes with a discussion of the sonnets in terms

3. Ibid, p.221.
of great praise, and admits that in all the poems there are traits of delicate feeling and original fancy. The final warning to Mr. W. to repent, when unheeded, later called down upon the unrepentant Mr. Wordsworth the criticisms of "The Excursion" and "The White Doe" already discussed.

In a review of Byron in 1816 Jeffrey seems to have changed his attitude by saying, "Undoubtedly the finer passages of Wordsworth and Southey have in them wherewithal to lend an impulse to the utmost ambition of rival genius, and their diction and manner of writing is both striking and original."

The charges against Jeffrey hardly prove true in the case of Wordsworth. Neither personal prejudice nor party bias has any weight. Jeffrey, as usual in his journal greeted the young poet with a slashing criticism, and, from time to time renewed the attack, yet he grows more penetrating in his later reviews, and in them makes statements not very different from the present estimate of the poet. Had Wordsworth's unfortunate prefaces not aroused Jeffrey, he would have been as just as the judicially minded man can be to the meditative poet.

The tone of the Quarterly is very different. Of the three prominent articles, Gifford is the author of but one, and only in the capacity of editor can he be held responsible for the others. The first one, a review of "The Excursion" in 1815 is by Charles Lamb, and, of course is favorable. At this late date the changes spoken of so bitterly by Lamb in his letter to Wordsworth are not evident except in a lack of...
smoothness in the review, but to Lamb they seemed to have taken away all his favorable comment.

In 1816 Gifford wrote an article reviewing the collected ballads and "The White Doe". This repeats in a large measure Jeffrey's criticism though with more moderation. There is fault-finding with the poetical theory, with the taking of language and subjects from low life, but the "White Doe" is treated with such tenderness as compared to Jeffrey's review that Gifford might almost by contrast, pass for an admirer rather than an opposer of Wordsworth. In 1834 Sir Henry Taylor has an article in the Quarterly which may be considered favorable. It is really a summary of the estimate that has been placed upon Wordsworth's poetry, after the years of most bitter controversy are over, and, without showing the enthusiasm of an ardent admirer, it is a fair discussion of Wordsworth's theory and practice of poetry.

In general, then, The Quarterly seems to have had little share in the attack on Wordsworth, though it may fairly be said to have followed rather than to have formed public taste.

In contrast with the attitude of the critics toward the other romantic poets is their feeling toward Byron. In January 1808 there had appeared in the Edinburgh a review of Byron's juvenile poems, "Hours of Idleness." Byron was very indignant at the harsh treatment given to his juvenile poems, and gave Jeffrey, who for once was guiltless, full credit for its authorship, retaliating for the supposed injury by his
"English Bards and Scotch Reviewers", where he attacked Jeffrey in the lines

"Moved by the great examples I pursue
The self-same road, but make my own review:
Not such great Jeffrey's, yet like him will be
Self constituted judge of poesy."

In February, 1812, Jeffrey reviewed favorably Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", Canto I and II, and from that time on he wrote the reviews of Byron's poetry himself, eight being credited to him in Cockburn's Life of Jeffrey. Jeffrey passes by with magnanimity Byron's attack on him. Of "Childe Harold" he says; "Lord Byron has improved marvelously since his last appearance at our tribunal, and this, though it bears a very affected title, is really a volume of very considerable power, spirit and originality,—which not only atones for the evil works of his nonage, but gives promise of a further excellence hereafter."

Jeffrey criticizes the lack of plot, admires the descriptive parts, and concludes by a reference to the appendix in which Byron expresses himself as still holding private resentment. The critic comments on his own self-restraint in having resisted the temptation to satirize in return, and remarks that he writes the review of Byron's poems, as he should have done had he never before heard of Byron as an author.

In his later review of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", Canto III, Jeffrey says, "If the finest poetry be that which leaves the deepest impression on the minds of the readers — and this

is not the worst test of its excellence, Lord Byron, we think, must be allowed to take precedence of all his distinguished contemporaries."

The general tone of all Jeffrey's reviews of Byron is the same. While praising the excellences of the style, he likewise sees its faults, and expresses condemnation of the moral tone, this condemnation growing stronger, until in his later dramatic criticism, he does not hesitate to say, "But their general tendency we believe to be in the highest degree pernicious; and we even think that it is chiefly by means of the fine and lofty sentiments they contain that they acquire their most fatal power of corruption."

Byron responded at once to Jeffrey's favorable attitude, for he wrote in his Journal for March 20, 1814 relating to a reference to him in the Edinburgh; "Many a man will retract praise, none but a high-spirited mind will revoke its censure or can praise the man it has attacked... I admire him for this—not because he has praised me...but because he is, perhaps, the only man, who, under the relations for which he and I stand or stood, with regard to each other would have had the liberality to act thus; none but a great soul dared hazard it."

After the publishing of the review on "The Corsair" Byron wrote to Moore, August 3, 1814; "He is only too kind to me in my share of it (The Review) and I begin to fancy myself a golden pheasant, upon the strength of the plumage wherewith he hath bedecked me." 3.

Regarding a supposed attack on him in an Edinburgh Review of Coleridge's "Literary Life", Byron writes to Moore February 28, 1817; "But I absolve him of all attacks, present and future; for I think he has already pushed his clemency in my behoof to the utmost, and I shall always think well of him. I only wonder he did not begin before, as my domestic destruction was a fine opening for all the world, of which all who could, did well to avail themselves."

Later when the less favorable reviews of the dramas came out, Byron refused to grow indignant at Jeffrey, as he says, when all "even to my grand patron Francis Jeffrey, Esq. of the Edinburgh Review have risen up against me in my later publications." ²

In his attitude toward Byron Jeffrey appears in a much more pleasant light. He never sneers. Though he indulges in personal references, "too many" he himself later said, yet they are only such as appeared to any thoughtful man on reading Byron's later poems. He is open, straight forward, and more truly a critic than usual. The personal and party prejudice attributed to Jeffrey had ample grounds for holding sway in this case. Byron was a Tory and a gentle man, upheld by The Quarterly; as later events proved, and yet Jeffrey honored him. On the other hand, Byron's poetry would naturally appeal to Jeffrey. It had the romantic elements which would arouse his own romantic interest, without the philosophy and mysticism, beyond Jeffrey's practical imagination.

2. Ibid, v.4, p.80.
But if Jeffrey's attitude seems unusual, Gifford's seems in some ways miraculous. The Quarterly made no mention of Byron's youthful poems, but though Byron had attacked Gifford in "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" from the time "Childe Harold" appeared, it viewed his poetry with uniform kindness.

Toward the last, there were no reviews; the stern Puritan sense of Gifford, perhaps, would not admit of The Quarterly's reviewing "Don Juan" and his feeling toward "Cain" is shown by the fact that he remonstrated with Byron against publishing it. His silence was taken by others as acquiescence and Southey wrote an indignant protest to Gifford because he did not openly condemn Byron's tragedies.

Sometime between 1808 and 1811 Byron changed his attitude toward Gifford, for by 1811 he is writing;

"As Gifford has been ever my "Magnus Apollo" any approbation...would of course be more welcome." Murray, Byron's publisher, showed Gifford the manuscript of "Childe Harold" much to Byron's disgust, as he feared that the literary dictator would feel that he was paving the way for favorable criticism.

At Murray's suggestion, Scott reviewed the book. From this time the references to Gifford in Byron's letters are most cordial. From hesitating to have Gifford see his poems, he comes to sending them to Gifford, taking the critic's suggestions as to improvements in diction and even going so far as to tell Gifford to burn Canto IV of "Childe Harold", if he felt that it lacked the power of the rest of the poem.

3. Ibid, v.4, p.69.
In this way Gifford saw besides "Childe Harold", at least "The Siege of Corinth", "Beppo", "Sardanapalus" and "Cain". Gifford himself wrote none of the Quarterly reviews of Byron, the very fact of his judging the poems, perhaps, making it necessary to let others do the actual reviewing. The reviews were written by George A. Ellis, Walter Scott, and Bishop Heber. The critics, as well as the editor, take a tone of opposition to Byron toward the last, especially in Bishop Heber's review of the tragedies.

Byron saw the change of attitude, but refused to accept it as Gifford's. In a letter to Murray he says:

"I see in the last two numbers of the Quarterly a strong itching to assail me, (see the review of the Etonian), let it, and see if they shan't have enough of it. I don't allude to Gifford, who has always been my friend and whom I do not consider responsible for the articles written by others." Before the review of the tragedies Byron had known Gifford's attitude as he had written to Murray, September, 1821; "I am mortified that Gifford don't take to my new dramas", but that did not change Byron's feeling of personal friendship, as through Gifford's illness (1821) Byron continues to inquire about him in the most friendly manner.

The relation between the two men is very interesting, neither appearing in his generally conceived character. Even with the fact that Byron was of the nobility and approved by Walter Scott, both of which may have added to Gifford's interest

in Byron, there remains an element still unaccounted for.

Such a study as this, though necessarily not conclusive, has brought out two or three facts. In the first place, the accusations against Gifford and Jeffrey are too sweeping, particularly those against the former. The statements made are probably all true in relation to Gifford's attitude toward Shelley and Keats. They certainly are not so in regard to Wordsworth and Byron. Toward Wordsworth there is no enthusiasm, but the critic's attitude is neither dogmatic nor lacking in taste; toward Byron, The Quarterly took always a moderate tone, condemning morals but admiring poetry.

The general accusations of the later writers toward Jeffrey are more true, yet even here the points most emphasized appear to move him the least. No personal prejudice nor party friendship has influenced Jeffrey in his attacks on Wordsworth. The Edinburgh, seemingly with no other than a critical motive, changed its attitude toward Byron, and became consistent in his favor, though never approving the moral tone of his poetry. He has condemned Wordsworth, no more severely, and no less truly than his friends of that day and this, and has been guilty only of the critical faults of the day, severity of tone and dogmatic statement. On the other hand, an analysis of the truth of Jeffrey's statements shows that for a man of his mental type, in those days of unkindly criticism, Jeffrey has shown unusual penetration and good judgment.
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