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MOURNFUL BOWLES AND WHY HE WAS

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“BREATHES not the man with a more poetical temperament than Bowles . . .” remarked Christopher North in *Blackwood's*. “His human sensibilities are so fine as to be in themselves poetical; and his poetical aspirations so delicate as to be felt always human. Hence his *Sonnets* have been dear to poets—”¹

To one poet, however, the *Sonnets* of Bowles were something less than dear, and that poet was George Gordon, Lord Byron. In *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, Byron says of Bowles:

Hail, Sympathy! thy soft idea brings
A thousand visions of a thousand things,
And shows, dissolved in thine own melting tears,
The maudlin prince of mournful sonneteers.²

Of the two estimates of Bowles here presented, it is probable that the modern reader will unhesitatingly prefer the latter. The criticism of our own day sets no very high value upon the mournful sensibility, and the Muse of Bowles is indisputably Niobeian. There is, however, some danger in an unquestioning acceptance of Byron's judgment of Bowles. The danger is, I think, that in accepting Byron's view we fail to understand what Coleridge first and Christopher North later both clearly understood—that the sentiment contained in Bowles's poetry,

¹ *Blackwood's*, xxx (Sept., 1831), 475. Christopher North is of course John Wilson.

² ll. 211-214. I have followed the reading of the first edition (1809).



W. L. Bowles

AUTHOR OF 'FOURTEEN SONNETS, 1786.'

although mournful, is nevertheless very genuine. It is not sufficiently recognized that what Byron took to be an endless, and perhaps commercial,³ sequence of sonnets is in fact two sequences: the first the record of an unsuccessful love affair, the second of a tragic one.⁴ Bowles himself points out rather sadly "the common remark on melancholy poetry, that it has been very often gravely composed, when possibly the heart of the writer had very little share in the distress he chose to describe." And he says of his own *Sonnets*, "They who know [the author], know the occasions of them to have been real."⁵

It is the purpose of the present paper to present in a more complete form than has hitherto been undertaken these two "occasions" from which the *Sonnets* spring. The first may be sketched out in a rather incomplete fashion from generally available biographical material; the second may be recreated in considerable detail from a unique unpublished correspondence which has recently come into the possession of the Rutgers University Library.⁶ It is hoped that through

³ "Stick to thy Sonnets, Man!—at least they sell—" *English Bards*, l. 246.

⁴ Bowles himself is quite specific on this point. In *Scenes and Shadows of Days Departed* (London, 1837), he says: "it will be sufficient here to relate further, that having made two engagements, one, in early life, to a young lady, the occasion of the first Sonnets, when in a foreign country, he sought oblivion of his youthful heart's first anguish . . . and the other, when, ten years afterwards, and being in orders, death put an end to all these dreams, on the eve of marriage" (pp. xxxiii-xxxiv). The earlier editions of the *Sonnets* did not make this duality clear. Bowles's biographers, however, have generally observed the fact that there were two affairs. Mrs. Crosse (see below, n. 23), the *DNB*, and Garland Greever (see below, n. 7) point out this fact. All references to the *Sonnets* are to the fourth edition of 1796.

⁵ "Preface," to the ninth edition of *Sonnets, and Other Poems* (London, 1805).

⁶ The correspondence consists of some forty-seven letters exchanged between Bowles and his second fiancée Harriet Wake during the years 1792-93. After the death of Harriet in 1793, the letters she received from Bowles were preserved by her sister Magdalene Wake, to whom the poet was married in 1797. After the deaths without issue of Bowles and Magdalene, the whole correspondence, along with Bowles's other letters and papers, passed to Mrs. Marianne Jones-Bateman, his niece and sole heir. In 1914-15, Professor Garland Greever examined the entire collection of Bowles materials at the former Jones-Bateman home at Pentre Mawr, Wales, and in 1926 published a selection entitled *A Wiltshire Parson and his Friends*. Professor Greever did not include the Bowles-Harriet Wake correspondence in the *Wiltshire Parson*, but he did include, in the life of Bowles with which he prefaced the selected correspondence, an account, drawn from the letters, of the events of the love affair. Professor Greever kindly permitted me to use in my dissertation (*William Lisle Bowles* [Yale, 1941]) transcripts of the Bowles-Harriet Wake correspondence made for him by Miss Margaret Jones-Bateman. In 1943, the originals were purchased by my father Mr. A. N. Kellogg and in 1951 were by him presented to the Rutgers University Library. I am deeply indebted to Mr. R. Jones-Bateman for permission to publish the letters. I am likewise indebted to Mrs. Dorothy Jones-Bateman and to Mr. Jones-Bateman for most gracious hospitality while in England and for subsequent generous assistance on many aspects of Bowles biography.

the narration of these events it will be possible to show that Bowles's *Sonnets* are in no real sense "maudlin," but the genuine expression, in an idiom now remote from our own, of deeply felt personal sorrow.

I

In 1781, Bowles entered Trinity College, Oxford, from Winchester. His career was at first successful and even brilliant. In 1782 he was elected scholar of Trinity College, and in 1783 he won the Chancellor's prize for Latin verse. Two years later he was awarded the Cobden exhibition for a student of Trinity College educated at Winchester.⁷

Unhappily, however, the even tenor of Bowles's life did not long continue. In 1786, Bowles's father died.⁸ Although Thomas Lisle Bowles left a considerable estate—William's share amounting eventually to some £610 cash and £110 stock—his death produced for his son no assistance but only an additional financial burden. The income from the estate was left to Mrs. Bowles for life,⁹ and was in fact barely sufficient for her own needs, since the death of Thomas Lisle Bowles had deprived his family of the income from the two rectories of Uphill and Brean in Somersetshire.¹⁰ During the same year, if we may believe Bowles's own capricious dating, occurred a further reverse—this time amatory. It would appear that by 1786 Bowles had become engaged to a very attractive young lady, and further that his lack of fortune created for him no favor in parental eyes. During the spring or early summer of that year—and one must here resort to conjecture—Bowles received a warning from her family that unless his fortune mended immensely, he must expect the engagement to be broken.¹¹ In deep dejection of spirit, Bowles proceeded to South-

⁷ The above dating is drawn from Garland Greever, *A Wiltshire Parson and his Friends* (London, 1926), p. 4. Professor Greever's two works: *William Lisle Bowles* (Unpublished dissertation, Harvard, 1914) and *A Wiltshire Parson* are basic to any study of Bowles.

⁸ *Wiltshire Parson*, p. 5.

⁹ The will of Thomas Lisle Bowles remains in the Jones-Bateman family. Information relative to the will I owe to a private communication from Mrs. Dorothy Jones-Bateman.

¹⁰ *Scenes and Shadows*, p. xlv.

¹¹ In *Scenes and Shadows*, at the beginning of the first series of *Sonnets*, occurs the following poem:

To—

FORGET ME—but sometimes, at close of day,
When I am lone and wandering far away,
THINK OF ME WITH A SIGH, and think that then,

ampton, and found a ship sailing for Northumberland.¹² After an extremely rough voyage, he arrived at Tinemouth, travelled north to Bamborough Castle and thence into Scotland as far as Clydesdale. He returned to Winchester,¹³ and eventually to Oxford.

Evil fortune, however, was by no means finished with Bowles. The succeeding year, 1787, was to contain the bitterest series of disappointments he had yet been obliged to face. In 1787, one of his scholarships expired, and sometime during this same year it must have become apparent that the fellowship of Trinity College for which he had all along been striving was not to become a reality.¹⁴ In the midst of his collapsing academic dreams, Bowles was also aware that the same factors were operating in another area to destroy his engagement. In the summer of 1787, finally occurred the event the young poet feared and the aged poet never ceased to delight in relating. This event, which Bowles in later years took pains to make ostentatiously mysterious, is most fully described in a darkly autobiographical

By some wild river's brink, or woody glen,
My heart, which still thy gentle image bears,
Is heaving, and mine eyes are fill'd with tears.

1786

Although Bowles's dating in *Scenes and Shadows* is thoroughly suspect, since it frequently clashes with his own earlier dating of the *Sonnets* and with objectively verifiable events, the date of 1786 he here affixes seems to be fairly accurate. The sonnets dealing with the European trip are dated 1787; the preceding sonnets dealing with the English and Scottish tour are not so dated. There is, moreover, at Sonnet VII (return to Winchester) a definite pause implying the passage of considerable time. This seems to represent the end of a group of sonnets dealing with the first journey. The following sonnet (VIII) has as its subject poverty and is, I think, the expression of Bowles's anguish at his final rejection for want of fortune (discussed below). It was this rejection, stated as I believe in Sonnet VIII and fully explained in *Banwell Hill* which occasioned his second or European journey. Thus I think the English and Scotch tour is to be assigned to the summer of 1786, and the European to the following summer of 1787. I conjecture further that Bowles's summer tour of 1786 was brought about by something like a warning since his impecuniousness is the only cause for a break ever mentioned, and since that continuing impecuniousness did not effect a final break until 1787. Bowles makes the whole matter as obscure as possible in *Scenes and Shadows* by giving Sonnet VIII (O Poverty) the title "Written on Resigning a Scholarship of Trinity College and Retiring to a Country Curacy." This is manifestly impossible, since Bowles was not ordained curate until 1788 and until *Scenes and Shadows* this Sonnet VIII invariably precedes the sonnets dated 1787. One suspects that Bowles was interested in later life in intimating that poverty was the cause of his not receiving a fellowship at Trinity College.

¹² Northumberland possessed powerful associations for Bowles. The Lisles, from whom his paternal grandmother was descended, came from Northumberland. His maternal grandfather, Dr. Richard Grey, was chaplain to Lord Crew, Bishop of Durham, who founded "that noble charity for preserving the lives of shipwrecked sailors, at Bamborough Castle, Northumberland." (*Ibid.*, p. xix.)

¹³ *Sonnets*, I-VII.

¹⁴ *Wiltshire Parson*, p. 5.

section of *Banwell Hill*. In that poem Bowles represents himself as standing upon the crest of the hill, surveying the Severn Sea and the country round. He says:

And where those hills that skirt the level vale,
On to the left, the prospect intercept,
I would not, could not look, were they removed;
I *would* not, *could* not look, lest I should see
The sunshine on that spot of all the world,
Where, starting from the dream of youth, I gazed
Long since, on the cold, clouded world, and cried,
Beautiful vision, loved, adored, in vain,
Farewell—farewell, for ever!¹⁵

If Bowles, looking west over the Severn Sea, turned to the left and were able to elevate his gaze over the low range of Compton Hill, Winscombe Hill, and Shute Shelve Hill and extend it some fourteen miles, he would see Glastonbury, where, I take it, he “started from the dream of youth.”¹⁶ This conclusion seems to be borne out by a passage a little later on in the poem:

The summer eve
Shone, as with sympathy of sweet farewell,
Upon thy Tor, and solitary mound,
Glaston, as rapidly I passed along,
Borne from those scenes for ever, while with song
The sorrows of the hour and way beguiled.¹⁷

If Glastonbury, or the neighborhood of Glastonbury, were the scene of Bowles's final rejection, the events of the first disappointment might be summarized as follows. In July, 1787, Bowles visited his fiancée at Glastonbury and was told finally and firmly that his hopes were not to be rewarded, or as Chaucer's Cassandra more bluntly put it, “thou art out.” The disappointed lover immediately set forth by coach for London,¹⁸ and proceeded from there to Dover, where he took ship for Ostend. He passed through the Low Countries and journeyed up the Rhine to Switzerland.¹⁹ Eventually he re-

¹⁵ W. L. Bowles, *Poetical Works*, ed. Rev George Gilfillan (Edinburgh, 1855), II, 69.

¹⁶ In Sept., 1945, the author, accompanied by a trusty companion, Sgt. James McMahon, and equipped with German field glasses, maps, and a taxi driver, triumphantly mounted Banwell Hill in the best scholar-adventurer tradition and stared about in an attempt to match Bowles's visionary glance. Unfortunately, all that was visible, despite the fact of its being for that locality a clear day, was a most impenetrable mist.

¹⁷ *Poetical Works*, II, 70.

¹⁸ *Days Departed; or Banwell Hill* (London, 1828), p. 65.

¹⁹ *Sonnets*, IX-XV.

turned to the coast and embarking, probably at Antwerp,²⁰ crossed to Dover. From Dover he returned to Oxford.²¹

So ended—or almost ended—the events which gave rise to the first series of *Sonnets*. A great many years later Bowles was introduced to a lady whose married name meant nothing to him. When she informed him of her identity,²² he exclaimed, “Oh, what a wreck!” but recollecting with consternation his position as poet and eternal lover, he in due course addressed to her a sonnet containing an adjusted—and considerably more romantic—version of the encounter.²³

II

By the spring of 1788, Bowles had abandoned his struggle to remain at Oxford and had “commenced a curate.” His curacy was that of Knoyle in Southern Wiltshire, and his residence was in nearby Donhead St. Mary. The rector of the parish was Dr. Charles Wake, a prebendary of Westminster, who lived at Knoyle only in the summer, and whose regular residence was the Little Cloisters, Westminster.²⁴ Dr. Wake possessed four daughters of varying attractions, to perhaps the handsomest of whom, Harriet Wake, Bowles in the summer of 1792 “explained himself.” Harriet found the explanation more than adequate, but her father was far from sharing her views. To the son of Archbishop Wake, Bowles was a youth of no fortune and little promise. The consent Dr. Wake gave was conditional, and as he later explained it, more than slightly negative. Under these circumstances, Harriet’s departure from Knoyle in the fall was filled with forebodings:

in heaviness
To me the hours shall roll, weary and slow,
Till mournful autumn past, and all the snow
Of winter pale! the glad hour I shall bless,

²⁰ *Scenes and Shadows*, p. 35.

²¹ *Sonnets*, XVI-XVII.

²² Mrs. Crosse (see note following) does not state the name of the lady of the first series of *Sonnets*, but she has been generally taken, on the authority of the *Gentleman's Magazine* (XXXIII [1850], 672) to be a “Miss Romilly, daughter of Mr. Romilly, of Dulwich, and niece of the celebrated Sir Samuel Romilly.” It should be pointed out that this identification is somewhat doubtful since the lady in question could not have been much above six years of age in July, 1787. See C. M. Atkinson and J. E. Mitchell, *An Account of . . . Sir Samuel Romilly* (Derby, 1920), p. 12, note.

²³ The story is told by Mrs. Andrew Crosse, “Poet, Parson, and Pamphleteer,” *Temple Bar*, CIII (Sept., 1894), pp. 30-31. There seems to be adequate substantiation. The source of the story is Mr. John Benett, a relation of Bowles’s by marriage, who was present at the occurrence. The sonnet may be found in Bowles’s *Poetical Works*, I, 24-25.

²⁴ *Wiltshire Parson*, p. 6.

That shall restore thee from the croud again,
To the green hamlet in the peaceful plain.²⁵

The story of the tragedy²⁶ which obsessed Bowles's consciousness for the rest of his life begins with the return of Harriet to Westminster.²⁷

[Postmark
Nov. 13, 1792]

Dear Mr. Bowles,

I am this instant arriv'd and have had a most melancholy journey. You must be prepar'd to hear something that I fear will give you pain. I only hope it will not shock you so much as it did me. I will not distress you by relating what I have suffer'd since last I saw you. I have been us'd, I am sorry to say, ungenerously. My Father has commanded me not to write to you but how can I forbare doing it? I find my Aunt Bowles²⁸ is the person who has set him against you. She has hear'd many things to your disadvantage and has persuaded my Father that I should be very unhappy if I was to leave him even supposing you had a large income. How strange it is they will not allow me to judge for myself. I am told you are so changable that it is impossible for you to be long attach'd to anyone. I cannot believe so ill of you. It is requir'd of me to give you up, but that I never will do till I am convinc'd it is your wish I should act as they would have me. I told my Father when he spoke to me on the subject that he had dealt insincerely by me for that he should not have given hopes unless he meant to realize them. Do write to me. I will watch the coming in of the post Saturday morning. I shall expect to receive a letter from you and I hope to get it without being found out. I must run the risque for I want to know what you think of this matter. I hope you have lost your cold and that you will take care not to get another. I am very unhappy. Perhaps

²⁵ *Sonnet XIX*: dated October, 1792.

²⁶ The events have in the main been traced before. The story was narrated, prior to the discovery of Bowles's correspondence, by Professor Greever in his Harvard dissertation *William Lisle Bowles* (1914). A summary of the events, based on the Bowles-Wake correspondence, is contained in Professor Greever's *Wiltshire Parson*, p. 6.

²⁷ It is perhaps worthwhile here to comment on the editorial policy, if it can be called such, followed in the selection and printing of the following passages from the Bowles-Harriet Wake correspondence. In the selection of passages the object has been to present the main occurrences of the courtship and at the same time to preserve the tone of the correspondence. Since the tone depends to a large extent on the extraordinarily complete question-and-answer form of the correspondence and on the cumulative character development thereby presented, as many letters as possible have been reproduced and the most characteristic expressions of both writers have been included. In following this procedure, however, it has been necessary to reduce to a very small compass several major topics of discussion, such as that of Bowles's attempt to purchase a regimental chaplaincy. In printing the text selected, an attempt has been made to adhere as closely as possible to the correspondence as written. Spellings have not been altered, and in general, only Harriet's disinclination to terminal punctuation has been affected.

²⁸ Magdalene Wake, sister of Dr. Charles Wake, married William Bowles, prebendary of Salisbury, who died in 1788—Sir Richard Colt Hoare, *History of Modern Wiltshire* (London, 1822-44), IV, ii, 36.

my Father will think better of you if he should hear no reports to your disadvantage these next two or three years. I have written in a very great hurry. Believe me ever,

Yours,
HW

Donhead Friday
[Nov. 16, 1792]

My dearest friend,

I am greatly distress'd at what you tell me. But I think you are deceiv'd as to the author & I believe there is *another person* at the bottom of all this who would spare no pains to set your father against me, & that your Aunt Bowles is made the *ostensible* person, & perhaps deceiv'd herself . . . But I hope & trust you will not be biass'd by such unfounded reports, or by any *machinations* of insidious people against *your* peace & my own. I know that not one of them can bring a *single thing* against me, or prove any one action of my whole life, that I should be asham'd to avow. As to the *changeableness* of my affections etc. I hope I need not say more than I have done already to you— Who are they, that, without any knowledge of me, without a shadow of proof, without even the slightest acquaintance, without so much as knowing me by sight (for I don't know that I ever saw your Aunt Bowles) should stand up and judge me, say exactly what my disposition is, what my heart is made of, & assert that you could not be happy with such a person as myself! . . . I could very easily, & *clearly disprove* every thing that is said about that part of my conduct that relates to *changeableness* etc. if I did not believe you had a better opinion of me, than to imagine it, after what I have said already . . .

I shall with great anxiety expect another letter & I hope in God to hear you are happier, & that your father behaves kindly to you. Do, my dearest love, make yourself compos'd—perhaps all this in time will blow over. I forgot to sa[y] that tho I trust to hear from you agai[n] I should not think it advisable for you to enter into a correspondence, if you have *promis'd* your father that you *would not* . . . One word more—let me know if by any means I might have half an hour's conversation with you. If it can possibly be contriv'd I will come to Town directly. I would give the world to see you & consult with you . . .

God bless you & believe me your sincere friend, & affectionate

W. L. Bowles

Monday Morn.
[Nov. 19, 1792]

Dear Mr. Bowles,

I am very angry with myself for having made you so uneasy. I wish I had written with more reserve. I hope I am not unjust in thinking with you that there is some other person beside my Aunt Bowles who has set my Father against you, but do not for an instant suppose that I can think ill of you from any thing they may choose to say to your disadvantage. I have been told something about you which I confess has made me uneasy. Do not be displeas'd

with me for saying so. I never could mention it when with you though it was often in my thoughts, and I am almost inclin'd now not to tell it you, yet I wish you to know what I allude to, for it is a kind of thing I could not speak of to your face. I must write it, or you will never know what I mean. I cannot tell you all that has been said to me about this matter. I have been inform'd that when you are from home, it is suppos'd greatest part of your time is pass'd with vicious Women. This is the chief thing I believe alledged against you by my Aunt Bowles. My Father spoke of it to me when at Salisbury,²⁹ and assur'd me that I must not expect to be happy with a person who would most probably prefer others to me. This is what I meant by saying that I had heard you was of a changeable disposition but I do assure you all this has made very little impression on me, because I am convinc'd the people who tell me these things exaggerate, in order to lessen my regard for you—which they will find a very difficult matter to accomplish, for I believe your good qualities far out balance the bad ones. No person is without faults.

I should be hurt if you was to imagine me capable of entering into a correspondence with you, if I had promis'd my Father I would not. I made him no answer when he commanded me not to write to you. I am happier than when you heard from me last, but I have not entirely recover'd the shock I receiv'd at Salisbury. My Father made use of very harsh language towards me which I cannot quite forget, though I am convinc'd I ought to do it. I have no cause to complain of his behaviour since I came to Town. He is very kind to me. Yesterday he ask'd Emma if I ever mention'd you to her, and said he thought I should soon cease to think of you, but that cannot happen. How little does he know me if he really means what he says . . .

I hope I have not said any thing in this letter that will make you uncomfortable. I would not for the world give you uneasiness. Adieu. Believe me always affectionately

Yours,
HW . . .

Shaston Tuesday
[Nov. 20, 1792]

My beloved friend,

You know not how greatly you have oblig'd me by the kind & open manner in which you have written about a particular subject—I should think it criminal in me to conceal any thing from you, & I cannot entirely deny what has been said of me. I never thought you could be ignorant of this part of my character, & I took not much pains to conceal it, because I abhor hypocrisy, & because if you should ever find I had deceiv'd you in one thing, you might reasonably suppose I might in another—but I did not think you suppos'd worse of me than you did of the rest of the world, & I knew I was not half so bad, for in no

²⁹ The events leading up to Harriet's unhappy experience at Salisbury may be conjectured somewhat as follows. On the return journey to London the Wake ménage paused for a considerable time at Salisbury. Harriet visited for several days at nearby Barford, during which time Dr. Wake's ear was assaulted with discourteous rumors about Bowles. On her return to Salisbury, Harriet was violently lectured by her father.

instance could I act dishonorably & however wrong I might have been in not checking my passions I never did any thing to be sorry for—If it may be any extenuation, recollect I was totally *unconnected* (except with a person whom I could not esteem) I car'd for nobody, & nobody for me, I alone was concern'd, and I alone was to be the sufferer³⁰—Hear me now speak truly & sincerely—Ever-since I have explain'd myself to you, no one can say any thing of me in the way you allude to nor shall they—& believe me, my dearest and best friend, when I assure you that the tenderness & respect I feel for you, are of themselves enough to prevent my being again the character I *have been*, even if *honor* was out of the question . . .

Adieu & believe me always most affectionately

Yours

W. L. Bowles

Wednesday Morn.

[Nov. 21, 1792]

Dear Mr. Bowles,

I have not five minutes to write to you in and I know not what to advise. Yesterday my Father was out of humor with me the whole day and said two or three very severe things. He accus'd me of want of affection towards him since he found I was resolv'd not to oblige him in one point which I must do at last, he said. I made no answer and I have not promis'd any thing here or at Salisbury. I am very unhappy to be the cause of so much uneasiness to him but I never can do as he would have me. Perhaps it would be best to be open and decisive. Do not fear for me. Act as you think proper. Your judgment is much better than mine. Your letter gave me great satisfaction. I am much happier since I receiv'd it. I shall be too late for the post if I add more than that I am very affectionately

Yours

HW

Pray write to me soon. The only pleasure I have is in hearing from you . . .

[Postmark

Nov. 24, 1792]

My dear Love,

The plan which I should think best to pursue with regard to your father is this—for me to write to him & to say that I think it a matter of very serious concern, on which my own, as well as your happiness depends . . . that If I should be so unfortunate as to find him against me, I should rest upon the un-

³⁰ This is an extremely interesting statement, since it shows how deeply—and genuinely—Bowles was affected by his first disappointment in love. Elsewhere in the correspondence he says, speaking of a lady who was considering travel as a relief from her unhappiness, "It is however something to *look forward to*, (going to another country & to other scenes), which alone might give a sort of satisfaction tho I should think a mournfull one. Perhaps it is the *only one* left, which we are all glad enough to lay hold of, be it ever so poor." The youthful Bowles did not think of the travels he undertook after his rejection as pleasurable sentimental journeys.

prejudic'd opinion of those who knew me, & the circumstances of the case & if I should appear to have acted right, that nothing in the world should or could induce me to give you up!

I shall not write before Monday, & I shall consider what I may say better. Let me know, my love, if you approve of this . . . God bless you, ever yours

W. Lisle Bowles

My Dear Mr. Bowles,

Saturday Morn
[Nov. 24, 1792]

I have this instant receiv'd your letter, and entirely approve of what you intend writing to my Father. I think his behaviour to you has been very wrong though perhaps I ought not to say so. He told me the other evening that since he found he could have no reliance upon me he was come to a determination to desire you to quit the curacy before he return'd to Knoyle. What he says to me upon this subject I hear in silence and I think he now begins to imagine that I shall never be prevail'd upon to do as he would have me. Do not be concern'd for me. I would suffer anything rather than give you up. Now I know what you intend writing to my Father I shall be prepar'd. I will be decisive though if he should tell me that my undutiful consent would injure his health and that it was cruel to vex him it will shock me exceedingly. Pray write as you intend. I have not time to add a word more than to assure you that I shall always remain affectionately,

Yours
HW

My dear Love,

[Postmark
Nov. 28, 1792]

I have no doubt but your Father will give me notice to quit his Curacy, but I do not consider this a moment. People will think him very much to blame, & I'm sure he will not be able to alledge any good reason for it—However I make myself easy & whatever is the consequence, no consideration in the world shall ever induce me for a moment to think of giving up you . . .

I fear to have your next letter, but pray write (if but a line) immediatly to let me know the worst—, & whether my letter has irritated him—I fear I have spoken too plain, but it cannot be help'd now . . .

I suppose you know I have given up all thoughts of the Living³¹—I now think it would have been very imprudent, & I have since heard very good news from the Bishop of Durham, which may prevent my trying to purchase Preferment, unless something very advantageous should offer—let the worst

³¹ In the early fall of 1792, Bowles was negotiating for the purchase of a living at Bristol. At that time Harriet assured him, "I have every reason to suppose [Father's] consent will not be withheld if you succeed in the business you are upon." Bowles decided against purchasing.

come to the worst I think we could *make-up* between us about three hundred a year independent of any body³² . . . Ever faithfully yours,

W Lisle Bowles

Wednesday Morning

[Nov. 28, 1792]

My dear Mr. Bowles,

My Father receiv'd your Letter³³ yesterday after he had din'd. It came by the penny post. I was with him when it was brought to him. I guess'd it came from you, and I instantly left the Room that he might not perceive I was agitated, and also to endeavour to get a little courage in case he should speak to me on the subject, but he has not said any thing to me respecting you since I writ last or has he mention'd having heard from you, so I suppose he does not intend to make me acquainted with the contents of your letter. He has been talking to me to day more than usual and came up stairs to sit with me. He said at breakfast that he should write to Dr. Dobson³⁴ by Mr. Turner who is in Town and offer'd to take charge of a letter to Salisbury if any of the family choose to write. I imagine he wishes to ask Dr. and Mrs. Dobson's advice, and that you will not receive an answer to your letter till he has heard from Salisbury . . .

I shall lose the post if I add any more. Ever affectionately

Yours

HW

I would give the world to see you. Perhaps my Father will allow you to come to his House. Things may turn out better than we expect.

Donhead

Dec. 1, [1792]

My dear Love . . .

Do write to me the moment you hear from Salisbury—I know he will be guided in great measure by what he hears from thence—I hope I may yet see you soon at your father's house, & God knows how much I wish it . . .

Be[lieve me] ever most affectionately and faithfully

Yours

W L. Bowles

This is Saturday night, how shall I miss you tomorrow—God bless you.

³² Bowles states elsewhere in this letter that he has "at present about three thousand" of his own. This represents, perhaps, an over-optimistic estimate of his share of his father's estate (See above p. 35). Harriet apparently possessed funds in her own right.

³³ This letter is the second known communication of Bowles to Dr. Wake. A first letter, written probably in Oct., 1792, had been favorably received.

³⁴ John Dobson became prebendary of Salisbury upon the death of William Bowles (see above, n. 28). Hardy lists him only as M.A.—T. Duffus Hardy, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae* (Oxford, 1854), II, 678. In numerous letters Bowles makes it clear that he considers Mrs. Dobson, rather than Aunt Bowles, the malicious informant who set Dr. Wake against him.

Saturday evening
[Dec. 8, 1792]

My dear Mr. Bowles,

I have defer'd writing to you till this time thinking I should have it in my power to tell you what answer my Father would return to your Letter but he has not yet heard from Salisbury and I suppose he will not write to you till he has . . .

Affectionately yours,
HW

Tuesday Morn.
[December 18, 1792]

My dearest Love,

I wish to write to you by the same post I have written to your father,³⁵ tho I have time to say very little, only to desire you will let me hear from you immediatly, to let me know in what manner your father took what I said to him—There is now I fear little chance of reconciliation. We must be determin'd—there can be no other way—I have written very decisively to him, but what I said had the entire approbation of all whom I consulted . . .

Believe me ever with the greatest affection

Yours,
W L. Bowles

Cloysters Thursday Morn
[December 20, 1792]

My Dear Friend,

I was sorry I could not answer your letter yesterday. I receiv'd it just as I was going to visit Miss Biggs. I had promis'd to take her to so many places that it was impossible for me to get home time enough to write to you.

When I return'd I could not discover from my Fathers manner that he had heard from you. He said a number of affectionate things to me and appear'd in good spirits. I think he is very grave this morning. He did not speak a word to anyone at breakfast and frequently fix'd his eyes on me which disconcerted me exceedingly. I assure you it gives me a great deal of pain to see him uneasy. I wish he had not stay'd at Salisbury on his way up to Town. Perhaps he will not speak to me on the subject for I hope he is convinc'd that nothing can make me alter my determination. Whenever he mentions you it is always with so much warmth that I dare not reply . . . Pray inform me what my Father said to you in his last letter. It is a great consolation to me to hear that almost all my friends think us right . . .

Adieu. Believe me ever
Yours
HW . . .

³⁵ The letter here referred to is the third communication from Bowles to Dr. Wake. A rough draft of it exists in the correspondence, and a summary is contained in Bowles's letter of Dec. 24 to Harriet. On Dec. 8 (see preceding letter) Dr. Wake had as yet not heard from Salisbury. Between Dec. 8 and Dec. 18, events moved rapidly. Dr. Wake received the answer from Salisbury and wrote Bowles. Bowles immediately took counsel and replied.

[Postmark
Dec. 24, 1792]

My dear Love,

I do not delay informing you of the contents of your Father's letter & my answer to it.

He said that his consent was conditional; that I had *no income* & therefore on that account he must be consider'd as having given a negative; he knew of no crime to accuse me of. He had *consulted with no one*; his objections were not from any *one* cause, but from many, which at first he did not consider. He acted precipitately and was sorry that he had.

To all this I return'd a plain and decisive answer. His consent was *not conditional* for he left us to judge for ourselves; & it was not true I had *no income* for I had sufficient to settle three thousand pound upon you tomorrow besides your own; & as to his *precipitation* I beg'd him to consider that he knew my regard for you for *two years*, & that he could not be unprepar'd for what might be expected to follow; that after the explanation took place he was at Knoyle three weeks during all which time his language was that of *deliberate* approbation—as to what might have said of me by enemies, I told him that the alteration in his behaviour was certainly *very sudden*: that no objections occur'd to him at Knoyle (or he must have acted a part I believ'd he would *disdain*) that I therefore conceived they must have been started to him by some one not my friend after he left his own door—that his behaviour at Salisbury at least was as *unexpected* as it was severe.

These are plain truths which he never can get over—I can believe he must be hurt, because every word must have *come home* to him, but I wrote very respectfull . . .

Write soon, & believe me ever most truly

Yours,
WL Bowles . . .

Tuesday Evening
[December 25, 1792]

How very good you were my Dear Mr. Bowles in answering my last letter immediately. I was impatient to hear from you for I wanted to know what my Father had said. Now I am not atall surpris'd at his being so grave that morning. Every word of your last letter must have hurt him. The day after he received it as soon as we had din'd he began to converse with me about you. Emma was gone to the play and James to Salisbury so we were quite alone. He gave me to understand that he had heard from you but declin'd entering into particulars. He said he blam'd himself exceedingly for not having at first express'd his disapprobation . . . He inform'd me that he had been led to imagine you had no income for he suppos'd from your way of life you had spent greatest part of it, (those he consulted put that in his head I daresay,) . . . He mention'd what your income was and said that there were circumstances which might make him alter his sentiments. I believe he thought he had said too much for immediately afterwards he began to remind me of things he

had spoke of to me at Salisbury. It was not a pleasant subject to me, and I stop'd him from saying any thing further, by assuring him that I had the highest opinion of you and that I believ'd you to be a very worthy man.

My Father has not a very delicate manner of expressing himself and I was afraid of what he might say . . .

I am come to the end of my paper and shall conclude with assuring you that I am ever most

Affectionately yours

HW

Wednesday

[December 26, 1792]

My dear Friend,

I write this in a great hurry from Salisbury to inform you I shall be in Town tomorrow.

Having heard from an attorney in Town, of my Brother's acquaintance, of something that might be advantageous,³⁶ I determin'd to set out the moment I could—I should wish however if possible to see you before I enter into any business—I shall stay in Town about ten days, & till I get lodgings shall be at the Bedford Coffee House, Covent Garden . . .

Yours

W Bowles

Thursday Morn

[Dec. 27, 1792]

Dear Mr. Bowles,

I have this moment receiv'd your letter and am rejoic'd to find that I shall so soon have the pleasure of seeing you. How I wish you could come here. I would give the world to see you at my Fathers house . . . Pray do not delay speaking to the attorney.

I do not think there would be any harm in my conversing with you in the park. My Fathers servant will be with me if I should meet any of my acquaintance. I must be at home by one o'clock but I could walk out soon after breakfast. I very often go into the green park. I shall not be easy until I see you. Ever most affectionately yours

HW . . .

Bedford Coffee

[Dec. 29[?], 1792]

My dear friend,

I did not receive your first letter till yesterday between eleven & twelve. It was too late for me to think of seeing you at that time in the Green Park, but

³⁶ This was the opportunity to purchase a regimental chaplaincy. Bowles's attorney attempted to maneuver the chaplain, a Mr. Adams, into a forced sale at a low price, but succeeded only in making the whole transaction impossible. Bowles later received "the offer of another chaplaincy in the light horse for fourteen hundred pounds." It is interesting to observe in this connection that had Bowles been somewhat less cautious, he might have had an opportunity from first hand experience of making Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" a work of supererogation.

at 2 o'clock I walk'd on the long walk in Hide Park till almost three. Immediately on my return I wrote to you by the Penny Post, which letter I am sorry you did not receive yesterday, as I hop'd you would—I was afraid to send a person on purpose as I thought it might be known . . .

Believe me ever most affectionatly yours
W. L. Bowles

Dear Mr Bowles

[Dec. 30, 1792—Jan. 3, 1793]

I suppose you had not time to come into the College garden to day. I write to inform you that the Box at Covent Garden is taken in my name and is the fourth from the stage. I hope I shall see you to night³⁷

Most sincerely

Yours

HW

Donhead

Jan. 7, [1793]

My dearest Love

I am just arriv'd at this place safe & well after my journey—I did not leave Town before ten o'clock Saturday morning, got to Salisbury by Eleven & stay'd there the night. From thence to Knoyle the next morning on horseback was by far the most unpleasant not to say dangerous part of my journey—I was oblig'd to ride very fast to get to Knoyle by Church-Time & the road was so slippery from the frost (which the sun had no power upon in so early a part of the day) that I fear'd every step my horse's falling with me—I got however to Knoyle just before Eleven . . .

I am amusing myself by planting Trees, & pulling down Hedges, & when you come to see Mrs. Benet³⁸ in the summer, I hope to shew you my *retreat* in a little order— . . .

Ever Most Affec^{ly} Yours

W. Bowles

Saturday Morn

[Jan. 26, 1793]

Dear Mr. Bowles . . .

Magdalene came to us Wednesday evening last. She is in good spirits and appears quite happy. She tells me Mrs. D declares she was not the person who influenc'd my Father to act as he has towards us. But I know she told him some thing about Mr. Wyndham for my Father has taken it into his head that

³⁷ The London letters are largely the record of appointments narrowly missed. However, it is clear that frequent meetings in the College Garden did take place. A later remark of Harriet's, "I have not spent an evening out since you left Town" (See also below p. 49) indicates that evening meetings such as the one referred to in the present letter were likewise successful. It is probable that the lovers found the making of appointments by letter too hazardous and uncertain.

³⁸ John Benet, LL.D. was rector of nearby Donhead St. Andrew.—Hoare, *Modern History*, IV, i, 132. Mrs. Benet, a relation by marriage of Harriet Wake, was thus a neighbor of Bowles.

I might have settled at Dinton if I choose it.³⁹ This in some measure accounts for his extraordinary conduct . . . I told my Father when he spoke to me on this subject the other evening, that I did not believe there was the least truth in what he had heard, and if there was, I should not ever have paid the slightest attention to it, even if you had not explain'd yourself to me, but that my conscience would not have allow'd me to give a young man reason to suppose I lik'd him, when I knew I prefer'd another . . .

Ever yours most affectionately

HW

Thursday Evening
[Feb. 14, 1793]

Dear Mr. Bowles

I was anxious to hear from you and was very glad to receive your last letter. Have you given up the idea of coming to Town in the Spring? I fear you have from your saying you should rejoice if my Father return'd to Knoyle the latter end of May; it is a great while before that time will arrive almost four months. . . . I have suffer'd a great deal of pain from the Rheumatism since you heard from me. I have been confin'd to the House the whole Week, which was no punishment to me, for I avoided going to a large party at Mrs. Wards . . . Saturday Magdalene and myself went with Mrs. Fisher to see the new play [*Every One Has His Fault*] written by Mrs. Inchbald.⁴⁰ I have not been to any public place before since you left town. I was very well amus'd and did not dislike the play. One part of it was so affecting it drew tears from the whole house. I believe I took cold that evening for the next day I was so unwell I did not get up till four o'clock in the afternoon. My Father is always particularly kind when any thing ails me. Tomorrow Mr. Richards and Mr. Walker dine here. I would rather they would stay away, because I am afraid my Father will drink more Wine than he ought. It is almost twelve o'clock, so I shall conclude my letter, with assuring you that I am ever most sincerely yours

H W

Donhead Saturday Eve
[Feb. 16, 1793]

My dear Miss Wake

You do not tell me how you are, & I write immediatly on receiving your letter with much anxiety—What you said of your having been so ill has given me great pain—Do pray write to me as soon as possible, if but a line, that I may know you are better . . . I am afraid you are worse than you would wish

³⁹ William Wyndham of Dinton inherited his father's very large estate in 1786—*Ibid.*, IV, i, 108. If the Mr. Wyndham referred to here is William Wyndham, as he seems to be, rather than one of the younger brothers, Bowles had every right to feel uncomfortable.

⁴⁰ *Every One Has His Fault* appeared at Covent Garden on Jan. 29, 1793. It was played "between 20 and 30 times"—J. Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage* (Bath, 1832), VII, 101-102.

me to imagine you are—I must therefore earnestly beg you will let me know exactly how you are . . .

I thank you for telling how you sometimes spend your time—I wish I could have been with you when you went to the new play—I hope to be in Town & to see you sometime before you return, tho I cannot exactly say when—probably the latter end of March, or the beginning of April. . . .

Most truly yours
W Bowles

Monday Morn
[Feb. 18, 1793]

Dear Mr. Bowles,

I am truly sorry for having made you so uneasy and I do not delay writing to you, to tell you that I am now quite well and am going out this evening with Magdalene to a party at Mrs. Vincent. I have had the Rheumatism and I increas'd it by going to the play; but since I have worn an additional handkerchief, and us'd Steers Opodeldock I have found myself much better. I often have the Rheumatism in the Winter though never to any great degree. It was very wrong in me to say any thing about it to you, I wish I had not, for I would not intentionally give you a moments uneasiness. . . .

On Friday last Mr. Walker Mr. Richards and Mr. Blake din'd here. I was sorry to see them though they came by invitation for I was afraid my Father must be under the necessity of drinking more wine than usual but he fell asleep soon after dinner. . . .

Yours most affectionately
H W

Donhead
March 1, [1793]

My dear Friend . . .

I look forward to the time when I shall hope to see you, with great pleasure. It will be I fancy the latter end of March or beginning of April. If I conclude the business about the Chaplaincy, perhaps I may come sooner . . . Nothing but the Event of so extraordinary & unexpected a War, makes me hesitate a moment—God only knows how it will end, but it [torn] be very calamitous & involve in it the loss of all security & perhaps of all property—It is unlike any War that was ever undertaken before. . . . Adieu, my dear Love write soon & believe me always most affec^{ly}

W. Bowles

Wednesday Morn
[March 6, 1793]

My Dear Mr. Bowles . . .

My Father tells every person he shall certainly leave Town the latter end of May. I hope he will continue in the same mind. . . .

I din'd out on Saturday with the rest of the Family at a Mr Barrets a very

old acquaintance of my Fathers where we met Mr and Mrs Carbonell and their Son who was anxious I should accept of Tickets for a Ball at Willis's Rooms where he is a Subscriber. I refus'd them. Magdalene and Emma rather wish'd to go but I persuaded them it would not be pleasant to be amongst a set of people they knew nothing of . . .

Your very affectionate and sincere Friend
HW

My dearest Friend,

Donhead Monday
[Mar 12, 1793]

You must not be surpris'd if I should come to Town sooner than I intended . . . I feel a hope that your Father when he returns to Knoyle may be brought round again, if he should not stay *too long* at Salisbury . . . Always most affectionately

Yours
W Bowles

My Dear Friend . . .

Friday Evening
[March 15, 1793]

I am inclin'd to hope my Father may be brought round again, if he is left to judge for himself. He has mention'd you lately and one day when I ask'd him for his snuff box, he told me he was sure you would dislike my smelling to it, if you saw me. . . . Pray write soon and believe me always most truly yours

H W

My dear Love . . .

Donhead Tuesday
[March 19, 1793]

What your father said gives me some hopes that he is not so seriously angry—our first meeting at Knoyle will be rather awkward. . . . I hope you will write soon & believe me ever most

Sincerely & affectionately yours
W. Bowles

My Dear Friend . . .

Friday Morn
[March 22, 1793]

I am sorry your Mother is so unwell as to be oblig'd to go to Bath. If you accompany her perhaps you will stay longer than a day or two, and I may not see you so soon as the Week after next. I have been thinking you may choose to remain with Mrs Bowles to see if she receives benefit from drinking the Waters, and that she will dislike your leaving her untill she is better. Should that be the case I should be very wrong to wish you to come to Town. If my Father keeps

to his resolution of leaving the Cloysters the latter end of May I shall be at Knoyle in eight weeks time . . .

Ever yours most affectionately
H W

The correspondence here breaks off and we hear no more from Harriet. Early in April, Bowles, who believed himself at last on the eve of marriage, defied misfortune and negotiated a loan of £1000 from his mother.⁴¹ On April 3, Harriet abruptly died.⁴² For Bowles there was little left except the garden at Donhead he had so earnestly prepared for the return of summer and Harriet:

HOW shall I meet thee, Summer, wont to fill
My heart with gladness, when thy pleasant tide
First came, and on each coomb's romantick side
Was heard the distant cuckoo's hollow bill?
Fresh flowers shall fringe the wild brink of the stream,
As with the songs of joyance and of hope
The hedge-rows shall ring loud, and on the slope
The poplars sparkle in the transient beam;
The shrubs and laurels which I lov'd to tend,
Thinking their May-tide fragrance might delight,
With many a peaceful charm, thee, my best friend,
Shall put forth their green shoots, and cheer the sight!
But I shall mark their hues with sick'ning eyes,
And weep for her who in the cold grave lies!⁴³

Harriet lies with Chaucer in Westminster Abbey.⁴⁴ Bowles reposes with his wife in Salisbury Cathedral.

⁴¹ Private communication from Mrs. Dorothy Jones-Bateman.

⁴² April 6, 1793. "In her 25th year, Miss Wake, daughter of the Rev. Dr. W. of Knoyle, in Wilts. This amiable and beautiful young lady was on the eve of marriage, but a putrid fever put a period to her life in a very few days"—*Gentleman's Magazine*, LXIII (April, 1793), 380. The date should be April 3.

⁴³ *Sonnet XXIV*: dated May, 1793.

⁴⁴ Harriet is buried in the North Aisle—Private communication from Mr. T. Hebron, Registrar, The Chapter Office, Westminster Abbey. I owe to Mr. Hebron the reference to the *Gentleman's Magazine* (above, n. 42) and his correction of the date.