

**MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT;
LETTERS TO IMLAY,
WITH PREFATORY MEMOIR
BY C. KEGAN PAUL**

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Mary Wollstonecraft; Letters to Imlay, with prefatory memoir by C. Kegan Paul by Mary Wollstonecraft

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
PREFATORY MEMOIR	v
LETTERS TO IMLAY	i

ETCHINGS.

FROM PORTRAIT IN POSSESSION OF SIR PERCY

F. SHELLEY, BART. *To face Title*

FROM PORTRAIT IN POSSESSION OF WILLIAM

RUSSELL, ESQ. *To face page 1*

. In giving reproductions of both the portraits by Opie, bearing the name of Mary Wollstonecraft, a word is necessary in reference to some of the difficulties which they present.

The portrait etched for the frontispiece is beyond all doubt that painted by Opie for Godwin during the few months of his marriage with Mary Wollstonecraft, and very shortly before her death. It is now in the possession of Sir Percy Shelley, a direct heirloom from his grandfather, William Godwin. The hair in this portrait is a bright auburn, and corresponds in

colour with that cut from Mary Wollstonecraft's head after death. A considerable quantity of this hair is also in Sir Percy Shelley's keeping. The features of the portrait correspond in every degree with a cast taken from the face after death, and show that the likeness must have been as striking as the painting is excellent. It was first engraved, as by Opie, by Heath in 1798, and was published by Johnson, Mary Wollstonecraft's publisher and intimate friend.

The second portrait is in the possession of Mr. William Russell, and was sold to him twenty years since as by Northcote, but was immediately pronounced by him to be by Opie, a fact now certain.

Is it Mary Wollstonecraft?

The face is older, though the likeness to the other portrait is strong. The hair is grey or powdered, the first being impossible in Mary's case, the second unlikely. But it was engraved, as by Opie, by Ridley, and published by Bellamy for the proprietors of the *Monthly Mirror* in 1796, with the name 'Mrs. Wollstonecraft,' that is to say in Mary Wollstonecraft's lifetime, and it does not seem that any doubt was thrown upon it. It is, however, clear from an article in the *Monthly Mirror*, that the print was issued without authority.

There is here a difficulty which is to me quite unsolvable, and I can only leave the puzzle as I find it, saying simply that the authenticity of the first portrait is obviously indisputable, while it is not easy to dispute that of the second.

C. K. P.

MEMOIR.



THE name of Mary Wollstonecraft has long been a mark for obloquy and scorn. Living and dying as a Christian, she has been called an atheist, always a hard name, but harder still some years ago. She ran counter to the customs of society, yet not wantonly or lightly, but with forethought, in order to carry out a moral theory gravely and religiously adopted. Her opinions, save on one point, were those which most cultivated women now hold. Mary Wollstonecraft loved much and suffered much; she had the real enthusiasm of humanity before the words were known which designate a feeling still far from common; and, like many more who think always of others rather than self, she has been

one of the martyrs of society. Nor did she win, like some other such martyrs, any immediate recognition when her sufferings ceased in rest, nor had she a certain pride in her rejection while here. She did not carry about in men's sight, as has been said of Byron—

“The pageant of her bleeding heart.”

For the most part her great sorrows were hidden, herself was unrecognised, and her name despised.

Known to and loved by only a very few, her writings have been almost unread, the facts of her life ignored, and only eighty years after her death has any serious attempt been made to set her right in the eyes of those who will choose to see her as she was. As the wife of Godwin, her life found place in a memoir of the philosopher published by me in 1876. How completely ignored she has been may be judged from the fact that when Miss Yonge, the well-known authoress of *The Heir of Redcliffe*, prepared some few years since a new edition of *The Elements*

of Morality, a book for children, translated by Mary Wollstonecraft from the German, she did not even take the trouble to discover the right name of her whose work she was reproducing, and spelt it *Wolstoncroft* and *Woolstoncroft*.

The following pages reproduce in part, and in part supplement, what was said in my *Life of Godwin*, in order to do justice to the memory of a woman as good as she was fair, and lovable as she was unfortunate.

Mary Wollstonecraft was born at Hoxton on April 27, 1759. Her father had once been rich, the son of a respectable manufacturer in Spitalfields who had realised a considerable fortune. The family was originally Irish; and Wollstonecraft the younger married an Irishwoman of good family, Elizabeth Dixon.

Never bred to any profession, Mr. Wollstonecraft, when he had spent great part of his patrimony in drink, tried farming, an occupation in which shrewdness, vigilance, and early hours

are, above all things, requisite. He got into deeper difficulties, and began a wandering, shifty life, marking each change of residence by a deeper fall in poverty and disrepute. The family roamed from Hoxton to Edmonton, to Essex, to Beverley in Yorkshire, to Laugharne in Pembrokeshire, where he seems to have had some little property, and back to London again.

Mrs. Wollstonecraft died in 1780, leaving six children : Edward, an attorney, in business near the Tower ; Mary, Everina, and Eliza ; James, who went into the Navy ; Charles, who finally emigrated to America. There are some of the name now settled in Australia. I am unable to say of which son they are the descendants.

Mr. Wollstonecraft soon married again ; and his wife appears to have done what she could, but quite in vain, to keep him steady and respectable. His home became no fit place for his daughters, and, indeed, the circumstances of the family drove them out to endeavour to earn a livelihood.