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## William Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth The Later Years*

The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Vol. 5: The Later Years: Part II: 1829–1834  
(Second Revised Edition)

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### 760. W. W. to MARY ANN RAWSON<sup>1</sup>

Address: Mrs W. B. Rawson, Joseph Read's Esq<sup>rc</sup>, Wincobank Hall, near Sheffield. [*In M. W.'s hand*]

Stamp: Kendal Penny Post.

MS. John Rylands Library.

N.B. Lewis, 'The Abolitionist Movement in Sheffield, 1823–1838', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xviii (1934), 377–92. LY ii. 660.

[? May 1833]

Dear Madam,

Your letter which I lose no time in replying to, has placed me under some embarrassment, as I happen to possess some Mss verses of my own<sup>2</sup> upon the subject to which you solicit my attention. But I frankly own to you, that neither with respect to this subject nor to the kindred one, the Slavery of the children in the Factories,<sup>3</sup> which is adverted to in the same Poem, am I prepared to add to the excitement already existing in the public

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mind upon these, and so many other points of legislation and government. Poetry, if good for any thing, must appeal forcibly to the Imagination and the feelings; but what at this period we want above every thing, is patient examination and sober judgement. It can scarcely be necessary to add that my mind revolts as strongly as any one's can, from the law that permits one human being to sell another. It is in principle monstrous, but it is not the worst thing in human nature. Let precipitate advocates for its destruction bear this in mind. But I will not enter farther into the question than to say, that there are three parties—the Slave—the Slave owner—and the imperial Parliament, or rather the people of the British Islands, acting through that Organ. Surely the course at present pursued is hasty, intemperate, and likely to lead to gross injustice. Who in fact are most to blame? the people—who, by their legislation, have sanctioned not to say encouraged, slavery. But now we are turning round

at once upon the planters, and heaping upon them indignation without measure, as if we wished that the Slaves should believe that their Masters alone were culpable—and they alone fit objects of complaint and resentment.

Excuse haste and believe me Dear Madam  
respectfully yours,  
W<sup>m</sup> Wordsworth

P.S. Unwillingness to allude to my own writings, even though indirectly led to the subject, has prevented me from expressing the satisfaction which I felt from your Letter that they had afforded you so much pleasure.—

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. W. P. Rawson, daughter of Joseph Read of Wincobank Hall, Sheffield, was an original member of the committee of the Sheffield Female Anti-Slavery Society (1825). Since 1826 she had been compiling an anthology of anti-slavery prose and verse, which was published in 1834 under the title *The Bow in the Cloud* in a limited edition of 500 copies. Contributors included Bernard Barton, William and Mary Howitt, Lord Morpeth, and James Montgomery. Among those who declined were Campbell, Moore, Macaulay, and Southey (in a MS. letter of 4 May 1833 in the John Rylands Library). W. W.'s reply, which echoes Southey's sentiments, was probably written at about the same time.

<sup>2</sup> *Humanity* (PW iv. 102), written in the autumn of 1829 and published 1835.

<sup>3</sup> Under pressure from Michael Thomas Sadler (see L. 666 above), a parliamentary commission of inquiry in 1832 produced evidence about child labour in factories that profoundly shocked public opinion. A Royal Commission, which included Edwin Chadwick (1800-90), made further investigations. The Act of 1833, which was vigorously promoted by Ashley, later 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-85), secured the exclusion of children under 9 from factories, and limited the work of children under 13 to forty-eight hours a week, or nine hours in any one day. Among other provisions, it enacted that children under 13 were to attend school for not less than two hours a day; and it set up a factory inspectorate to ensure the proper working of the Act. But it failed to secure the ten-hour day for all persons under 18, as had been hoped.