



## **Mark Rutherford Society Newsletter**

July 2009



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**This photograph of William Hale White in old age was with the collection of Letters to Mrs Colenutt purchased by the Mark Rutherford Society in 1998.**



## Editorial and News

I must apologise for the lack of publication in 2008. This was mainly as a result of lack of material and partly preoccupation with the Colenutt letters of which more in this issue.

### 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

It is only four years till the 100th anniversary of William Hale White's death in 1913 which should be commemorated in some way both in Bedford and nationally if not internationally. If you have any contacts in high places, i.e. BBC or Channel Four please let me know or better still use your influence to put in a good word for the greatest least known author of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It always grieves me how we have endless adaptations of Dickens and other writers whilst many lesser known but equally worthy are neglected.

### Sally Ledger

The death of Sally Ledger, Hildred Carlile Professor in English and Director of the Centre for Victorian Studies since 2008 at the age of 47 was very tragic. I corresponded with her and met her when she visited the Mark Rutherford Collection in Bedford whilst undertaking graduate work in Oxford on Mark Rutherford under Terry Eagleton's supervision, sowing the seeds of her involvement with politically and socially dissenting 19th-century writing. She went on to be a great Victorian authority and is sadly missed by all especially her family.

### Autobiografiction

The Times Literary Supplement for October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008 contained an article by Max Saunders called "Autobiografiction, How the Edwardian Stephen Reynolds identified a new genre among the experiments of his time" which included *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* as "a representative example of pseudo- autobiography..."

### Bedford Plaque

Richard Wildman has been asked to advise on a revised new plaque to mark William Hale White's birthplace and has suggested it should read as follows:

William Hale White  
 'Mark Rutherford'  
 (1831-1913)  
 novelist and critic  
 was born above his father's bookshop  
 on this site on  
 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1831

This is to be placed lower down than the existing plaque which is getting faded with age and forms one of three to be placed in the St. Paul's Square area of the High Street. The proposed location of the new plaque is on the wrong building (No 3 next door) but this is probably because there is no room on the correct building which replaced number 5. There is also no need to remove the existing plaque, which was paid for c.1962 by Paul Paviour OAM to mark the centenary of MR's birth. Dr Paviour is an eminent Australian composer and musician, and an Officer of the Order of Australia.



## Among the Insurgents

### William Hale White and George Eliot

Vincent Newey

William Hale White knew George Eliot before either entered the field as a novelist. During 1852-54 he worked with her at the offices of the radical London publisher John Chapman, where, still plain Marian Evans, she held a position as assistant editor of the *Westminster Review*. A section of Hale White's first novel, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (1881), is based on memories of this episode in his life. Chapman's premises, famous in their day, were at 142 Strand. The *Autobiography* moves the location to 'Oxford Street', which is the title of the relevant chapter.<sup>1</sup>

There are moments in the *Autobiography* when it seems possible that at Chapman's Hale White developed a romantic interest in his young colleague, for Mark, his substitute self, recalls her striking 'yellowish hair [...] naturally waved', her 'greyish blue eyes', her 'vigorous firm walk', and indeed mentions feelings of 'unhesitating absorbing love' (*AMR*, IX, P. 143,157, L.105,115) Whatever truth there may be in this speculation, however, it remains a minor side issue. Hale White's view of Eliot, as it emerges in his reconstruction of the past, is firmly centred in intellectual and ethical considerations, though sometimes it is tinged with sentiment.

Something of his sense of what is important in Eliot's work and character is signalled in his very choice of her fictional name - Theresa. (Names often signify in Hale White. 'Mark', for instance, instructs the reader to take heed of the narrator's wisdom.)<sup>2</sup> The word directs us to the Prelude of *Middlemarch* (1871-72), where Eliot compares and contrasts the destiny of women like her heroine in this novel, Dorothea Brooke, with that of Saint Theresa of Avila, the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic who rose from obscure origins to reform a whole religious order.<sup>3</sup> These 'later-born Therasas', Eliot observes, achieve no 'epic life' or 'far-resonant action', being subject to the sad constraint of 'a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with meanness of opportunity'. Nevertheless, as *Middlemarch* amply shows, Dorothea does leave a positive mark upon the world by improving the lives of others – most notably the egotistical Rosamond and her flawed and ostracized husband, Lydgate – through acts of compassion and support. Theresa plays just such a role in the *Autobiography* when she helps Mark overcome his desperate self-doubt after he has bungled a job with a batch of printer's proofs: 'It was as if water had been poured on a burnt hand, or some miraculous Messiah had soothed the delirium of a fever-stricken sufferer' (*AMR*, IX. P.154,L.114). She is cherished for her restorative influence: 'I should like to add one more beatitude to those of the gospels, and to say, Blessed are they that heal us of self-despising. Of all services which can be done to man, I know of none more precious' (*AMR*, IX.P.157,L.114) Whether or not Hale White has *Middlemarch* immediately in mind, it seems clear that thoughts of Eliot as he had once known her come together with a respect for her humanistic ideals, as expressed in Dorothea and other characters, to produce in Theresa an exemplar of the virtues of charitable instinct and fellow-feeling.

A slightly different way of viewing this focus on the values of being ‘kind and human’ (*AMR*, IX.P.150,L. 110) is as a reflection of Hale White’s consciousness of Eliot’s status as a standard-bearer for the Religion of Humanity, the influential secularizing philosophy that sought universally to replace the doctrine of ‘God is love’ with that of ‘Love is god’. She had (as Marian Evans) published in 1854 a translation of one of the movement’s core texts, Ludwig Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), and the biblical language of the passages I have quoted from the *Autobiography* indeed presses us to see in Theresa’s actions that very ‘essence’. An earlier part of the *Autobiography*, we may remember, dramatizes that portion of Hale White’s life when he himself, while training for the Dissenting ministry, turned away in disillusionment from Christian dogma to take up the underlying ethic, the ‘Christ idea’.<sup>4</sup> He came in due course to share with Eliot the distinction, dubious or otherwise, of being one of the notable Victorians who lost their faith and looked for an alternative salvation - albeit with the difference that, whereas for her the break meant welcome release and opportunity, in him it bred smouldering discontent and perpetual trial. Benevolence such as Theresa’s represents a capacity in which Eliot at least could invest real hopes for the future of humankind.

Eliot’s quasi-religious humanism, however, is not the only or the primary basis on which she qualifies for a place in the pantheon of Hale White’s modern guides to thought. Although the image of Theresa’s Madonna-like ministrations vis-à-vis the despairing Mark on one level infers a rejection of orthodoxy in the matter of faith, it is on another deeply conservative in that it confirms by its iconic form the traditional idea of emotional and moral influence as the proper sphere of female attainment. The issue of woman’s fulfilment - that great theme sounded in the Prelude to *Middlemarch* - is more provocatively evoked in the *Autobiography*, however, through a portrayal of Theresa’s intellectual force and blurring of gender divisions. Here her relation to her real-life counterpart is direct rather than mediated through recall of Dorothea Brooke or any other character. She is very much the independent and perceptive woman, able, under the liberal conditions created by her employer Wollaston (the John Chapman figure), to debate matters normally reserved for men, even ones that in mixed company ‘brought a flame’ to Mark’s face (*AMR*, IX. P.146-47,L.108). Whether the question of the place of love in a man’s life, which is the topic on which we witness her specifically addressing and indeed contradicting Mark, falls into this last category we are not told. It is clear, however, from her robust way of arguing - ‘What would Shakespeare be without it? And Shakespeare *is* life. A man, worthy to be named a man, will find the fact of love perpetually confronting him till he reaches old age’ - that she is, as Mark emphasizes, a woman rich in ‘ideas’ and ‘intellect’ (*AMR*, IX. P.147, 151, L.108-111).

It is a short logical step from this picture of unconventionality to the brief yet wonderfully pointed memoir of Eliot that Hale White wrote in 1885, five years after her death, and published in the *Athenaeum*. The purpose of the piece was to challenge the anodyne impression of respectability created in the recent ‘official’ *Life* by J.W. Cross, Eliot’s husband, which presented her as a staid eminent Victorian. Hale White remembered quite a different person. She was ‘one of the most sceptical, unusual creatures’ he had ever known, though it seems that in her the independence of the sceptic existed alongside that of the spirited enthusiast, for she told him ‘it was worthwhile to undertake all the labour of learning French if it resulted in nothing more than reading one book - Rousseau’s *Confessions*.’<sup>5</sup> At the heart of the document, however, lies a singularly graphic reminiscence from the days at Chapman’s:

‘I can see her now, with her hair over her shoulders, the easy chair half sideways to the fire, her feet over the arms, and a proof in her hands, in that dark room at the back of No. 142.’

The young Eliot’s appearance and posture, slightly askance and set at unusual angles, symbolized an attitude of mind. Her confidently informal hair and odd manner of sitting; the proof suggesting not only her own precocious command of the word but her involvement in managing the words of others; the fact that she inhabits an obscure small corner yet is intent upon bringing light to the world at large: in all of this she cuts, as it were, a figure of solid but subtle dissidence. Hale White puts the case in memorable phrases when concluding that Cross’s biography had done her a grave disservice by removing her from ‘the class - the great and noble church, if I may so call it - of the Insurgents’. It is common knowledge that Eliot’s life and opinions as a whole were in fact a paradoxical mixture of the progressive and the conventional, so that, for example, she lived openly with a married man, G.H. Lewes, while opposing votes for women.<sup>6</sup> It was the former side that Hale White encountered at first hand and subsequently foregrounded.

There is some evidence that Eliot had a bearing on Hale White’s writing in other places and in other ways than we have considered. Very much to the point is Catherine Harland’s contention that Mrs A. in his short story entitled ‘*Confessions of a Self-Tormentor*’, who tries unsuccessfully to redeem the narrator through friendship from his habitual self-deprecation, is a fictional portrait of Eliot<sup>7</sup> - the whole scenario being of course a variant of an ‘Oxford Street’ theme. Less specifically, Stephen Merton suggests that Hale White followed Eliot’s example in treating

provincial life in his novels.<sup>8</sup> In matters of technique, it appears likely that he owes something to her in his use of the omniscient narrator as an agent of moral and psychological analysis, although the insights this produces are altogether less intricate.

When all is said, however, it is a concern with the ‘woman question’ in various of its dimensions that above all links the two as novelists. *Catharine Furze* (1893) is a significant text in the history of the modern literature of female identity, exploring closely as it does the force of woman’s desire, intellectual, spiritual and sexual.<sup>9</sup> *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and Maggie Tulliver spring to mind. *Clara Hopgood* (1896), Hale White’s last novel, then evokes Eliot more particularly, for, like *Middlemarch*, it opens with a scene contrasting two sisters through the dramatic interaction of practical and impulsive natures. This work also shares with another of Eliot’s earlier novels, *Adam Bede* (1859), the theme of the unmarried mother; but whereas Eliot’s Hetty Sorrel is seduced, abandoned, convicted of child-murder, and transported, Madge Hopgood refuses to marry her well-intentioned but shallow lover and struggles successfully to care for her child without him, before meeting and marrying the thoughtful and reliable widower Baruch Cohen: a cautionary tale of the fallen woman, vain and self-indulgent, has set over against it a story of the self-respecting and strong woman who earns her eventual good fortune. In isolation, the contrast of course, drastically simplifies Eliot’s position on the women – even in the same book Dinah the Methodist preacher cuts a very different figure of womanhood – but it nonetheless illustrates the radical streak in Hale White that took him to Chapman’s publishing house as a young man and in general bolstered his appreciation of Eliot throughout his career.

Finally, this strain in Hale White may be further drawn out through consideration of the fate of Clara Hopgood herself, Madge’s sister. Having been introduced in London to the exiled patriot, Giuseppe Mazzini, she goes off to work for the cause of Italian independence, presumably as an undercover agent, and eighteen months later is reported dead. Her motives in taking the course she does are never fully explained, but clearly involve an urge to transcend self in an embrace of the needs of others; that is, of both ‘the poor people of Italy who were slaves’ (as Baruch Cohen puts it to his little stepdaughter when celebrating her aunt)<sup>10</sup> and Madge, whose way to marrying Baruch is cleared by Clara’s renunciation of her deep and requited, though unspoken, love for him. In practically the last words of the novel Baruch, talking to Madge, presents Clara’s story as having an equivalence to that of Christ:

The theologians represent the Crucifixion as the most sublime fact in the world’s history. It is sublime, but let us reverence also the Eternal Christ who is for ever being crucified for our salvation. (*CH*, XXIX. 135)

We are back with the Religion of Humanity: Baruch’s words, which express Hale White’s own position, claim the ‘sublime’ in supernatural Christianity for the drama of selfless sacrifice regularly enacted in the lives of men and women. It may seem, especially in the light of Baruch’s celebratory language, that Clara’s history calls in question Eliot’s contention that for women in the nineteenth century there is available no life of ‘far-resonant action’; but the challenge virtually evaporates in a cloud of irony when we consider that Clara acts unseen, apparently without trace, and is remembered only by the small circle of her immediate family. Nevertheless, *Clara Hopgood* does sound a significant note in its ending. However much or however little Clara achieves in the arena of historic affairs, she at least is granted the privilege of being involved in them, rather than confined to well-trodden domestic ways. Through her a blow is struck for the freedom not only of Italy but also of womankind.

The same conclusion arises if we compare this late strand of *Clara Hopgood* with the climax of yet another Victorian novel, not by George Eliot, but by the other colossus of the age. In choosing to pay for Madge’s future with her own Clara resembles Sydney Carton in Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), who takes the place of his double, Charles Darnay, on the scaffold, leaving the latter to marry the woman both men love and thereafter to perpetuate his line. The motive Carton fulfils in doing this, which is to redeem his life from unrelenting futility, is nowhere in sight in *Clara Hopgood*, but there are similarities between the two episodes beyond this basic act of creative self-abnegation. We have the shared object of affection, say, or the fact that both protagonists are raised in death to a Christ-like eminence, for, while Clara is associated with ‘Christ ... crucified’, Carton’s journey to the guillotine resonates with the narrator’s repeated incantation of ‘I am the resurrection and the life’, which reads not so much as an aspect of ritual as a reference to Carton’s role as Darnay’s saviour.<sup>11</sup> We learn from this last detail that Dickens too was attracted by the Religion of Humanity, but it is in relation to that system of belief that *A Tale of Two Cities* finally develops an irony comparable to that we have noticed in *Clara Hopgood*. For the committed non-Christian humanist the only immortality is that of a posthumous good name. If Clara’s claim to that distinction is limited because of the apparently narrow circle in which she is remembered, Carton’s is even more severely compromised by being possibly founded on an illusion, since the picture of the Darnay family honouring his memory far into the future is presented, not as objective reality, but as his own inward reflection and thus a prophecy of

wishful imagination which may or may not come to pass: ‘I see that I hold a sanctuary in their hearts, and in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence’ (3. 15. 404). When all is said, however, it remains that what Dickens gives to a hero Hale White grants to a heroine. The reversal highlights that dimension of Hale White’s writing – what we may call his proto-feminism – which puts him most obviously alongside George Eliot in the ranks of the Insurgents.

#### NOTES

1. William Hale White, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, ed. William S. Peterson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), chapter IX (P) and the edition introduced by Don Cupitt, London: Libris 1983 (L). All references are given for both editions. Chapman’s importance and milieu are explored in Rosemary Ashton, *142 Strand: A Radical Address in Victorian London* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2006).
2. For an approach to Hale White’s resourceful use of names in the *Autobiography*, see my ‘Mark Rutherford’s Salvation and the Case of Catharine Furze’, in Vincent Newey and Philip Shaw (eds), *Mortal Pages, Literary Lives: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Autobiography* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), pp. 172-73.
3. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994), pp. 3-4.
4. This is of course a central thread in the earlier parts of the *Autobiography*, coming to the fore in such episodes as that in which Mark, when a theological student on preaching practice is condemned by his instructors for teaching (as he sees it) the vital spirit rather than dead letter of gospel truth.
5. Hale White, memoir of Eliot, quoted in Tim Dolin, *George Eliot* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 2-4. All references are to this source.
6. See Dolin, *George Eliot*, p. 2.
7. Catherine R. Harland, *Mark Rutherford: The Art and Mind of William Hale White* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), pp. 95-97.
8. Stephen Merton, *Mark Rutherford (William Hale White)* (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 170, note 41.
9. See Newey, ‘Mark Rutherford’s Salvation and the Case of Catharine Furze’, *Mortal Pages*, pp. 182-99.
10. William Hale White, *Clara Hopgood*, ed. Lorraine Davies (London: J.M. Dent, 1996), 29. 136.
11. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, ed. George Woodcock (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), book 3, chapter 9, pp. 342-43 and 3. 15. 403.

#### The Colenutt Letters by Nick Wilde

Following a letter to the *Guardian* about the omission of William Hale White from John Mullan’s book *Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature*, a London Bookseller sent David French an email about a collection of letters he had in his possession written by WHW to Mrs Colenutt. David let me know and I contacted Nick Jacobs and together we met in Cecil Court and looked through the collection. Only a selection of these letters, and then often heavily edited by his second wife Dorothy, appeared in *Letters to Three Friends* (1924) a further sixty exist in the collection. It was thought at first one was missing but it was simply misplaced because a 3 looked like an 8 in the date. We made an offer which was accepted and as a result of many kind donations by members they are now in the Society’s possession. Their ultimate home will be the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service.

I have completed the transcription of these and will pass them on once final checks are made. A ‘print on demand’ publisher ‘Victorian Secrets’ which has already published the *Autobiography* and *Deliverance* has offered to make them available. This seems the best arrangement because the volume is unlikely to become a bestseller.

These letters were written by William Hale White to Mrs Colenutt from January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1870 until 17<sup>th</sup> October 1910. Although that is a period of forty years the actual friendship lasted from the early 1850’s whilst Hale White was in Portsmouth where he became friends with Richard Colenutt. Mr Colenutt was a friend of his cousin William Chignell who was a preacher. Richard was twelve years his senior but Hale White saw in him a very like minded individual. Richard Colenutt had married Sarah Fabian Clay and, although some letters are written to Mr. Colenutt the majority are written to Mrs Colenutt. Hale White initially addressed her as “My dear Mrs Colenutt” but from 1883 he always addressed her as “My dear friend” and signed himself W. Hale White. This is a bit odd because he writes to the second of the three friends published in *Letters To Three Friends* as “My dear Miss Partridge” from 1893 until 1903 when it becomes “My dear Sophie” until they stop in 1912. Incidentally the letters to Philip Webb are all addressed to My Dear Webb and run from 1894 until February 1913. However he seems inordinately fond of Mrs Colenutt but seems to have both refrained from using her first name and from signing himself William.

What seems odd is that the last letters to Mrs Colenutt seem to be written by a far frailer man than the letters to the other two correspondents at the time (1910) when the letters seem to stop. Perhaps it was Mrs Colenutt’s ina-



bility to read them that ended the correspondence. Nonetheless they are fascinating in a way although different from those written to the other correspondents. They are very more domestic in character and although they do touch on many serious subjects from literature the full letters are very concerned with family matters enquiring and informing about what is going on.

For example the first letter we have which did not appear in *Letters to three Friends* begins:

*‘The cuffs which you have sent me are exactly the thing that I wanted; in fact they are so exactly what I wanted that I felt ashamed when I got them because I was shameless enough to beg for them when Mary was here. They are a very sweet present. Every time when the cold bites of course I must think of you. The mittens will warm me and so will the thought. Is there not something peculiarly just-the-thing- if I may make an adjective of the phrase- in your gift?’*

Before moving on to report the birth of the twins:

*‘My two babies are quite well and Mrs White seeing that a night with twins, who will not cry together but have separate performances is rather wearisome. Tell Mary that she is now godmother to the girl, that is to say as much so as she can be, seeing that the little heretic has not been baptised nor ever will be. Their names are Mary Theodora*

*Ernest Theodore*

*My best wish for the girl is that she may be as much like her godmother as she can be. The child has really been named after yours.’*

It seems strange that the girl is baptised and the boy not, WHW seems very against organised religion and later when his daughter Mary or Molly as she is called joins the church he writes

*. “Some two years ago Molly joined the Church. I am bound to say that the parson who had much to do with her conversion is a singularly Broad. (1) , but it was a shock at the time, and, although to me she is just what she always was, it does make a difference. I am no friend to priests of any sect and I have to be on my guard lest I should offend. It is strange to hear that a clergyman has called and “that he did not ask for you, Sir; he wanted to see Miss White”. I believe Molly is happier now that she is a member of a religious community. Very few are able to stand alone and to live without a solution of ecclesiastical problems which they are told are of eternal importance. Besides, Molly now has friends, pleasant creatures most of them, and she feels she is not isolated. So I submit and try to make the best of it. Much love from your old friend.”*

(1) The Reverend John Broad is the minister of Tanner’s Lane Chapel in *The Revolution in Tanner’s Lane*, London T.Fisher Unwin 7th ed.(XVII, p 251 etc) a caricature of John Jukes, Minister of the Old Meeting.

I will let members know when publication takes place. I have indexed them by the name of literary and others mentioned in the letters.

#### **Mark Rutherford reprints and print on demand.**

A cursory look through Abe Books reveals an amazing quantity of reprints and ‘print on demand’ editions of books by William Hale White which are available. Here are the publishers I have found.

BASTIAN BOOKS <http://www.bastianbooks.com/> Canadian  
 BiblioLife <http://bibliolife.com/> Charleston, south Carolina  
 BIBLIOBAZAAR <http://www.bibliobazaar.com/> but comes up as Bibliolife  
 Kessinger Publishing, <http://www.kessinger.net/> Glacier National Park in Montana  
 Lightning Source Inc. <http://lightningsource.com/> Print on Demand publisher  
 Read Books <http://www.readbookonline.net/>  
 Read How You Want.Com, <http://www.readhowyouwant.com/> Large print and Braille editions.  
 Reprint Services Corp. <http://booksxyz.com/publishers.php?p=Reprint+Services+Corp>  
 Traviata Books <http://www.traviatabooks.co.uk/> .  
 Victorian Secrets <http://www.victoriansecrets.co.uk/>



### Three Ways of Feeling Disenfranchised by Orthodoxy: A Short Comparison of William Hale White, George Harrison and Jack Kerouac Paul Zahl

The initial reason I became interested in the novels of "Mark Rutherford" (aka William Hale White) was because of his *way* of being a Christian. Ever since his expulsion from theological college, he never felt himself to be an actual part of the Christian Church. He could not break away from some core Christian convictions and ideas, but nor could he go to church. He said this often, and even to his children. Yet as we all know, his books and letters and journals are full of religion! Specifically, his work is full of an inward, lifelong, and also extremely well informed struggle with Christianity as he had received it in orthodox Dissent.

William Hale White did not regard himself as a credal Christian, but his works are full, absolutely and undeniably full, of a wrestling with those very deep preoccupations of Christians with Original Sin as the normal human condition and with Christ Jesus as the Deliverer, or Savior, from that normal condition. Almost always, White comes across as a wistful Christian, someone who looks (back) on traditional Christianity with admiration yet also with disappointment for its failure to leaven the lump of his own life. No more wistful words occur in all of White's work than the closing sentences of his "John Bunyan" (1910):

We cannot bring ourselves into a unity. The time is yet to come when we shall live by a faith which is a harmony of all our faculties. A glimpse was caught of such a gospel nineteen centuries ago in Galilee, but it has vanished. (pp. 49-50)

For myself, as a member of the Mark Rutherford Society and as a Christian minister whose life has come straight up against reality, reality which is a brick wall in relation to so many common aspirations for happiness and satisfaction, William Hale White's work is a courageous and almost unflinching engagement to deal with reality, yet from a Christian point of vantage. The fact that Hale's life story was filled with "reality", with sorrow and impasse, makes his religious grappling with that reality enormously appealing or convincing, and also instructive.

In the light of Hale's struggle, combined with his refusal to give up the relation of his struggle with traditional Christian ideas and hopes, I have also become affected over the last couple of years by the music of George Harrison. 'George Harrison!' you say. 'I thought he was a Hindu.' He *was*. Harrison left his childhood Roman Catholicism quite early, and in mid-career as a Beatle adopted the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* as the mainstay of his life. This is visible in everything Harrison wrote and composed from the 1970 classic album "All Things Must Pass" right on through to the last record he worked on, entitled "Brainwashed". Not only is Krishna the hero and be-all of Harrison's work, but Jesus gets some nice mentions, too, as time goes on. Harrison was something of what we today call a "Gnostic Christian" toward the end of his life, although he prayed to Krishna right to the end.

Where the comparison of William Hale White, who had an allergy to "theosophy" and almost anything resembling what is today called "New Age" or "Eastern" spirituality, with George Harrison is interesting lies in the fact that both were "bruised reeds" in relation to Western orthodoxies, yet both were religious Englishmen. What White would find in Spinoza -- a universal form of acquiescence and resignation in the face of natural law and the givens of life and nature over which human beings seem to have little control -- Harrison would find in the broad sweeps of "Eastern"-style resignation. Both men were drawn to theories of controllessness, both were receptive to universal ideas of God found in the life of Jesus as they understood it, and both were on the distinct margins of conventional Western religiosity.

May I add one more "boundary" figure? This is the quite hot (just now) American novelist Jack Kerouac, whose classic novel *On the Road* had its 50th anniversary in 2007. Kerouac is the subject of a massive and authoritative exhibition in 2008 at the New York Public Library on 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue. Many people think that Kerouac was a Buddhist. He was a Buddhist, for a period. But he was also a Christian of broad sympathies, who returned very passionately to the Roman Catholic Church toward the end of his life. Like his near contemporary Andy Warhol, Jack Kerouac was a "hipster" artist who was actually interested almost solely in Christianity. On the margins of American literary culture, Kerouac wrote about religion, and never stopped writing about religion. When you realize that religion, first Christianity, then Buddhism, then, later, Christianity again, is *the* core theme of Kerouac's several novels, not to mention his journals and also the great many oil paintings he created in later years, then you can spot, again, an artist of the highest quality who, like "Mark Rutherford", was portraying reality, indeed the suffering reality of life, in the context of Christian ideas. All this is set out systematically in an elaborate new "coffee table" book produced for the New York Public Library and written by Isaac Gewirtz entitled *Beatific Soul: Jack Kerouac on the Road* (Scala Publishers London, 2007).

As a Christian minister and an admirer of William Hale White, I am fascinated by the comparisons that such an exhibition evoke, and not to mention the work in music of George Harrison. These three were all religious men, to their toes. Each had left formal Christianity. Each also, however, was attracted to Jesus and his teachings, in relation to the sufferings and transiency of life. I have recently told my Episcopal congregation, in Washington, D.C. , that I wish I could imagine a conversation of Hale White with the later English artist George Harrison -- Harrison was so mild-mannered that I think Hale would have listened to what he had to say -- and also with the American (French-Canadian) writer of "stream-of-consciousness" novels Jack Kerouac, who could not 'shake' his Christianity nor fully embrace it (except at the very end).

Aren't you interested, too, within our secular era, in artists who refused to throw out the ancestral religion completely but were also locked in the normal life struggle with suffering and transiency? After all, Christians of any stripe, and possibly religious people of almost any stripe, are wanting to ask questions of reality by which the possibility of God, or even just some universal essence of love, call it what you will, can co-exist with reality. I see "Mark Rutherford" locked in a pretty big struggle to bring things together in the light of Christinity, just as George Harrison was fixed upon religion as the dialogue partner with all life as he perceived it, and just as Jack Kerouac observed the world through his acute sensorium in the light of his religious quest.

Read WHW's "*The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*" in one hand, the ending of Kerouac's "*Big Sur*" in the other, and put on Harrison's "*Brainwashed*" CD in the background. As Spinoza said, as Kerouac never tired of saying, and as Harrison sang, "All is One".

Paul F.M. Zahl, *Dr. theol.* (Tuebingen)

## Mark Rutherford Remembers A work in progress

### Mark Crees

If there is one passage which sets me pondering about Mark Rutherford it is that mischievous spiral of a sentence which opens his very first book, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, originally published in 1881:

Now that I have completed my autobiography up to the present year, I sometimes doubt whether it is right to publish it.

Autobiographical writers usually enjoy their opening sentences; a good beginning sets things off like a tiny spark, igniting memories, lifting all that is dark into the light of day. ‘I awakened quickly and opened my eyes’ wrote Edna O’Brien at the start of her autobiographical novel, *The Country Girls*, dropping the reader, wide-eyed, into the midst of things and striding out from there. At the beginning of his own autobiography, however, Mark Rutherford appears slightly less keen to get going; he claims to have written a manuscript which he is now reluctant to allow us to read and he makes this rather brooding, difficult thought into his actual starting point. A subheading on the title page of this very thin book of memories announces that Mark Rutherford was a ‘Dissenting Minister’; another tells us that this book has been ‘edited by his friend, Reuben Shapcott’, a suggestion that the author himself may not have lived long enough to have seen his own work into print. Both inscriptions only add to the growing impression that we are about to read the autobiography of a complete unknown, a literary obscurity. I imagine Rutherford composing this brief preamble in a quiet house, long after dark, his family fast asleep in upper rooms, his completed manuscript beside him, there, on the desk:

Now that I have completed my autobiography up to the present year, I sometimes doubt whether it is right to publish it. Of what use is it, many persons will say, to present to the world what is mainly a record of weaknesses and failures? If I had any triumphs to tell; if I could show how I had risen superior to poverty and suffering; if, in short, I were a hero of any kind whatever, I might perhaps be justified in communicating my success to mankind, and stimulating them to do as I have done. But mine is the tale of a commonplace life, perplexed by many problems I have never solved; disturbed by many difficulties I have never surmounted; and blotted by ignoble concessions which are a constant regret. I have decided, however, to let the manuscript remain. I will not destroy it, although I will not take the responsibility of printing it.

This opening passage clearly belongs to a specific moment in time and represents something of a turning point in the author’s life. For a while, it seems, Rutherford has been trying to face the difficult question of whether to publish a book which reveals aspects of himself which he has never attempted to put to paper before. Now the manuscript is completed, not only does the life seem glaringly unremarkable, ‘commonplace’, but there is an added worry that bits of it may appear shameful and potentially humiliating, the pages of this autobiography are ‘blotted by ignoble concessions which are a constant regret’, phrases which bear the signs of a distinctly religious frame of mind, a tormented conscience.

Poised on the brink of publishing, Mark Rutherford now airs his doubts; one can almost picture him sliding the pile of loose pages into a pre-addressed envelope which, after further deliberation, he hides away in a locked drawer. Perhaps he sat there for a good half-hour, taking it out and locking it away again, before finally retiring to his bed, exhausted, yet unable to sleep.

Rutherford is also careful to mention that the book we are about to read is only provisionally complete; the autobiography is finished ‘up to the present year’. As no specific date is appended to the text – no date, that is, except for the year of its publication – then it is hard to know for sure which particular moment in time Rutherford is referring to. For the meanwhile, it seems that he simply put down his pen when the recorded sequence of past events caught up with the present, with this quiet moment of the key and the envelope and the dark house. The troubled life, like the book we hold, remains ongoing; the book will end, we assume,

with a resounding anticlimax, looping back to the feelings of disappointment we first encountered in the opening passage. Neither is there any definite sense that this autobiography represents the first part of a projected whole. Perhaps Rutherford will add some extra chapters when a few more years have gone ticking by. Perhaps not. *Probably* not, given the fact that he can hardly bring himself to publish this one.

Yet the most heartening aspect of this reluctant start, the element which persuades us that the book might indeed be worth carrying on with, despite the author's misgivings, is the prospect of listening to someone who is unable to discern a clear pathway through life. Reading on, we discover that, as a young man, Rutherford had trained as a dissenting minister. As he enters his twenties and starts work, Rutherford must face the growing awareness that he is not suited to the life of a preacher. Everything about his calling frustrates him: the congregations are narrow minded and merely turn up 'through force of habit'; his accommodation is bleak and uninviting. From the outset Rutherford's sermons turn into solemn, unorthodox rants about loneliness and failure, lectures which soon win him enemies from within the chapel community. ('I wonder now,' he writes, 'that I was not stopped earlier'.) Increasingly, Rutherford realises that his own vision of the universe has become indistinguishable from atheism. 'The older I got', recalls Rutherford, 'the less I appeared to believe. Nakeder and nakeder had I become with the passage of every year and I trembled to anticipate the complete emptiness to which before long I should be reduced.'

From hereon, Rutherford's autobiography recounts his desperate search for a new spiritual vocation, as well as a home, a point of rest. His frustration culminates in a nasty row with one of the chapel deacons, (Mr Snale), after which Rutherford jumps denominations, forsaking 'the Independents' for 'the Unitarians'. Six months pass but Rutherford is still unable to ignore his rationalist urges; feeling that he was born a 'hundred years too late' for the church he promptly resigns and takes up a post as a school teacher, a position which he abandons after one single, solitary day. He then finds employment working for a radical, atheistic publisher in London, work which feels a betrayal of everything he once held dear; for nothing can fill the gaping hole left by the departure of his religion and the Christian beliefs which still remain very much a part of him, despite his raging doubts. As the years go by, Rutherford's extraordinary position as a freethinking dissenter makes it harder and harder for him to fit in and define who he is and where he is going. By the end of the book he is none the wiser, as the opening passage, rather apologetically, points out.

Yet to read about a life still 'disturbed by difficulties', still awkwardly unfolding, can be a heartening, consolatory experience. Autobiographies which focus solely on groundbreaking achievements, on stories of exceptional people made even happier by glittering prizes, are guaranteed to leave us feeling inadequate or downright stupid. 'So it is not impossible' writes Rutherford, a little further down, 'that some few whose experience has been like mine may, by my example, be freed from that sense of solitude which they find so depressing.'

The fact that Rutherford so frequently records his own bouts of depression reminds us that there is a deeper psychological undercurrent coursing through this book, a profound unease, too easily overlooked if you read Rutherford purely as a chronicler of nineteenth-century 'faith and doubt'. His story is marked not only by his religious doubts but by an unending stream of false starts; botched love affairs; unworthy conduct; missed opportunities; dark stuff which seems to surface and multiply the more he tries to write it away. As we read we will accompany Rutherford, therefore, not only through the bitter events of his life, but through the many bolts and shocks which result from remembering that life.

Rutherford's many troubled love affairs cause him as much – if not more – anxiety than his fears of an encroaching atheism. At the heart of the book, Rutherford remembers an engagement he broke off to Ellen, the daughter of another chapel deacon. At the time, Rutherford had believed they were both intellectually incompatible: 'She never read anything,' he recalls, 'she was too restless and fond of outward activity.' Looking back, however, in his quiet, lonely study, Rutherford now wonders if he did the right thing and whether he has not missed something vital in Ellen, something which his earlier, rather shallow opinions allowed him to discard. It is as if Rutherford now longs for the very domestic stability which he rejected in his youth. Throughout his autobiography, marriage remains a daunting prospect for Rutherford; as with religious belief, he remains suspicious of his own convictions and terrified of choosing the wrong person and wasting his life. When it comes to marriage, writes Rutherford, 'there is nothing which a man does which is more liable to self-deception.' Nevertheless, if only he had married Ellen he would have found a real home for himself, as well as a lifelong friend:

Living together we should mould one another, and at last like one another. Marrying her, I should be relieved from the insufferable solitude which was depressing me to death, and should have a home. So it has always been with me.

The past keeps pouncing upon Rutherford in unexpected ways like this, forcing him to reflect, more conscious-

ly, upon the links between the rather priggish youth he was and older man he has become. We can hear Rutherford trying to grasp those alternative visions of how his life might have been if he had only seen things differently. Despite the fact that Rutherford sounds fairly forthright when he talks about his experiences, it soon becomes apparent that he has always cultivated a strong counter-tendency to mask his most difficult personal problems. As a result, Rutherford's sentences frequently buckle under the strain as he attempts to record his conflicting feelings towards his younger self:

'Looking back I have sometimes wondered . . .'

'[I]t is a mistake for which, considering everything, I cannot much blame myself. I hope it is amended now.'

'Reflecting on what I suffered then, I cannot find any solid ground for it . . .'

One such sentence comes especially close to the knowing circularity of the opening passage:

'I am constrained now, however, to admit that my trouble was but a bubble blown of air, and I doubt whether I have done any good on dwelling on it.'

The overall sense gained is that of reading an incoming tide.

Autobiographical writing is at its most compelling, when it reveals to an author some facet of his personality which he may not have anticipated when he first picked up his pen. It can also be a source of deep pleasure to read such intimate, self-revelatory accounts; undercurrents, doubts and partial disclosures provide the vital human ingredient which a more steady, chronological sequence of events so often strives to conceal. Contemporary novelists, such as Kazuo Ishiguro, have also ventured to recreate the little slips and giveaways which storytelling can unlock in otherwise restrained, guarded narrators, knowing what a moving experience it can be to listen to a someone struggling with memories, maintaining dignity, keeping pain at bay, worrying. In his recent book on *How The Novel Works*, the critic, James Wood has further commented on how the famously unreliable narrators of Ishiguro's novels - the butler, for example, in *The Remains of the Day* - are at least, *reliably* unreliable. The butler's self imprisonment, his repressed desire, is painstakingly joined up, line by line by Ishiguro, until we can only marvel at the craftsmanship (what Woods elsewhere terms 'the mechanics of manipulation') that went into such a finely tuned creation. *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, however, is perhaps unique in that the guilt and unease which the narrator experiences as he looks back on his life is not a fictional construct. Rutherford's feat of memory is genuinely out of control as it seeps into the lamp light of the present. And yet, for all that, he keeps on writing it down, as if he can't bring himself to stop; the book seems almost to rise out of itself with an urgency which over-rides its author's strong desire to suppress it. And despite all that might be said against Rutherford's stubborn pride, his relentless egotism, one can't help but feel that it has taken real moral courage to have revisited the past in this way, with its many regrets and depressing episodes. A few words spoken at a friend's funeral and recorded towards the end of the book could almost have emerged out of Rutherford's own rain drenched soul: 'The cloud breaks up and comes down upon the earth in showers which cease, but the clouds and the showers are really undying.'

For all his fears of having made such a disappointing botch of his life, Rutherford does not sound like a weak, amoral individual, but someone who has hoped and endured, whose life, throughout, has been confusing - 'perplexed by many problems' - as well as having been, one suspects, a touch lonely. He sounds not a little resentful of the role fate has allotted him and painfully embarrassed by many of his decisions. The tone conveyed is that of a constrained romanticism, as if Rutherford's life has not lived up to the epic hopes of his youth, which may well explain the exaggerated sense of doom which weighs Rutherford down, rather too heavily, whenever he looks back upon his mistakes. 'Of what use is it' he asks, 'to present to the world what is mainly a record of weaknesses and failures?' 'Very useful indeed', we may well reply, thinking of our own. Reading Rutherford's opening passage, you soon discover that this distinctly nineteenth-century dialect shares something with the voice we all hear quietly moaning and groaning away within ourselves for much of the time. Mark Rutherford expresses, succinctly and powerfully, the very same reasons which most of us would give when asked why we have not yet published our autobiographies.

But if Rutherford sits holding an envelope he is never going to send, but can't quite bring himself to destroy, then how is he to proceed? Should he burn it? Or hide it away? The dilemma is shared by many authors, haunted by boxes of personal papers, diaries and letters - all crammed with ignoble concessions, 'weaknesses and failures' -

which will remain long after their decease, a potential blight on their hitherto untarnished posthumous reputation. Larkin's notebooks, for example, would most certainly have been published by now if Larkin himself hadn't arranged for another reliably loyal party to have them shredded on his behalf shortly after his death. Many famous authors write in the knowledge that everything, each scribbled seaside postcard, might one day prove to be of some value to the wider literary culture, a fact which must surely make the shredder's promised task far more disquieting, and much harder to execute. Literature is, by its nature, nosy and fiercely inquisitive; it needs, always, to search for lost keys, open forgotten cupboards; its healthy survival depends, to no small extent, on having eluded the claws of the loyal shredder.

Fortunately, Rutherford couldn't bring himself to destroy his own manuscript. In fact, re-reading the opening passage, it becomes obvious that he never allowed the last word to fall entirely into the hands of his gravest doubts: 'Now that I have finished my autobiography up to the present date', he writes, 'I *sometimes* doubt whether it is right to publish it' – a canny touch. That 'sometimes' brings with it a sense of time passing as well as a glimpse of Rutherford's shifting moods, beneath which he waits, impassive. It suggests that there must be long periods when Rutherford feels completely fine about publishing his autobiography; inevitably, the moment never lasts but moves over him, like those clouds which somehow vanish from the sky when he isn't looking. How difficult it is, he must wonder, to live life as it unfolds, somewhat cloudily, without benefit of hindsight, avoiding regret. And what on earth can be done about snap decisions, especially those of a riskier nature concerning the future of a manuscript, the gloomy contents of which he might well regret as he walks home from the post office, fumbling with his change?

Yet from this 'sometimes', and the memory it contains of an earlier, fragile certitude, comes Rutherford's instinctive flight from self-destruction, the larger desire to preserve the autobiography, not burn it, an urge which led Rutherford to this final ingenious plan, a decision which might well be termed his plan of inaction.

For there is something distinctly odd going on in those last two sentences of the opening passage. Having entered into lengthy negotiations with himself regarding the future of his own manuscript it is now, in this very moment, that Rutherford announces his own, highly idiosyncratic solution:

I have decided, however, to let the manuscript remain. I will not destroy it, although I will not take the responsibility of printing it.

Unable to send the book himself, Rutherford somehow managed to arrange for the manuscript to fall into the hands of his friend, Reuben Shapcott, after his death. The whole thing might then be published posthumously at Shapcott's behest.

Shapcott also makes a very brief appearance within the autobiography itself. The two friends had once been students together at theological college and had apparently kept in touch, despite Rutherford's subsequent loss of faith. When Rutherford turns up at Shapcott's house, unannounced, having abandoned his teaching post, Shapcott takes him in. He also manages to find a flat for Rutherford, somewhere for him to rest and 'consider what could be done.' There is no evidence of Shapcott having done any more than this, which implies he may well have been the very friend Rutherford needed in a time of crisis: non judgemental, practical and unquestionably supportive, in spite of the very erratic, disjointed way in which Rutherford appears to have been living.

In a note attached right at very end of Rutherford's narrative, Reuben Shapcott tells us that he now has the manuscript of Rutherford's book in his possession and that he believes there may be more of his friend's writing to be found. 'I know that there is more of it' he writes, 'but all my search for it has been in vain. Possibly some day I may be able to recover it.'

No mention is given in Shapcott's notes as to how or when Rutherford died, or at what stage of his life he passed away. That Shapcott was given full permission to root around in Rutherford's private papers after his friend's death suggests that Rutherford may have lived alone at the very end, or that Mrs Rutherford (if she existed) never ventured into her late husband's cluttered study. Whatever the circumstances, the strange thing is that Mark Rutherford felt he couldn't 'take the responsibility of printing' his own autobiography; he decided that he had to disconnect his own will from the fate of the book he had written, as if some final judgement were feared as soon as that envelope disappeared into the fatal black hole of the post box. Considering this curious abdication of responsibility, Rutherford's friendship with Shapcott soon begins to reflect a division which existed within himself, the division between the minister who decides and the artist who doubts, between the sensible and the compulsive; the rooted and the rootless.

To picture Shapcott going through Rutherford's papers, digging out the manuscript, reading the first page and then seeking out a publisher for such an obscure work of autobiography, is also to be reminded how much the book owes, not merely to Shapcott's diligent friendship but to blind luck. Rutherford's opening message to his future

readers could almost have been plucked out of a bottle at sea, so precarious does the physical existence of his book seem today. Even when it was eventually published, the first edition ran to just 500 copies, hardly enough, one would think, to have ensured its cultural survival beyond a couple of months.

And yet Rutherford did, eventually, find his readers. Joseph Conrad found him ‘good, and more than good. It’s precious wood of straight fibre and with a faint delicate scent.’ Andre Gide, writing in his journal thought that ‘the exquisite qualities [of Rutherford] . . . are the very ones I should like to have.’ ‘How good he is!’ wrote D. H. Lawrence in a letter to Arthur McLeod, his teacher-friend, thanking him for a book which arrived just at the right time, ‘so just, so harmonious. I have enjoyed him today; it has rained,’ a passing remark which returns us to the steady English drizzle which accompanies so many soggy scenes in the autobiography.

The very problematic existence of the book is also part of its implicit charm; *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, somehow made it through. The fact that I currently hold this oddly moving book of memories confirms that it was, eventually, published in 1881, despite any initial doubts the author may have had once he had placed it in the envelope and licked the seal. The existence of the book, in other words, stands in clear defiance of the author’s tendency to doubt its worth, as expressed in his opening passage to his readers.

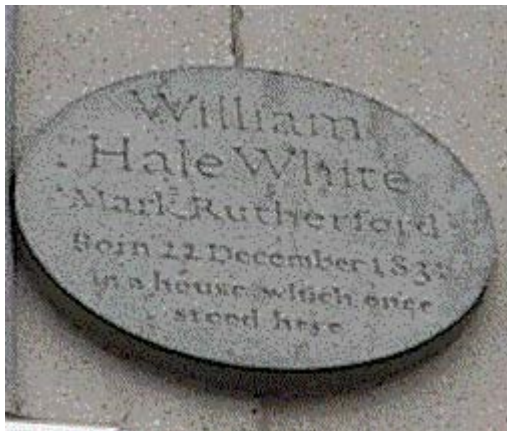
And sure enough, four years later, another volume, *Mark Rutherford’s Deliverance*, appeared out of the blue as if it had suddenly surfaced from beneath an old pile of papers. This was shortly followed by a second edition of *The Autobiography*, with a new preface by Shapcott. More astounding, Shapcott - no doubt buoyed up by his finds - managed to delve even deeper into Rutherford’s posthumous papers and uncovered an entire novel left by his friend entitled *The Revolution in Tanner’s Lane*, which he subsequently edited for publication in 1887. Over the next decade, yet more of Rutherford’s posthumous fiction keeps turning up, although, from then onwards, the rather forlorn male doubters were replaced with freethinking, female protagonists: *Miriam’s Schooling* appeared in 1890, followed by *Catharine Furze* (1893) and *Clara Hopgood* (1896), all bearing Reuben Shapcott’s name on the title page.

By the time the reading public discovered that Mark Rutherford was the pseudonym of William Hale White, a high ranking civil servant and provincial journalist, the author, fortunately, had little further need to conceal his identity.

That Rutherford did, indeed, find more to say about his life is confirmed by the subsequent appearance, some five years later of *Mark Rutherford’s Deliverance*. The ‘present year’, therefore could refer either to the time as it stands at the end of *The Autobiography*, or, if you think about it, the moment with which he ends *Deliverance*. Each of these contingencies remains possible, but each comes with its own problems and contradictions. Rutherford aficionados may even be tempted, in the light of this fact, to find a more definitive answer to the conundrum of the ‘present year’. *The Autobiography*, for example, ends with the death of Mardon, not long after Rutherford has left Wollaston’s publishing house, which could well suggest that Rutherford was still a young man, adrift, unmarried, when he first began to write about his life. I remember that Charles Swann, for a while, researched the possibility that Hale White also wrote *The Autobiography* in the 1850s, just after having left No. 142 The Strand, and that he kept the manuscript hidden for thirty years or so before dusting it down again in 1881. (And if Rutherford started writing this stuff in the 1850s, pondered Charles, then surely there must be more!) But surely this is a too literal interpretation of the opening paragraph and contradicts the strong mood of middle aged retrospection which runs through the book. ‘The present year’ could also, of course, refer to a ‘past’ year (my own preference), the particular bit of memory which the now much-older Rutherford has just finished writing about before attaching his opening note (although it still leaves unclear how much time passed between his finishing the manuscript and adding the note). All of this confusion arises because, there are, in effect, two very distinct kinds of manuscript at play – a fictional one (Mark Rutherford’s autobiography), and a real one (Hale White’s autobiographical novel). More crucially, there are moments when even Hale White seems to have ceased to concern himself with the distinction between the two. This blurring of the real and the fictional is, after all, part of the book’s imaginative triumph; it is this which enables Hale White to keep writing as passionately and as intimately as he does. Hale White was partly improvising when he first constructed this scenario of an unknown writer, looking back on his life, unsure about whether to continue with the task. And this voice was soon to grow and develop beyond the bounds of the form in which Hale White originally conceived for it. For this reason ‘the present year’ remains an insolvable and rather cryptic conundrum. Hale White, at any rate, decided to let this intriguing inconsistency alone which can, if we let it, distract us, unnecessarily, from the writing itself.







WILLIAM HALE WHITE  
(MARK RUTHERFORD)  
WAS BORN IN THIS HOUSE  
22<sup>ND</sup> DECEMBER 1831

William Hale White  
'Mark Rutherford'  
(1831-1913)  
novelist and critic  
was born above his father's bookshop  
on this site on  
22<sup>nd</sup> December 1831

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