

EDWARD MOXON

Publisher of Poets



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EDWARD MOXON

Publisher of Poets

By

HAROLD G. MERRIAM



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Preface

BY THE eighteen-thirties, in Great Britain, the powerful publishers like John Murray and Constable, who had been looked upon as and considered themselves as patrons of authors and therefore in a sense as arbiters of excellence in literature, had either crashed financially or suffered diminished influence at the hands of a public which determined its pleasure in reading by standards that were not aristocratic. The middle classes were becoming the principal support of booksellers and publishers. The prices of books were dropping; their formats were becoming less adapted to libraries of noblemen. Fiction, formerly issued at a guinea and more a novel, was cheapening in price as it swept into popularity. It and volumes of informative materials for general reading outstripped poetry. By 1830 Murray was refusing to read manuscripts of verse and was publishing few novels. Versifiers on social themes and poets who relied on the rhetoric of noble sentiment were in public favor. The great critical journals, the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, although still authoritative, were experiencing sharp competition from smaller, cheaper, and less intellectual periodicals. Financial distress and social unrest were in the air.

Edward Moxon, Yorkshire born and apprentice bred, lover of poetry, ambitious, and looking back toward the great days of the publishers when the volumes of Lord Byron sold in editions of thousands, opened business in 1830 in London. The social connections he had made as a young man determined both the course his business should run and its tone. In spite of his upbringing among workingmen and his social sympathies, that tone tended toward the aristocratic, and the course was in the direction of a selected clientele. Elaborate illustrated editions of Rogers's poems were largely responsible. Soon Moxon was bidding for verse manuscripts. They came to him readily. When within two decades it was

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necessary for Her Majesty's ministers to appoint a poet laureate for Great Britain, the six poets who were considered for the post—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Samuel Rogers, Leigh Hunt, Henry Taylor, Sheridan Knowles, and Alfred Tennyson—had each published for a period of years with Edward Moxon. Another of his authors, William Wordsworth, had been poet laureate for seven years. Moxon had established, in the face of bad business conditions, of falling book prices, of the rise of a new reading public, a sound trade in the issuing and sale of poetry.

Moxon priced volumes moderately, putting them within the financial reach of middle-class readers. He printed his books in clear type and designed them in good taste. He looked upon his business as something superior to mere trade. Poets liked to have their volumes come before the public over the name of Edward Moxon, publisher. Against a few more than twenty volumes of lesser poetry published by him there were fifty by major poets. No other publisher during the thirty years following 1830 showed any such list. Of the major Victorian poets Arnold, Rossetti, and Morris published nothing with Moxon. Only Arnold's first volume, *The Strayed Reveler, and Other Poems*, 1849, could have appeared from the firm of Edward Moxon, for Rossetti wrote in early life, but published late, in 1870, and *The Defence of Guenevere, and Other Poems*, the first book of poems by Morris, appeared in 1858. Moxon died in that year.

Because Edward Moxon rose in early Victorian days to commendable achievement as a publisher of poetry and because he associated on friendly terms with many literary persons, his life is worthy of record. This book attempts to show his nature, his ideas about publishing, the manner in which he built and maintained his business, and his relations with the poets whose writings he placed before the public.

No personal diary of Edward Moxon's, no business journal, and few of his letters have been available for the construction of this biography. There exist no important manuscript sources of information. Facts and ideas have of necessity been gathered from materials about the writers he published and the men with whom he associated. Their letters, diaries, autobiographies, and biogra-

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phies have been searched. Such accounts as members of the book trade have left of Victorian publishing have been read. The process of construction has been that of matching fact with fact, of placing comment beside comment.

Several English and American scholars, librarians, booksellers, and men who possess knowledge concerning different phases of the subject have shown interest in this proposed life of Moxon and have offered counsel and whatever materials have been in their possession. I again express to them my gratitude. I am in particular indebted to Mr. Gordon Wordsworth, of Ambleside, England; Mr. de V. Payen-Payne, of London; the Rev. R. S. Moxon, of Lincoln, England; the Trustees and Mr. Stephen K. Jones, librarian, of Dr. Williams's Library, London; Mr. James Reynor, of Luton, Bedfordshire, and Mr. W. R. Le Fanu, of the library of the Royal College of Surgeons, London. Professor Edith J. Morley, of Reading University, England, and the late T. J. Wise, of London, offered materials and advice. Miss Maud Moxon, of Brighton, granddaughter of Edward Moxon, answered inquiries and placed some letters and photographs at my disposal. In this country Miss Belle Da Costa Greene, of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, was especially helpful and gracious in allowing use of manuscript materials. The librarian of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, kindly gave access to the letters of Wordsworth to Moxon that were formerly in the Rowfant Library. Mr. E. D. North discussed with me Lamb documents. My colleague Professor Edmund L. Freeman has given the manuscript criticism. The librarians at Montana State University have been indefatigable in their aid.

This study was begun under the counsel of the late Professor Ashley H. Thorndike, and completed under that of Professor Emery Neff, to whom I offer my gratitude for patient criticism and encouragement.

H. G. MERRIAM

MISSOULA, MONTANA
SEPTEMBER 14, 1938

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Chapter I * THE YEARS BEFORE PUBLISHING, 1801-30

EDWARD MOXON came of a family long established in Yorkshire as workers in the textile trade.¹ His father, Michael Moxon, after some years in Leeds returned about 1798 to Wakefield, in that county. He married, November 30, 1800, Ann Watson, and to them were born nine children, Edward, the eldest, on December 12, 1801.² Michael Moxon was a "cropper,"³ a worker who cut off the rough surface of the cloth with large shears before the material was pressed and finished so that the nap lay evenly.⁴ In the early nineteenth century Wakefield was a cloth center; it possessed several "cloth halls" for the sale of woolens. With cloth, however, Edward Moxon never had anything to do, since at nine years of age he was apprenticed to a bookseller.

The town of Wakefield had a long history. With the conservatism of the north country it clung until late into the nineteenth century to picturesque customs and traditions. Henry Clarkson, a contemporary of Edward Moxon who perhaps knew him as a lad, in 1887 recalled that as late as his day the town was walled,

¹ The Moxon genealogy has been fully constructed from the middle of the fifteenth century by the Rev. Dr. R. S. Moxon, headmaster of the Lincoln School, Lincoln, England, in an unpublished account. The writer was graciously allowed to consult this work.

² The children were Edward, December 12, 1801; Mary, 1803; John, 1806; William, 1808; Ann, 1811; Elizabeth, 1812; Henry, 1815; Maria, 1818; and, according to Miss Maud Moxon of Brighton, England, granddaughter of Edward Moxon, Alfred, "who was very fond of poetry." "In the register of the Wakefield Parish Church is an entry of the baptism of Edward, son of Michael and Ann Moxon, December 12, 1801. This Edward Moxon I presume to have been the one in question."—Lupton, *Wakefield Worthies*, p. 257.

³ A note, in the possession of De V. Payen-Payne, Esq., London, made by his mother, Mrs. J. Bertrand Payne. The Rev. Dr. Moxon, Lincoln, has the same information. The Rev. J. H. Lupton took some of his information from the Rev. Mr. Clarkson, Wakefield. See footnote 4, below.

⁴ Clarkson, *Memories of Merry Wakefield, an Octogenarian's Recollections*, p. 48; Hewitt, *History and Topography of the Parish of Wakefield*, p. 289: "One shear grinder's forge for making and grinding shears such as were then used by the 'croppers.'" "

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with four entrances, Westgate Bridge, Warrengate Bar, Kirkgate Bridge, and Northgate.⁵ It was controlled by a constable, and from ten at night to six in the morning old men kept watch, calling the hours. Clarkson remembered vividly the stormy weather that lasted from December, 1813, to April, 1814, which "took place a few months after the appearance of the great comet of 1813." He recalled the wrecking by Luddites of mills which had introduced machinery. He danced in memory the gay dances in the "assembly rooms." He saw a man and a woman in the pillory on the market place and many floggings in the streets, the "cat" at that time being "freely administered for comparatively slight offences." He vividly remembered the whippings. The floggings began at twelve, noon; schoolmasters dismissed classes at eleven forty-five. The culprit, tied with outstretched arms to the back of a cart, was flogged through the town and finally into the yard of an old inn, where wine was poured into the wounds. The last public whipping, he asserts, was in 1814, when Edward Moxon was thirteen years of age. Bear baitings were still common. On occasions an ox for roasting was led about the town "bedecked and with horns gilded." Clarkson recalled the performance at school of Hannah More's sacred drama *Daniel*. At the theater, which was on the York circuit, he saw Charles Kean in *Richard III* and *Othello* and Miss O'Neill as Juliet. Amid these events and customs young Edward Moxon grew into youth. The poems which he wrote before departure from Wakefield reflect this town life, especially the long poem "Christmas."

Wakefield stands on a slight elevation in open country that stretches away to east and west, north and south. Small streams cut the fields, and occasional wooded hillocks break the sweep. The skies are often lowering and heavy, and winters are severe, with much wind and snow. Spring comes as lovely relief. A feeling for the out-of-doors entered the spirit of Edward and found expression in his early poems.

When the fleeting skate shall sweep
The brittle surface of the deep . . .

⁵ In *Memories of Merry Wakefield*.

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Streams where in boyhood I was wont to sport
Polluted now, no more are the resort
Of such as quiet seek. Time once has been
When yonder spire alone was seen to rise
Where now obnoxious chimneys pierce the skies
Tainting the air, while 'neath their sultry walls
Mechanic childhood for scant pittance toils
Whose melancholy doom the heart appals . . .

The charity school which Edward Moxon attended, probably for only three or four years, was known as the Green Coat. It was founded in 1701 for the poor of Wakefield, and at various dates since then has been assisted "by gifts of land and money for teaching poor boys reading, writing, and arithmetic."¹⁰ "The charity school," asserted Edward Parsons, in 1834, more than twenty years after Moxon had attended it, "is one of the best institutions in the county, and one hundred and six poor boys and girls, of Wakefield, are clothed and educated within its walls."¹¹ Mr. James Reynor, a pupil of the school and its last master, writes,

The Green Coat School educated both boys and girls, but in separate buildings and under separate heads, the boys, at any rate in my time, greatly outnumbering the girls. . . . In the time of Moxon all were dressed in green, and the boys wore a flat pancake-shaped cap which it was their delight, when not under their master's eye, to send skimming through the air.¹²

The governors of the Charities of Wakefield under the Cross Chambers Charity, "which dated from about the same time as the Green Coat Charity," apprenticed and placed out boys to learn trades, educated them and clothed them, and "started each of them with a donation of £15 on the completion of their apprenticeship. As the recipients of the charity were almost exclusively taken from the Green Coat School, Moxon may have been one of

¹⁰ Banks, *Walks in Yorkshire: Wakefield and Its Neighborhood*, pp. 51-52.

¹¹ Parsons, *The Civil, Ecclesiastical, Literary, Commercial, and Miscellaneous History of Leeds, Bradford, Wakefield, Dewsbury, Atley*, II, 162.

¹² Letter written from Luton, Bedfordshire, on July 14, 1926, to the writer of this biography. Mr. Reynor was a pupil-teacher from 1865 to 1870. The school was closed in 1875.

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them.”¹³ Edward was apprenticed, in 1810,¹⁴ to “one, Smith, a bookseller.”¹⁵ With Smith he learned something about printing and books and more about the selling of them in a provincial town. He read books from his master’s shelves, and saw contemporary magazines, perhaps the powerful new *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* reviews.¹⁶ Being a charity apprentice and an eager-minded boy, he exercised diligence and faithfulness and acquired humility of manner, coupled with some facility in meeting people. Mr. Reynor’s words, “placed out boys to learn trades, educated them,” suggest that during the apprenticeship young Edward pursued some sort of formal education. His business training and his reading could not have been considerable, yet they set his ambition toward book-selling and toward the writing of poetry.

Queen Elizabeth founded in Wakefield a Free Grammar School. It was housed in a stone building with pointed roof and mullioned windows. Its master from 1814 to 1834, the Rev. Joseph Lawson Sisson, befriended Moxon.¹⁷ Since this master had but recently taken his degree at Clare College, Cambridge, he was not so old as to inhibit confidence or to inspire awe. He was a strong influence upon Edward during his youthful years. In Moxon’s first volume of poems (1826) he addressed him as “my worthy, reverend, trusty friend,” and in his second as “cordial friend.” A suggestion of the nature of their relations is in the lines,

Do youthful joys thee still attend?
Tho’ learned rank and high degree
Have proudly been conferr’d on thee,
Will not the sight of this [verse] recal [sic]
When thou wert foremost in the brawl?
For youth is youth in every age;
Philosophers, not always sage.

¹³ Letter from Mr. James Reynor, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ “At the age of nine.” Lee, “Moxon, Edward,” *Dictionary of National Biography*, XIII, 1136.

¹⁵ Hewitt, *op. cit.*, lists an Edward Smith among “Tradesmen in Wakefield in 1812.”

¹⁶ The *Edinburgh Review* was founded in 1802; the *Quarterly Review*, in 1809.

¹⁷ Peacock, *History of the Free Grammar School of Queen Elizabeth at Wakefield*. Information about the Rev. J. L. Sisson is also to be found in a footnote on page 233 of Lupton’s *Wakefield Worthies*.

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Some indication of Moxon's early reading may be suggested by the books he placed in the laborer's cottage described in his poem "Christmas": the Bible, *England's Rights and Charters*, Fox's *Book of Blessed Martyrs*, Bunyan, the Psalter, Taylor's *Rules for Holy Dying*, "a few old volumes, murders, treasons, with Baxter's *Rest*, and Thomson's *Seasons*."

Moxon left Wakefield about 1817 and set off for London. Presumably he went unaccompanied, for the tone of *The Prospect*, written after his arrival, indicates extreme loneliness. He may have carried letters to London merchants or to friends of his Wakefield acquaintances. Smith, the bookseller for whom he had worked, may have had influence with some London dealer in books. Sisson may have given him introductory letters to make his advent less distressing. But if he had recommendations, he made no reference to them in his poems. Not more than seventeen years old, he was young to be arriving from a provincial town in the confusing and impersonal city.

Jobless and lonely, he felt pity for himself: "So through the world I solitary stray," he wrote,

No breast to whom [sic] I can my thoughts confide,
Not even a friend my erring steps to chide;
No hopes to cherish, and no ties to bind,
Save those I've left in sorrow deep behind.

He yearned for the companionship of his Wakefield friends. The minor poems in *The Prospect* are "To the Rev. J.L.S.," "To Maria," "To Mary," "To Some Friends," "On Being Visited by an Old Friend after Long Absence," "On the Death of a Friend," "On Being Presented with a Rose by a Young Lady." He had left in Wakefield, too, a sweetheart; in one poem he wrote of Maria as ever in his mind—"with thee is my home"; he also mentioned a "rival."

What his life during his first three or four years in London was it is impossible to state. There is no record of friendships, none of occupations. But in 1821 he entered the service of the firm of Longmans, publishers. There he "soon had conduct of one of the four departments of the country line."¹⁸ Booksellers' accounts

¹⁸ Lee, in *D.N.B.*

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were, in those times, distributed into four divisions with a head for each. Young Moxon's knowledge of small-town trade, as well as his diligence, undoubtedly gave him rapid promotion into work that probably took him on trips over "the Fourth Division." Before many years he had revisited Wakefield and had seen the Lake country, possibly during business trips. He had also crossed the Channel and visited France.

During the London years when he was in his late 'teens and early twenties Moxon was reading steadily and writing verse. The poems were, on the whole, unmusical, thin in thought, weak in emotion. They were not "laughable" or "absurd," as the *Quarterly* charged, noticing these early poems when criticizing Moxon's later sonnets,¹⁹ nor were they "promising," even for first attempts, as Charles Lamb maintained.²⁰ Moxon was a homesick, ambitious young man, assiduously trying to improve his mind. Not possessed of poetic invention or of vigorous imagination, his mind noted phrases in the poems he read, and in all likelihood was deceptively retentive, for much of the verse is derivative. Phrases like "athwart the purple sea," "where broods the sable night," "peeping Phoebus bright," "the feathered choir," "hollow echo that in cavern dwells" suggest the reading of eighteenth-century versifiers. Lamb, in commending *The Prospect* to Wordsworth's attention in a letter of September 6, 1826, assured him that though the images were common, the author had felt all he poured forth and had not palmed upon the reader "expressions which he did not believe *at the time* to be more his own than adoptive."²¹ Lamb's words carry a misgiving. The reader of today finds many unmistakably "adoptive" phrases.

Yet some lines, although not strikingly poetic, are not unhappy in expression; for example,

The quiet vales more peaceful sleep below . . .
Young Jenny, lovely, blushing in her prime . . .
The swallow swiftly skims the silent deep.²²

¹⁹ LIX, 209-17 (July, 1837).

²⁰ Lucas, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb, 1796-1842*, 1912, II, 760. All references to Lamb's letters throughout this book are to this pocket edition, the most recent one, unless otherwise noted.

²¹ The italics are mine.

²² From *The Prospect, and Other Poems*.

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In Moxon's description of his home a modern reader is aware of the sincerity which Lamb felt or knew. The young writer appealingly portrays the rustic cottage with woodbine over it, climbing roses, jessamine, "unspotted" walls, the smooth lawn running out to the road, the hawthorn hedge, and, within, clean floors. Likewise attractive, simple, and honest are his words about his father, mother, brothers, and sisters:

Unletter'd here, in calm he spends his days,
He gives to none, nor seeks from any, praise . . .

Beneath the shade she reads God's holy word;
He listens to the voice so oft he's heard;
He hears those truths which make him to rejoice;
She sees their force, and louder lifts her voice . . .

Some take the garden, some the shade beneath,
Some round the door, the evening air to breathe . . .

In 1824 Edward Moxon submitted his poems to Charles Lamb for criticism, and through that means met him.²³ Something in the younger man appealed to the older, for the friendship, Talfourd wrote, became "habitual."²⁴ In his own memoir of his beloved friend, Moxon acknowledges "praise and friendly criticism,"²⁵ and in the fifty or more letters from Lamb to Moxon which Mr. E. V. Lucas prints one finds much of both. The young man needed a friend and severer judge of his verse than Lamb's nature would allow him to be. Lamb, until his death, in 1834, criticized the young man's writings and counseled him in his actions. However, what Charles and Mary did for Moxon as a maturing young man by opening to him their home and their companionship was of much more importance.

At about the same time, through Lamb,²⁶ Moxon met Samuel Rogers, then about sixty years of age but still an arbiter of the arts for social and literary London and the patron, or at least the friend in need, of more than one poet. Rogers, like Elia, after read-

²³ Talfourd, *Memoirs of Charles Lamb*, edited and annotated by Percy Fitzgerald, 1891.

²⁴ Talfourd, *Final Memorials of Charles Lamb*, p. 58.

²⁵ M[oxon], *Charles Lamb*, a pamphlet of eight pages, dated January 27, 1835.

²⁶ Lucas, *Letters*, VI, 760.

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ing young Moxon's poems in manuscript, "paid him some proper compliments, with sound advice intermixed."

Encouraged by the approval of these two friends, Moxon published, in January, 1826, with the firm in which he was one of the "best hands,"²⁷ Longmans, *The Prospect, and Other Poems*. The volume carried a dedication to Rogers, "in admiration of his poetical genius." The humility of its Preface reveals a timid youth who is very unsure of himself. The young man calls the book an "unworthy" volume; apologizes for it as the output of a "very young man" (although he was twenty-five years of age at the time), "unlettered, untaught, ignorant of every language except his native tongue, and even imperfect in that"; recites his life history with self-pity—how from twelve he has labored from sunup to sunset, how he has read and has educated himself on Sundays or during the "still more solemn hours of midnight"; naïvely asks indulgence on the ground that the poems have been set down "just as they originally emanated from the author's mind," and also that little time was employed in writing them and less time in correcting and amending them, "as the author generally found those lines which were written quickly and spontaneously the best." He has, he asserts, "little pretensions to originality or elegance" and hopes this modesty will "dull or smooth a little the too severe edge of criticism." After asserting claims on moral approbation, he confesses to "two plagiarisms" which he has left, as he has found it "easier to acknowledge these than to substitute words equally appropriate." The final sentence states that the "Muse who, in her conscientious rectitude," dictated to him the poems, also consoles by whispering in his ear "that it is noble even to fail, in good cause!" The writer had much to learn: self-appraisal, confidence, *savoir-faire*, especially. Where better could he learn those social essentials than in the Lamb household, under the gentle lash of Charles's wittily critical tongue, in the warmth of Mary's sympathy, and in contact with its interesting visitors?

The purpose of the poem of 1,500 lines, according to the "Peroration" (for the book had all the trimmings that could be attached), was to wake pity for the poor, to remind the rich that "riches profit

²⁷ The phrase is Lamb's.

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nought, unless consign'd to noble purpose, or in virtue's cause," and to paint the noble toil of the husbandman's life. Solitary, the poet leaves home to see other lands, his "own to prize"; and observes "three different ranks respective roads pursue": the wealthy, cruel and hard, traveling a smooth way "with prospect bright and clear"; those seeking ambitious power traveling the second, pitiless toward the poor; a "lowly train" ("of such an I") plodding along the third, doing the work of the world. In this third section he writes his best verse, picturing the ideal husbandman, the sowing and reaping of grain, harvest dances, bird songs of the country, evenings, quiet for simple reading and musing, country Sabbaths, with their meek congregations (contrasted with the pomp and the vanity in the city churches), the churchyard, with its epitaphian teachings of life and death. We shall need to remember this strong sympathy for the poor when we come to consider the nature of the books that early issued from Moxon's publishing house.

On vacation in the early autumn of this year, 1826, Moxon visited the Lake country. The letter of introduction which Lamb wrote to Wordsworth, dated September 6, 1826, tells us that young Moxon had "a Yorkshire head, and a heart that would do honour to a more Southern County"; that he knew the "trade" and could give a good account of it; that he was a "friendly serviceable fellow" who lugged from Longmans²⁸ to the Lamb home once or twice a week a "Cargo of the News and Novels" to gratify Mary's passion for them; that he was a poet of promise, a friend of Rogers, an admirer of the Lake poet. The meeting was the first of many friendly visits, which continued until Wordsworth's death, in 1850.

A presentation copy of Moxon's verse, *The Prospect, and Other Poems*, followed the visit. Wordsworth read the verse and on December 8 wrote, "Your poem I have read with no inconsiderable pleasure; it is full of natural sentiment and pleasing pictures. This little volume, with what I saw of yourself during a short interview, interests me in your welfare." He added, as counsel, "Fix your eye upon acquiring independence of honourable business, and let the

²⁸ Wordsworth was at that time publishing with the Longmans Company and Moxon was a clerk in its employment.

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muses come after, rather than go before.”²⁹ Moxon accepted the friendly comment on his poems but did not immediately follow the poet’s advice.

Soon he became restless with the Longmans firm, wishing to better his position and salary. In September of the next year, 1827, Lamb recommended him to Henry Colburn as “of the highest integrity, and a thorough man of business.” The change which Moxon made, presumably early in 1828, was, however, to Hurst, Chance and Co. There he worked until the summer of 1830, when he left to set up in business for himself. In their employment he formed a friendship with Evans, later of the firm of printers Bradbury and Evans. In these years we catch only glimpses of Moxon, such, for instance, as those of Lamb writing him in behalf of a possible volume or two of tales by P. G. Patmore³⁰ and of Moxon requesting album verses from Lamb for Hurst’s annual, *The Keepsake*.

In 1829 Hurst, Chance and Co. published their employee’s second volume of verse, *Christmas*, dedicated to Charles Lamb. In the poems there is evident some advance in technique and more in sense, confidence, good taste, and harmony of parts.

The poem has about 1,500 irregularly-rhymed iambic tetrameter lines. The rhythm and the words and phrases obviously echo Milton’s *L’Allegro*, even to what seems paraphrase—

Come, come, ye sprites, on tiptoe throng;
Weaving the merry dance along;

Nor watch the moments as they go;
But tread them lightly while we may,
Ere youth and vigour pass away.

At one place he quotes—

From store of ladies, whose bright eyes
Rain influence.

²⁹ Knight, ed., *Letters of the Wordsworth Family*, II, 29.

³⁰ Moxon himself published the first volume of poems, in 1844, of P. G. Patmore’s son, Coventry.

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In the description of Christmas festivities, however, there is honest, realistic observation and adequate expression. He knew the winter of Yorkshire and had grown up among cherished Christmas customs. The verses on weather are wintry; those on customs charming; and those on the evening of the Nativity and of the coming of Christ are strongly felt and tender. As the Christmas season approaches, the children rush more eagerly out of school; winter sports are played with hilarity; coaches rattle by, loaded with holiday crowds and Christmas packages—turkeys, geese, pies; workers walk home to their “thousand cheerful hearths.” The Christmas-eve festivity at the Squire’s Hall with its yule clog, harper, mince pie and spiced ale, and dancing, is contrasted with the festivity in the husbandman’s cot, also with its yule clog, its cake and ale, its tales and carols. These lines run with vigor. On Christmas morning the bells peal out merrily; greetings run from person to person, from house to house. At this point the narrative is interrupted by invocation of Crabbe for skill in portraying the village festivity. Then are described homecomings, decorations, cooking. At night the hall is alight, “lifting its window’d wide expanse,” and the cots twinkle as “satellites . . . of low degree.” Again the celebration at the hall becomes graphic—the boar’s head, “the knighted loin,” pheasant, pie, turkey, savory chine, with toasts in wassail, a Lord of Misrule and Old Father Christmas, Dame Mince Pie, Robin Hood “in Lincoln Green,” fair Maid Marian, and Puck:

Enough for me, in homely rhymes,
If I an image here present
Of joy and honest merriment,
And hearts that beat in full content,
Both high and low with one accord,
In honour of our precious Lord,
Of Christmas, and the good old times.

Yet with all its worthy intention and often cheery spirit, the poem is not exhilarating. As in much of Moxon’s early verse there is a steady burden of “Life’s splenetic melancholy,” and a shadow of gloom, cast by the “grave reality that comes with age,” or by the “musing sullenness” haunting the persistent thought of the fading

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of "all that is most fair." These are an old man's notions aped by a nostalgic young writer of verse.

Moxon's inability to forget the harshness of life emphasizes the severity of his experiences as well as a certain kicking against the pricks that may have been admirable; but it also indicates a self-pity that must have worn on the patience of his friends.

The joy he sings hath oft illumin'd
His path, life's weary scenes among . . .

and yet not "oft" enough, for he seems never to tire of bemoaning those weary scenes.

As in "The Prospect" so in this poem "Christmas" Moxon evinces strong, though conventional, patriotism—

England, comfort is with thee,
Thy shores forever shall be mine;
Where reigneth sacred liberty,
And joy and truth, and love divine.

Young poets of the eighteen-twenties and eighteen-thirties were similarly vocal about their country, though some of them did not achieve so simple a line as this first one by Moxon. One recalls that the youthful Tennyson shouted for England. Good sense, as in his earlier verse, is often lacking; for instance, irrelevant lines, like,

The raging winds, tho' loud, have died;—
*So tyrants breathe and pass away,*³¹

break startlingly upon the reader. Weak lines abound. The writer is unaware of the marring effect of such lines as the wind "blowing with unremitted vigour" following the expression "Nor aught abateth of its rigour." Moxon's taste was unsure—Christmas enters "in a car" attended by the lovely Graces, "Heaven-born sisters," Youth, Beauty, Masque, Mirth, Laughter, Hospitality. A considerable number of pseudo-classical allusions appear—the moon, Cynthia, and "Ida's snow." There is conventional phraseology—women's eyes are "twins of light," and their tresses are

³¹ The italics are mine.

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“dark as raven’s plumes.” On the other hand there are successful phrases like, “She [Judea] treads her dark unpitied way.”

In these two long poems, both of which have strongly autobiographical elements, one sees an ambitious young writer who is more aware of beauty than able to express it. A reader does not suspect that within a few years Moxon will be able to discern good poetry when he reads it and as a publisher place before the public the best verse written in his day.

Moxon should by this time, 1829, have lost his false sense of humility and his moodiness. He had not fared badly in the eleven years of his residence in the metropolis. He had arrived a green youth from the country, unknown. He had had eight years, at least, of steady and fairly good employment. He had come to know personally three literary giants—Rogers, Lamb, and Wordsworth. As a familiar visitor in the Lamb home he had met people like Crabb Robinson, Fanny Kelly, George Dyer, and Thomas Hood; and as a friend in the Rogers drawing room, men such as Luttrell, Alexander Dyce, and Stothard. He was by this time, in all probability, also in correspondence with the poet laureate, Robert Southey, and knew Leigh Hunt well.

In the Lamb household was living an attractive young lady, a sort of adopted daughter, Emma Isola. In 1820 she had visited with Charles and Mary during her Christmas holidays, a slip of a girl of twelve, “making dog’s ears in books, and pinching them on Pompey,” the dog. Upon the death of her father, Charles Isola, who had been the “Squire Bedell” at Cambridge University, she came to live with the Lambs. From that time until Charles’s death, in 1834, she called out his playfulness and tender sentiment. When young Edward, twenty-three years old, came frequently to visit the home she was sixteen years of age, a “girl of gold,” somewhat of a pensive cast, brown-eyed, blackhaired, and much the Italian in her aspect, as Lamb and Crabb Robinson described her. Moxon must have watched her interestedly. With her he found companionship such as he sorely needed. Thomas Westwood, a neighbor, in 1822 wrote of

The brisk fire in the grate—the lighted card-table some paces off—Charles and Mary Lamb and Emma Isola . . . seated round it, play-