

INTRODUCTION

THERE are those who deprecate introductions to the masterpieces of literature, and doubtless many such efforts have been in the nature of impertinences. Attempts at criticism and elucidation as forewords to the work of a great author can only be justified when the critic is on the same level of power and genius as the writer that he criticizes. There are, however, things that may be said with profit concerning most books, and many a reader of *Sylvia's Lovers* will learn for the first time, from this Introduction, so simple a fact as that Monkshaven is Whitby, and that Mrs. Gaskell has pictured what is now a fashionable watering-place as it was in the closing years of the eighteenth century. To know this is surely to enhance our enjoyment of the story.

Whitby still has its Abbey ruins, and its legend of Abbey bells torn from the tower by pirates, but nearly everything else is changed. The whaling trade that Mrs. Gaskell describes so graphically is all but gone. It must have been during her residence at Newcastle, some two years before her marriage, that Mrs. Gaskell made her first acquaintance with Whitby, and learnt something of the traditions of the town. She visited the place again in 1859, but for the main outline of her story our author went to actual historical circumstances. There was really a serious riot in 1793, when the Whitby sailors rose against the press-gang, and having forced them to abscond, demolished their