

superficial examination of the speeches and writings of Negro leaders of the time who at best hoped to lay the basis for the rise of capitalists of their own group. The crowning absurdity of Du Bois' point of view may be seen in the fact that the reconstruction governments had the support of men like Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens, leaders of the "radical" Republicans who can hardly be said to have wanted more than an eradication of the worst abuses of capitalism. For a short while Sumner and Stevens even had the support of the majority of northern capitalists and lost it only when the industrialists, harried by the Greenbackers and agrarians in the West, made peace with their erstwhile southern enemies in order to hasten pacification of the country and restoration of internal markets.

Black Reconstruction is valuable as a source book for dates and figures but Du Bois' confusion destroys its utility for wider use. He has an abiding distrust of the working class and his bias runs all through his book. For example, he can see clearly enough that the rise of slavery and the failure of the reconstruction governments redounded to the benefit of capitalists but he insists on blaming white workers for the plight of Negroes. Thus he argues that the colored workers of the world as "the majority of the world's laborers, by the insistence of white labor, became the basis of a system of industry which ruined democracy and showed its perfect fruit in World War and Depression." The emphasis is misplaced; the systems of world imperialism and slavery were not established by the *insistence of white labor* but rather by the insistence of white capitalists able to bribe and mislead a then undeveloped working class. In a similar vein Du Bois puts a large share of the blame for post-war violence on the disappearance of the old planter class which, he says, "explains so many characteristics of the post-war South: its lynchings and mob law, its murder and cruelty, its insensibility to the finer things of civilization."

That same distrust underlies Du Bois' hostility to working-class movements and his advice to Negroes to "accept segregation." It leads him to support the New Deal as he once supported the New Freedom. At a time when the masses of Negroes need more than ever to throw their support behind movements for real labor governments and genuine dictatorships of the proletariat Du Bois can only yearn for a limited bourgeois democracy that will give him and his beloved Talented Tenth a place in the sun.

LOREN MILLER.

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Two Escapes

LETTERS OF GERARD MANLEY
HOPKINS. Edited by C. Collier Abbott.
2 vols. Oxford University Press. \$10.

THE EARLY LETTERS OF WILLIAM
AND DOROTHY WORDSWORTH.
Edited by Ernest De Selincourt. Oxford
University Press. \$8.75.

THE poet as a person and the poet as a craftsman will be of secondary consideration in this review, although the first is Wordsworth's chief preoccupation and the second is the chief matter of Hopkins' letters.

Wordsworth, with the self-consciousness of the introvert, strove to live the "good life," to be irreproachable, and scarcely after his thirties lived at all. A more unlovely exhibition of constipated emotions, dosed constantly with extracts in capital letters, it would be hard to find anywhere in literature. The good of humanity was regularly in his mouth but never got further. In important decisions personal salvation and a selfish independence came before and his retirement to the lake country is one of the most thorough escapes in the history of literature.

Hopkins, on the contrary, was a man of rigidly objective mind. To him selflessness was natural, as it is to men who look upon their careers as well as their bodies as instruments to satisfy some larger curiosity or fulfill some larger purpose than the boundaries of one life can contain. He entered the Catholic Church seeking, not salvation, which a more egotistic nature might have found, but solutions which he could not find there. The course was a hard one. It involved two successive intellectual and emotional crises, renunciation of one religious faith and initiation into another. But he is quiet about both his motives and his experience, the rack of which can be felt, however, in the calm, mask-like style. A powerful and independent will and keenly-inquiring mind, bowed in Jesuit discipline, leaped out through the one permitted outlet, literary technique; and so this obedient Jesuit became perhaps the boldest and most deliberate experimenter in the history of poetry.

Wordsworth and Hopkins appear here together not accidentally as poets whose letters happen to be published in the same year, nor as men who either by literary or temperamental affinities belong together. As already mentioned, there were scarcely two men further apart and their poetry is even more opposed. Both, however, viewed a revolution and reacted to it; both were distressed by the visible miseries of the system they lived in; both retreated from it; and for both the retreat appears to have been a disaster. These considerations, therefore, make their correspondence, or at least chosen elements in it, important to contemporary writers.

Curiously enough the period spent by Wordsworth in revolutionary France brought

no comment beyond references to "disturbed conditions" and inconveniences. Perhaps he was too absorbed in his famous love affair. It is not until he returned to England that we find the revolution to have made any impression upon him. In those early years of his manhood Wordsworth was moody, restless, unsettled and depressed by his insecure future. He wandered about in England and on the continent. His correspondents of the time were, like himself, young men not yet snugly fitted in business, church or official posts. Their impatience burst out in democratic sentiments, which disappeared when posts appeared. One by one, as they settled down in church livings, business or public office these democrats turned conservatives. Wordsworth, left a considerable legacy by a friend, went into literary retirement. Such agitation of soul as the times stirred in him was for the class with which he identified himself, the class of small landholders. He speaks of it several times in the letters. In one place he writes: "In the last poem of my second volume, I have attempted to give a picture of a man of strong and lively sensibility actuated by two of the most powerful affections of the human heart, the parental affection and the love of property, *landed property*, [italics Wordsworth's], including the feelings of inheritance, home and personal and family independence. This poem has, I know, drawn tears from the eyes of more than one—persons well acquainted with the manners of the statesmen as they are called, of this country. . . . But nevertheless, I am anxious to know the effect of this poem upon you, on many accounts; because you are yourself the inheritor of an estate which has long been in possession of your family and above all because you are so well acquainted, nay, so familiarly conversant with the language, manners and feeling of the middle order of people who dwell in the country."

What alarmed Wordsworth most, in the change to capitalist industry was its pressure upon the small landholders. Imported food-stuffs were destroying their economic base. The poverty of the already poor he treated in vague sentiments; but the impoverishment of his own class moved him desperately. It is further reflected, in a more diffused way, in the general melancholy of his poetry and in the deepening nationalism of his scenic poems. It was the beauty of *English* land that he was celebrating, adding a patriotic note to his plaint against the industrialism that was defacing and depreciating the English land and turning out its "owners."

Seventy years later another young poet was reading accounts of the rise of the Paris Commune. We see at once, a firm, clear, unsentimental, objective mind:

I must tell you I am always thinking of the Communist future. . . . I am afraid some great revolution is not far off. Horrible to say, in a manner I am a Communist. Their ideal bating

some things is nobler than that professed by any secular statesman I know of (I must own I live in bat-light and shoot at a venture). Besides it is just—I do not mean the means of getting to it are. But it is a dreadful thing for the greatest and most necessary part of a very rich nation to live a hard life without dignity, knowledge, comforts, delight, or hopes in the midst of plenty—which plenty they make. They profess that they do not care what they wreck and burn, the old civilization and order must be destroyed. This is a dreadful lookout but what has the old civilization done for them? As it at present stands in England it is itself in great measure founded on wrecking. But they got none of the spoils, they came in for nothing but harm from it then and thereafter. England has grown hugely wealthy, but this wealth has not reached the working class; I expect it has made their condition worse. Besides this iniquitous order the old civilization embodies another order mostly old and what is new in direct entail from the old, the old religion, learning, law, art, etc., and all the history that is preserved in standing monuments. But as the working classes have not been educated they know next to nothing of all this and cannot be expected to care if they destroy it. The more I look the more black and deservedly black the future looks, so I will write no more.

Elsewhere in Hopkins' letters are other indications that he felt the essential *disorder* of the capitalist world in which he lived. He turned, as a number of modern poets have done, to what seemed an oasis of order, the church. He destroyed his poems on entering the Jesuit order and willingly made other personal sacrifices in submitting to its discipline. He only began to write again when he was invited to do so by his superiors. Then the creativeness and independence of his nature poured itself out through that outlet. It became an escape from his escape. What Hopkins might have done today, with a new order before him in Russia and a disciplined revolutionary party at hand, as an instrument for extending that order throughout the world, one can only speculate. But the characteristics of his mind are such that we might presume, at least, the possibility that he would have turned to the revolutionary movement. Objective, realistic, uncompromising minds like his are most frequently found in revolutionary circles.

What were the outcomes of these escapes?

Even admirers of Wordsworth's poetry speak of its drop in vigor and beauty after his thirties. There were no clear reasons for it. He was in comfortable circumstances, growing in prestige, living a life of his own choice. Circumstances could not be better contrived for literary production; yet it fell off, continually. A number of explanations have been offered. I add my own.

Wordsworth's poems are almost all autobiographical. Even the lyrics are descriptions of direct personal impressions. The pronoun I is to be found in almost all of them. The long poems, like "The Prelude" and "The Excursion," are the work of a man so smugly certain of the value of his life and the rightness of his feelings that he presumes to build a philosophy upon them. For material he falls back upon the years before his retirement, the years when his life had been, by

comparison, an active one. When that material is used up the poetry grows noticeably emptier and duller. Obviously, then, his escape was into a vacuum and was infertile. He had leisure and peace of mind, but lacking active participation in the life of his time they were useless advantages. Life had been the source of his poetry and in parting from one he parted unknowingly from the other.

Moreover, the retirement proved to be an unhealthy place. It may be that he was actually an ailing man, but even sick men when they are writing satisfactorily do not complain so much. The letters carry frequent references to illness. His sister Dorothy's more vital and more entertaining letters, speak frequently of the pains in his side and his upset stomach, when he sat down to write. Sucking the spent vein gave pain. From contemporary writers who have similarly attempted to write from one refuge or another, we have heard similar groaning.

Hopkins' letters, despite their different preoccupations, reveal similar though more tragic suffering. Hopkins, far from receiving any honors died without seeing book or

even substantial magazine publication. He had to endure misunderstanding criticism from his best friends. As time went his isolation grew and with it dullness. Uncomplaining references to apathy and lack of energy grow in number. It is known that he died of anemia in his forties and it may be that his miseries had an entirely physical origin. On the other hand, the psychological roots of disease are well known; and there have been enough cheerful invalids to make it clear that melancholia usually has other sources—frustrations and blocks. A psychiatrist reading Hopkins' letters would probably diagnose a nervous breakdown; and it is clear that for such a breakdown the isolation of his refuge must have been a major cause.

Can a writer then safely withdraw from life, to cultivate his talent? These two historic examples are witnesses to the contrary. In the disturbed world of today vigor and a sort of gaiety are with those standing in the midst of the current. The cries of despair come from those in the treetops.

ISIDOR SCHNEIDER.

Within Such Walls

I HAD ILLUSIONS, by Beth McHenry.
The Henkle Company. \$2.50

THE story of a great hospital is one that had to be told. Lives within such walls are vital, because of their very proximity to death. It is this ever-present closeness of death here, which gives to each life a naturally dramatic importance.

In *I Had Illusions* Beth McHenry simply tries to tell of the human beings, the patients and nurses, superintendants and doctors, whose lives are vitally affected, spent or lost, in a large San Francisco hospital. Through it all we are constantly aware of the youthful student-nurse, captured by the ballyhoo of Florence Nightingale idealism.

This is not a muckraking book, though one such would fill another real need. Hospitals, posing as public benefactors, are the cruelest exploiters of the young skilled workers who like to be known as professionals, the nurses and internes. In turn, the callousness and discrimination of these great, well-organized rackets, against the sick and injured who are unable to pay exacting rates, can hardly be compensated for by the scanty well meaning of a few doctors and nurses.

The cold cynicism of the hospital gradually batters down and permeates the attitude of the novice. When Beth McHenry first enters, she takes her free time to look up the story of the man who later became the skeleton used in classes. He is one of the most vivid of her people.

Toward the end of her book, she thinks more and more of herself in the role of writer and, consequently, writes more of her own feelings and reactions instead of making us feel the people and events she describes.

There is one long chapter about an established and well-known writer who advises and encourages her. It is from him, too, that she has gained a facile style and learned unworthy, too-easy tricks along with other lessons. There is the feeling that she has yet, in this book, to find her own pace. The imitation writing which sometimes creeps into this story should be left to those who have nothing to say. Beth McHenry's material and her own potentialities, deserve the best.

Garr, the one who knew what she wanted and had the way irrevocably cut off; little Freddie, the tiny newsboy who lay wasting away; the venereal quack; the anaesthetist with his frustrated love for surgery and his vicarious gas-fed peace; the proud unmarried mother finally defeated by poverty; these people remain with me from the book. These and the feeling that what might have been the greatest of them somehow failed to live—the story of Mother Mooney. This is because the author says what she believes—what we all believe—ought to be said, but the book fails to make the story say it.

I closed the book with the feeling that, while there are chapters which stand out, we have been given a sight of material which is so powerful it deserves to make us weep and clench our fists. Somehow, it doesn't quite do this.

"The real beginning remained ahead," Beth McHenry writes as the last line in this, her first book. Since she left the hospital, stripped of many illusions, she has worked among other people, has done other things, which surely deserve to be told. Unless I am mistaken, her next book should bring those hot tears and should clench our fists for us.

BORIS ISRAEL.