Horace Walpole's "Dear Both."*

In 1852 died two remarkable women, sisters, both well along toward their ninetieth year. So closely had Mary and Agnes Berry been associated for more than half a century with the literature and society of England and the Continent, that their loss was widely regretted. Mary, the elder, had edited the works of Horace Walpole and engaged in other literary enterprises; but in their own time, as now, the two were better known for their personality than for anything they produced. Maria Edgeworth, anxious that a brother who had been long imprisoned in France should now have the advantage of good society, set about accomplishing that end by giving him a letter of introduction to the sisters. Kate Perry expressed the general feeling when she wrote, after their death: "There is no salon now to compare with that of the Miss Berrys."

In 1865 Lady Theresa Lewis published three volumes of extracts from Mary Berry's letters and correspondence. Mr. Melville now supplements these with a book of 448 pages, well printed, freely illustrated, and composed almost wholly of new material. He gives Agnes Berry an increased prominence, though he reserves the chief rôle for Mary. The correspondence of the Hon. Mrs. Damer and of General O'Hara with the latter, is the best and most readable part of the new volume.

It may be as well to comment at once upon Mr. Melville's work and then devote our attention to the Misses Berry themselves. Mr. Melville relies mainly upon the correspondence to carry on the story, though he supplies narrative when needed, and tacks on the necessary footnotes. This part of his task is, in general, well performed. There are repetitions, however, and other signs of haste, as when Bertie Greathead is told about twice within a few pages (121 and 125) and made bi-sexual. A more difficult problem was to decide what letters should be included. Here Mr. Melville was between the devil and the deep sea. If he omitted materials made accessible already by Lady Theresa Lewis or in the correspondence of Horace Walpole, he would have only left-overs to choose from. If he inserted them, he could not cry, "hitherto unpublished." He adopted the first of these alternatives, wrongly we think. Readers are not usually able—or, if able, willing—to piece out their knowledge from other publications. Moreover, the book is padded: some of the letters from people of distinction are so formal as to be of little consequence, while many from less conspicuous people are tiresome. Finally, there are almost no direct utterances from Walpole—Walpole, whose connection with the sisters remains the most interesting thing about them.

The outward life of the sisters was marked by few striking events. Their mother died early and they were left to the care of an improvident, if kindly, father whose annuity, though moderate, should have enabled him to lay something by for them. They early had the advantage of travel, an advantage they continued to enjoy through life. In 1788, while temporarily resident at Twickenham, they became acquainted with Walpole, then in his old days. Two years later, under his persuasions, they established themselves at

* The Berry Papers. Being the Correspondence Hitherto Unpublished of Mary and Agnes Berry (1763-1852). By Lewis Melville. With many illustrations. New York: John Lane Co.

Little Strawberry Hill. When he died, in 1797, he left them the house, together with a bequest in money. It was here and in London, chiefly, that their days were spent. The friendship with Walpole had given them such prominence that they were thrown thereafter with the most distinguished people. To study their lives, indeed, is to see familiarly many of the celebrities of the age.

Not all of their importance was borrowed, however. When Walpole first met them, he described them thus:

"They are . . . the best-informed and the most perfect creatures I ever saw at their age. They are exceedingly sensible, entirely natural and unaffected, frank, and being qualified to talk on any subject, nothing is so easy and agreeable as their conversation, nor more apposite than their answers and observations. The eldest, I discovered by chance, understands Latin, and is a perfect Frenchwoman in her language. The younger draws charmingly. . . . They are of pleasing figures; Mary, the eldest, sweet, with fine dark eyes, that are very lively when she speaks, with a symmetry of face that is the more interesting from being pale; Agnes, the younger, has an agreeable sensible countenance, hardly to be called handsome, but almost. She is less animated than Mary, but seems, out of deference to her sister to speak seldomer, for they dote on each other, and Mary is always praising her sister's talents. I must even tell you they dress within the bounds of fashion, though fashionably; but without the excrescences and balconies with which modern hoydens overwhelm and barricade their persons. In short, good sense, information, simplicity, and ease characterize the Berrys; and this is not particularly mine, who am apt to be prejudiced, but the universal voice of all who know them."

The prim, old-time pictures of the sisters, and the quiet demeanor of which we hear so much, might incline us to think them "goody-goody." They had too much force to be that. Even Agnes, self-effacing, submissive it would seem in matters of love, was far from weak. She was one of those persons who exercise a tact so perfect that it seems effortless until we stop to realize the strength of character behind it. Thackeray thought her the more naturally gifted of the two. However that may be, the qualities of Mary were more pronounced. She had a keen eye for the faults of others. She wrote of the Duke of Wellington:

"The simplicity and frankness of his manners, and the way in which he speaks of public affairs are really those of a great man: altho' talking of the allied sovereigns, their views, etc., etc., he says *we* found out so and so, *we* intend such and such things, quite as treating *de Couronne à Couronne.*"

She was potentially prankish. Here is the account in her journal of her presentation to the Princess of Wales:

"I don't think she was taken with me, as she saw, when I did not suppose she did, the *moue* which I made to Lady Sheffield when she proposed it to me . . . which I changed for a proper Court face the moment I saw her looking, and the thing inevitable."

Happily the Princess forgave the indiscretion, and often invited the sisters to Kensington Palace. Sometimes Mary was betrayed into an indiscretion by pique. When her one acted play (produced anonymously) failed on the stage, she published it with an advertisement which withheld her own name but dragged in that of Walpole. She could be resentful too. Cadaverous Samuel Rogers liked her little and called on her but once a year—on the day they shared perforce, as they chanced to be precisely of an age. "Miss Berry and I are twins," he remarked to a friend; "I have just been to see how *she* wears; this is her and my birthday." Her comment was: "When I heard this, I went to my looking-glass to see if it reflected such a death's-head as his."

Despite the belief that long was current, Walpole did not propose to Mary Berry. His affection for her was genuine, however. To Agnes he was less ardently attached, but he took care to include "wife the second" in the matrimonial alliance he pretended to have formed. He referred to himself as an old "fondle-wife," to them as "my beloved spouses," "twin-wives," "dear both." The playful tone of his communications to them is manifest from the first. "I am afraid of protesting how much I delight in your society, lest I should seem to affect being gallant," he wrote in 1789; "but if two negatives make an affirmative, why may not two ridicules compose one piece of sense? and therefore, as I am in love with you both, I trust it is a proof of the good sense of your devoted H. Walpole." While we are sent elsewhere for these letters of Walpole, we are grateful to Mr. Melville for the fresh glimpses he gives of the man's devotion through the ample correspondence of the Hon. Mrs. Damer with Mary Berry. Here we see an old man gay with the sprightliness of youth yet peevish with the impatience of age. He is anxious when the post brings him no word, is so elated with the letters which come that he must read them forthwith to Mrs. Damer, is curiously indifferent to the letters sent to her, and turns up his nose at Madame d'Albany, will never forgive her in fact, for not recognizing immediately the name of Mary Berry, though she had heard it before as Mary Barry.

Walpole was in part responsible for the unhappy outcome of Mary Berry's connection with General Charles O'Hara. This officer had served with distinction in America until captured with Cornwallis at Yorktown, and had since acquitted himself well in Europe. He was a man of forceful and fascinating presence. To him Mary Berry plighted her troth; but she would not marry him at once for fear of hurting Walpole and of doing an injustice to her father and sister. An appointment to the governorship of Gibraltar took him from her side. Under the wiles of less worthy women, his unstable nature repented very quickly of its former attachment. To his efforts to break the engagement in such a way as to imply that the fault lay with her, she replied spiritedly and yet with moderation. She never ceased to believe that the union which would have come under happier auspices "would have called out all the powers of my mind and all the warmest feelings of my heart." When he died, a few years subsequent to the rupture, she sealed up her correspondence with him. In her old days she opened it again and recorded in a pathetic note her "conviction that some feelings in some minds are indelible."

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