PLATE LV

Photograph by Walter Stoneman, 1947

HELEN DARBISHIRE, C.B.E.

HELEN DARBISHIRE

1881–1961

HELEN DARBISHIRE was born in Oxford on 26 February 1881; and in Oxford she was to spend the greater part of her life. Yet when she retired to her Lakeland cottage (Shepherds How, Grasmere) it seemed like a home-coming: so long and so closely had she lived with Wordsworth; so deeply had she identified herself with the spirit of his work and of his countryside.

But in another sense too there was a fitness in her retirement to Westmorland, for she came of generations of good northern stock. The family has been traced back at least as far as a certain Colonel Darbishire who was an officer in Cromwell's army. Thereafter they appear as staunch Dissenters of the Presbyterian persuasion, tradesmen or professional folk, living in the neighbourhood of Manchester. In 1752 James Darbishire married Anne Dukinfield, the daughter and heiress of Sir Robert Dukinfield, and thereby brought into the family (says Mr. Stephen Darbishire, to whom I am grateful for some of these details of family history) 'a strain of ruling blood, with its obligations, of honour, duty and courtesy, and a pedigree of twenty-one quarterings which included the rulers of Britain and France'. A certain Charles J. Darbishire was elected the first Mayor of Bolton in 1836. But the most important recent ancestor of Helen's, in the direct line, was Samuel Dukinfield Darbishire (1796–1870), her grandfather. He was a Manchester solicitor who 'through property deals and hard work as law adviser to the Lancashire and Yorkshire railway became fairly wealthy'. A sturdy liberal and nonconformist, he was said to be 'upright, honourable and full of good principles'—though, adds my informant, 'I also have a letter from one of his great-nieces in which he is referred to as a "Calvinistic old devil"'. The adjective must, however, have been used metaphorically rather than in its strict theological sense, for by this time the Darbishires—like so many of the old Presbyterian families—had become Unitarians. Mr. Darbishire's house at Greenheys (then on the southern fringe of the city) was much frequented by leading Unitarians, who included some of the choicest spirits in the Manchester of a hundred years ago. Thither came William and Elizabeth Gaskell; James and Harriet Martineau; Francis

Newman; thither, too, came J. A. Froude—not formally a Unitarian, but sufficiently heretical and spiritually unattached, after his 'expulsion' from Oxford, to find the liberal Darbishire atmosphere very congenial and invigorating. Gaskell (the novelist's husband) was for many years minister of the Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, and it was at the house of his predecessor, also at Greenheys, that he first met his bride-to-be. I have found no evidence that Mr. Darbishire was a member of that congregation, though I think it likely. He was, in any case, linked with Unitarianism at the highest level by holding office successively as secretary, treasurer, and president of 'Manchester New College', the principal connexional place of higher education. This college (now Manchester College, Oxford) had been founded in 1786, following the demise of the old dissenting academy at Warrington; it was removed to York in 1803, and returned to Manchester in 1840. While it was at York, Mr. Darbishire's brother Francis (Helen's great-uncle) was a student there, together with James Martineau and William Gaskell; and during their student years he and James Martineau were inseparable friends.

Samuel Dukinfield Darbishire had a country house in Wales, Pendyffryn, near Penmaenmawr in Caernarvonshire; and here Mr. Gladstone was often a guest. John Morley, in his *Life of Gladstone*, treats this friendship with a Unitarian as evidence of the widening of Gladstone's mind. At one time Gladstone had been shocked whenever he heard that anyone was a Unitarian; now, in some letters to Darbishire quoted by Morley, he expresses sympathy with some views of Martineau's (or at least tolerance of them), and concedes that salvation may not depend, after all, 'upon the reception of a particular and a very narrow creed'.

It is clear that, had things fallen out a little differently, Helen Darbishire might have had James Anthony Froude for an uncle by marriage. Her grandfather, who was ever ardent for education, secured for his delicate son Vernon a succession of the most distinguished tutors he could find: James Martineau, Francis Newman, and J. A. Froude; and his elder daughters shared these privileges. Froude was a special favourite with the Darbishires, and it is certain that Marianne, then in her twenty-second year, lost her heart to him. I am indebted to Mr. Waldo H. Dunn, of Wooster, Ohio, U.S.A., for permission to quote the following extracts from his recently published *Life of Froude*. The storm aroused by the publication of Froude's *Nemesis of Faith* (1849) had ended his Oxford career. Resigning his fellowship at

Exeter College, he had sought temporary asylum with the Charles Kingsleys in Devon. There he met, and fell in love with, Charlotte Grenfell, Mrs. Kingsley's sister.

> At the time their acquaintance began [writes Mr. Dunn], Charlotte was deeply interested in Roman Catholicism, and contemplating the life of a nun. Both she and Froude were mutually attracted, but strong opposition on the part of her family almost prevented further acquaintance.

Such was Froude's plight when, soon after (Mr. Dunn here gives a passage from Froude's fragmentary autobiography), there came

> an overture to me from a gentleman of wealth and influence in Manchester, . . . entirely unknown to me, who had been interested in my writings, and it seemed was both able and willing to give me a start in that city, and to receive me into his house as a tutor to his son till further opportunity should present itself. Mr. Darbishire is now dead, but I may be allowed to lay my small offering of gratitude on his tomb. He was a man of high ability, absolute sincerity, and wished and meant to help me in earnest.

Marianne Darbishire was 'a lively and gifted young woman in her twenty-second year, full of zest for music [Charles Hallé had recently arrived in Manchester, and was giving her piano lessons], for art, and for intelligent company'. *She* had no intention of becoming a nun, and Froude soon found himself in an emotional dilemma. Several letters of Marianne's, written at this time to her sister Louisa, have survived; from these Miss Helen Darbishire herself published some extracts in the *Manchester Guardian* (9 April 1953), under the heading 'Manchester A Century Ago'. They show the state of affairs clearly enough:

> I am in a melancholy way rather—I miss my long afternoon rides very much now that Mr. Froude is gone, he made them so pleasant. . . .
>
> Papa and Mama have been looking at a house . . . for Mr. and Mrs. Froude. It will be strange to have him living near us. It is a secret that he is going to be married.
>
> I had another letter from Mr. Froude last night: he writes such nice letters I am quite sorry he is coming home, because I can have no more. He comes on Saturday: Hurrah!

Froude was torn between Charlotte Grenfell and Marianne Darbishire. With the other dear charmer not only away but likely to be officially denied him at any moment by her family, would he not be foolish to miss the chance of present happiness? At any rate (so the Darbishire family tradition has it) he made a clean breast of the whole thing to Marianne's father, and was

told by him, quite rightly, that there should be no 'understanding with Marianne until he had obtained an unconditional release from the other young woman'. At that moment, as it chanced, the Grenfell family capitulated, so Marianne and Froude had to adjust themselves to the situation as best they could. Marianne steeled herself to welcome Froude's wife to Manchester, and to show the couple nothing but cordial friendship. But she married, on the rebound, a man old enough to be her father, and died less than three years later (in 1853—not, however, without becoming the mother of two daughters who, as Helen says in a letter to Mr. Dunn, 'turned out to be very fine women, one of whom I knew well. They were strong, vigorous Darbishires!'). One more quotation to conclude this episode: just before his wedding, Froude wrote to A. H. Clough: 'I very much admire Manchester, that is, the Darbishire section of it,—and as I conquered my wife from Romanism and a convent, there can hardly be a more healthy atmosphere (moral I mean) to transfer her into.'

It is with Helen's father, Samuel Dukinfield Darbishire the second (1846–92), that the scene shifts from Manchester to Oxford. Yet he too had spent most of his early life in Manchester and at Pendyffryn (his schooling was largely private) and he was to marry a Manchester girl, a Miss Eckersley (Helen's mother). Darbishire went up to Balliol in 1864, and made himself famous as one of the best strokes—perhaps the very best—that the Oxford boat has ever had. He stroked the winning Oxford eight against Cambridge in 1868, and again in 1869; in the latter year he also stroked a winning four against Harvard.

On going down from Balliol he took up medicine, studying at the medical schools of Tübingen and Vienna, acting as house-surgeon and house-physician at St. Bartholomew's, and then practising privately in Kensington. It was not long before he returned to Oxford as Physician to the Radcliffe Infirmary. Later he held, in addition, the Litchfield Lectureship in Medicine, the University Coronership, and an examinership; and he was one of the first members of the newly constituted Faculty of Medicine. 'A modest and unassuming English gentleman', he was much beloved in Oxford; he was kind to the poor, often giving his services to them and to his poorer private patients. He died in Wales, after a long illness, at the age of only forty-six—Helen being then only eleven years old. He left a widow and three children: Arthur Dukinfield (b. 1879), Helen, and Rachel. Rachel died in 1911, of tuberculosis; and Arthur, after showing

brilliant promise as a biologist (he was successively lecturer at the universities of Manchester, London, and Edinburgh, and the author of two remarkable books on the philosophical basis of biological theory, of which the second was edited after his death by Helen) was cut off in 1915 by cerebrospinal meningitis, just after he had been commissioned in the R.G.A. Mrs. Darbishire, the mother, lived on at Boars Hill till 1916, and then in north Oxford until her death in 1917.

In 1889 the failure of Dr. Darbishire's health had led to a break in the continuity of Helen's Oxford life. The family left Oxford that year; they spent three months in Alassio, and then moved to the Darbishires' home in north Wales, where they remained till after the father's death in 1892. Helen and Rachel there shared the life, and the governesses, of their numerous young cousins, some of whom still remember her genius for story-telling—'often perched hidden in the branch of a leafy tree, with cousins grouped round in neighbouring branches'. Mrs. Darbishire brought her family back to Oxford in 1893.

Helen was educated at the Oxford High School (1893–9), and it was during those years that she first met Ernest de Selincourt. He came to Oxford in 1896, when he married Ethel Shawcross, a cousin of Helen's mother; and Helen soon became 'a familiar of the de Selincourt household'. In 1900 she went up to Somerville College as Pfeiffer Scholar, and took a First in Honours English in 1903, when she also won the Coombs Prize. During those years as a student at Oxford she was a pupil of Ernest de Selincourt, who in 1899 had been appointed to the first University Lectureship in Modern English Literature at Oxford, and was in the following years not only organizing English studies there but doing most of the lecturing and teaching himself. 'He was a great teacher' (wrote Miss Darbishire many years later, in her British Academy obituary of de Selincourt), 'stirring the minds of his pupils, setting before them a scholar's standard of accuracy and thoroughness. . . . For a student who really cared about his subject he could not do enough. To many of his pupils he became a lifelong friend.' Helen Darbishire's mind was indeed stirred; she learned, and kept for life, his standards of scholarship; and he became her lifelong friend and associate.

After qualifying academically (women could not 'take their degree' till after 1920) she accepted a post as 'Visiting Lecturer' for three years (1904–7) at Royal Holloway College; then she returned to Oxford as Tutor in English at Somerville, a post she held until she became Principal of the college in 1931. She was

a member of the College Council from 1913 onwards, a Fellow of the college from 1921, and a University Lecturer in English from 1926 to 1931. She was the first woman-chairman of the Faculty Board of English. Apart from a year as Visiting Professor at Wellesley College, Massachusetts (1925–6), and apart from vacations spent in Italy, Greece, and France, and at Ladywood (the de Selincourts' holiday home at Grasmere) working on Wordsworth, the rest of her life—until she retired to Grasmere herself—was spent in Oxford. I will now give a few impressions of Helen Darbishire as tutor and lecturer, which have been communicated to me by some who knew her best.

> In retrospect I see her first as a straight, slim figure with her aureole of gold hair framing her wide, serious face—standing in the lecture room at Somerville (some of her early lectures on Metre and on Prose Form were among those we attended in the pre-1914 era). She was in some ways formidable as a tutor, especially in her younger days. She had a great capacity for silence, and her inviolable love of truth was sometimes disconcerting to the timid and raw student. She always pricked the bubble of pretentiousness, whenever she met it, and not only at the undergraduate level. But I remember her quoting Wordsworth's account of his fellow-students at Cambridge and saying that she liked 'honest dunces': quite true, the homely, simple and natural always attracted her.

> She communicated to her pupils something of her own love of literature and fine discrimination, holding up to them the high standard of scrupulous scholarship that distinguished her published works.

Qualities in her which specially impressed others were:

> Her power to set us free; the *strength* of her presence; her serenity; her wisdom, poise, kindness and sympathetic understanding; her modesty and disinterestedness; her triumphant embodiment of the qualities that command both profound admiration and warm human affection; her absolute directness and integrity; and her humour, which kept all things in proportion.

On the retirement of Miss Margery Fry, Helen Darbishire was appointed to succeed her as Principal of Somerville College (1931). At that time she had already made her mark in scholarship, with her *De Quincey's Literary Criticism* (edited, with Introduction, for the Oxford Miscellanies Series, 1909); *Wordsworth, Poems in Two Volumes, 1807* (edited, with biographical and critical Introduction, 1914); and *The Manuscript of Milton's Paradise Lost, Book I* (1931). The year after her appointment yet another work appeared: *The Early Lives of Milton* (edited, with Introduction and Notes, 1932). I shall come back to her works

later, but meanwhile it is to be observed that already the main interests of her life had been announced, and her characteristic methods of approach made evident. After becoming Principal she went on lecturing and teaching, but she had to absent herself from scholarship awhile and attend to administration. Fortunately—it does not often happen—her life was to be long enough, and her energies sufficiently indomitable, to enable her to complete, in the end, all that in her youth she had greatly planned.

Somerville knew that they had appointed a distinguished scholar and a valued friend and teacher; they now found that their new Principal was an able administrator too. Miss Darbishire had never coveted any position of authority and responsibility; she was essentially modest, and disliked publicity. But greatness being thrust upon her, she cheerfully accepted all that it involved. Mrs. Adler writes:

> Her time of office as Principal was an eventful one. Eleven years earlier, women had been admitted as members of the University, and their growing share in the academic and social life of Oxford occasioned new developments in administration and policy. The East Quad [of Somerville], the Council Chamber and the Chapel came into being under her watchful care. The war brought new problems—some of the staff and students were called away, air raid dangers had to be met, the changing demands of war work upon women students affected their college courses. To all problems, public and personal, Miss Darbishire brought the same open mind and steady judgment. And authority never impaired her sense of every individual's freedom, and her liberal appreciation of people of widely differing characters.

Miss Vera Farnell, in her *A Somervillian Looks Back*, says that

> through her character and personality, through what she was, she made us as individuals feel the need to examine the foundations of our individual selves; not that she was intense—no one could be less so, for a rich vein of humour, essential to her make-up, lay just beneath the surface . . .—but with so *real* a person as Miss Darbishire superficial thinking and living was simply out of place.

The college Chapel, which had come into being during her reign, meant a great deal to her, and she regularly gave addresses there which impressed themselves on the minds and memories of those who heard them. Her own strong religious instincts were the natural inheritance or aftermath of her Unitarian ancestry. She acknowledged no denominational adherence, and her beliefs were undogmatic and nebulous. But what Mark Rutherford said of Wordsworth's early pantheism was true of her

religious faith: it may have been 'vague', but it was, for her, none the less 'supporting'. Her 'sermons' were impressive because they came straight from her heart. Without a trace of unction or churchiness, but in words 'Which [spoke] of nothing more than what we are', she led her hearers to examine the foundations of their inmost lives, and to make sure that they were firmly based on enduring things. It is significant that of those of her addresses I have been privileged to read, one dealt with Job and another with Virginia Woolf. In both these figures, poles asunder as they are, she found embodiments of inward integrity maintained in the face of sufferings and doubts: 'central peace subsisting at the heart Of endless agitation'.

A glance at the list of Miss Darbishire's publications shows that Milton and Wordsworth shared her main attention between them. First one, then the other, is taken up, as opportunity allows or duty prescribes. It is likely that, had there been no fourteen years' silence imposed by her principalship, she might have proceeded straight from her early Milton researches to the definitive edition of Milton's poetical works which, as things were, had to wait till Wordsworth had been served. She was, in fact, helping de Selincourt in his great work from its beginning, and continued to help him until his death in 1943. In the Preface to his epoch-making edition of *The Prelude* (1925) he acknowledges his great debt to his 'old pupil . . . a profound and acute student of Wordsworth'. And when he died, Miss Darbishire, after she herself had retired, gave her whole mind to the completion of the task he had left unfinished: the last three volumes of the five-volume edition of *Wordsworth's Poetical Works*, 1946–9. Then, and not till then—with a courage and purposefulness worthy of Milton himself—she returned in advanced age to her other self-allotted task, and produced (1952–5) her monumental edition of Milton, with Introduction and Commentary. Lastly, as if that were not enough, she came back to Wordsworth and produced, in old age and in failing health, but with energy unabated and unimpaired, the revised edition (1959) of de Selincourt's *Prelude*, thus placing the coping-stone upon the great Wordsworthian fabric he and she had built up over the years. In between times she had somehow found leisure, or made opportunity, to bring out some of the work by which, perhaps, she will be best remembered by the general reader: her Clark Lectures *The Poet Wordsworth* (1950), and her World's Classics edition of Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals*, with its delightful Introduction (1958).

Miss Darbishire combined in a remarkable degree two elements not often found in such close association: exact scholarship and a sensitive imagination. This is the secret of her success with Milton and Wordsworth: though she submits them to a textual examination of unexampled severity, they emerge from her treatment not as dissected bodies, but as men and poets better understood and better loved than before. These two aspects of her work, the textual and the interpretative, are already to be seen fully developed in her early publications, *Wordsworth's Poems in Two Volumes, 1807* (1914), *The Manuscript of Milton's Paradise Lost, Book I* (1931), and *The Early Lives of Milton* (1932). In the Introduction to the Wordsworth volume she shows herself to be already, as far back as 1914, deeply versed in the poet of whom she was later to become the pre-eminent exponent. After a sketch (still innocent of Annette) of the poet's life, she compares and contrasts Wordsworth's objective and experimental style in the *Lyrical Ballads* with his more subjective manner in the poems of 1807. If there are any who think of Miss Darbishire as a mere expert on handwriting or variant readings, let them consider such a passage as this, on the poetry of the *Lyrical Ballads*:

> Their language is as colourless as water. Their atmosphere is clear like the air of early morning, and the vision they impart of earth and of human life is like that which we ourselves see sometimes on early waking. The world of familiar things is intensely real and yet strange with a secret significance. Light seems to flood our own minds, and more than to touch, to enter into the objects we contemplate. It is as if for the first time we had enough light to see things by.

The Manuscript of Paradise Lost, Book I illustrates the scientific precision of Miss Darbishire's scholarship. It was the first stage (a long one) of the journey which ended, twenty years later, in her edition of Milton's complete poetical works. In this early volume, which gives a collotype facsimile of the Pierpont Morgan manuscript of Book I, a transcript on opposite pages of the said manuscript and the First Edition, and an elaborate Introduction and Notes, Miss Darbishire establishes the principles on which a correct text of Milton should be based. By a minute study of the handwriting of the manuscript, backed by a knowledge of other Miltonic manuscripts and texts, she was able to demonstrate that Milton used certain conventions of spelling and punctuation in order to emphasize the meaning and rhythm of his lines and paragraphs. She even succeeded in distinguishing

the hands of several different scribes, and in identifying one of them as that of Edward Phillips; and, by spotting some of Milton's characteristic spelling habits (notably 'thir' for the unaccented 'their'), she proved John Phillips's authorship of the hitherto anonymous *Life of Mr. John Milton* (afterwards published as the second of her *Early Lives of Milton*, 1932). Lastly, by the most meticulous collation of the manuscript with the texts of the First and Second Editions, she demonstrated the care with which Milton, though blind, supervised the correction of his work for the press. 'The result', as she truly claims (in the Introduction to Vol. I of her later edition of *Milton's Poetical Works*, 1952), was 'a page which represents more nearly than any previous printing of *Paradise Lost*, what Milton would have achieved if he had had his sight.' The interesting, the characteristic thing about all this detailed work of Miss Darbishire's is that it springs from no mere pedant's zeal but from a passionate admiration of Milton the man and poet, and a determination to bring readers as close to him as possible. The depth of her feeling for Milton, and of her understanding of him, is clearly revealed in the Introduction to the *Early Lives*; and again in her James Bryce Memorial Lecture (Somerville, 1951), 'Milton's *Paradise Lost*'. In this lecture, for instance, she refers as follows to the denigration of Milton by some twentieth-century critics:

> There has been a change of literary fashion: Donne and the metaphysicals are in, Milton and the Romantics are out. Perfection of texture is out: colloquial idiom is in. But these changing fashions are like mists round a mountain; they come and go, changing its colour and contour to the eye, but *the mountain does not budge*. [Italics mine.]

She goes on to illustrate the human and psychological interest, often undervalued, in Milton's characterization of Adam and Eve (especially Eve); and concludes with some wise comments on the ultimate value of his 'scheme of ideas':

> The value of Milton's theological scheme is that it sets 'innocent frail man', as Milton calls him, with a beautiful and characteristic touch of compassion, within the vast circle of its ideas, making us feel at once his littleness and his greatness, his frailty and his supreme responsibility.... It is the measure of Milton's greatness as a poet, that his art is equal to his theme.

The completion of de Selincourt's definitive edition of *Wordsworth's Poetical Works* will probably be thought of as her greatest achievement. De Selincourt, drawing chiefly upon the mass of

manuscript material at the Dove Cottage museum—very little of which had previously been available to scholars—aimed at 'supplying the reader with a sound text, together with an *apparatus criticus* which will record its development from the earliest existing copy, through its successive stages in manuscript and print, till it received its final revision'. The whole project, reckoning from the publication of de Selincourt's *Prelude* in 1926 to that of Miss Darbishire's final volume (V) in 1949, represents about a quarter of a century of devoted work, and stands as one of the greatest scholarly achievements of our time. It set a new standard in textual accuracy and critical acumen; no later editor of any modern writer has dared, if he wished to be taken seriously, to fall too far below it. Wordsworth was a long-lived poet, who in his middle and later years revised and re-revised what he had written; sometimes, as we all know, he improved upon the earlier versions, but more often he robbed them of life and meaning, by rewording them in conventional diction or more orthodox phraseology. With such a poet as this, therefore, it was of more than ordinary interest to recover as many of the earlier drafts as possible, and to watch the poems actually evolving before our eyes. This, first and most spectacularly for *The Prelude*, and then for the rest of Wordsworth's poetry, is what the de Selincourt–Darbishire edition achieved. After scrutinizing and dating the numerous manuscripts with infinite patience, care, and skill, they were able to present us not only with a definitive text, but with virtually every surviving fragment of verse that Wordsworth ever wrote: much of it intrinsically interesting, and still more of it valuable as a guide to the interpretation and chronology of the end-product.

At the death of Ernest de Selincourt (1943) only the first volume of the edition had appeared (1940); the second, which he had completed a few months before he died, was published the following year (1944). Miss Darbishire, upon whose collaboration he had increasingly relied, was therefore left with the task of seeing the edition through to completion; and she carried out the work quite as well as he could have done. In her modesty she would have us believe that de Selincourt had left the copy for the last three volumes 'in a state substantially ready for publication, with injunctions that I should see it through the press' (Preface to Vol. III, dated Dec. 1945). But in reality she did a good deal more than this; new manuscript material kept coming to light, and Miss Darbishire was able to carry, beyond the point reached by de Selincourt, the unravelling of some of

the knottiest problems in Wordsworth scholarship—notably the chronology of the composition of *The Prelude*, *The Excursion*, and the *Ode*, *Intimations of Immortality*. It was for that reason that when in 1956 a new printing of de Selincourt's *Prelude* was called for, Miss Darbishire found she must put out a revised edition, incorporating the early manuscript called JJ (containing drafts for Book I), and 'other manuscripts in Dove Cottage which de Selincourt had not fully drawn upon, in particular an early version of Book II . . . apparently not seen by him; and the notebooks *Alfoxden*, *Christabel*, and 18*a*' (Preface, dated 1958).

Wordsworth was notoriously lucky in his lifetime, both in the regularity with which bequests and preferments came along when most needed, and in the services of devoted and adoring amanuenses. His good fortune continued posthumously, for no poet—surely—has ever been better served than he was by Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire. To crown all, the edition was completed in time for the centenary celebrations held at Grasmere in April 1950. Those celebrations, unforgettable to all who took part in them, owed their charm, variety, and interest largely to Miss Darbishire, who as Chairman of the Dove Cottage Trustees (she had succeeded de Selincourt in this office) was the moving and presiding spirit throughout. Over 360 people attended, including well-known scholars and critics from many countries; there were lectures, receptions, excursions; an exhibition to which King George VI lent two Wordsworth items from his own library; and special services, with readings, in Grasmere church. Amongst the guests were nearly forty members of the Wordsworth family.

Fortunate and appropriate, too, was Miss Darbishire's appointment by Trinity College, Cambridge, as Clark Lecturer for 1949—an appointment almost 'mandatory' in view of the completion of the editing and the approach of the centenary; and doubtless due largely to the then Master, G. M. Trevelyan, at that time one of the Dove Cottage Trustees. The published outcome of these lectures was *The Poet Wordsworth* (1950), a slim volume which contains 'infinite riches in a little room'. Here we have the essence both of Wordsworth and of Helen Darbishire.

Eschewing highbrow theories, psychological or other, and touching but lightly on points of Wordsworthian biography or doctrine, she keeps close to the poetry itself, and concentrates first on the stages by which Wordsworth's characteristic style was attained. Next in a chapter which is a maturer version of her above-mentioned Introduction to the *Poems in Two Volumes*, she

traces the development from *Lyrical Ballads* to the poems of 1807. The central section of the book deals with the problem of the chronology of the composition of *The Prelude*; in 1949, it will be appreciated, her results were still new and had not yet been incorporated in a revised edition. Next, in what many will feel to be the best and profoundest section, she interprets, not 'Wordsworthianism' considered as a doctrine, but Wordsworth's world, and his central imaginative and spiritual experience; and finds the core of it in his visionary power: his power, that is, to see so intensely that sensation itself 'Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed The invisible world'. Never were Miss Darbishire's gifts of sense and sensibility displayed in closer union than in this little book, into which she packed the knowledge and reflection of a lifetime. The sensibility appears in her account of Wordsworth's unique power of blending sensation with illumination; the good sense, in her firm dismissal of Annette as a major influence, and her blunt refusal to add to the growing pile of theories about the poet's 'decline' after the Great Decade.

> My answer to the obstinate questioning about Wordsworth's poetic decline is simply, The spirit bloweth where it listeth. When it ceases to blow, what is a poet to do? Like Coleridge, plunge into metaphysics? Wordsworth took the way that was inevitable for him: he doggedly pursued his vocation, pursued it as a man with a moral purpose and as a self-respecting craftsman.

De Quincey pointed out the total absence, in Dorothy Wordsworth, of anything that could be called *bluestockingism*, and this may account for the affinity that Miss Darbishire felt with her—the intuitive sympathy which enabled her, at the end of her life, to produce that wonderfully fresh and perceptive little Introduction to her World's Classics edition of the *Journals*. Helen Darbishire, for all her academic and scholarly eminence, remained a simple soul to the last, and with those who were natural and genuine—notably with the unlettered—she was immediately at home. With any kind of intellectual affectation, with mere cleverness, or with humbug, she had a short way; 'the mountain did not budge'. And so, coming at last (accompanied by her devoted friend and 'second sister' Vera Farnell) to live at Shepherds How, within a stone's-throw of Dove Cottage, she was merely adding physical presence to a world that she had long before made her own.

> The peace and beauty in which her cottage was set [says Mrs. Adler] exactly suited her, and the change [i.e. from Oxford] was in the nature

of a most happy and inevitable home-coming. Here she continued her life as a student, as she always liked to describe herself, giving generous and untiring help to the many students and scholars who wrote to her or came to consult her from all over the world as the pre-eminent authority on Wordsworth and his circle, with whom, and especially it seemed with his sister Dorothy, she seemed to enjoy almost a living intimacy.

And here, on a height commanding the whole microcosm of Grasmere Vale, its every object linked with the life and poetry of Wordsworth, and with a dramatic vista (best seen from the sink, as she loved to point out to visitors) through Dunmail Raise to the Cumberland fells, she enjoyed a few years (alas, too few) of fulfilment and happiness. Richly deserved honours came to her in the later years: the C.B.E. in 1955; honorary degrees from Durham and London; and twice over the British Academy (of which she became a Fellow in 1947) awarded her the Rose Mary Crawshay Prize, once for Milton and again for Wordsworth. But it is upon her personal qualities, her lovable oddities perhaps, that I want to dwell in conclusion. Although she was at peace at Shepherds How, and in a sense relaxed, she went on working to the end. Yet she was never in a hurry at any time, even in her most active years; de Selincourt used to say that she 'worked in her sleep'. A friend writes:

> I think if Helen had any vanity it was for her achievements in cooking, sewing and gardening—never for her work as teacher and scholar. She used to be chaffed by her friends for her absent-mindedness; and it was a relief to many of them when she gave up cycling in Oxford. She had a great capacity for *not* listening to what did not interest her. She could withdraw herself readily from the noise and trivialities of the daily round, but could also bring her whole mind to bear on any matter —however apparently unimportant—which claimed her attention.

Professor Geoffrey Tillotson has kindly sent me the following extract from a letter he once had from her:

> I like hearing of anything connected with 'the old 'un', as my friends call W. W. in connection with me:—if for instance I forget what pudding we are having for supper, they say 'She's thinking of the old 'un'. And I nearly always am.

She nearly always was: and how could she do otherwise, looking down from her window or her garden upon a scene he had made so peculiarly his own? Often and often must she have repeated to herself, and *for* herself, the lines from 'Home at Grasmere', in

which Wordsworth had tried to define the peculiar magic of his chosen vale:

> 'Tis, but I cannot name it, 'tis the sense
> Of majesty, and beauty, and repose,
> A blended holiness of earth and sky,
> Something that makes this individual Spot,
> This small Abiding-place of many Men,
> A termination, and a last retreat,
> A Centre, come from wheresoe'er you will,
> A Whole without dependence or defect,
> Made for itself; and happy in itself,
> Perfect Contentment, Unity entire.

Helen Darbishire died here on 1 March 1961, soon after her eightieth birthday.

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BASIL WILLEY