

Yeats and the Professors

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I

IN THE first letter in Allan Wade's collection, Yeats writes ironically of 'My peculiarities [*sic*] which will never be done justice to until they have become classics and are set for examinations'.¹ The abyss suggested to students by the last phrase is confirmed by the dismal picture of his own schooldays which Yeats gives in his autobiographies. Terrible at spelling, worse at grammar, worst at literature, at the bottom of the class in one school, idle at art school, a failure at French classes — because his sisters came along — causing scandal with his English essays because he reported the conversation of his father's friends; it is no surprise, therefore, that his father, who wished him to be distinguished, would have found him exhausting and difficult to teach.² Meeting a former headmaster, it seems as though, at best, the teenage W. B. Yeats thought of him as a mere 'horse of instruction'. Although he suggests that he was scandalously idle, a mere collector of moths and butterflies, a carrier of rats, there was some sneaking comfort in a master's rebuke, 'all the world knew that any Irish boy was cleverer than a whole class-room of English boys' (*Autob.*, pp. 41-2).

Yeats was to break the long line of forbears who had attended Trinity College, Dublin, as 'neither my classics nor my mathematics were good enough for any examination' (*ibid.*, pp. 79-80), but later he accepted an Honorary degree there as well as at Oxford and Cambridge. He reflects that the young minds of his

¹ *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade, New York, 1953, p. 30, hereafter *Letters*.

² W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies*, 1961, pp. 23-4, hereafter *Autob.* See also William M. Murphy, 'Father and Son: the Early Education of William Butler Yeats', *Review of English Literature*, viii, 1967, pp. 75-96; also the anonymous 'W. B. Yeats at School, Interesting Reminiscences of the Irish Poet's Schooldays by a Classmate', *T.P.'s Weekly*, 7 June 1909, p. 709.

schoolfellows were 'thirsty' and 'parched by many examinations' (*ibid.*, p. 91), and echoing possibly the Bible, perhaps Milton, and certainly Blake, he wrote to Katharine Tynan in 1889 after meeting a female senior wrangler: 'Men have set up a great mill called examinations, to destroy the imagination' (*Letters*, p. 123).

Yet for all this self-effacement and diffidence in *Autobiographies* and some of the letters, a reader cannot help but feel that there is something wryly self-conscious in Yeats's attitude to the attempts to school him conventionally. It is with some pride that he reiterates: 'My father had brought me up never when at school to think of the future or of any practical result. I have even known him to say, "When I was young, the definition of a gentleman was a man not wholly occupied in getting on"' (*Autob.*, pp. 89-90). In all his accounts of his intellectual beginnings, although there is a rejection of the kind of regular schooling that was erratically imposed upon him, Yeats still holds a certain kind of learning in esteem, and the whole course of his life sometimes appears devoted to gaining the prestige of the scholar for the poet. There is a curious awe of scholarship, and a distinction of this from mere learning, from the academic, and from culture. For all that early self-schooling in argument, obnoxious as it might have been, Yeats never lost his early ambition to be 'wise and eloquent', although he frequently found that the high reserve he desired as a concomitant is poor travelling wear on the road to the palace of wisdom.

Clearly the atmosphere in which Yeats was brought up, apart from those years he liked to regard as gloomily unhappy, was one of considerable culture and scholarship in spite of his father's bohemianism. Not only in Dublin and its environs, but also in London and Bedford Park, Yeats came into contact with the academic world and men of letters perhaps more frequently than most major poets who do not attend university. His father was a painter of college notabilities in Dublin, had many college friends, and had inherited a considerable tradition of academic distinction: a prize-winning grandfather, William Butler Yeats, M.A., T.C.D., a father who helped to edit the *Dublin University Magazine*, a prize-winner himself for an essay on John Stuart Mill. Men of intellectual distinction with whom the young William came into contact form an impressive list: A. P. Graves, T. W. Rolleston, John

Todhunter, Professor James Legge, Dr George Sigerson, George Coffey, D. J. O'Donoghue, John Rhys, Professor Joyce, Kuno Meyer, Oliver Elton, Edward Dowden, Frederick York Powell, to name but a random selection.¹ But these are perhaps mere names that form part of the asterisked and footnoted undergrowth in theses and professional lectures for the attention of examination-bruised students, marks of the academic that Yeats would have scorned.² I should like to clear a small path through the fine print as a gesture *in piam memoriam*, a tribute of recollection periodically owing to fine teachers. It must, however, be beyond dispute that the greatest educational influence on W. B. Yeats's life was his father, John Butler Yeats,³ who would have to head any such list as proffered here: incessant talker, a genuine tiger of wrath (trying to hurl Willie bodily from the room), sensitive, presenting his son with continuous discussion, introductions to new literary experiences, new friends, advice, remonstrance, the surging stream of very attractive letters from America: 'I find it hard to realise my Father's death'; wrote Yeats, 'he has so long been a mind to me, that mind seems to me still thinking and writing' (*Letters*, p. 678). Oliver Elton, hearing the son lecture at Liverpool speaks for genuine and permanent influence when he declares, 'I heard the voice of J.B.Y.' (*ibid.*, p. 505).

John Butler Yeats himself had two particular friends, both professors, both important to him by opposition and affinity who are worth recalling: Edward Dowden, old school friend from Sligo, Professor of English at Trinity from the age of twenty-four; and Frederick York Powell, Regius Professor of History at Oxford, and a very dear neighbour at Bedford Park, who died at the early age of fifty-four. Both men were teachers who took their profession very seriously. Both men were an encouragement and a help to the young poet, and if only indirectly and with his father as catalyst, both men deserve some

¹ Compare Ann Saddlemyer's remarks on the scholarly origins of the Celtic movement, in *The World of W. B. Yeats. Essays in Perspective*, eds Robin Skelton and Ann Saddlemyer, British Columbia, 1965, pp. 29-30.

² A writer in *The Times Educational Supplement*, 6 May 1913, suggested that it was 'impossible to imagine Mr. Yeats facing the routine duties of a university professor', and further remarked that 'it would be, to say the least, incongruous to ask this poet of fairyland to set examination papers and add up columns of marks'. Quoted in Philip Edwards, 'Yeats and the Trinity Chair', *Hermathena*, *ct.*, 1965, p. 9.

³ William M. Murphy, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

note as influential in the shaping of Yeats's attitude towards the academic life and education generally. Powell does receive attention from Yeats in his *Autobiographies*, but as his father's friend, and perhaps with a note of regret that he could not himself gain much from the man. Clearly he is not so obvious a scapegoat as the unfortunate Dowden whose famous portrait in the *Autobiographies* suggests that the mirror of art can offer cruel distortion.

II

Characterized by the elder Yeats as 'a man born to write a life of Southey',¹ Dowden manifests, by his very career, the immediate reasons for the Yeateses' disillusion with him. They never quite get around to calling him 'a rich ugly old maid courted by incapacity', but he is a man of prudence who has forsaken poetry for academic toil or, as Willie scornfully suggests, for books of 'popular instruction' (*Autob.*, p. 88); he is a traitor to the national idea, describing himself in 1887 as a Liberal Unionist on the side of order,² and in particular he was opposed to the idea of a national literature. It is not difficult to spot further grounds for the objections. Although Dowden's three collections of Letters were obviously very carefully selected, occasionally there emerges a trenchant irony.³ Ireland was only capable of producing 'more long-eared asses' he wrote in the year of W. B. Yeats's birth; it produced 'idiotic noises' as part of 'national sentimentalism'. Ireland, he writes to a friend, is 'not intolerable for a week' (*Dowden*, pp. 24, 241, 127). Yet Dowden remained in Ireland all his life, hating London (where, according to W. B. Yeats, there were more cultivated people), and he declined offers of more lucrative posts in America when his scholarly fame was international.

J. B. Yeats, whose views coloured those of his son, gradually became more and more disappointed with his friend. He felt that Dowden placed too high a value on intellect as the first and last

¹ John Eglinton, 'Edward Dowden's Letters', *Irish Literary Portraits*, 1935, p. 65.

² *Letters of Edward Dowden and His Correspondents*, eds Elizabeth D. Dowden and Hilda M. Dowden, 1914, p. 230, hereafter *Dowden*.

³ The other two are, *Fragments from Old Letters. E.D. to E.D.W., 1869-1892*, First and Second Series, 1914, hereafter *Fragments* 1 and 11.

thing in education,¹ and after Dowden's refusal to heed the painter's urgings to come to London as a young man, Yeats felt that he suffered from a slowness of mind, a timidity of spirit, and that he had sacrificed his genius to his talent. For John Butler Yeats a man could only be a specialist. 'General Knowledges are those knowledges which idiots possess', Blake had noted, and we find W. B. Yeats complaining in *Four Years* that in his youth 'I generalised a great deal and was ashamed of it' (*Autob.*, p. 188).² The antithesis of this was Dowden's interpretation of Goethe: that 'a man can be a complete man' (*J.B.Y., Letters*, p. 97). Dowden seemed a failure to the painter and poet, in spite of his generosity, and in spite of, or perhaps even on account of the hero-worship that W. B. Yeats had felt for him as a young visitor to the 'orderly, prosperous house, where all was in good taste, where poetry was rightly valued', which 'made Dublin tolerable for a while', and where 'for perhaps a couple of years he was an image of romance' (*Autob.*, pp. 85-6). As one commentator on the Dublin scene claims, Dowden 'was culture'.³ But this is not Lissadell, not The Big House. Dowden's father was a linen-draper. The poet's reaction to his earlier liking was devastating, and I think he had cause to be 'nervous' ('I am afraid you will very much dislike . . .' then: 'I don't think you will very much object . . .') about what his father would think of the chapter in *Reveries* dealing with his friend (*Letters*, pp. 602, 606). Perhaps it is just to see in the 'professional pose' of Dowden 'certain Victorian ideals', his growing up like his favourite George Eliot in 'a century of utilitarianism, when nothing about a man seemed important except his utility to the State, and nothing so useful to the State as the actions whose effect can be weighed by reason'.⁴ This quotation is taken from an essay in *Ideas of Good and Evil*, 'At Stratford-on-Avon', where the whole attack on Shakespearian criticism is indirectly but bitterly aimed at Dowden, who, he said later, on account of his eloquence and plausibility 'has to stand for the whole structure in Dublin, Lord

¹ J. B. Yeats, *Letters to his Son W. B. Yeats and Others, 1869-1922*, ed. Joseph Hone, 1944, p. 48, hereafter *J.B.Y., Letters*.

² James Joyce made a similar observation about Yeats when he first met him. See Richard Ellmann, *Eminent Domain*, Oxford, 1967, p. 37.

³ Stephen Gwynn, *Experiences of a Literary Man*, 1926, pp. 63-4.

⁴ W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, 1961, p. 102.

Chancellors and all the rest'. But there is a qualification, which without a special pleading for the intention of *Reveries*, is mealy-mouthed. He goes on, 'They were ungracious realities and he was a gracious one, and I don't think I have robbed him of the saving adjective' (*ibid.*, pp. 602-3).

Poor gracious Dowden. Who would write on Southey? Did he not write on Shelley only to please the Shelley family? Did he not abandon his *magnum opus* on Goethe? Was he not, as Mahaffy the Provost claimed, idle in his role as a professor of T.C.D.? Bourgeois in his conjugal relations: 'the fire shut up in the flint', he offers the saddest of dying remarks: 'he would have wished before all things to have been the lover of many women' (*J.B.Y., Letters*, pp. 169, 161; *Autob.*, p. 235). 'Withering in the barren soil of Dublin Unionism', he whimsically had a board put over his hall door 'Dealer in words, licensed to sell polysyllables' (*Fragments*, II, p. 142). This hardly seems to be Walt Whitman's man: 'Dowden is one of the few — the sacred few — the everlasting sacred few',¹ yet Dowden's own irony would have enabled him to account for the hostile point of view:

I come to Irish subjects neither as an Englishman nor as an Irishman, but as a half-breed. Until comparatively recently I did not even know of the existence of Moore and Deirdre and Cuchillain; perhaps I even suspected that King Brian the unspellable was a mythic hero who never fought Danes (in whom English history had led me to believe) at Clontarf. At first, on discovering my loss, I was angry. Now on third thoughts I am inclined to believe my father's error one on the right side. I am infinitely glad that I spent my early enthusiasm on Wordsworth and Shakespeare, and not on anything that Ireland ever produced. (*Dowden*, pp. 183-4)

Yeats's own words on Wordsworth, reading him in Dowden's seven volume edition, could be used as a convenient, but cruel, summary of his view of the Professor: 'He is full of a sort of utilitarianism and that is perhaps the reason why in later life he is continually looking back upon a lost vision, a lost happiness' (*Letters*, p. 590).

There is certainly something of all this in Dowden, but it is to distort him. There is something else that filtered through the

¹ Quoted in Lily E. Marshall, 'The Letters and Poems of Edward Dowden', *Studi di Filologia Moderna*, VII, 1914, p. 217.

relationship besides the characteristics chosen for polemical or rhetorical purposes. After all, to the end of his life, Dowden regarded J. B. Yeats with affection, saying in 1913 'how very good it is to me to have, after so many years, a place I like to have in your memory' (*Dowden*, p. 388). He was a most perceptive critic of J. B. Yeats's paintings, and during an illness in 1910 recommended the poet as his successor in Trinity. Every schoolboy read Dowden on Shakespeare as they were later to read and know by heart A. C. Bradley's lectures, and his students at Trinity and Alexandra College admired and respected him. It is this side of Dowden, his professing and study of Literature, rather than any particular study or his poetry, which is worth pausing on briefly, because no reader of his letters would believe it to be a secret life. The reserve which Yeats felt so strongly in Dowden, he refused to see as a protective mask, choosing rather to see it as a West-Briton urbanity, yet Dowden had said to John Todhunter: 'for my own sake I have to assume a cool, somewhat nonchalant way of talking about things and people I love to any third person' (*ibid.*, p. 86).

According to Yeats, Mahaffy, the Provost of Trinity, said to him in 1911 that: 'It has been of great value to this University having Professor Dowden associated with it, because he has a reputation as a scholar; but he has been teaching here for thirty years and hasn't done a pennyworth of good to anybody. Literature is not a subject for tuition!'.¹ Notwithstanding this early view of the division of scholarship and teaching, Dowden could be direct and forceful on his professed subject:

Whether English literature can be taught or not, I am convinced that the right method of approaching a great author, the right method of dealing with a great period can be taught, and that to teach this is the most important part of a professor's work. And the first lesson which must be enforced is that which enables the student to bring home to himself the vast difference between knowing *about* an author, or knowing *about* a book and knowing the author or the book.²

Dowden was very diffident about his own teaching, in spite of the fact that Lady Gregory evidently felt that he was rather

¹ Philip Edwards, 'Yeats and the Trinity Chair', *Hermathena*, CI, 1965, p. 6.

² Edward Dowden, 'The Study of English Literature,' *Fortnightly Review*, XLIII, n.s., 1888, p. 333.

smug about his success (*Letters*, p. 603). He surely could hold some justifiable pride in having six former pupils as professors of literature. He was always ready to assist others; the most famous example is his instant recognition of Walt Whitman's poetry with its 'large and free play of life' (*Fragments*, I, p. 68). This may only be expected in a man who viewed criticism as 'getting out of ourselves' (*Dowden*, p. 32), but not so expected perhaps is the great support of the scholarship of others: James Crawford, Furnivall, Todhunter, Littledale, MacMechan, Lyster. As a professor he was always anxious about becoming a 'mere erudite', the acquisition of useless knowledge, and he felt that there was far too much specialism in English Literature, nearly crushing him out of existence (*ibid.*, p. 134). He was prepared to give evening lectures to young men in shops who might care to learn things when Yeats was only eight years old (*Fragments*, II, p. 21). Obviously his lectures were popular, his classes overflowing: 'Have you seen the following passage of modern poetry?' he writes in 1882: "'Where gentle Dowden's lectures, sweet as verse, Draw student crowds —" etc.', and he concludes: 'I now understand Shakespear's comparison "as *humourous* as *Winter*"!' (*Dowden*, p. 177). Nevertheless, Dowden obviously found the routine of continuous lecturing a distraction from literature. He told his brother, not very seriously, that 'if I could make up my stock of lectures to 100 I'd grind out the same until I was ninety-five years old, and so my Goethe might get published about my eighty-eighth year' (*Dowden*, p. 193). Of course he did not do this, but remained on his 'torture-wheel of College examinations'. 'Torturing English literature into questions is as painful to an honest examiner as to be examined'¹ he writes, and asks if writing new lectures is still 'virtuous at my age' — sixty-three?

¹ It is characteristic of Dowden that he could give the other side of the question: 'The value of questions put at examinations is often erroneously estimated. It is supposed that because the subject-matter of a question is of little importance, therefore the question itself is injudicious or trivial. But every sensible examiner knows that a question seemingly trivial may sometimes serve as an excellent test, which shall ascertain whether attention has been paid to an important class of topics. When for lack of time or through some other causes, a candidate cannot be expected to give full *proof* of his knowledge, the skilful examiner desires him to exhibit the *signs* of that knowledge, signs the presence of which implies that much else is present, though all cannot on the moment be shown. Whether these signs be trivial or not matters less than is commonly supposed.' 'The Study of English Literature', p. 334.

(*Dowden*, pp. 330, 346). To an intimate friend he was able to relieve some of the spleen that is inevitably the unfortunate accompaniment of Departmental or College administration:

Yesterday the potsherds of the college were striving. The College is like a big girls' school and full of little squabbles. Dr. Traill on Saturday was before the Board to plead, in opposition to Dr. Carson, that the fellows might have ice-pudding for dinner! Dr. Carson gave some Bismarckian answer about the refrigerator and the cook, but I believe the Fellows are to have ice if they long for it *very* much. The question was not, however, within the province of the council, as only indirectly, by its effects on the internal systems of the Junior Fellows, affecting the interests of education. Then there is the matter of the battle-axes! Dr. Atkinson had borrowed a MS. "Life of St Alban", with illuminated pictures. On its return to the library, oh horror! six battle axes appeared nicely shaded with lead pencil. Dr. Atkinson asseverates his innocence! He has certainly put the MS. to good use, having now published an edition of it, with six years of most laborious work in notes, etc. (*Fragments*, II, p. 110)

It comes as little surprise to a reader of his correspondence that Dowden had 'long epochs when scholarship repelled me, and then little spells of scholarly curiosity', but he was always adding to his stock (*Dowden*, p. 298).

Certainly Dowden had a certain amount of professional satisfaction as he grew older. What teacher does not hope for such 'secondary satisfactions . . . in the kindness of old College pupils, and the friendliness of my present students? I had feared that as I grew old the gap between them and me might widen; but the contrary seems to be the fact' (*Fragments*, I, pp. 197-8): surely a note of comfort for all prospective teachers, and excusable in an intimate letter to a student who was later to be his second wife. To the stranger, Dowden was most humble, and it was his humility as a teacher that Yeats seems to have missed. At the beginning of his friendship with Professor Sampson in America, he writes:

I have hesitated long before replying to your letter because I fear so much that I may mislead you. If you should come here at any time, I shall gladly do all I can to help you in your studies. But I want you to know that English Literature is a small part of the big University machine — Classics and Mathematics are our central subjects, and we have eminent teachers. English is a voluntary subject chosen by a few honour candidates, and studied in conjunction with French or German . . .

I think I am a bad teacher in several respects. I convey very little definite instruction. But I believe I have sometimes quickened men's interests in literature, and sometimes led them to useful points of view. I don't want either to depreciate or magnify what I have tried to do. If you should come here, I hope outside the class-room we might be helpful to one another as my dear friend Horace Fiske and I were.

But at Glasgow, you could probably get more and better teaching from Professor Raleigh, and if you wanted Early English and Anglo-Saxon scholarship you could get it at Oxford or Cambridge or in Germany; and not from me . . .

All I can say is that if you come your welcome from me will be sincere, and I will try to be of use, but I honestly cannot feel sure that you choose wisely in wishing to come to Dublin.

And yet some of my pupils have been distinguished; and I think I could count six who are now Professors in Universities. But if you want much and exact teaching, you should go elsewhere (*Dowden*, pp. 303-4).

Dowden felt that there was too much history in college lectures, and 'too little of literature itself'. His ideal, was a small class 'sitting round a table', going through 'chosen poems from such a book as the *Golden Treasury* — trying to deepen the feeling for what is beautiful in literature rather than the talk about books and authors' (*ibid.*, p. 372). He was continuously refreshing his perspective on his teaching aims, and the 'extraordinary zeal, and not without knowledge, at present among undergraduates about English Literature', caused him some unhappiness, for, he said, 'I see it runs the risk of becoming a mere piece of scholarship and refined culture severed from the deeper interests of life'. He felt that his own completely literary enthusiasm was partly to blame for this. He wanted his students to be 'literary in order to be something more and better than literary, and I shall have to try to give this little College zeal a turn lifewards and away from books, if possible' (*Fragments*, I, p. 98). He refused 'to found a School of English Literature' at Johns Hopkins University, as it 'would mean a life of teaching what I already know instead of trying to know more' (*Dowden*, p. 209). This did not mean the mere accruing of knowledge, but continued reflection on a life of literary experience. One year after the American offer which would have meant riches to him (and J. B. Yeats said, rather vulgarly, that Dowden was always on the side of the dollar) (*J.B.Y., Letters*, p. 188), Dowden wrote that 'once I thought I

ought to tell something new in a lecture, but now I know that people like the old things said in a way not entirely old' (*Fragments*, I, pp. 171-2). He held scholarship in respect, but felt that life was too short for most of it, looking up and seeing 'life fleeting and the sky and the sea not dreams but realities which one should look at and live in before death comes' (*ibid.*, I, p. 134).

As artists the Yeatses both rather rejected these virtues as 'provincial', and also, unlike Dowden, did indeed reject the prudential but humilitating 'Journeyman's work for pounds, shillings, and pence, to pay Essies governess, to take Richard to the sea' (*ibid.*, I, p. 135) — at least until slates were needed for Thoor Ballylee. 'On life's roadside I sit and break Poor learning's stone for pay', Dowden wrote in an execrable poem,¹ but neither of the Yeatses seems to have been willing to share the irony. Few Professors have patrons, and the *opus magnum* 'on the mainspring of this century of ours' of which a 'Mind and Art of Goethe will form a comparatively early portion', never appeared (*Dowden*, p. 88). 'Honest, careful — if often humble work', was Dowden's verdict on his own *Shelley* (*Fragments*, I, p. 162), and in his opening paragraph on another very prudential man and rather maligned man of letters, Robert Southey, Dowden provides a suitable self-portrait to balance that which the Yeatses provide: 'With him literature served the needs of both the material life and of the life of intellect and imagination; it was his means of earning daily bread, and also the means of satisfying his highest ambitions and desires.'²

III

If Dowden stood for the Dublin establishment and as a type of the failed imagination, nothing could seem further removed in non-conformity and optimistic mental vitality than the personality of John Yeats's friend Frederick York Powell. York Powell's writings are fragmentary, there is no *opus magnum*, and his work consists chiefly in providing help and inspiration to others by way of introductions to their work, endless suggestions and encouragement in projects, unflagging enthusiasm for whatever

¹ Edward Dowden, *A Woman's Reliquary*, 1914, p. 66.

² Edward Dowden, *Southey*, 1884, p. 1.

interested the intellect of his friends and pupils. Although J. B. Yeats thought him 'vilely wrong' on the Boer War, where Powell lent his enthusiasm to the imperialist side, he usually thought of him as the 'tender-hearted Powell'; his one quarrel with him was on account of young William (*J.B.Y., Letters*, pp. 67, 58). The elder Yeats spoke of Powell characteristically as a winged and aspiring Celt in a 'cage' in his Oxford donship (*ibid.*, p. 79), and indeed the Professor often surprised his colleagues in the Senior Common Room of Christ Church by appearing barbarously in a pea jacket and sailor's peaked hat. In spite of his exuberance, which both Edward Clodd and his pupil Oliver Elton plentifully attest, as well as J. B. Yeats who clearly had a portion of it himself, York Powell was no mere jolly Professor, a survivor from a bibulous eighteenth-century Oxford.¹

Although he wrote no sustained work of his own, he left a monument in Icelandic studies in co-operation with S. Vigfusson. Perhaps more interestingly, he took a large part in the establishment of institutions; for example, the *English Historical Review*, the Modern Language School at Oxford, the University College at Reading, the Irish Text Society, and, at the end of his short life, Ruskin College. He was a man of prodigious learning and tremendous memory, yet these practical concerns with which he was connected go side by side with a distrust of books, and of professional critics. When his biographer is speaking of Powell's love of the Icelandic sagas and culture, he explains this by his desire to be 'occupied with something simple, subtle, and positive, like himself' (*Elton*, I, p. 24). And indeed, in all the accounts of York Powell there is something slightly larger than life, something rather akin to one of W. B. Yeats's later Celtic heroes. Any reader of Powell will immediately notice the similarity of his prose to that of some of Yeats's own introductions. Powell described his prose as 'plain and homely', and it has not the poet's cadences, but something of the deliberate simplicity caught from translating Norse sagas. The following illustration from his introduction to a work compiled by William Hines, an Oxford

¹ Edward Clodd, *Memories*, second edition, 1916, pp. 122-31. Oliver Elton, *Frederick York Powell. A Life and A Selection from His Letters and Occasional Writings*, 2 vols, Oxford, 1906, hereafter *Elton*.

chimney-sweep and a great friend, would have offered Yeats an alternative to Paterian enchantment:

This little book of songs has been put together for labouring men and women. It will give them songs to sing at meetings, at work and home, and the music for each bit of verse here can easily be got; many of the tunes are known to nearly every child.

The men who wrote the songs in this little book were of many different classes, plowmen and gentlemen, artists and schoolmasters, authors and labouring men, but they all alike have felt that those who toil in England have not as yet the just recompense for their honest labour, and they have all alike felt that if those that toil are but true to each other and to their hopes, there is yet assuredly a good time coming in England for them; and the compiler earnestly hopes that the good time may come soon, and that this little book may be of some help to bring it by putting hope and independence into people's minds.¹

The deliberate simplicity is obvious, and the self-effacing willingness to put himself at someone else's disposal in the attempt to reach a wide audience. In other instances of introduction, the prose is full of the concrete; paragraphs describing the Viking ship in elaborate detail in the introduction to Collingwood's *Scandinavian Britain*, or the introduction to Elton's translation of Saxo Grammaticus which had been carried out under Powell's encouragement.² No account of Powell's freshness and vitality is possible without at least mention of his address at Bangor in 1902, *The Study of History in Universities*: we may leave his question open, 'Well, supposing we have our zealous and intelligent student up at the university eager to begin the definite study of history, what work shall we set him at?' (*ibid.*, II, p. 83).

Although he wrote no large work, Powell did write many reviews and articles, 'sometimes for money, sometimes for self-relief', but he was careless of keeping them (*ibid.*, I, p. 108). He put his energy into the expansion of knowledge, and for this reason he always urged the avoidance of mere hard work. 'Take care of yourself', he writes to a friend, 'don't overwork, and

¹ *Labour Songs for the Use of Working Men and Women*, compiled by William Hines, Abingdon, 1893.

² W. G. Collingwood, *Scandinavian Britain*, 1903, pp. 7-42; *The First Nine Books of The Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus*, translated by Oliver Elton, 1905, I, pp. 5-76.

for "Goddess Luve" do not do any pot-boilers. Research and hard work, my dear sir, must be your game; till you *arrive*, anyhow. But I don't want you to be an immoral *arriviste*, but to make your way by unquestionable work and not by coaching those silly boys through their silly schools' (ibid., I, p. 300).

York Powell's comments on Oxford at the turn of the century have a sadly timeless ring. Writing to Oliver Elton in 1903, he comments:

The schools are dragged down by the desire to have masses of pupils and the dread of losing money by lessening the number. The most they do teaches them how to write a *précis* (nothing else) of other people's facts. For the love of God don't let your new school follow this model; insist on thinking. It is painful but needful. To make a good *précis*, even, is something *if it is made out of one's own facts*, but we have not even that. Of course it doesn't hurt the best men. It just wastes their time, but it is pure humbug, and rots with the 3rds, 4ths and bad 2nds and it is not history but memorising. I could talk a long time on this . . . (ibid., I, p. 357)

and so could we all. But Powell needed only the best men to encourage, as both students and teachers. One can always 'get a gerund-grinder', who will help 'crocks' through exams, but will not 'inspire any thought or piece of knowledge into any human soul' (ibid., I, p. 346). The Universities were in grave danger even then of becoming what Powell called a 'mere lecture and exam-shop'. He despised cramming, then a common practice, and wanted to see the ready-found knowledge in lectures reduced in favour of instruction in methods of research into knowledge, and we may read him urging Mrs Boas, wife of the Dublin Shakespearian scholar, not only to 'make your son an engineer if you are wise, and not a professor', but also not to 'let your husband smother himself in lectures (as his too delicate conscience will make him do if you don't look out). One *Kyd* is worth a hundred lectures. Don't let them waste his time over pupils who can teach themselves if they wish but find it easier to get others to teach them' (ibid., I, p. 317). It can be easily seen that such a teacher would have great respect for the intelligent and industrious, the perhaps unconventional and lonely, moth-collecting student. Like J. B. Yeats, Powell 'thought intellect a something quite secondary' (J.B.Y., *Letters*, p. 98).

Powell's ideal University would have 'no building (save for the stinksmen and anthropotomists) save library, reading room, and a few big rooms for lectures of the right sort. Students who like the work, or else the place and the companionship. (*The good young man*, how bare he is, how bad to build from!) It ought to be a (profane) communion of those who know a little already and those who wish to know as much as they (students), with the others help, can get' (*Elton*, I, p. 121). Evidently Powell was not a very popular lecturer, and doubtless he was an irritation and useless to many students. Yet one student who claimed that he 'was quite unfit to follow Powell in all his breathless and bewildering recommendations', also added that, 'He must be among the few men of learning who have never bored anyone, not even an undergraduate' (*ibid.*, I, p. 200). High praise indeed! Another student, who took notes, a course Powell did not recommend, discovered on re-reading them,

that there was always a definite line of thought connecting the bewildering multitude of facts and quotations and impressions he so prodigally showered upon us. He aimed at arousing our interest, and at sending us to the literature of Dane and Angle and Saxon to make our own discoveries. In his own kindly way he made us believe that we could be real students. If he found we took an interest in any special aspect of the subject, he continually asked us to help him. My knowledge of Welsh was continually utilised. York Powell never lost an opportunity of declaring himself a patriotic Welshman, and his knowledge of Welsh seemed to me to be very thorough.

From his lecture-room, at the end of the hour, we adjourned to his library. We left it full of the desire to buy books. In his lectures and conversation, we saw how the historian worked; we were not only brought to know what things were but made to see how they are found. (*Ibid.*, I, p. 198)

I have quoted this passage at some length because it helps to clarify what York Powell's attitude would be not only to the study of local history and arts and crafts which he urged at Reading and in the Thames Valley; but also what would be his stand on national movements like the Celtic renaissance, which he was the foremost in England to welcome (*ibid.*, I, 336). He saw the political question in terms of 'character', although he would not talk about 'race'; his character of the Irish was 'fine people full of clarity and hate and imagination and sympathy and

instinct and obedience, who see through folly in others very quickly' (ibid., 1, p. 128). He was direct and very clear-sighted about the need for a good Irish history: 'When I read what Irishmen usually write (always excepting Lecky and Prendergast) about their own country, it saddens and sickens me — the blind party spirit, the disregard of fact, the blatant sonorous stuff.' But, he goes on, to replace it would be 'a true martyrdom, — a bearing witness, against men and devils, of the realities' (ibid., 1, pp. 182-3). Powell only made one visit to Ireland, but his comment is characteristic: 'I can't *judge* at all. I am trying to see' (ibid., 1, p. 342). He urged Mrs Boas to have her son learn Irish, and he was one of the first scholars in England to welcome its literary revival in Ireland. He gave Douglas Hyde's movement support in 1899 ('If anything I can say is of any use pray make use of it'), not as a believer in 'Celtic glamour', for which he despised the poems of Archbishop Trench (ibid., 1, pp. 309-10), and without political 'row to hoe', but because of 'deliberate opinion that it would be a very retro-grade step for the Royal Commission to try to do away with the study of Celtic as a school subject. It is a good subject, and a subject that, far from being discouraged, should be encouraged by any who care for education in the true sense in Ireland' (ibid., 1, pp. 280-3).

It is clear that Frederick York Powell had a very different personality from that of Edward Dowden, and nowhere is this revealed more finely than in their views on literary works and figures. Like Dowden, Powell also thought that literature was a valuable object of study and not merely a preparation for an examination (ibid., 1, p. 369), but distinctions are obvious when opinions on authors which were of vital importance to W. B. Yeats are set side by side. Powell's attitude towards Oscar Wilde had been 'granitelike', but he became 'all compassion' and 'more than sympathetic' as he heard more of the man (*J.B.Y., Letters*, p. 55); a man for whom Dowden, on the other hand, could not write a letter of sympathy, on account of a 'dislike for everything that Wilde had written' (*Autob.*, p. 287). Of Lady Gregory's 'Cuchillin and Finn' [*sic*], Powell writes, quite simply, 'They are good, both of them' (*Elton*, 1, p. 396); but, says Dowden of the first, 'Yeats writes a little too extravagantly in its praise, but setting aside some needless affectations of Anglo-Irish peasant

terms of phrase — it is very well done — and gives the finest pieces of Irish legend in a single volume' (*Dowden*, p. 318).¹

It is appropriate to leave Professor Powell, as I have been trying to recall him in this too brief a space, with two impressions which form the man. Formally, we may see him as the first chairman of the Irish Text Society in 1899:

Is it too much to hope for the establishment of an Irish Text Society? It should publish in handy, clear-printed form the unpublished texts of each division of the tongue, early, old, middle and modern Irish, with versions if possible, into plain English or Latin, as may be most convenient. There is matter enough unprinted to keep such a society going for a century. It is a disgrace to Irishmen that they have neglected their own tongue, and contented themselves with the thin culture to be drawn from rhetorical English speeches of Irishmen from the end of the last and the early years of this century, and with a few verse translations that smother half the beauties of the original . . . [But] "the day of the storm is not the day of thatching" and those who care for the Irish tongue must bestir themselves ere it be too late. (*Elton*, 1, pp. 185-6)

More informally, our view could be that of the correctly clothed visitor visiting Powell's Meadows Building rooms on a Sunday, who would sometimes be shocked by the don dressed in red shirt, sash, and flannels, engaged in fencing (*ibid.*, 1, p. 131). It is not surprising that John Butler Yeats found in Powell as his son did in John O'Leary 'something as spontaneous as the life of an artist', or that we might be reminded of the young Ezra Pound.²

IV

I left W. B. Yeats a few pages back, struggling along the high-road to wisdom and eloquence, a self-taught pilgrim along a way

¹ It is worth noting some further comparisons. Powell had made the first transcript of Blake's *The Book of Los*, and was an enthusiast all his life (*Elton*, 1, pp. 133-4); Dowden responded to Blake cautiously at first, but was finally won over to something like enthusiasm by immersing himself in Blake's pictures on a rare visit to London (*Fragments*, 1, pp. 18-19; 151-2). Both Professors were admirers of Whitman, where only the work could be involved, although Powell had some political reservations (*Elton*, 1, p. 21). Balzac, for Powell, was not only the 'best history of 1830', but he 'alone has studied the heart as well as the intellect of the average French man and woman of his age' (*ibid.*, 1, p. 417). Dowden felt it necessary to protect himself against Balzac's 'corroding mineral acid which he jets upon one's heart', and he felt in the 'presence of a great power (and a dangerous power)' (*Fragments*, 1, p. 111).

² See Noel Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound*, New York, 1970, p. 288.

marked by some curious turns. It would be possible to speculate at this point in various ways on the reasons for Yeats's treatment of Frederick York Powell and Edward Dowden: as inevitable reaction to friends of his father, one of whom overpowered him, and the other of whom he had been told too much, a discerning of

Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

Insoluble speculations, but certain it is that Yeats's attitude to the academic world is ambivalent, and that a number of his own positions would have found a ready endorsement by both professional teachers. When Yeats once remarked to two English dons, 'I can't see what you think you are achieving. You seem to be busy with the propagation of second, third and fourth hand opinions on literature. Culture does not consist in acquiring opinions but in getting rid of them',¹ he seems to have totally accepted his father's view that college dons and their retinue were 'malign' (*J.B.Y., Letters*, p. 117). He once planned a poem, or dreamt that he had, as a dialogue between a tinker and 'a certain portentous Professor of Trinity whom I changed into a lap-dog and set to guard the gates of Hell' (*Letters*, p. 307).² We immediately think of the poor indignant angel in Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, to whom Blake says in the pit: 'we impose on one another, & it is but lost time to converse with you whose works are only Analytics.'³ Complaining of Dowden's beloved George Eliot, Yeats remarks, 'analytics are the scrofula of literature' (*Letters*, p. 31). In August 1894, he wrote: 'A young Englishman of literary ambition is usually busy with details of rhythm, the advantages of opposing methods & the like, and is content to leave problems of government to the journalists, and questions of fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute to the professors and devils.'⁴ Yet Yeats obviously had many supporters from this underworld.

¹ *The Yeats We Knew*, ed. Francis MacManus, Cork, 1965, p. 55.

² In a paper, 'The Allegory of the "Wanderings of Oisín"', delivered at the Eleventh International Yeats Summer School at Sligo, August 1970, Professor Michael J. Sidnell suggested some affinities between the demon of Book II, and Professor Dowden.

³ 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 1957, p. 157.

⁴ *Bookman*, August 1894, in W. B. Yeats, *Uncollected Prose*, ed. John P. Frayne, 1970, I, p. 336.

When Yeats made his first visit to Oxford in 1888 to do some copying of a manuscript for the publisher David Nutt, it was at the instigation of Frederick York Powell. Powell could clearly see what was of value in the young Yeats and was trying to help; although Jack Yeats was the cleverest man he knew and 'had a mind like Shakespeare's' (*J.B.Y., Letters*, p. 228). Yeats was nervous on this visit to Oxford, and found the Senior Common Room dull, with the single exception of the pugnacious Churton Collins: 'a most cheerful, mild, pink and white little man, full of the freshest, the most unreasonable enthusiasms' (*Letters*, p. 82). Yeats always loved Oxford, and in particular he found the Bodleian a most friendly library (*ibid.*, p. 646), and he lived there for a while until his wife found that she could no longer bear the hats of the dons' wives. In his early impression he found the place to have a kind of unreal beauty, 'like an opera', 'one almost expects the people to sing instead of speaking' (*ibid.*, p. 82). Yeats's ideal college might have suited both his father's friends: 'By the way', he writes to Father Matthew Russell, 'I found a wonderful account of the old Bardic colleges in a life of Clarricarde published in 1772, how the building was commonly in a garden remote from the world and without windows, and how the bardic pupils composed, on set themes, in perfect darkness that nothing might distract their minds' (*ibid.*, p. 105). Fifteen years later he was admiring 'a university amidst great trees, great evergreens' in San Francisco.¹ Lady Gregory's house at Coole with its beautiful park was Yeats's Urbino, 'a place of peace', and perhaps he was fortunate that Trinity missed the opportunity of departmentalizing him in 1910. The fact is, that although Yeats found his schooling inefficient, or unsatisfactory in many ways, and although he raged against the academic establishment in his younger days, he thought he might become a professor himself, a 'personage' as he said when he received his Honorary Degree at Trinity. He was always a student, and there is a curious frequency of the mention of scholarship and scholars in his work. But Yeats associates studentship with solitude, and not with what his father called the 'footrules of Departments' (*J.B.Y., Letters*, p. 69).

¹ See W. B. Yeats, 'America and the Arts', *Metropolitan Magazine*, April 1905, p. 55: 'I found there a little of that pleasure in the Arts, which brings creative art and not scholarship, because it is delight in life itself.' Compare *Letters*, pp. 458-9.

At first, he seems a student in the very general sense: he disliked working in the British Museum, and found some of the books too heavy for him! Yet it is not long before Yeats applies the word 'student' more seriously, perhaps after his visit to Oxford and its calm. He was certainly a serious student of William Blake, and impatient with the irreverent. Oliver Elton seems to hint that Powell offered the original suggestion for the edition of Blake (*Elton*, I, p. 12). Of the Rhymers' Club Yeats speaks of all things as a 'study' (*Autob.*, p. 304). The major reason for ceasing to write reviews in 1899 was to enable him to continue 'study', by no means restricted to the study of the occult of which he claims himself a 'true student', not an 'academical mystic' (*Letters*, pp. 323, 228). Preparing an edition of Spenser in 1902, Yeats cries 'there is so much to learn'; and indeed he was studying hard with some confidence — his prefatory essay being, he declares, 'very striking', and enabling him to 'say all kinds of interesting things about that time' (*ibid.*, pp. 384, 387). It is amazing how hard Yeats worked in the early years of the century, and how undivided was his attention once he began his study: he speaks of this kind of study as 'getting down into a well', and when deep into Chaucer, he would not write a Shakespeare essay for Bullen. Yet he was only too aware of his lack of methodical training, finding himself 'drifting about' among the Elizabethans, and when 'deep in' Ben Jonson seeking advice again from Bullen (*ibid.*, pp. 457, 478-9). Sometimes it is difficult to avoid feeling that he protests too much, and looks at some aspects of the academic life with something of the tinted glass with which he viewed The Big House. There is no lack of evidence for his studies,¹ but there is a touch of excess when Yeats declares that from Oxford he 'returned very pale to [his] troubled family' (*Autob.*, p. 154).

From the start of this self-studentship, Yeats worked on philosophy. When he had made up his mind to stop reviewing, he was writing an article on the philosophical ideas in Shelley. Even when he had long finished his edition of Blake, Yeats continued to work at Blake's philosophy for new lectures in 1917. Perhaps the most remarkable instance of his self-education is his

¹ See David Clark, 'Metaphors for Poetry', in *The World of W. B. Yeats*.

study of philosophy towards the end of his life, particularly his discovery of the Italian educationalist Giovanni Gentile, and his rediscovery of the eighteenth-century Anglo-Irishmen. Dr Rossi's account is important: 'Nowhere have I met a more eager interest in metaphysics . . . Yeats asked to know. He was searching again and again for an explanation . . . He sought occasions for thinking, for pitting his brain against metaphysics.'¹ Not only can this not be mistaken for a pose, but it can be traced through a lifetime of study. The broad range of his intellectual interest can be seen in the conversation recorded by John Sparrow at Oxford in 1931 when Yeats was receiving an Honorary degree, and in the lack of any diminution of those interests as he grew older.² Nevertheless, in order to 'liberate' his mind 'from all that comes of councils and committees, from the world as it is seen from universities or populous towns',³ Yeats had frequent recourse to define his learning as a discipline of the imagination. After his study of Blake, Swedenborg, the Occult, there is something rather touching about the way in which Yeats spent some of his Nobel prize-money in 1924, on 'something I have always longed for, a sufficient reference library — *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Cambridge Medieval*, and *Ancient and Modern History* — and a good edition of Gibbon and some art books'. And as he concludes, we are again reminded of the 'personage': 'As I look at the long rows of substantial backs, I am conscious of growing learned minute by minute' (*Letters*, p. 702). Three weeks before his death in January 1939, Yeats wrote to Lady Pelham: 'I have put away everything that can be put away, that I may speak what I have to speak, and I find expression is a part of "study"'. In two or three weeks — I am now idle that I may rest after writing much verse — I will begin to write my most fundamental thoughts and the arrangement of thought which I am convinced will complete my studies' (*ibid.*, p. 922). This study is the reducing of experience to order and an unravelling of the dream: 'We are the ridiculous, we are the learned at whom the little boys laugh in the streets' (*Autob.*, p. 549).

¹ Joseph Hone, *W. B. Yeats, 1865-1939*, second edition, 1962, p. 422.

² Quoted in A. N. Jeffares, *W. B. Yeats. Man and Poet*, 1966, pp. 267-8.

³ W. B. Yeats, 'Anima Mundi', *Mythologies*, 1962, p. 343.

Yeats regretted having small Latin and less Greek, for a man was not properly educated without them. As a Senator he also regretted having no Gaelic, and realized that he had underestimated the strength of Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League. He regretted his lack of scholarship, not merely when reflecting upon his Dublin Art School experiences, but particularly when he came into contact with the cultivated he admired in London (not Dublin). But there is an important qualification which helps to explain what seems to be the ambivalence towards scholarship in Yeats's writings. Scholarship was indeed prodigious systematic learning, but it was applied learning, absorbed and placed in experience. For example, Yeats quotes with approval Henley's praise of Oscar Wilde as 'ever the scholar and gentleman' on his usage of 'cold mutton' in a particular technical sense (*ibid.*, p. 328). Only the anecdotal irony saves this from pedantry, but the story illustrates the manner in which Yeats was always distinguishing scholarship from learning, a distinction which would have been supported by both Powell and Dowden. Powys Mathers was a man of much learning, but of little scholarship; Davidson the same. Professor Sigerson was 'unscholarly'. Florence Farr began to wane in Yeats's estimation by reason of a destroying curiosity exercised in the British Museum (*ibid.*, pp. 187, 318, 202, 122). Perhaps the distinction lacks any real refinement, but the importance of expert scholarship, for example in the classics, Persian, in Irish, was that it could be the handmaiden of the imagination. This is why in 1898, Yeats attacked Professor George Armstrong's scholarship, not merely because 'his knowledge of Irish things was of the most obsolete kind' but because it was barren; Armstrong is the Nobodaddy of Trinity casting his restrictive net over the emerging literary imagination of a country. When reviewing Armstrong's work, Yeats makes the distinction again, entitling his review 'Noetry and Poetry'. 'Noetry' is 'a word ingenious persons derive from the Greek word *nois*, and consider descriptive of verse which though full of the intellectual faculty is lacking in imaginative impulse'.¹ Irish literature is 'too much in the hands of men of learning who cannot write' (*Letters*, p. 201), thus it is not

¹ *Uncollected Prose*, 1, p. 237.

surprising that Yeats should find this barren ground in 'the accredited organs of enlightenment',¹ and in institutions of which Dowden was the chosen representative. A victim of Yeats's pugnacious iconoclasm because 'he believed too much in the intellect', and bitterly attacked in a debate in Trinity in 1895, Dowden was cruelly reminded in a letter Yeats wrote in reply to a newspaper 'that every literary revolution the world has seen has been made because of the readiness of the young to revolt against what Walt Whitman has called "the endless audacity of elected persons?"'² There is a little of the tone here of Yeats's drunken fisherman 'shouting at somebody that he was no gentleman because he had not been educated at Trinity College, Dublin';³ and the singling out of the Trinity College men in *The Second Book of the Rhymers' Club*, Rolleston, Hillier, Todhunter and Greene, 'who are intolerably bad as was to be expected' (ibid., p. 232). But it is too easy to quote Yeats's poem on the Scholars, and to see him as the fierce opponent of institutions and scholarship. In a recent study it has been suggested that scholars for Yeats were 'even farther down the tree of life' than critics, and 'dismissed in an epigram so clever one hardly believes it to be Yeats: for there is all the difference in the world between the man who finds one thing in everything and him who finds everything in one thing — between the pedant and the artist'.⁴ The distinction is worth preserving, but it is possible to overestimate the quarrel with Dowden and Trinity. As J. B. Yeats reminded his son that it was better to be illogical than 'INHUMAN', he also brings to our attention Dowden's magnanimity: 'Of your qualifications for a real professor he spoke glowingly' (*J.B.Y., Letters*, pp. 160, 168). The elder Yeats had claimed to have received all his philosophy just by looking at York Powell (ibid., p. 146; *Autob.*, p. 118), and if all valuable education was but a stirring up of the emotions (*Autob.*, p. 88), then Powell was an 'artist' not primarily a man of learning. Mere learning is stagnant; it leads to repeated lectures, the examination mill, the suppression of enthusiasm, to academic institutions, with their rotting thirds and bad seconds. It

¹ Ibid., p. 147.

² Ibid., p. 349.

³ Ibid., p. 222.

⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

encourages journalists to aspire to be men of letters, and men of letters to become journalists, 'the shallowest people on the ridge of the earth', and to see 'the spirit of the press conquering the spirit of literature' (*Letters*, pp. 83, 549). 'The man of learning', said Yeats 'who has no literature, is the enemy of the human race' (*ibid.*, p. 201), an axiom doubtless imbibed from his father whose description of a contemporary Professor Yeats must have received with some pleasure:

The late Dr. Salmon was a great man and a great mathematician but it was well known that tho' he was an infallible judge of every kind of investment he paid no attention to what is called the artistic values being exclusively a man of science and therefore a philistine. (*J.B.Y., Letters*, p. 200)

Dr Salmon was Edward Dowden's cousin.

The story of Yeats's efforts in the Senate, his reading of the Italian educationalist Gentile, and of Castiglione are well recorded, and need no elaboration here.¹ Yeats's work at the Abbey and his years as a Senator illustrate a considerably developed practical side which must not be overlooked amidst the speculation on learning. Frederick York Powell's stress on the local life as the thing to encourage leads him to emphasize the importance of preserving and translating manuscripts and to urge support of the stained-glass industry in Ireland (*Elton*, 1, pp. 278, 357-8). Twenty years later Yeats was to make forceful speeches in the Senate on both subjects, and it is doubtful whether anything would have pleased Powell as much as Yeats's concern with the Irish coinage.² Not only did the sixty-year-old smiling public man give considerable attention to all matters connected with Irish scholarship and learning when he had some authority in the House, but in his writings he produced a great deal of criticism of the Irish educational system of the time which he claimed substitutes 'pedantry for taste', and 'external facts' for a 'sense of style or feeling for life' (*Autob.*, p. 500). He was anxious that teachers should be represented in both Houses of the

¹ *The Senate Speeches of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Donald R. Pearce, 1961, pp. 11-26; C. Salvadori, *Yeats and Castiglione, Poet and Courtier*, Dublin, 1965; Donald T. Torchiana, *W. B. Yeats and Georgian Ireland*, 1966, pp. 3-35; see also Giovanni Gentile, *The Reform of Education*, translated by Dino Bigongiari, 1923.

² *Senate Speeches*, pp. 42-5, 68-77, 80-1, 161-7.

Irish Parliament, and echoes the Australian Minister for Education: 'It is precisely because we are poor that we must spend our money on our schools.' Amidst his round of school visits, the pursuit of his own studies, he never forgot the principle that 'the child itself must be the end in education'. Bad-tempered teachers and unclean conditions will not produce 'a centre of civilisation in the Schools', and without this 'not only might the child as well remain at home, but the child should be running through the fields and learning nothing'. It is only such a 'centre' that will prepare the national ideal, an Ireland 'healthy, vigorous, orderly, and above all, happy'.¹

Yeats was a teacher all his life. Not simply on the wide scale of proselytizing for a national literature as earnestly as ever did a professional professor, nor by those most successful lecture tours, successful in spite of himself if we believe in Lennox Robinson's delightful parody:

Mine isn't at all a serious lecture, it's just a little talk about Ireland, an attempt to make you visualize the island of saints and scholars, the dream-island, the island of the poets; I illustrate my lecture by poems and songs.²

Unlike either Professor, Yeats liked lecturing; he was for the most part sensitive to his audiences, and his letters show that he worked hard at lectures. He liked it for its immediate effect, and because 'I covet honour' (*Autob.*, p. 533). 'Mounted upon his winged horse', his advertisements for North American lectures claimed that he was 'filled with enthusiasm and always saying unusual things in an unusual way'.³ He wrote, he said when he was sixty-six, for 'young men between twenty and thirty' (*Letters*, pp. 704, 781). On the smaller scale, Yeats's letters sometimes seem a continuous advice-column. His theories for his children, like those of most fathers, seemed difficult to enforce. He records his daughter's desire to 'debauch her intellect with various forms of infantile literature' which of 'course was provided by the servants (*ibid.*, p. 743), not by the publishers Bullen or Macmillan. Shakespeare was expurgated, and the wonderfully imaginative

¹ *Ibid.*, 106-18.

² Lennox Robinson, *Ever the Twain. A Comedy in Three Acts*, 1930, p. 72.

³ Richard Cary, 'William Butler Yeats at Colby College', *Colby Library Quarterly*, Series VI, pp. 365, 362.

cursing letter to a prospective headmaster was never sent.¹ Like Professor Starkie of Trinity, who returned from life with the gypsies with 'undisturbed Academic face' (*ibid.*, p. 766), it is Yeats's anti-self, one of his masks that imposes upon 'drowsy learning' the discipline of the joy of youth. Such a discipline is exacting. Towards the end of his life, Dowden suspected Yeats of 'a little losing of his finer self' (*Dowden*, p. 351), but it is a father's privilege to be more direct: 'I only accuse you of being too critical' (*J.B.Y., Letters*, p. 69). It is to be regretted, I think, that Yeats outgrew the hedge schoolmaster Hanrahan, with his audience of poor sinners, and that the audience he came to admire in the thirties was composed of 'great ladies, diplomatists, everybody who goes to grand opera and ourselves' (*Letters*, p. 807). It is perhaps even more regrettable that Yeats did not follow the generous example of his countryman Richard Stanyhurst, acknowledging his own teacher in 1565: 'And bicause it was my happie hap (God and my parents be thanked) to have beene one of his crue, I take it to stand with my dutie, with I may not stretch mine abilitie in requiting his good turnes, yet to manifest my good will in remembering his paines.'² It may be admirable to be as cold and passionate as the Dawn, even aristocratic; and it is equally delightful, as Yeats well understood, to retain youth and beauty; but Tithonus was professorially human, and there is still a case to be made for him as he attempts to reduce the past to order.

¹ Joseph Hone, *W. B. Yeats*, pp. 432, 420-1.

² Quoted in P. J. Dowling, *The Hedge Schools of Ireland*, Cork, 1968, p. 16.