

GRAY

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Gray by Edmund W. Gosse

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EDMUND W. GOSSE

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BY
EDMUND W. GOSSE



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PREFATORY NOTE.

As a biographical study, this little volume differs in one important respect from its predecessors in this series. Expansion, instead of compression, has had to be my method in treating the existing lives of Gray. Of these none have hitherto been published except in connexion with some part of his works, and none has attempted to go at all into detail. Mitford's, which is the fullest, would occupy, in its purely biographical section, not more than thirty of these pages.

The materials I have used are chiefly taken from the following sources :

I. The *Life and Letters of Gray*, edited by Mason in 1774. This work consists of a very meagre thread of biography connecting a collection of letters, which would be more valuable, if Mason had not tampered with them, altering, omitting, and re-dating at his own free will.

II. Mitford's *Life of Thomas Gray*, prefixed to the 1814 edition of the *Poems*. This is very valuable so far as it goes. The Rev. John Mitford was a young clergyman, who was born ten years after the death of Gray, and who made it the business of his life to collect from such survivors as remembered Gray all the documents and anecdotes that he could secure. This is the life which was altered and enlarged, to be prefixed to the *Eton Gray*, in 1845.

III. Mitford's edition of the *Works* of Gray, published in 4 vols., in 1836. This contained the genuine text of most of the letters printed by Mason, and a large number which now saw the light for the first time, addressed to Wharton, Chute, Nichols, and others.

IV. Correspondence and Reminiscences of the Rev. Norton Nichols, edited by Mitford, in 1843.

V. The *Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, to which are added other letters, not before printed, an exceedingly valuable collection, not widely enough known, which was published by Mitford in 1853.

VI. The *Works* of Gray, as edited in 2 vols. by Mathias, in 1814; this is the only publication in which the Pembroke MSS. have hitherto been made use of.

VII. *Souvenirs de C. V. de Bonstetten*, 1832.

VIII. The Correspondence of Horace Walpole.

IX. Gray's and Stonehewer's MSS., as preserved in Pembroke College, Cambridge.

X. MS. Notes and Letters by Gray, Cole, and others, in the British Museum.

By far the best account of Gray, not written by a personal friend, is the brief summary of his character and genius contributed by Mr. Matthew Arnold to "The English Poets."

No really good or tolerably full edition of Gray's *Works* is in existence. Neither his English nor his Latin Poems have been edited in any collection which is even approximately complete; and his Letters, although they are better given by Mitford than by Mason, are very far from being in a satisfactory condition. In many of them the date is wrongly printed; and some, which bear no date, are found, by internal evidence, to be incorrectly attributed by Mitford. No attempt has ever been made to collect

Gray's writings into one single publication. I am sorry to say that all my efforts to obtain a sight of Gray's unpublished letters and facetious poems, many of which were sold at Sotheby & Wilkinson's on the 4th of August, 1854, have failed. On the other hand, the examination of the Pembroke MSS. has supplied me with a considerable amount of very exact and important biographical information which has never seen the light until now.

I have to express my warmest thanks to the Master and Fellows of Pembroke College, Cambridge, who permitted me to examine these invaluable MSS.; to Mr. R. A. Neil, of Pembroke, and Mr. J. W. Clark, of Trinity, whose kindness in examining archives, and copying documents for me, has been great; to Mr. R. T. Turner, who has placed his Gray MSS. at my disposal; to Professor Sidney Colvin and Mr. Basil Champneys, who have given me the benefit of their advice on those points of art and architecture which are essential to a study of Gray; and to Mr. Edward Scott and Mr. Richard Garnett, for valuable assistance in the Library of the British Museum. For much help in forming an idea of the world in which Gray moved, I am indebted to Mr. Christopher Wordsworth's books on Cambridge in the eighteenth century.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.	
CHILDHOOD AND EARLY COLLEGE LIFE	PAGE 1
CHAPTER II.	
THE GRAND TOUR	23
CHAPTER III.	
STOKE-POGGS.—DEATH OF WEST.—FIRST ENGLISH POEMS	46
CHAPTER IV.	
LIFE AT CAMBRIDGE	68
CHAPTER V.	
THE "ELEGY."—SIX POEMS.—DEATH OF GRAY'S AUNT AND MOTHER	93
CHAPTER VI.	
THE PINDARIC ODES	117
CHAPTER VII.	
BRITISH MUSEUM.—NORTON NICHOLS	140