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Wordsworth on Burns

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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

Wordsworth on Burns

It is well known that Wordsworth thought highly of Burns, although his esteem was not without qualification. The poems he wrote to the memory of the Scottish poet are not among his greatest, but they are not unworthy of his pen. Wordsworth's most sustained comment on Burns is contained in *A Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns* (London, 1816) addressed to the Rev. James Gray of Dumfries. It was written to further the revised edition of Currie's *Works of Robert Burns* of 1820, but adds little to our appreciation of Burns.

A hitherto unpublished letter¹ from Wordsworth to Captain Charles Gray of the Royal Marines (not related to, but a literary friend of the recipient of the *Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns*²) follows. Charles Gray (1782-1851) published *Poems* (Cupar, 1811); *Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh, 1814); *Stray Leaves* (Malta, 1836); *Lays and Lyrics* (Edinburgh, 1841); and *A Familiar Epistle Addressed to P. M'Leod* [in verse] (Edinburgh, 1845). He contributed to John Muir Wood's *Songs of Scotland* and to John Donald Carrick's well-known *Whistle-Binkie* and wrote "Critical Notes on Scottish Song" which appeared in the *Glasgow Citizen*. His works contain poetical tributes to Burns, including two written for anniversaries of the Irvine Burns Club. Whether the Poet Laureate was referring to one of these, or, more probably, to an unpublished poem which Gray had sent him, is not known.

G. R. R.

Dear Sir

Pray accept my thanks for your Tribute to the Memory of Burns —

Your verses are animated by a right feeling of this subject,

¹I wish to take this opportunity of thanking the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland for permission to publish this letter, and Dr. E. F. D. Roberts for drawing my attention to it.

²"Right well I knew my namesake Gray," wrote Charles Gray in a poem. I wish to thank Mr. Anthony G. Hepburn, of the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, for sending me information about the two Grays.

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and in my judgement they do their Author no little credit.

I am old enough, had accidents favored to have known [person (*deleted*)] Burns; but it was not my fortune ever to have seen him, [which (*deleted*)] which I cannot but regret, as I was old enough some years before he died, to have had a lively sympathy with his extraordinary genius.

Believe me to be with good wishes for your health and happiness,

your obliged
Wm Wordsworth —

B I,

I write from my Son's House Carlisle —
16th March — 1849

Capt. Charles Gray R.M.

TRIENNIAL ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON PRIZE

A prize of 50 guineas will be awarded for an Essay on some aspect of the life and writing of Robert Louis Stevenson, entry being open to undergraduates or graduates of not more than five years' standing. The subject suggested for this year (1966-67) is "Stevenson and the Novel." Length required is not less than 6,000 words, and final date of entry is 1 May 1967. Entrants need a form of entry and further particulars, which may be obtained from the University of Edinburgh, Department of English Literature, David Hume Tower, George Square, Edinburgh, 8.