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The Influence of the French Revolution
on the Life and Poetry of Wordsworth

by

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INTRODUCTION

"The French Revolution was an endeavour to disentangle human life from the coils of an intricate and artificial social system, and re-establish society upon a simple and natural basis. It was a struggle to destroy an old and to construct a new social order; to substitute for feudalism, with its three privileged classes, with its power founded upon authority and tradition, a government of democracy, with freedom and equality for all men, and its power founded upon reason and the consent of the governed." (1)

"In a few favored districts of France and England farmers were able to pay their taxes and still live comfortably. But elsewhere the misery of the people was such as can hardly be imagined. With the best of harvests they could barely provide for their families, and a dry summer and a long winter would bring them to want. There was only the coarsest of bread--and little of that; meat was a luxury; and delicacies were for the rich. We read how starving peasants in France tried to appease their hunger with roots and herbs, and in hard times succumbed by thousands to famine. One-roomed mud huts with leaky thatched roofs, bare and windowless, were good enough dwellings for these tillers of the soil. In the dark corners of the dirt-floors lurked germs of pestilence and death. Fuel was expensive, and the bitter winter nights must have found many a peasant chivering supperless on his bed of straw." (2)

The revenue of France was near twenty millions when Louis XVI., finding it inadequate, called upon the nation for supply. In a single lifetime it rose to far more than one hundred millions, while the national income grew still more rapidly; and this increase

(1) The French Revolution and The English Poets, Hancock, p. 3.

(2) A Political and Social History of Modern Europe, vol. 1, Hayes, p. 398.

was wrought by a class to whom the ancient monarchy denied its best rewards, and whom it deprived of power in the country they enriched. As their industry effected change in the distribution of property, and wealth ceased to be the prerogative of a few, the excluded majority perceived that their disabilities rested on no foundation of right and justice, and were unsupported by reasons of State. They proposed that the prizes in the Government, the Army, and the Church should be given to merit among the active and necessary portion of the people, and that no privilege injurious to them should be reserved for the unprofitable minority. Being nearly an hundred to one, they deemed that they were virtually the substance of the nation, and they claimed to govern themselves with a power proportioned to their numbers. They demanded that the State should be reformed, that the ruler should be their agent, not their master.

Scientists, of whom the period was full, had done much to exalt the notions that the universe is run in accordance with immutable laws of nature and that man must forever utilize his reasoning faculties. It was not long before the philosophers were applying the scientists' notions to social conditions. "Is this reasonable?" they asked, or, "Is that rational?" Montesquieu insisted that divine-right monarchy is unreasonable. Voltaire poked fun at the Church and the clergy for being irrational. Rousseau claimed that class inequalities have no basis in reason. His most advanced point was the doctrine that the people are infallible. Beccaria taught that arbitrary or cruel interference with personal liberty is not in accordance with dictates of nature or reason.

Philosophy did not directly effect a change; it was merely an

expression of a growing belief in the advisability of change. It reflected a conviction, deep in many minds, that the old political institutions and social distinctions had served their purpose and should now be radically adapted to the new order. "The philosophers of the Revolution.....considered man as a mite, infinitely small, amidst a cosmos infinitely great; they viewed him as an animal, sociable, to be sure, and capable of wonderful development, yet withal closely related to the beasts of the field.. This propaganda, fired with reformatory zeal, produced a violent shifting of the centre of vital faith. The supremely desirable thing became, not assurance of happiness in a life to come, but happiness here in this world and now;--an amelioration of the present environment." (1)

Every country in greater or less degree heard the radical philosophy, but it was in France that it was first heeded. France was the country which, above any other, had perfected the theory and practice of divine-right monarchy. In France had developed the sharpest contrasts between the various social classes. It was likewise in France that the relatively high level of education and enlightenment had given great vogue to a peculiarly destructive criticism of political and social conditions.

Having lost confidence in their rulers, having been driven to despair by oppression, men began to feel confidence in themselves; and as they became conscious of their own strength they realized that in their own wills, their wills so long dormant, their wills now awakened, lay the sources of power. "Then from the throats of the apostles of the new age there came the ringing, modern shibboleth

(1) The French Revolution and The English Poets, Hancock, pp. 5-6.

of liberty, equality, and fraternity; then the old men began to see visions and the young men to dream dreams; then the whole of Europe began to tremble as if at the dawning of the day of wrath and judgment." (1)

Liberty implied certain political ideals. Government was henceforth to be exercised, not autocratically by divine right, but constitutionally by the sovereign will of the governed. The individual citizen was no longer to be subject in all things to a king, but was to be guaranteed in possession of personal liberties which no state or society might abridge. Such were liberty of conscience, liberty of worship, liberty of speech, liberty of publication. The liberty of owning private property was proclaimed by the French Revolution as an inherent right of man.

Equality embraced the social activities of the Revolution. It meant the abolition of privilege, the end of serfdom, the destruction of the feudal system. It pronounced all men equal before the law. It aspired, though with little success, to afford every man an equal chance with every other man in the pursuit of life and happiness.

Fraternity was the symbol of brotherhood of those who sought to make the world better and happier and more just. In France it found expression in an outburst of patriotism and national sentiment. No longer did mercenaries fight at the behest of despots for dynastic aggrandizement; henceforth a nation in arms was prepared to do battle under the glorious banner of "fraternity" in defense of whatever it believed to be for the nation's interests.

"Too much emphasis can hardly be laid upon the statement that Wordsworth at his best, in his great years, when he was most truly

(1) The French Revolution and the English Poets, Hancock,
p.7.

himself, when he was animated by courage and hope, was a fervent Revolutionist.....He breathed with joy and awe, the spirit of a glorious time. And the time found in him its most faithful and inspired interpreter. He alone, of all who had experienced or contemplated the Revolution, has left an adequate artistic record of its effect upon the spiritual life of those who welcomed it and those who opposed it." (1)

"In England the fire(of the Revolution) did not fall upon the State, but its inspiration and the passionate emotion which attended it, fell upon the poets; and out of the heart of Wordsworth the poetry of universal Man, of freedom, of equal rights, of infinite promise, of the overthrow of tyranny, leaped full-grown into a manhood which has never endured decay."(2)

(1) Wordsworth: His Life, works, and influence, Vol.1, Harper, p.15.

(2) Theology in the English Poets, Brooke, p. 146.

CHAPTER I

WORDSWORTH IN FRANCE

While a student at Cambridge Wordsworth resolved to spend his third summer vacation in a foreign walking tour with one of his fellow collegians, Robert Jones, a Welshman. They crossed from Dover to Calais on July 13th, 1790, on the eve of the Fete in the Champ de Mars, when the anniversary of the taking of the Bastille was celebrated, and Louis XVI took the oath of allegiance to the new constitution imposed on him.

The French Revolution in those early days of its growth seemed to many in England to promise only a new era of freedom, and the two Cambridge youths were in eager sympathy with it. Everywhere along their route through France from Calais they saw rejoicings, they too danced with others round a table and sang and pledged the new republic. They did not go to Paris, but to Burgundy, and down the Rhone.

Although Wordsworth was interested in the great political struggle for freedom which formed the European question of the day, and though it had been one of the motives that made him wish to go abroad, yet, when he was there, it was the beauties and wonders of Nature that made the deeper impression on him. It was later, when he had again been to France, that the Revolution was to grip his mind; and it is with that later realization of it that he writes the account of his earlier visit in the Prelude and describes

"France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again." (1)

(1) The Prelude, *VI*, ll. 240-241.

Of this summer of 1790 he writes:

"a glorious time
A happy time that was; triumphant looks
Were then the common language of all eyes;
As if awaked from sleep, the Nations hailed
Their great expectancy;" (1).

and in retrospect he says;

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven!" (2).

But his sympathy with the Revolution, however feeble it may have been in its infancy, existed even then, and was destined before two years had passed to develop into strong affection.

Most young men leave University with some definite vocation in view, especially these young men who have to earn their own living; but not so Wordsworth. His relatives, indeed, including his anxious and devoted sister Dorothy, seemed to have expected that he would enter Holy Orders; but Wordsworth faced the world with two MS. poems in one pocket, a very small allowance in the other, a bowing acquaintance with modern and classical languages, a familiar companionship with English poetry, a strong dislike of mathematics and of systematic study of any sort; and a Cambridge degree. And somehow it did not suit his temperament to settle down to any calling or in any local habitation. In his own words, he was

" Well pleased to pitch a vagrant tent among
The unfenced regions of society." (1)

He idled several months in London and in Wales, and finally, on his relatives pressing him to enter the Church, he discovered he had enough money to afford himself a "Wanderjahr".

(1). *The Prelude*, VII, ll. 754-758

(2). *Ibid.*, XI, ll. 108-109.

(3). *Ibid.*, VII, 56-57.

Wordsworth went to France in November, 1791. He passed through Paris on his way to Orleans, spending only a few days in the capital, and while there visiting the National Legislative Assembly and the Jacobin club, wandering about the streets, staring and listening, sitting in the sunshine on the ruins of the Bastille, where he picked up and pocketed a stone as a relic, "affecting more emotion than I felt."

"Through Paris lay my readiest course, and there
Sojourning a few days, I visited
In haste, each spot of old or recent fame,
The latter chiefly; from the field of Mars
Down to the suburbs of St Antony,
And from Mont Martre southward to the Dome
Of Genevieve. In both her clamorous Halls
The National Synod and the Jacobins,
I saw the Revolutionary power
Toss like a ship at anchor, rocked by storms;
The Arcades I traversed, in the Palace huge
Of Orleans; coasted round and round the line
Of Tavern, Brothel, Gaming-house, and Shop,
Great rendezvous of worst and best, the walk
Of all who had a purpose or had not.
I stared and listened, with a stranger's ears,
To Hawkers and Haranguers, hubbub wild;
And hissing Factionists with ardent eyes,
In knots, or pairs, or single. Not a look
Hope takes, or Doubt or Fear is forced to wear,
But seemed there present; and I scanned them all,
Watched every gesture uncontrollable,
Of anger, and vexation, and despite,
All side by side, and struggling face to face,
With gaiety and dissolute idleness,
Where silent zephyrs sported with the dust
Of the Bastille, I sat in the open sun,
And from the rubbish gathered up a stone,
And pocketed the relic, in the guise
Of an enthusiast; yet, in honest truth,
I looked for something that I could not find,
Affecting more emotion than I felt;" (1)

For the boy was only two-and-twenty, and he frankly confesses that he was carelessly indifferent to the great political earthquake that was shaking the foundation of society. And the reason for this, as he also frankly confesses, was his political and historical ignorance;

(1) The Prelude, ix. 42-74.

"but I was unprepared
 With needful knowledge, had abruptly passed
 Into a theatre, whose stage was filled
 And busy with an action far advanced.
 Like others, I had skimmed, and sometimes read
 With care, the master-pamphlets of the day;
 Nor wanted such half-insight as grew wild
 Upon that meagre soil, helped out by talk
 And public news; but having never seen
 A chronicle that might suffice to show
 Whence the main organs of the public power
 Had sprung, their transmigrations, when and how
 Accomplished, giving thus unto events
 A form and body; all things were to me
 Loose and disjointed, and the affections left
 Without a vital interest. At that time,
 Moreover, the first storm was overblown,
 And the strong hand of outward violence
 Locked up in quiet. For myself, I fear
 Now, in connection with so great a theme,
 To speak (as I must be compelled to do)
 Of one so unimportant; Night by night
 Did I frequent the formal haunts of men,
 Whom, in the city, privilege of birth
 Sequestered from the rest, societies
 Polished in arts, and in punctilio versed;
 Whence, and from deeper causes, all discourse
 Of good and evil of the time was shunned
 With scrupulous care; but these restrictions soon
 Proved tedious, and I gradually withdrew
 Into a noisier world, and thus ere long
 Became a patriot; and my heart was all
 Given to the people, and my love was theirs." (1)

He passed through revolutionized Paris with satisfaction and sympathy, but with little active emotion, proceeded first to Orleans, and then to Blois, between which places he spent nearly a year. At Orleans he became intimately acquainted with the nobly-born but republican general, Michel Beaupuy, the first man who was able to really touch his intellect, and to turn all his emotional philandering with republicanism into passionate feeling. He and his friend Beaupuy, who was rejected with hatred

(1) The Prelude, ix. 91-125.

by his brother officers, lived almost together. Both were enthusiastic, both were full of hope, and the description which Wordsworth gives of him splendidly illustrates the best type of the men of the earliest times of the Revolution: "

" A meeker man
Than this lived never, nor a more benign,
Meek though enthusiastic. Injuries
Made him more gracious, and his nature then
Did breathe its sweetness out most sensibly,
As aromatic flowers on Alpine turf,
When foot hath crushed them. He through the events
Of that great change wandered in perfect faith,
As through a book, and old romance, or tale
Of Faery, or some dream of actions wrought
Behind the summer clouds. By birth he ranked
With the most noble, but unto the poor
Among mankind he was in service bound,
As by some tie invisible, eaths professed
To a religious order. Man he loved
As man; and, to the mean and the obscure,
And all the homely in their homely works,
Transferred a courtesy which had no air
Of condescension; but did rather seem
A passion and a gallantry, like that
Which he, a soldier, in his idler day
Had paid to women; somewhat vain he was,
Or seemed so, yet it was not vanity,
But fondness, and a kind of radiant joy
Diffused around him, while he was intent
On works of love or freedom, or revolved
Complacently the progress of a cause
Whereof he was a part: yet this was meek
And placid, and took nothing from the man
That was delightful." (1)

" Wordsworth had a feeling for the poetical aspect of the past, and for the beauty of nature. Beaupuy was too much absorbed by his religion of humanity to shed any tears over things which were old and passing away or to go into raptures over a landscape." (2) In conversation with him Wordsworth learned with what new force the well-worn adages of the moralist fall from the lips of one who is called upon to put them at once in action, and to stake life itself on the verity of his maxims of honor. The poet's heart burned within him as he listened. Words-

(1) The Prelude, ix. 292- 321.

(2) The Early Life of Wordsworth, Legouis, p. 206.

worth told Coleridge in after years that if it was a joy to them to discuss the state of man, and the question of human liberty and destiny by the banks of their favourite Cumbrian streams, it was doubly so to do this with one who had to be an actor in the great tragedy, and to put the doctrine which he held into living deeds." (1)

"Beappuy was Wordsworth's instructor in branches of study for which he had until then shown no aptitude. He awakened new interests, gave him social consciousness, clothed for him in garments of majestic associations the history of mankind. Henceforth the poet could no longer regard the chronicles of nations as a mere quarry for romantic incidents. History, he now saw, was organic, Heroism was but the eminent outcrop of deep popular virtues and aspirations. Creeds and sects took their place with national custom, as growths unconsciously implanted and irresistibly evolved. But in all this they saw the workings of a destiny, not blind and aimless, but moving towards a glorious end." (2).

Wordsworth found regret in his soul, even during the republican's "heart-bracing colloquies", for the matin bell that sounded no more, for the twilight taper, and the Cross on the topmost pinnacle, which had in times past gladdened the eyes of weary travellers as a sign of sure hospitality, peace, and rest:

"And sometimes—
When to a convent in a meadow green,
By a brook-side, we came, a roofless pile,
And not by reverential touch of Time
Dismantled, but by violence abrupt—
In spite of these heart-bracing colloquies,
In spite of real fervour, and of that
Less genuine and wrought up within myself—
I could not but bewail a wrong so harsh.
And for the Matin-bell to sound no more
Grieved, and the twilight taper, and the cross
High on the topmost pinnacle, a sign
(How welcome to the weary traveller's eyes!)
Of hospitality and peaceful rest." (3)

(1) Life of Wordsworth, Knight, Vol. I, p. 63.

(2) Wordsworth, Life, Works, and Influence, Harper, Vol. I, p. 164.

(3) The Prelude, ix. 465-479.

Again, when Beaupuy pointed the site of some royal castle with a romantic story, the "virtuous wrath and noble scorn" of the younger republican warred in him with the "chivalrous delight" of the poet.

Beaupuy was not contented with telling Wordsworth stories of the evils which existed under the old regime, but, better still, made him lay his finger on the wounds which it had inflicted, and pointed out the remedies to which his own vows and efforts were directed. They met a half-starved girl walking along, languidly knitting, with a heifer tied to her arm and picking its sustenance, and Beaupuy exclaimed with emotion, "'Tis against that that we are fighting! "

Accustomed as he had been from boyhood to the sturdy, independent manhood of the Cumberland dalesmen, Wordsworth now saw with astonished indignation a peasantry that had been starved and enslaved for centuries. It was this great, suffering people that were now awaking, and, with a voice that shook all Europe, claiming their place among mankind. He had not been deeply moved by general declamations on liberty and the rights of men, even when he had given assent to such large principles; but the picture of this starving girl and the thousands like her all over France, got hold upon his imagination. He saw in the Revolution the promise of a time when this sodden and nerveless people should wrest from their rulers the rights and privileges of liberty. From that day Wordsworth believed

" That a benignant spirit was abroad
Which might not be withstood, that poverty
Abject as this would in a little time
Be found no more, that we should see the earth
Unthwarted in her wish to recompense
The meek, the lowly, patient child of toil,
All institutes forever blotted out
That legalized exclusion, empty pomp
Abolished, sensual state and cruel power,

Whether by edict of the one or few;
And finally, as sum and crown of all,
Should see the people having a strong hand
In framing their own laws; whence better days
To all mankind." (1)

The mirage was a glowing reality to Wordsworth. He was still at Blois when the king was deposed after the memorable tenth of August, but he returned immediately afterwards to Orleans, where he remained during the September massacres. The king himself and his wife and family had been imprisoned. The deliberate murder by hired ruffians of unarmed prisoners, unconvicted of any crime, had already aroused the deserved execration of the civilized world. For five days and nights the slaughter went on uninterruptedly, but these lamentable crimes did not chill his enthusiasm; almost before they had ceased, Wordsworth was ready to believe that such horrors were forever at an end:

"Ephemeral monsters, to be seen but once!
Things that could only show themselves and die." (2)

The great events which marked the close of the same month filled his heart with hope:

"The State, as if to stamp the final seal
On her security, and to the world
Show what she was, a high and fearless soul,
Exulting in defiance, or heart-stung
By sharp resentment, or belike to taunt
With spiteful gratitude the baffled League,
That had stirred up her slackening faculties,
To a new transition, when the King was crushed
Spared not the empty throne, and in proud haste
Assumed the bold and venerable name
Of a Republic." (3)

The sound of that one word was truly intoxicating in Wordsworth's ear. France, that fair, favoured region which his

- (1) The Prelude, ix. 519-532.
- (2) Ibid., x. 41-47.
- (3) Ibid., x. 31-41.

soul was to "love, till Life had broke her golden bowl," (1)
shone with new glory on the day when she ceased to be a monarchy
and became a republic.

Wordsworth returned to Paris in October, 1792, a month
after the September massacres. It was a time well calculated to
excite to a higher level the mind of the poet, and the passage
in which he describes the intensity with which he felt the passion
is one of the finest in the Prelude:

" But that night
I felt most deeply in what world I was,
What ground I trod on, and what air I breathed.
High was my room and lonely, near the roof
Of a large mansion or hotel, a lodge
That would have pleased me in more quiet times;
Nor was it wholly without pleasure then.
With unextinguished taper I kept watch,
Reading at intervals; the fear gone by
Pressed on me almost like a fear to come.
I thought of those September massacres,
Divided from me by one little month,
Saw them and touched: the rest was conjured up
From tragic fictions or true history.
Remembrances and dim admonishments.
The horse is taught his manage, and no scar
Of wildest course but treads back his own steps;
For the spent hurricane the air provides
As fierce a successor; the tide retreats
But to return out of its hiding-place
In the great deep; all things have second birth;
The earthquake is not satisfied at once;
And in this way I wrought upon myself,
Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried,
To the whole city, "Sleep no more." The trance
Fled with the voice to which it had given birth;
But vainly comments of a calmer mind
Promised soft peace and sweet forgetfulness.
The place all hushed and silent as it was,
Appeared unfit for the repose of night,
Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam." (2)

Not only was the poet ready to espouse the cause of freedom,
but presently he even entertained, and dallied with, the notion
that he himself might become leader of the Girondists, and bring
salvation to France. In a passage which curiously illustrates that

(1) Descriptive Sketches, II, 740-741.

(2) The Prelude, x. 55-93.

reasoned self-assurance and deliberate boldness which for the most part he showed only in the peaceful incidents of a literary career, he has told us of the conviction that his single-heartedness of aim would make him, in spite of foreign birth and imperfect speech, a point round which the confused instincts of the multitude might not impossibly rally.

"An insignificant stranger and obscure,
And one, moreover, little graced with power
Of eloquence even in my native speech
And all unfit for tumult or intrigue,
Yet would I at this time with willing heart
Have undertaken for a cause so great
Service however dangerous." (1)

And still Wordsworth remained in Paris, awe-struck and ambitious in his little attic. He was bereft of all the influences that had hitherto upheld him. His passionate love of Nature-- what communion with nature had he in Paris? His attitude to the Church in which he had been reared was one of cold criticism and impatient scorn. His stronger self, his sister Dorothy, was in the quiet Farnett parsonage. Even his last hero, Beaupuy, was no longer beside him. What was the boy's life in Paris when, rudderless, and under full sail of impetuous feelings and vain hopes, he tossed on that dangerous sea?

Whatever it was, Wordsworth's sojourn in France ended somewhat ignominiously, for - his allowance was stopped from home.

"Dragged by a chain of harsh necessity
So seemed it, - now I thankfully acknowledge,
Forced by the gracious providence of Heaven, -
To England I returned else (though assured
That I both was and must be of small weight,
No better than a landsman on the deck
Of a ship struggling with a hideous storm)
Doubtless, I should have then made common cause
With some who perished; haply perished too,
A poor mistaken and bewildered offering, - (

(1) The Prelude, x. 148- 154.

Should to the breast of Nature have gone back,
With all my resolutions, all my hopes,
A poet only to myself, to men
Useless ----- " (1)

The timely and decisive mandate of his guardians saved him, if not from an early death, at least from committing himself to a programme. The consequence was that from first to last he watched the Revolution with other eyes than those of a partisan. He was forbidden to act but he saw and suffered the more. It was while these long years of painful thought lay heavy on his spirit that he wrote these lines from The Borderers:

" Action is transitory- a step, a blow,
The motion of a muscle-this way or that-
'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:
Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity." (2)

Thus the " patriot of the world" descended, penniless and reluctant, from his Paris attic, and returned to England and the poet Wordsworth was saved to literature.

During his stay in France, Wordsworth worked on his Descriptive Sketches. This is the only poem which he wrote "in the full faith of the French Revolution. And yet it is, of all his poems, with the exception of An Evening Walk, the most artificial, the least like anything that he wrote subsequently, the most like everything that was worst in the conventional manner of the latter ^{part} of the eighteenth century." (3) In this poem, written as he was wandering on the banks of the Loire, all Nature is made more beautiful to him by his dreams of the advent of perfect liberty; a milder light fell from the skies, the river rolled with more majestic course, the foliage shone with richer

(1) The Prelude, x. 223- 235.

(2) The Borderers, Act III, p. 60. (Works of Wordsworth, MacMillan 1913)

(3) Wordsworth by Garrod, p. 41.

gold. But as he wrote he heard the gathering of the enemies of freedom, he foresaw that the land would soon be wrapt in fire, and that all the promise in his heart could not be fulfilled. Yet undespondent, he appealed to God as the source and protector of the work that France was doing against the oppressing kings of Europe:

" Great God! by whom the strifes of men are weighed
In an impartial balance, give thine aid
To the just cause; and, oh! do Thou preside
Over the mighty stream now spreading wide." (1)

(1) Descriptive Sketches, p. 20, (*Works of Wordsworth*, Macmillan, 1913).

CHAPTER II

A REPUBLICAN IN ENGLAND

Wordsworth, as we have noted returned to England, "a patriot of the world." The Revolution, in its earlier phases, involved no revolution in his mental life. In common with a large number of his countrymen, he accepted it gladly, and expected for its principles a peaceful and beneficent triumph. The societies with which he had been most familiar in his youth were, as he explains, essentially democratic in their basis. Among the dalesmen of Cumberland there reigned an absolute equality. He had rarely seen, during his schoolday time, the "face of one vested with respect through claims of wealth or blood."

At Cambridge again, he found that strong infusion of democratic principles which from the first had been the mark of university life:

"All stood thus far
Upon equal ground; that we were brothers all
Scholars and gentlemen." (1)

Political problems, at this earlier period were almost indifferent to him; they seemed cold and theoretic; and history was valued only as another form of fiction, a collection of tales that

"made the heart
Beat fast, and filled the fancy with fair forms." (2)

To this natural republicanism he traces his first indifference on the outbreak of the Revolution. It did not seem so wonderful to him as to others, for he had breathed unconsciously

(1) *The Prelude*, IX, ll. 226-229.

(2) *Ibid.*, IX, ll. 206-207.

its air from the beginning. Even afterwards when, having fully shared in the excitement, his mind subsided, he recovered quickly the cooler judgment he had possessed; and for a long time, when other men in England despaired, retained his faith in freedom in spite of the Terror. He had never been swept upwards on the shore so violently as others; he was not swept back so far as others in the reflux of the wave. " We must note that even temporary despair about France did not come upon Wordsworth as the result of the reign of Terror. It is no small proof of his sane calm-mindedness that the judicial murder of the Girondins in whom he trusted did not shake his confidence in the blessings of liberty. He never for a moment ceased to deplore the war between England and France as long as England was, in his eyes, fighting against the independence of France and the freedom of Frenchmen. " (1)

" It was always evident that, through the fiery trial of the Revolution and the Napoleonic tyranny, he kept a saner judgment, as well as a more heroic temper, than any man in this country, probably than any save a very small remnant, in the whole of Europe." (2)

" To himself, at least, Wordsworth appeared a man, made for the Revolution- and it for him. In the Prelude he is most careful to explain to us that the Revolution presented itself to his thinking and feeling as the most natural thing in the world.

' I stood 'mid these concussions unconcerned -
Tranquil almost. ' " (3)

(1) The Statesmanship of Wordsworth, Dacey, p. 49.

(2) Modern Language Review, Vol. xi. pp. 437-438. (C. Vaughan)

(3) Wordsworth by H. W. Garrod, p. 59.

Wordsworth's position on returning to England, and for nearly three years afterwards, was extremely uncomfortable. He had no home and was obliged to live with friends and relatives. He had no profession, and was less inclined than ever to become a clergyman, thus disappointing his family. His principles were abhorrent to them for he was a republican. This was his time of storm and stress. It was largely because of what he underwent between 1792 and 1796 that he became one of the voices of his age.

The Revolution humanized Wordsworth. "The self investigation that Nature had before forced upon him; the sense of the pre-eminent dignity of the human soul that he had learnt from her; and the previous conception he had formed of Nature as One, led him to investigate human nature, to recognize then its pre-eminent dignity, and finally to see mankind as One Being whose life and rights and powers and place in the world, whose origin and whose destiny he was above all bound to study. The revolutionary idea of one universal humanity was germinating in his mind." (1)

While in France he saw

"a people from the depth
Of shameful imbecility uprisen,
Fresh as the morning star. Elate I looked
Upon their virtues; saw, in rudest men,
Self-sacrifice the firmest; generous love,
And continence of mind, and sense of right,
Uppermost in the midst of fiercest strife." (2)

It was this that he carried back to England with him and wrought into his poetry.

(1) Theology in the English Poets, Brooke, p. 146.

(2) The Prelude, IX. ll. 383-389.

He was the first in England to pour around the dalesmen's cottages, and the wandering life of the pedlar, and the unheard struggles of the country and the mountain folk, the consecration and the poet's dream. He was the first who isolated life after life in tender and homely narrative, and made us feel that God was with simple men and women; that in their lives were profound lessons; that the same equal heart beat in the palace and the hamlet hidden in the hills; that all men were brothers in the charities which soothe and bless, in the feelings which nature awakens in their hearts; that a spirit of independence and stern liberty is the birthright and the passion of the poorest shepherd, as well as of the patriots who fill the pages of history.

Anxious to follow from a near standpoint the great drama in which he had been prevented from taking an active part, he chose to remain in London in preference to the country. He felt more in harmony with the general stir of the great city, where public questions were in the air. His soul was full of ardour, his brain of theories. London itself had lately been the scene of a humanitarian campaign, conducted by Clarkson and Wilberforce against the slave trade, but he was little distressed at its unfortunate issue. He was convinced

"That if France prospered, good men would not long pay fruitless worship to humanity, and this most rotten branch of human shame, object, so seemed it, of superfluous pains, would fall together with its parent tree." (1)

He still maintained a calm loyalty to his country. But England, as he now saw it, presented a disheartening spectacle.

(1) The Prelude, x. 255-262.

it was very different from the country he had quitted. At the time of his departure, near the end of 1791, England, though already divided in opinion, might be considered, as a whole, favourably disposed to the French Revolution. Government had remained neutral, or, at any rate, whatever its mistrust of the reformers, had not resorted to persecution. " The body of the nation, always slow to rouse itself, had not declared openly for one side or the other, and indeed was not to be set in motion without some more powerful stimulus than political doctrine, such as threats of war, and appeal to the patriotic war-spirit, or else the evident danger of a social upheaval on English soil. " (1) Now, however, the ranks of those who had at first been ardent supporters of the Revolution, became almost entirely empty. The Whigs who had for sometime been conscious of their mistake, went over in a body to the government. The bloodshed in France, the proclamation of the Republic, and the agitation for universal suffrage in England, had awakened them from their vague dreams of philanthropy.

But England's declaration of war filled him with horror and indignation. As high as was his trust, so low was his despair, when his own country, which he had heard Frenchmen praise for her love of liberty, declared war upon the land of his hopes:

" What, then, were my emotions, when in arms
Britain put forth her free-born strength in league,
Oh, pity and shame! with those confederate Powers!
Not in my single self alone I found,
But in the minds of all ingenuous youth,
Change and subversion from that hour." (2)

(1) The Early Life Of Wordsworth, Legouis, p.223.

(2) The Prelude, ix. 263-268.

Love for France became with Wordsworth a passion. Loyalty to his native land changed into something very like hatred of England as the ally of oppressors. This statement is not too strong;

" I rejoice,

Yea, afterwards - truth most painful to record! -
Exulted, in the triumph of my soul,
When Englishmen by thousands were o'erthrown,
Left without glory on the field, or driven,
Brave hearts! to shameful flight. " (1)

When in church prayers were offered up or praises for English victories, he sat silent, and

" Fed on the day of vengeance yet to come."

Until the moment when, in February 1793, England declared war upon France, Wordsworth regards his life as having been one continuous process of natural development. His words in this connexion are memorable:

" No shock

Given to my moral nature had I known
Down to that very moment: neither lapse
Nor turn of sentiment that might be named
A revolution, save at this one time;
All else was progress on the self-same path
On which, with a diversity of pace,
I had been travelling." (2)

"He was thrown into moral paralysis and practical altruism by his country's active hostility to France" (3) at this time. Was it possible that his country was on the side of oppression against the destroyers of oppression? So deep was the feeling that he, than whom none was a truer patriot, but who yet was more a prophet of humanity than a patriot, wished and prayed that the arms of England might fall lifeless in the battle, and her hosts be scattered by the young republic. He followed the victories

(1) The Prelude, x. 283-288.

(2) Ibid. x. 268-275.

(3) Wordsworth and His Circle, Rennie, p.183.

of the Republic with as great delight as was the sorrow with which he groaned over the insults heaped on liberty by the crew of Robespierre.

Wordsworth was a zealous patriot but it may be well at this stage to point out his strong dislike for the monarchical form of government. He had written to his friend Matthews: " I disapprove of monarchical and aristocratical government, however modified. Hereditary distinctions and privileged orders of every species, I think must necessarily counteract the progress of human improvement. Hence it follows that I am not among the admirers of the British constitution. I conceive that a more excellent system of civil policy might be established among us; yet in my ardour to attain the goal, I do not forget the nature of the ground where the race is to be run----- . I recoil from the very idea of a revolution. I am a determined enemy to every species of violence." (1)

Early in 1793 Wordsworth wrote " A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff on the Extraordinary Avowal of his political Opinions, contained in the Appendix to his late Sermon; by a Republican." It is the best evidence we possess, not only of the way in which the revolutionary movement fascinated Wordsworth, by its promise of "liberty, fraternity, equality, " but also of his insight into the principle which underlay it- a principle to which he clung to the last, even when borne back on the tide of a healthy conservative reaction. He " never wrote anything more creditable to his heart, and, except Burke's ' Reflections ', the literature of the time furnishes no other treatise at once so lively, so acute, and so profound." (2)

(1) Life of Wordsworth, Knight, Vol. I, p. 69.

(2) Wordsworth, His Life, Works, and Influence, Vol. I, p. 221.

In his letter, Wordsworth confesses that he is little touched by the death of Louis XVI, of whose guilt he is fully persuaded. In stern and judicial terms, which contrast boldly with the misplaced pathos of Burke, he says: "At a period big with the fate of the human race I am sorry that you attach so much importance to the personal sufferings of the late royal martyr, and that an anxiety for the issue of the present convulsions should not have prevented you from joining in the idle cry of medish lamentation which has resounded from the Court to the cottage." Arguing on the main subject, the superiority of an equalitarian republic over a monarchy and a system of privilege, he indulges in much strong and sarcastic language. "Relying upon the temper of the times, you have surely thought little argument necessary to contest what few will be hardy enough to support; the strongest of auxiliaries, imprisonment and the pillory, has left your arm little to perform."

In the next place, Wordsworth makes the keen observation that law-makers have unjustly left unprotected that most important part of property, not less real because it has no material existence, that which ought to enable the labourer to provide food for himself and his family. He requires, further, that titles, ribbons, "garters, and other badges of fictitious superiority" should be done away with. He will have no hereditary nobility; for, however great the services a man has rendered, a reward descending to his remotest posterity, who may perhaps prove unworthy of him, is an excessive form of compensation. He is even opposed to granting distinctions for life, since no one can answer for a man's future conduct. Advocating manhood franchise, he declares that "if there is a single man in Great Britain who has no suffrage in the election

of a representative, the will of the society of which he is a member is not generally expressed; he is a Helot in that society." Again, the Bishop has endeavoured to divert public attention from the weak points of the constitution and the misdeeds of those in power. He has sought to throw dust in the nation's eyes instead of attempting to instruct it, and has "aimed an arrow at liberty and philosophy, the eyes of the human race."

Wordsworth admits the horrors perpetrated in the name of Liberty; but "have you so little knowledge of the nature of men as to be ignorant that a time of revolution is not the season of true Liberty? Alas! the obstinacy and perversion of men is such that she is too often obliged to borrow the very arms of despotism to overthrow him," and in order to reign in peace, must establish herself by violence.

"He proceeds to principles and boldly defends the Republic. In adopting it, the French people only exercise 'that right in which liberty essentially resides'. He is surprised that the Bishop should think of 'dictating to the world a servile adoption of the British constitution'. He proceeds to trace the root of human misery, and the evils which desolate States, to the fact that the governors have interests distinct from the governed; and he infers that whatever tends 'to identify the two must also, in the same degree promote the general welfare'. He advocates---- a brief tenure of office on the part of every legislator, because our best guarantee for the virtue of office exists when the private citizen knows that 'tomorrow he may either smart under the oppression, or bless the justice of the law which he has enacted today.' " (1)

(1) Life of Wordsworth, Knight, Vol. I, p. 72.

"He objects to regal government, from its instability; and boldly affirms that from the 'eternal nature of man' the office of King is a trial to which human virtue is not equal; and while admitting that the end of government cannot be secured without some members of society commanding, and others obeying, he thinks that nothing will check the abuses of power so much, as when 'the person in whom authority has been lodged occasionally descends to the level of private citizen;' " (1)

"There were two streams of tendency flowing side by side and at work together in that wondrous movement of 1792, the one a purely democratic movement, that turned for support to the primal nature and personal 'rights of man' and could therefore ally itself easily with the stream of as pure and thorough conservatism as the world has ever known. The other was a spirit of reactionary uprising against order, of blind wrath and antagonism to those fundamental differences in humanity which had by time been evolved, and which are at all times radical and inevitable. With the former Wordsworth had the fullest sympathy; with the latter he had none. But when he tried to vindicate the Revolution in France by the arguments advanced in this letter, he was drawn for a time, unconsciously aside, by the magnetic spell of a tendency which he at heart abjured." (2)

It was within a few days of the publication of Bishop Watson's tract that the long-dreaded break took place between England and France. From that day forward a cloud obscured Wordsworth's natural cheerfulness. At first nothing could restore it, neither travel, of which he was so fond, nor the consolations of poetry. Even in 1804, he had not as yet forgiven the ministry of Pitt;

(1) Life of Wordsworth, Knight, p. 73. (Vol. I.)

(2) Life of Wordsworth, Knight, Vol. I, p. 74.

"Oh! much have they to account for, who could tear,
By violence, at one decisive rent,
From the best youth in England their dear pride,
Their joy, in England; this, too, at a time
In which worst losses easily might wear
The best of names, when patriotic love
Did of itself in modesty give way,
Like the Precursor when the Deity
Is come whose harbinger he was; a time
In which apostasy from ancient faith
Seemed but conversion to a higher creed;
Withal a season dangerous and wild,
A time when sage Experience would have snatched
Flowers out of any hedge-row to compose
A chaplet in contempt of his grey locks." (1)

The poet set out with a friend in the summer of 1793 on a tour through the south of England, and spent a whole month of "calm and glassy days" in the delightful isle of Wight. At any other time his imagination would have been charmed by the beauty of this resort; but he never heard the sunset cannon from the English fleet, as he watched it riding in the Solent, ere it went to war.

"Without a spirit ever cast by dark
Imaginations, sense of woes to come,
Sorrow for human kind, and pain of heart. " (2)

"In Wordsworth's soul the patriot of England and the patriot of humanity's cause fought for the supremacy; there was a spiritual duel, but, in the end, the sympathy for the great experiment was triumphant." (3) The poet suffered a shock that threw him out of the pale of love, and soured and corrupted his feelings upwards to the source.

As news came from France, bad enough in itself, and always rendered more fearful in the telling, his spirits drooped, and he was obliged to use all his philosophy to maintain the wider outlook.

(1) The Prelude, x, 300-314.

(2) Ibid., x, 328-330.

(3) The French Revolution and the English Poets,

The awful months of the Terror brought almost nothing but disheartening stories. After the expulsion of his friends, the Girondists, from the Convention, accounts of their deaths, one by one, reached him either through the newspapers or through private letters; and few, if any, of them renounced their faith in republican principles. Here was some consolation.

Deep as was his horror for the fanatics in Paris, he hated bitterly the foreign enemies of France:

"It was a lamentable time for man,
Whether a hope had e'er been his or not;
A woeful time for them whose hopes survive
The shock; most woeful for those few who still
Were flattered, and had trust in human kind;
They had the deepest feeling of the grief.
Meanwhile the invaders fared as they deserved:
The Herculean Commonwealth had put forth her arms,
And throttled with an infant godhead's might
The snakes about her cradle; that was well,
And as it should be; yet no cure for them
Whose souls were sick with pain of what would be
Hereafter brought in charge against mankind." (1)

It is worthwhile to observe that his satisfaction in the defeat of the Allies continued at least so late as 1805, when the tenth book of the Prelude was written, and that he never afterwards saw fit to alter these words.

Nor did he ever cast his eyes on France without misery; misery because God seemed to have forgotten Man, because liberty seemed to have forgotten herself and to wear the robes of tyranny, because the deeds then done would be brought in charge against her name. In the midst of that domestic carnage that filled the whole year with feast days,

"amid the depth
Of these enormities, even thinking minds
Forgot that such a sound was ever heard
As Liberty upon earth: yet all beneath

(1) The Prelude, x, 385-397.

Her innocent authority was wrought,
Nor could have been, without her blessed name."(1)

For years his dreams were haunted by the ghastly visions of that time; he saw dungeons, the executions, the unjust tribunals, and in sleep he seemed to plead in long orations before their judges,

"with a voice
Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense,
Death-like, of treacherous desertion, felt
In the last place of refuge- my own soul." (2)

Yet, as he looked deeper- and that he could do this marks the temperate courage of Wordsworth as a thinker, and the mastery of his intellectual will over mere emotion- he saw no reason to despair of Man. He looked again, and saw another star of hope in the self-sacrifice and virtues of those who suffered. He saw in a hundred instances that God had not forsaken human nature. Green spots appeared in the desert, bright islands of "fortitude, and energy, and love," of honour, faith, and sanctity:

"And as the desert hath green spots, the sea
Small islands scattered amid stormy waves,
So that disastrous period did not want
Bright sprinklings of all human excellence,
To which the silver wands of saints in Heaven
Might point with rapturous joy."(3)

Then came to support his hope the news that Robespierre was dead. He heard it as he crossed the estuary of the Leven, and hope revived within him, more than hope--enthusiasm:

"Great was my transport, deep my gratitude
To everlasting Justice, by this fiat
Made manifest. 'Come now, ye golden times,'
Said I forth-pouring on those open sands
A hymn of triumph: 'as the morning comes
From out the bosom of the night, come ye:
Thus far our trust is verified; behold!
They who with clumsy desperation brought
A river of Blood, and preached that nothing else

(1) The Prelude, x, 375-381.

(2) Ibid., x, 412-415.

(3) Ibid., x, 485-490.

Could cleanse the Augean stable, by the might
Of their own helper have been swept away;
Their madness stands declared and visible;
Elsewhere will safety now be sought, and earth
March firmly towards righteousness at peace." -
Then schemes I framed more calmly, when and how
The madding factions might be tranquillised,
And now through hardship manifold and long
The glorious renovation would proceed.
Thus interrupted by uneasy bursts
Of exultation, I pursued my way
Along that very shore which I had skimmed
In former days." (1)

But he was still doomed to disappointment. Preserving amid
the weakness of the new government his trust in the people, he
found it slowly ebb away; and when Frenchmen changed "the war of
self-defence for one of conquest, and lost sight of all they
struggled for"; when finally, to close her gains, a Pope "was
summoned in to crown an Emperor ", when he saw a people that once
looked to Heaven for manna,

"take a lesson from the dog
Returning to his vomit."

then the crash was too great; he lost faith for a time in God,
in moral right; and he lost his true love of Nature, his true
love of man, or rather he lost the true foundations on which they
were based.

"Having an inadequate perception of the necessity of divine
grace, he placed his hopes where they could not stand; and did not
place them where if placed, they could not fall. He sought for ideal
perfectibility where he could not but meet with real frailty, and
did not look for peace where alone it could be found. Hence his
mind ^{was} ill at ease. " (2)

"He had believed that a benignant spirit was abroad; and
the September massacres were the comment of destiny on that belief.

(1) The Prelude, x, 576-597.

(2) Memoirs of Wordsworth, C. Wordsworth, Vol. 1, p 89.

He expected to see the power of the one or few abolished; and Napoleon arose to mock his expectations. He believed that in a little time the extreme of poverty would be found no more; and some ten years later he met the leech-gatherer at Grasmere. He had far to travel in those ten years; from the fallacious vanities of the reformer and the large, easy hopes of the philanthropist to the humility of the mind that was to seek comfort for itself from the old man on the moor. The length of the journey is a measure of Wordsworth's spiritual progress. " (1)

But the poet had "left France with two convictions, neither of which did he ever in substance abandon. The one was that France had a right, as had every other independent nation, to choose for herself her own form of government; the other was that England, the land of freedom, had no right whatever to invade the soil of France as the ally of kings who intended to force upon her a government which she detested, and hoped to wrest from her some part of her territory. " (2)

(1) Wordsworth, Walter Raleigh, p.53.

(2) The Statesmanship of Wordsworth, Dicey, p.52.

CHAPTER III
MORAL CRISIS

It was in the Spring of 1796 that Bonaparte addressed to the French soldiers in Italy his famous exhortations to pillage. Though Wordsworth could not hold the Revolution and the whole French nation responsible for the crimes of one man, it seems nevertheless to have been at this time that he withdrew from all active political strife:

"But now become oppressors in their turn
Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defense
For one of conquest, losing sight of all
Which they had struggled for; up mounted now
Openly in the eye of earth and heaven
The scale of liberty. I read her doom
With anger vexed, with disappointment sore,
But not dismayed, not taking to the shame
Of a false prophet," (1)

He made no further attempt to write in the newspapers and abjured personal satire. Sometime ere this, moreover, his dreams of universal happiness, which could find no promise of fulfilment in the world of present reality, nor any safe retreat either in France or in England, had taken refuge in the free land of thought and meditation.

These years of perplexity and disappointment, following on a season of overstrain and violent hopes, were the sharpest trial through which Wordsworth ever passed. He had been away from Cambridge more than four years; he had had his stimulating and disturbing time in France; he was face to face with the imperious necessities of bread and butter. It would have been natural for him to take Orders, but he did not hear the call, without which he was too conscientious to dare to take the step. In fact, in those days, though far from the Unitarianism of Coleridge, the Deism, or whatever it may have been, of Southey, though he never probably would have been turned

(1) The Prelude, xi, 206-214.

into a Pantisocrat, Wordsworth was much of a rebel; he was ashamed of his country, or at least of the government of it; he felt as if his spiritual beliefs were built on the sand. " Part of the skepticism that was numbing him came, not from any infections of French atheism but from loss of faith in the revolutionary movement." (I)

The violence of the shock he suffered may be judged from this, that now for a time he sought refuge in the arid rationalism of the day, best exemplified in England by the newly published work of William Godwin. The system that makes the gymnastic Reason sole governor of human life, and submits, or attempts to submit, to its impartial control all social and personal relations and affections, was congenial to many barren, dexterous little minds, who found in it, indeed, the basis of their sympathy with the Revolution. Wordsworth's sympathy with the Revolution had a widely different origin, and it was only by stress of weather, and from the dire need of reinforcements for his faith, that he was driven into that harbour. He had trusted to the event to vindicate his belief in the inherent goodness and purity of human nature, and the event failed him. The feelings and passions of men had played him false, but the doctrine might yet be saved if those feelings and passions could only be regarded as "infirmities of nature, time, and place," to be shaken off by a regenerative humanity.

The French proclamation of liberty as a pure, unselfish passion was proved a mere dream. Wordsworth in the light of facts saw himself a false prophet. His sympathies, his emotional enthusiasm for the vision of the promise failed, had betrayed him. He was the dupe of his feelings, and of demagogues. How did it happen? This is the question he now set himself to answer. He began to scrutinize, to

study the philosophy of the movement, to justify himself by reason. The emotional enthusiasm left him; questionings of the intellect took its place:

"And thus, in heat
Of contest, did opinions every day
Grow into consequence, till round my mind
They clung, as if they were its life-- nay, more
The very being of the immortal soul." (1)

The poet fell into a pitiable plight; sorrow, disappointment, vexation, confusion of the judgment, loss of hope-- these took the place of the faith and zeal for the Revolution..

"This was the time when, all things tending fast
To depravation, speculative schemes--
That promised to abstract the hopes of Man
Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth
Forever in a purer element--
Found ready welcome. Tempting region that
For Zeal to enter and refresh herself,
Where passions had the privilege to work,
And never hear the sound of their own names.
But, speaking more in charity, the dream
Flattered the young, pleased with extremes, nor least
With that which makes our reason's naked self
The object of its fervour. What delight!
How glorious! in self-knowledge and self-rule,
To look through all the frailties of the world,
And, with a resolute mastery shaking off
Infirmities of nature, time, and place,
Build social upon personal liberty,
Which, to the blind restraints of general laws
Superior, magisterially adopts
One guide, the light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent intellect." (2)

"At last Wordsworth, who previously had discussed social and philosophical problems only in a desultory way, who previously had lived his intensest life in an emotional exhilaration, had come down to the bed-rock level of the rationalists." (3)

But to take refuge in pure reason is not always a safe course for certain minds to pursue. The rationalistic spirit lives largely

(1) The prelude, XI, 218, 222.

(2) Ibid, xi, 223-244.

(3) The French Revolution and the English Poets, Hancock,
P.137.

by proof, which is often far from possible, and then skepticism is likely to follow. Barrenness, and often worse, is the outcome. It proved to be so in Wordsworth's case. He had forsaken the light by which his sentiments had been

" by faith maintained
Of inward consciousness, and hope that laid
Her hand upon the object." (1)

He wanted a safer guide, and finding tradition and ancient tenets insufficient, he finally accepted pure reason, free from instinct, passion, and sentiment with the melancholy result that he was led into utter darkness. All things-- "all precepts, judgments, maxims, creeds"-- were dragged to the bar of Reason. They were treated like culprits.

"It is well to note that it was moral skepticism and despair which were the outcome of his reflective thinking-- the most serious kind of doubt and dejection that can lay hold upon the human spirit, because of the vital relation which morality sustains to life. Morality is the fact of supreme worth for human nature; it, above all things, unifies, dignifies, and exalts the human soul-----As a consequence, moral scepticism was the outcome." (2)

"This was the crisis of that strong disease
This the soul's last and lowest ebb; I drooped,
Deeming our blessed reason of least use
Where wanted most: 'The lordly attributes
Of will and choice,' I bitterly exclaimed,
'What are they but a mockery of a Being
Who hath in no concerns of his a test
Of good and evil; knows not what to fear
Or hope for, what to covet or to shun;
And who, if those could be discerned, would yet
Be little profited, would see, and ask
Where is the obligation to enforce?
And, to acknowledged law rebellious, still,
As selfish passion urged, would act amiss;
The dupe of folly, or the slave of crime.' " (3)

(1) The Prelude, xi, 201-203.

(2) Wordsworth, Poet of Nature and Poet of Man, Sneath, p. 61.

(3) The Prelude, xi, 306-320.

Moreover, Wordsworth's mind had degenerated into a logic-machine. It could

"unsoul
As readily by syllogistic words
Those mysteries of being which have made,
And shall continue evermore to make,
Of the whole human race on brotherhood." (1)

Nature, his early love, who ministered to him in his childhood and youth; who, by her visitations warned, counseled, and sustained him; who refreshed him with her beauty, and gave him vision and insight-- she, too, is now viewed with a critical eye." "He looks at her with sense apart from soul. He sees her outward aspect, but fails to see into her inner life. The beautiful vision is gone. Imagination seems dead, and sensibility dulled. Nature is robbed of her spiritual charm and power. For him she no longer has a heart and utters no consoling message; she no longer ministers through beauty and aesthetic joy. The mystic sense of kinship has vanished. He has unsouled her, and stands, a spiritual orphan, in the midst of a dead universe." (2)

The result of this scanning "the visible Universe" is manifest in his address to the Soul of Nature:

"O Soul of Nature! excellent and fair!
That didst rejoice with me, with whom I, too,
Rejoiced through early youth, before the winds
And roaring waters, and in lights and shades
That marched and countermarched about the hills
In glorious apparition, Powers on whom
I daily waited, now all eye and now
All ear; but never long without the heart
Employed, and man's unfolding intellect:
O soul of Nature! that, by laws divine
Sustained and governed, still dost overflow
With an impassioned life, what feeble ones
Walk on this earth! how feeble have I been
When thou wert in thy strength! Nor this through stroke

(1) The Prelude, xii, 83-87.

(2) Wordsworth, Poet of Nature and Poet of Man, Sneath, p. 64.

Of human suffering, such as justifies
Remlessness and inaptitude of mind,
But through presumption; even in pleasure pleased
Unworthily, disliking here, and there
Liking; by rules of mimic art transferred
To things above all art; but more,-- for this,
Although a strong infection of the age,
Was never much my habit-- giving way
To a comparison of scene with scene,
Bent overmuch on superficial things,
Pampering myself with meagre novelties
Of colour and proportion; to the moods
Of time and season, to the moral power,
The affections and the spirit of the place,
Insensible." (1)

The poet thus contrasts his relations to Nature at this time with those of former years:

"What wonder, then, if, to a mind so far
Perverted even the visible universe
Fell under the dominion of a taste
Less spiritual, with microscopic view
Was scanned, as I had scanned the moral world?" (2)

The guide, unmentioned by Wordsworth, whom he was following even when he supposed himself most thoroughly emancipated, was William Godwin, whose "Political Justice" appeared in 1793. "In 1792, Wordsworth saw everything in the French Revolution; in 1795, he tended to see everything in Godwin. He was, in fact in 1795 in revolt against the French Revolution, and was enrolling himself betimes as the disciple of an extreme individualism." (3)

In 1793 Wordsworth was living in London and in touch with the Godwin coterie. Prominent among the set was Joseph Fawcett, one of Godwin's collaborators. Wordsworth followed his sermons in the old Jewry and became a convert to necessitarianism. "Throw away your books on chemistry," he said to a student, "and study the doctrine of Godwin on necessity."

There is more definite evidence in the Prelude that Godwin's

(1) The Prelude, xii, 93-121.

(2) Ibid., xii, 88-92.

(3) Wordsworth by H.W. Garrod, p. 41.

book was uppermost in the poet's mind at the critical moment of his speculations. In this autobiography he speaks of the abstract system, which after the failure of his hopes, found ready welcome; for it built new hopes for the future. And in The Borderers his ethical code is that of Godwin, as summed up in the following lines:

"They who would be just must seek the rule
By diving for it into their own bosoms.
Today you have thrown off a tyranny
That lives but in the torpid sequecence
Of our emasculated souls, the tyranny
Of the world's masters, with the musty rules
By which they uphold their craft from age to age:
You have obeyed the only law that sense
Submits to recognize; the immediate law,
From the clear light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent intellect." (1)

There is so little which Reason, divested of all emotional or instinctive supports, is able to prove to our satisfaction that a skeptical aridity is likely to take possession of the soul. It was thus with Wordsworth; he was driven to a perpetual questioning of all beliefs and analysis of all motives,--

"Till, demanding formal proof,
And seeking it in everything, I lost
All feeling of conviction; and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
Yielded up moral questions in despair." (2)

Godwin did not write, as Paine did, for the people but for the select and thoughtful few. He combined in one clear and rigid system all the scattered revolutionary ideas contained in the philosophical works of the period. His principal teacher was Rousseau, who had perceived two important facts--that the imperfections of governments were the only permanent source of the vices of mankind, and, what was a more profound reflection, that a government, however reformed, is almost incapable of doing good." (3)

(1) The Borderers, II, 1496-1506.

(2) The Prelude, xi, 301-305.

(3) The Early Life of Wordsworth, Legouis, p. 260.

Man should therefore not only cease to conform to the traditional rules of morality, but should also no longer make use of a ready made code, even of his own manufacture.

The dreadful consequences of this doctrine of moral anarchy were not at first apparent to Godwin and his readers. The impassive philosopher was genuinely convinced that all men were made in his own image, and his illusion acquired credit from the impressive sobriety of his logic. He himself appears to be a sage entirely free from passion, who, with truth as his only guide, and the good as his only aim, strove to reform the world from the seclusion of his study. The Prophet of individualism diffused a kind of sanctity around him. The stoicism which he maintained himself, and advised others to imitate; the contempt he professed for vulgar pleasures, for suffering, moral or physical, for sickness and for calumny; and also his superiority to all the narrow and trifling interests of humanity, invested his system with a lofty dignity which recommended it to youthful souls in search of an ideal.

"If I were to speak my own mind, I should be inclined to say of Godwin----- that he was 'not a man but a disease'. Godwin is a disease of English poetry for thirty years; from 1793, when Political Justice appeared, until 1822.(1)

But for his own explicit statement, it would be difficult to believe that a scheme of thought like that of the Political Justice could ever have established an ascendancy over Wordsworth's mind. In the Prelude he shows himself well aware of the weaknesses of a system which gave license to fanatic zeal under the guise of sober reason, and which flattered youthful pride of intellect by allowing it to hold itself superior to the shackles of custom and the claims of natural feeling. Moreover, in 1795, when he planned the tragedy

(1) Wordsworth by H. W. Garrod, p.67.

of the Borderers he exhibited in his philanthropic villain, Oswald, all the practical dangers of the creed.

The conclusion of the matter was that Wordsworth was cast on the shallows of agnosticism. He paid unrestricting homage to the goddess of Reason, expecting in return a release from his perplexities. He was, on the contrary, bereft of faith, bereft of that spiritual view of life, of that clairvoyant, mystical vision, which made him an original poet. The rationalizing process took away his belief in his mind as a thing in itself, and as a consequence, the hope of immortality. The feeling that his own mind was a creative power, that of itself it added to the inner experience, had been a cardinal point in his faith. But in the revolutionary philosophy the mind shrivels up into nothingness, and Wordsworth, consistent with the principles of the rationalists, demands that it "establish in plain day its titles and its honours. "

"A nature like Wordsworth's, rooted in personal memories and local pieties, slow of growth and sensitive in every fibre of its affections, could not without mortal violence be reduced to a geometric pattern, or transplanted to a frozen climate." (1)

Before the end of 1794, Wordsworth completed his poem entitled Guilt and Sorrow, a story of poverty, crime, and repentance, told in sixty-four Spenserian stanzas. It was suggested by the poet's observation of the destitution and suffering among the English humbler classes, produced by a half-century of almost continuous war. "It is a distinctively morbid attack upon the whole social order, produced under the influence of Godwinism. It is morbid in its execution, morbid even where real and lively in detail. In its fundamental conception I take it to be, not only unreal, but immoral.

(1) Wordsworth, Raleigh, p.59.

It is merely not true. If great crimes and great virtues proceed from one source, if the good man is even more liable than the bad man to bad actions and bad passions, then are we, of all creatures not only the most miserable, but the most uninteresting." (1)

The Borderers was begun in the autumn of 1795, when the poet was settled in Dorset. "Mr. Swinburne has spoken of the plot of this tragedy as characterized by a 'morbid and monstrous extravagance of horrible impossibilities.' Beyond 'the earliest and most frantic romances of Eugene Sue, it is a product of moral disease.' " (2)

In spite of its imperfection this poem is interesting as showing the matters with ^{which} the author's mind was preoccupied, and as sounding, with no less psychological boldness than lack of dramatic skill, the blackest depths of villainy. Just as it has rendered Oswald, the trader, indifferent to opinion, thought has gradually destroyed within him all semblance of emotion:

"Remorse--
It cannot live with thought; think on, think on,
And it will die." (3)

Nor does pity fare any better under the assault of his reasoning:

"Benevolence, that has not heart to use
The wholesome ministry of pain and evil,
Becomes at last weak and contemptible." (4)

Wordsworth, who had once desired to contend against evil, could now say, with Marmaduke,

"We look
But at the surfaces of things; we hear
Of towns in flames, fields ravaged, young and old
Driven out in troops to want and nakedness;
Then grasp our swords and rush upon a cure
That flatters us, because it asks not thought:

- (1) Wordsworth, H.W. Garrod, p. 86.
- (2) Ibid., p. 91.
- (3) The Borderers, ll. 1570-1572.
- (4) Ibid., ll. 618-620.

The deeper malady is better hid;
The world is poisoned at the heart." (1)

And yet, at the very time when he was writing The Borderers, Wordsworth was on the brink of recovery. He was in the midst of the conditions necessary to it. All of which were co-operating to restore his health of mind. It must also be remembered that what he sympathised with-- while in France and on his return-- was rather the wave of national enthusiasm, the glad uprise of the suppressed instinct of freedom, and its outcome,

"Joy in widest commonalty spread,"

than any intellectual doctrine as to "the rights of man"; the formulated creed of the democracy.

"The truth is, that Wordsworth became a radical at the most susceptible age, and ceased to be one at the age when conviction usually takes deepest root. The consequence is that, in his maturer poems, we have such a sympathy with democratic aspirations, as every wise conservative will endorse, tempered by such an aversion to its revolutionary outcome as every wise liberal will hail." (2) One of the ideas with which his later poems are full is that the loftiest good alike to the individual and the race, is being constantly developed out of the most terrible disasters, by a process hidden to our eyes, yet verified both in personal and in national experience.

We shall see as we proceed how a deepening insight into the lives of the peasantry around him,-- the happiness and virtue of simple Cumbrian homes,--- restored to the poet a serener confidence in human nature, amid all the shame and downfall of such hopes in France. And that still profounder loss of delight in Nature herself,--

(1) The Borderers, ll. 1039-1046.

(2) Life of Wordsworth, Knight, Vol. I, p. 77.

that viewing of all things "in disconnection dull and spiritless," which, as it has been well said, is the truest definition of Atheism, -- this dark pathway also was not without its outlet into the day.

CHAPTER IV
RESTORATION

From childhood Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy had been very close in sympathy and interests. Together they roamed the fields, hills, and mountains of their native region. Endowed with unusual perceptive powers, imagination, and poetic feeling, both were keenly alive to the natural beauty of their surroundings. And when the force of circumstances--Wordsworth's school and university life, his travels and wanderings--interrupted this pleasant companionship, their correspondence breathed tender and sweet affection. Now, when he was lost in the darkness of an apparently hopeless skepticism, one of the greatest of all her valuable services to him was rendered. She it was who, understanding him better, in some respects, than he understood himself, called him away from the things disturbing his peace; who maintained for him "a saving intercourse" with his true self; who, in the hour of deepest gloom, whispered that brightness would come again.

It was Dorothy's presence, more than anything else, which tended to divert the young disciple of Godwin in the hours of his sickness and to lead him back to the object of his early worship. And how warm was Wordsworth's gratitude when he was able to recognize the full value of this favour!

"Then it was,
Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good!--
That the beloved Sister in whose sight
Those days were passed, now speaking in a voice
Of sudden admonition--like a brook
That did but cross a lonely road, and now
Is seen, heard, felt, and caught at every turn,
Companion never lost through many a league--
Maintained for me a saving intercourse
With my true self; for, though bedimmed and changed
Much, as it seemed, I was no further changed
Than as a clouded and a waning moon:
She whispered still that brightness would return,
She, in the midst of all preserved me still
A Poet, made me seek beneath that name,
And that alone, my office upon earth." (1)

Old trains of feeling and old memories, by her aid, were recaptured; by infection from her he caught zest in the little observations, and pleasures, and solitudes of daily existence. The outer world re-asserted itself, and the things that he had loved in childhood came back cool and sweet upon his senses. This restoration of the life of the senses after the dark tyranny of a life of abstract thought is the turning point in Wordsworth's career.

He turned his back first of all, upon the goddess of Reason. Dorothy, the presiding genius, the physician of his ills, took him away from the logical debates of the city; she ^{led} ~~led~~ him once more into the open fields; she guided him back into the experiences of his youth. Once more amid the inspirations of his early years the poet saw how he had been the dupe of his inexperience and enthusiasm; for, entrusting himself to barren reason, in becoming a worshipper of Baal, the sensational philosophy, he had alienated himself from the true sources of power and truth. If I despair not, he says, but retain a more than Roman confidence,

"The gift is yours,
Ye winds and sounding cataracts, 'tis yours,
Ye mountains, thine, O Nature."

And, in a beautiful passage towards the end of the Prelude where he looks back on his own inward disappointment, addressing the breezes, the brooks, the waves, and the woods, he says:

"Oh! that I had a music and a voice
Harmonious as your own, that I might tell
What ye have done for me." (1)

The poet's account of the marvellous change that finally took place is both interesting and instructive. "Long time", he says,

"in search of knowledge did I range
The field of human life, in heart and mind
Benighted; but the dawn beginning now

(1) The Prelude, XII, 29-31.

To re-appear, 'twas proved that not in vain
 I had been taught to reverence a Power
 That is the visible quality and shape
 And image of right reason; that matures
 Her processes by steadfast laws; gives birth
 To no impatient or fallacious hopes,
 No heat of passion or excessive zeal,
 No vain conceits; provokes to no quick turns
 Of self-applauding intellect; but trains
 To meekness, and exalts by humble faith;
 Holds up before the mind intoxicated
 With present objects, and the busy dance
 Of things that pass away, a temperate show
 Of objects that endure; and by this course
 Disposes her, when over-fondly set
 On throwing off incumbrances, to seek
 In man, and in the frame of social life,
 What'er there is desirable and good
 Of kindred permanence, unchanged in form
 And function, or, through strict vicissitude
 Of life and death, revolving.
 Were re-established now these watchful thoughts
 Which, seeing little worthy or sublime
 In what the Historian's pen so much delights
 To blazon--power and energy detached
 From moral purpose--early tutored me
 To look with feelings of fraternal love
 Upon the unassuming things that hold
 A silent station in this beautiful world." (1)

Turn to his confessional poem, the very epitome of his life
 and thought, the lines written above Tintern Abbey. This is the
 first poem significant of his new view of life, that was written
 after the recovery of his mind from its mental disease. Five years
 have passed since the former visit to the abbey; he finds himself
 changed somewhat; the vague experience of youth has become more
 clearly defined; now, too, with the added years, he can phrase his
 feelings. Now, looking upon Nature, he feels

"A presense that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,

(1) The Prelude, xiii, 16-47.

And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,--both what they half-create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being." (1)

We may search Wordsworth's entire body of verse without finding a better expression of the fundamentals of his faith than is found in this poem. Nature so ministers to the mind through her beauty, through the knowledge she imparts, and the thoughts she inspires, through her sorrows and joys, that all the evil men can do, and all the dullness and "dreary intercourse of daily life", can neither overcome us, nor disturb our faith in a beneficent order of things.

"And this prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy; for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings." (2)

"Here is a creed full of moral and spiritual elevation, and Wordsworth seems to believe it with his whole mind and heart. He smites the hard rock in the wilderness of human life, and from it flows a veritable stream of living water, full of healing for human souls. Nowhere in literature can be found a more refined Spiritualism, and a more indomitable Optimism, than is here expressed." (3)

(1) Lines written above Tintern Abbey, 94-111.

(2) Ibid., 121-134.

(3) Wordsworth, Poet of Nature and Poet of Man, Seventh, p.134.

"Wordsworth seems to conceive his restoration as consisting mainly in a free re-surrender to natural influences: in the un-resisting re-immersion in Nature of a self hardened by a four years' sophistication. The system of Godwin had left no room in the world for sense, passion, will, imagination, sympathy, habit. From this self-defeating extreme of Rationalism Wordsworth seems to recede, not by any logical process, nor by gradations, but suddenly; by ^arush of conflicting feeling, by the unpredictable melting of a proud and prodigal temperament. With never a word, he lays his head upon the lap of Nature. A mysterious resurgence of the primeval carries him from deep unto deep? (1)

In his despondency at the ill consequences of the French Revolution, Wordsworth had turned away from the works of Man to seek and find comfort in the works of Nature. And Nature led him back with more composed and surer feelings to consider man once more--not Man of the politicians, the statistes, and the moralists, but the individual man, "the man whom we behold with our own eyes? Sanguine schemes, ambitious projects for the regeneration of mankind, pleased him less; the wild dream of promise which had flown before him in the Revolution, "retired into its due proportion." "I sought", he says,--

"For present good in life's familiar face
And built thereon my hopes of good to come."

He wondered why so few among mankind-- one in ten thousand-- exhibit mental power and genuine virtue. The men who pass their lives under a weight of labour and hardship, battling for a bare subsistence, would be able, he thought, to tell him more than all the theorists and economists. He took to the road:

"Therefore did I turn
To you, ye pathways and ye lonely roads;

(1) Wordsworth, H. W. Garrod, p. 104.

Sought you enriched with everything I prized,
With human kindnesses and simple joys." (1)

There he learnt the wisdom of the poet, the wisdom to feel deeply and to know things and men through love; healing and repose came to his wounded heart as he wandered over the moors, or sat on the cottage bench, or by the well-spring, and talked with all he met. This was his school; it was here he read the passions of mankind, and the depths of the human heart, and heard

"From mouths of men obscure and lowly, truths
Replete with honour; sounds in unison
With loftiest promises of good and fair." (2)

"Among the vagrants and beggars and pensioners who were his chosen subjects he found those qualities which gave Rome her empire in the ancient world, and those also which, in the mediæval world, drew whole peoples on pilgrimage." (3)

He sketches such a life in the character of the Pedlar, in the Excursion, and he drew it from himself. It was the life he would have chosen, and perhaps no words can describe better than the following--a few lines being excepted--the character of Wordsworth at this time:

"He wandered far; much did he see of men,
Their manners, their enjoyments, and pursuits,
Their passions and their feelings; chiefly those
Essential and eternal in the heart,
That 'mid the simpler forms of rural life,
Exist more simple in their elements,
And speak a plainer language. In the woods,
A lone enthusiast, and among the fields,
Itinerant in this labour, he had passed
The better portion of his time; and there
Spontaneously had his affections thriven
Amid the bounties of the year, the peace
And liberty of nature; there he kept
In solitude and solitary thought
His mind in a just equilibrium of love.

(1) The Prelude, xiii, 116-119.

(2) Ibid., xiii, 163-165.

(3) Wordsworth, Raleigh, p. 178.

Serene it was, unclouded by the cares
Of ordinary life; unvexed, unwarped
By partial bondage. In his steady course,
No pitiless revolutions had he felt,
No wild varieties of joy and grief.
Unoccupied by sorrow of its own,
His heart lay open; and, by nature tuned
And constant disposition of his thoughts
To sympathy with man, he was alive
To all that was enjoyed where'er he went,
And all that was endured; for, in himself
Happy, and quiet in his cheerfulness,
He had no painful pressure from without
That made him turn aside from wretchedness
With coward fears. He could afford to suffer
With those whom he saw suffer. Hence it came
That in our best experience he was rich
And in the wisdom of our daily life." (1)

"There are two principal characters in the Excursion, the Solitary and the Wanderer. These two represent the Wordsworth of the Revolution's making, and the Wordsworth of Nature's wisdom and mould. The Solitary is lost in the spiritual gloom of the woods, the Wanderer has found his way out and has passed into the light. In these two characters the two aspects of the post-revolutionary moods confront each other. The discourses of the Wanderer to the Solitary constitute Wordsworth's medical prescription for the recovery of spiritual health." (2) Having restored confidence in the spiritual and transcendent truths, the poet in the person of the Wanderer, prescribes for the restoration of confidence in man. He knows, first of all, how intimately the health and vigour of the mind depend upon the condition of the body. The Wanderer advises the Solitary first of all to leave his brooding inaction, to join with the forces of Nature in a life of healthy action, to rise with the lark, to climb the mountain, to chase the wild animals, and returning "sink at evening into sound repose."

As for social man the Solitary had to learn that mere Sufferance for one's fellows is not sufficient. It is necessary to live

(1) The Excursion, Bk. I, P. 420. (*Works of Wordsworth*, MacMillan '913)

(2) The French Revolution and the English Poets, Hancock, p. 149.

in society, full of the spirit of love. There is nothing that fosters this love so much as a quiet communion with Nature and observation of her life:

"For, the Man--
Who, in this spirit, communes with the form
Of nature, who with understanding heart
Both knows and loves such objects as excite
No morbid passions, no disquietude,
No vengeance, and no hatred--needs must feel
The joy of that pure principle of love
So deeply, that, unsatisfied with aught
Less pure and exquisite, he cannot choose
But seek for objects of a kindred love
In fellow-natures and a kindred joy." (1)

So for Wordsworth, Nature is first and last. At first she was a boyish passion, a first love which obscured human relations, but in the end she is an influence which fosters them. "Briefly, 'The Excursion' reveals the poet of Man, with a heart full of love for him, and a mind solicitous for his welfare. It reveals, also, that this poet sees Man at his best among the unconventionalized rural folk who occupy the modest and obscure stations of human life." (2)

When his Lyrical Ballads were derided as trivial and vulgar, Wordsworth wrote for the second edition that famous Preface which contains his own explanation and defense both of his subjects and his manner. He says, "Rumble and rustic life was usually chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from these elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and lastly,

(1) The Excursion, V, Works of Wordsworth, 1913 edition, p. 467
(2) Wordsworth, *Sonnet*, p. 293.

because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." (1)

Thus the child and the peasant became to Wordsworth the types of a wisdom higher than that of the world. He even goes further. He is prepared to find insight and inspiration in the mad, the crazed, and the idiotic. We are apt to attribute this penchant in him for Bedlamites, imbeciles, and 'simples' to mere childish whim. Yet, however perverse it may be, it is in fact a most solid part of his theory of life and of the mind and of truth.

All the doctrines of the French Revolution are here implicit: its demand for the free development, in the individual, of nature; its demand for political simplification; its war upon custom; its attack upon class distinctions; its conception of a kingdom of heaven, here and now, for those who can exchange the prejudices of grown men for the faith of little children.

This power to find high suggestion in humble circumstance is nowhere better shown than in the poem called Resolution and Independence, or The Leech Gatherer. It is only the story of his accidental meeting with a feeble old man who was poking about for leeches in the muddy pools; yet the poem Wordsworth made of it will take rank with the noblest verse of the century, and the old beggar who gathered the leeches is one of the august figures in the gallery of our imagination.

Nothing in the poem is pure invention. Dorothy in her Journal describes in detail the appearance and speech of the old man as she and William met him one day in September of 1800. At a particular time, when the poet was entirely sunk in morbid brooding,-

"Beside a pool bare to the eyes of heaven
I saw a Man before me unawares;
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs."

To his startled imagination there seemed something mysterious, supernatural, about this strange figure that rises, silent and solitary.
(1) Wordsworth: How to Know Him, Winchester, p.112.

as if transfigured into the solemn spirit of the place, the embodiment of the gaunt and lonely moorland. The grave and stately words in which he describes his homely occupation sound like words in a dream. And when at last by further conversation he has proved that he is no vision, this bent and decrepit old man still remains in the poet's memory, almost like one of the permanent forms of nature, an image of calm strength and independence. His unyielding, unconquerable spirit, labouring under most discouraging difficulties, handicapped by age, comes as a rebuke to Wordsworth for yielding to fears concerning his own future lot, and inspires him with courage and resolution.

Remembering the old beggars whom he had seen in his boyhood as they pursued their regular round in the neighbourhood of Hawkshead, he compares the feelings to which their existence really gives rise with those condemned by the philosophers. The Old Cumberland Beggar is, like the Leech-gatherer, a commissioner from Heaven, a kind of good angel, calling forth, wherever he passes, acts of human kindness, pity, and love. He is far too old and frail to do anything for his living; but is he therefore useless?

" 'Tis Nature's law
That none, the meanest of created things,
Or forms created the most vile and brute,
The dullest or most noxious, should exist
Divorced from good--a spirit and pulse of good,
A life and soul, to every mode of being
Inseparably linked. Then be assured
That least of all can aught--that ever owned
The heaven-regarding eye and front sublime
Which man is born to--sink, how'er depressed,
So low as to be scorned without a sin;" (1)

The old beggar's extremity offers an opportunity for kindness on the part of others. Thus he becomes a moral force:

(1) The Old Cumberland Beggar, ll. 73-83.

"Then let him pass, a blessing on his head;
And while in that vast solitude to which
The tide of things has borne him, he appears
To breathe and live but for himself alone,
Unblamed, uninjured, bear about
The good which the benignant law of Heaven
Has hung around him; and, while life is his,
Still let him prompt the unlettered villagers
To tender offices and pensive thoughts.
--Then let him pass, a blessing on his head;
And, long as he can wander, let him breathe
The freshness of the valley; let his blood
Struggle with frosty air and winter snows;
And let the chartered wind that sweeps the heath
Beat his grey locks against his withered face." (1)

It is this desire to get back to the primitive and fundamental things in human nature that explains Wordsworth's interest in childhood at this time. In children he never had much personal interest but he always had a wondering, questioning interest in the child mind. The inmost charm of such a poem as We are Seven (1798), resides not in its pathos--which may be commonplace--but in the quiet insistence with which this little maid, upon whom our clayey mortality has as yet no power, clings to the truth that we are spirit, the glad primitive instinct of life that makes her unable, even in the presence of the little mound, to conceive our gloomy illusion of death:

" But they are dead; those two are dead!
Their spirits are in heaven;
'Twas throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said, 'Nay, we are seven! ' " (2)

The homely sense of duty, the simple reverence for religion, the neighbourly sympathies, the fireside virtues of home, it was to these, Wordsworth believed, we must look for all improvement in social and political conditions. And so we meet in his poetry with numerous examples which illustrate the fact that he is teaching the

(1) The Old Cumberland Beggar, Works of Wordsworth,
(Macmillan, 1913) p.97.

(2) We are Seven, ll.65-69.

lessons he learned from lowly folk, and his carrying out the resolution referred to in the Prelude:

"Of these, said I, shall be my song; of these,
If future years mature me for the task,
Will I record the praises, making verse
Deal boldly with substantial things; in truth
And sanctity of passion, speak of these,
That justice may be done, obeisance paid
Where it is due; thus happy shall I teach,
Inspire; through unadulterated ears
Pour rapture, tenderness, and hope,--my theme
No other than the very heart of man,
As found among the best of those who live,-----" (1)

The poet takes delight in describing a crazy mother's fondness for her child, her alternate thrills of joy and fits of madness. Again, he depicts the love of Betty, the peasant woman, for her idiot boy, her admiration of him in spite of his affliction, the pride with which she hears and tells to others his least phrase which contains a glimmering of sense, and the happiness with which the poor idiot's existence fills her life (The Idiot Boy).

The volume of Lyrical Ballads, published in 1798 contained several poems which have been blamed for triviality,-- as The Thorn, Goody Blake, The Idiot Boy; several of which, as in Simon Lee, triviality is mingled with much real pathos; and some as Expostulation and Reply, and The Tables Turned, which are of the very essence of Wordsworth's nature.

In Expostulation and Reply the poet represents his friend as remonstrating with him for dreaming his time away, sitting on an old gray stone by Esthwaite Lake. He is urged to take to books instead, and imbibe "the spirit breathed from dead men to their kind." To this the poet makes reply, in which he brings out again his belief in Nature as a source of inspiration and knowledge. The "mighty sum of things" has a voice which reaches the human mind and heart. There is a time for quiet meditation, and for communion with the Spirit of the

(1) The Prelude, xiii, 232-242-

Universe;

"The eye--it cannot choose but see;
We cannot bid the ear be still;
Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
Against or with our will.

Nor less I deem that there are Powers
Which of themselves our minds impress;
That we can feed this mind of ours
In a wise passiveness.

Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking?

--Then ask not wherefore, here, alone,
Conversing as I may,
I sit upon this old grey stone,
And dream my time away." (1)

In a similar vein is the poem, The Tables Turned. Here Wordsworth brings out still more explicitly Nature's relation as a teacher of Man. Books are dull and full of endless strife. Nature, on the other hand, is full of inspiration and harmony. From her we may learn more concerning ourselves, more of things moral, than from the wisdom of the ages:

"One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can." (2)

The analytical method of approach to Nature is the method of the cold, logical intellect, which fails to yield the richest results. We need the warm, sympathetic, watchful, receptive heart to get at Nature's secret meanings:

"Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:--
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives." (3)

(1) Expostulation and Reply, ll. 17-32.

(2) The Tables Turned, ll. 21-24.

(3) Ibid., 25-32.

The Tintern Abbey poem, referred to before, was written in July, 1798, and is a fitting close to a period of gradual mental and moral restoration, in which his former faith in, and love for both Man and Nature were not only restored but also strengthened and enriched. "Whoever would understand what Nature meant to Wordsworth must know this poem by heart. There is little English poetry better worth knowing; it is hardly too much to say that no such noble verse, of such high thoughtfulness, had been written since the days of Milton." (1)

In some of his longer poems from humble life, like The Brothers, and Michael both written in 1800, Wordsworth does not merely relate an incident, but tells the story of a lifetime. Yet here his purpose is the same. He wishes to exhibit the fundamental forces of character, the affections, the faith, the endurance that support and uplift our lives.

In Michael, Wordsworth is at his best. It is a simple story of a plain, mountain shepherd, who when eighty-four years of age was forced by hard poverty to send the only son of his old age away to the city, and who lived on among the hills in stern and silent loneliness, years after his boy had wandered from the path of honour. The character of Michael himself illustrates the dignity which the life of ordinary man takes on, for the poet's imagination, when it is "incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." Among the hills of the Lake Country he

"had learned the meaning of all winds,
Of blasts of every tone; and oftentimes
When others heeded not, He heard the South
Make subterraneous music, like the noise
Of bagpipes on distant Highland hills." (2)

(1) Wordsworth; How to Know Him, Winchester, p. 189.

(2) Michael, Works of Wordsworth (Mac Millan, 1913) p. 132.

The description of the evening, after the meal of pottage and skimmed milk, eaten cakes and home-made cheese--the father and son betaking themselves to light evening tasks of carding wool for the housewife's spindle, or repairing some injury to sickle, flail, or scythe, while, as the daylight grew dim, the housewife rose and lit and hung up the old lamp on its hook in the ceiling, beside the dark overhanging chimney--the old lamp that had been hung there so regularly for years, and which, as the cottage stood "single on a rising ground," had cast its constant light all round, so that

"----the house itself, by all
Who dwelt within the limits of the veil,
Both old and young, was named The Evening Star." (1)

There is something in all this that is hardly second in its appeal, even to a Scottish heart, to Burns' "Cottar's Saturday Night."

Wordsworth did not use the gorgeous stage effects to be got by dealing with the gods and goddesses and heroes of mythology; nor with the queens and kings, courtiers and imaginary dignitaries, such as fill Shakespeare's plays; nor with legendary heroes and heroines of romance, such as Spenser and Tennyson love. He drew the humble, pastoral life of English rustics, the life of the dalesmen and people he knew and watched and lived among day by day. He was utterly devoid of the dramatic instinct, and of the power of handling the necessary impediments of the dramatic poet--passion and jealousy, hate and scorn, love-making and ambition--but he could

"----hear Humanity in fields and groves
Pipe solitary anguish;" (2)

No account of the life of Wordsworth at this time would be complete without a brief reference, at least, to the influence of

(1) Michael, p. 133, (Works of Wordsworth, Macmillan, 1913)

(2) Wordsworth by Masson, p. 83.

Coleridge. Like Wordsworth, Coleridge was at once a republican, a poet, and a philosopher. Like him, he was an ardent supporter of the French Revolution, became highly indignant at the war, and contended both in verse and in prose against an evil and tyrannous world. Like him, he was for a time the admirer of Godwin. And like him, when he became conscious of the vanity of the struggle, he contemplated withdrawing from a society he abhorred, in which generous and independent souls could find no place.

On September 16th, 1798, Wordsworth, Dorothy, and Coleridge left England for Germany. Coleridge left the Wordsworths at Hamburg, going to Ratzeburg, and thence to Göttingen. The Wordsworths went to Goslar, where they remained until February 10th. The Poet was not idle here, and these winter months witness the production of a goodly number of poems, all of which bear the usual marks concerning Nature. His principal conceptions and beliefs are constantly in evidence.

"Many of the poems Wordsworth composed during that lonely winter in Germany have a strange inwardness, approaching melancholy ----- All these clouds were blown away when Coleridge burst upon him like a riotous wind. His courage revived. He took a larger view of his future tasks. When alone with Dorothy, he observed and penetrated the minute particulars of nature. With Coleridge to stimulate his synthetic powers, he saw things in their connection with one another" (1)

In the Prelude, the poet pays tribute to his friend:

"With such a theme,
Coleridge! with this my argument, of thee
Shall I be silent? O capacious Soul!
Placed on this earth to love and understand,

(1) Wordsworth, His Life, Works, and Influence, Harper, Vol. I
p. 390.

And from thy presence shed the light of love,
Shall I be mute, ere thou be spoken of?
Thy kindred influence to my heart of hearts
Did also find its way: thus fear relaxed
Her over-weening grasp; thus thoughts and things
In the self-haunting spirit learned to take
More rational proportions; mystery,
The incumbent mystery of sense and soul,
Of life and death, time and eternity,
Admitted more habitually a mild
Interposition--a serene delight
In closer gathering care, such as become
A human creature, howsoever endowed,
Poet, or destined for a humbler name;" (1)

"It is hardly an accident that the period of Wordsworth's
decline of power coincides with the period in which his gradual
estrangement from Coleridge began." (2)

(1) The Prelude, xiv, 276-292.

(2) Wordsworth by H. W. Garrod, p. 30.

CHAPTER V
PATRIOTISM AWAKE

It was the action of England, after the murder of the French king in 1793, in preparing for war with France, that previously roused Wordsworth. The idea of his own country joining with others to suppress the new insurgent cry for liberty in Europe and taking the side of the oppressor and the tyrant, fired him with indignation. And now the action of France, in the day of its newly found freedom, becoming unjust and oppressive towards Switzerland--the old home and bulwark of the liberties of Europe--disillusionized him, showing him that the very greatest tyranny might be practised under the specious name of liberty, and that the very champions of democracy, in levelling all distinctions, might be neither true sons of France, nor genuine citizens of the world, nor friends of the human race. The disappointment he underwent was in the truest sense an education to him. It showed him the intellectual and moral root of the illusion that had blinded his eye for a time, when France seemed to be

"Standing on the top of golden hours."

Naparte was becoming a portent in men's minds. Wordsworth was beginning to speculate about him, beginning to fear him; but he had not yet made up his mind about him. He dedicated to him his first tentative sonnet:

"I grieved for Naparte, with a vain
And an unthinking grief! The tenderest mood
Of that Man's mind--what can it be? What good
Fell his first hopes? What knowledge could he gain?
'Tis not in battles that from youth we train
The Governor who must be wise and good,
And temper with the sternness of the brain
Thoughts motherly, and meek as womanhood.

Wisdom doth live with children around her knees;
Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk
Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk
Of the mind's business: these are the degrees
By which true Sway doth mount; this is the stalk
True Power doth grow on; and her rights are these."(1)

Already in this somewhat irregular piece, Wordsworth showed what he was to be as a sonneteer; here already are the massiveness, the unity, the seriousness, the sense of climax and finish,-- above all the pregnant suggestiveness of immortal phrase, which make the sonnet what at best it is.

In the spring of 1802 Bonaparte, who had been named First Consul in December, 1799, but was now not satisfied with that position, was elected Consul for life. A vote was taken in France on the question, which was decided in the affirmative by over eight thousand votes to less than four thousand. On August fourth, 1802, he was given the right to name his successor by decree of the Senate. This really conferred on him as complete despotic power as when he became Emperor two years later.

The celebration of Bonaparte's birthday on August 15th, after he had received supreme authority, brought home to Wordsworth, then in France, what many Englishmen failed to realize at first, the nature of the power that in this short interval of peace was being built up against them. We are reminded in the Prelude of his former visit to Calais in 1790, on the first anniversary of the taking of the Bastille:

"we chanced
To land at Calais on the very eve
Of that great federal day, and there we saw,
In a mean city, and among a few,
How bright a face is worn when joy of one
Is joy for tens of millions. Southward thence

(1) The Works of Wordsworth, p. 177(Macmillan, 1913).

We held our way, direct through hamlets, towns,
Gaily with reliques of that festival,
Flowers left to wither on triumphal arcs,
And window-garlands. On the public roads,
And, once, three days successively, through paths
By which our toilsome journey was abridged,
Among sequestered villages we walked
And found benevolence and blessedness
Spread like a fragrance everywhere, when spring
Hath left no corner of the land untouched." (1)

And now in 1802 what a contrast!

"Festivals have I seen that were not names;
This is young Buonaparte's natal day,
And his is henceforth an established way--
Consul for life. With worship France proclaims
Her approbation, and with pomp and games.
Heaven grant that other Cities may be gay!
Calais is not; and I have bent my way
To the sea-coast, noting that each man frames
His business as he likes. For other show
My youth here witnessed, in a prouder time;
The senselessness of joy was then sublime!
Happy is he, who, caring not for Pope,
Consul, or King, can sound himself to know
The destiny of Man, and live in hope." (2)

Twelve years before he had seen the hailing of Liberty near

Calais:

"From hour to hour the antiquated Earth
Beat like the heart of Man: songs, garlands, mirth,
Banners and happy faces far and nigh!" (3)

And now,

"Sole register that these things were,
Two solitary greetings have I heard,
'Good-morrow, Citizen!' a hollow word,
As if a dead man spoke it!" (4)

Wordsworth's ardour for liberty did not alter, it merely
changed its form. He "returned to France immediately the English
were once more at liberty to enter it, that is to say, during the
Peace of Amiens, and, although he was disgusted to find the country
ripe for the empire, on his return he looked back upon it from the
cliffs at Dover 'with many a melancholy and tender thought.' " (5)

(1) The Prelude, vi, 344-359.

(2) Works of Wordsworth, p. 179. (Macmillan, 1913).

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 179.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 179.

(5) Life of Wordsworth, Knight, Vol. I, p. 350.

However, he had been able, at Calais, to look westward over England, at the setting Venus, and dare to take the glorious star for a type of his country's glory:

"Fair Star of evening, Splendour of the west,
Star of my Country!--on the horizon's brink
Thou hangest, stooping, as might seem, to sink
On England's bosom; yet well pleased to rest,
Meanwhile, and be to her a glorious crest
Conspicuous to the Nations. Thou, I think,
Shouldst be my Country's emblem; and shouldst wink,
Bright Star! with laughter on her banners, drest
In thy fresh beauty. There! that dusky spot
Beneath thee, that is England; there she lies.
Blessings be on you both! one hope, one lot,
One life, one glory!--I, with many a fear
For my dear Country, many heart felt sighs,
Among men who do not love her, linger here." (1)

"He only avowed his hostility to France when Napoleon became visible in Bonaparte, and when another journey had convinced him that the free and generous spirit of 1789 had given way to the military passion."⁽²⁾

The work of Napoleon stirred into a warmer flame the hatred of oppression which the Revolution had awakened in Wordsworth. When to attain an end with which he sympathized, dubious means were adopted and defended,--when, e.g., the Revolution swept before it not only the evils of the past, but the barriers against evil in the present, and created new ones of its own, his vivid, emotional sympathy with it received a check and finally died away. In wrath and pity he threw himself into the cause of distressed nationalities; he remembered the starving people, the cruelty which came of irresponsible will and greed, and he saw in Napoleon the concentration into one man of all the elements of the evil which had darkened the old regime. All men, all people who fought against him, were on the side of God, even though they had been on the side of the devil for years before.

(1) Wordsworth's Patriotic Poetry, Acland, p. 57.

(2) *Early Life of Wordsworth*, Legouis, p. 379.

"Wordsworth always felt strongly on the meanness of Napoleon's character. Nearly thirty years later he wrote: 'Few men at any time have been at the head of greater events, yet they seemed to have no power to create in him the least tendency to magnanimity-----, My thoughts dwell with unqualified scorn upon his various libticide projects and the miserable selfishness of his spirit.' " (1)

In 1803, wondering if One Man had been raised up to sway the world the poet wrote:

"Then, looking on the present face of things,
I see one man, of men the meanest too!
Raised up to sway the world, to do, undo,
With mighty Nations for his underlings,
The great events with which old story rings
Seemed vain and hollow; I find nothing great:
Nothing is left which I can venerate;
So that a doubt almost within me springs
Of providence, such emptiness at length
Seems at the heart of all things. But, great God!
I measure back the steps which I have trod;
And tremble, seeing whence proceeds the strength
Of such poor instruments, with thoughts sublime
I tremble at the sorrow of the time." (2)

When the French Government ratified the abolition of slavery in 1793, Toussaint, a negro leader of remarkable powers in San Domingo, came to their aid. In 1796 with an army of blacks he became master of the island, and restored order. He acknowledged the French allegiance, but Napoleon resolved to destroy him, and sent his brother-in-law to restore slavery in the eastern part of the island and to entrap Toussaint, who was betrayed, and brought a prisoner to France. On April 27th, 1803, he died in prison. Listen to Wordsworth:

"Toussaint, the most unhappy man of men!
Whether the whistling Rustic tend his plough
Within thy hearing, or thy head be now
Pillowed in some deep dungeon's earless den;--
O miserable Chieftain! where and when
Wilt thou find patience! Yet die not; do thou
Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow:
Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,
Live, and take comfort. Thou hast left behind

(1) Wordsworth's Patriotic Poetry, Acland, p.88.

(2) Works of Wordsworth, p. 201 (Macmillan, 1913).

powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind." (1)

In the winter of 1797--1798, France invaded Switzerland. To the English friends of France this blow was fatal. "How could men who had constantly sheltered themselves behind the words peace and liberty justify an attack made by the strong against the weak, by a young republic upon one so vulnerable, upon the country which, rightly or wrongly, thanks chiefly to Rousseau, had been regarded by all men as the natural temple of the republican virtues in all their grandeur and poetry?" (2). The treasury of Berne was seized and the money used to finance Napoleon's expedition to Egypt. In 1802, Napoleon took the title of Mediator of the Confederation of Switzerland.

Wordsworth's "Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland" is interesting:

"Two Voices are there; one is of the sea,
One of the mountains; each a mighty Voice:
In both from age to age thou didst rejoice,
They were thy chosen music, Liberty!
There came a Tyrant, and with holy glee
Thou fought'st against him: but hast vainly striven:
Thou from thy Alpine holds at length art driven,
Where not a torrent murmurs heard by thee.
Of one deep bliss thine ear hath been bereft:
Then cleave, O cleave to that which still is left;
For, high-souled Maid, what sorrow would it be
That Mountain floods should thunder as before,
And Ocean bellow from his rocky shore,
And neither awful Voice be heard by thee!" (3)

"It must be constantly remembered that from the year 1800 till almost 1814 most Englishmen feared, and all but expected, the triumph of Bonaparte. This period of national depression has been hidden from Englishmen of today by the memories of Trafalgar, of

(1) Works of Wordsworth, p. 180. (Macmillan, 1913).

(2) The Early Life of Wordsworth, Legouis, p. 375.

(3) Works of Wordsworth, p. 361. (Macmillan, 1913).

Leipzig, and of Waterloo. But the dread was not in itself unreasonable. The war against France, which ended in the transitory Peace of Amiens, had, in spite of England's naval successes, turned out a failure. It had increased, instead of restricted, the power of France. It had left her supreme among European States. Napoleon ruled a far larger domain, and exerted a far more extensive authority than had ever been obtained by Louis the Fourteenth." (1)

From 1802, Wordsworth, on the subject of the war with France, entirely agreed for practical purposes with the best Tories of his time, and with some few of the best and the wisest of the Whigs. He felt that to put an end to the Treaty of Amiens, and to carry on the war against Napoleon, was for England both a necessity and a duty. He was a moralist inspired with absolute faith in the triumph of righteousness. He was a prophet who preached and believed that national failure arose from the faults or sins of a nation, and of the men who composed it. Therefore with perpetual reiteration he insisted that in the war against Bonaparte, which was a war against injustice and oppression, the inability of England to overthrow the power of the tyrant arose from the errors or crimes of England, and from the personal faults of Englishmen. Writing of his stay in London in 1791 he speaks of its "luxurious pomp" and says:

"Folly, vice,
Extravagance in gesture, mien, and dress,
And all the strife of singularity,
Lies to the ear, and lies to every sense—
Of these, and of the living shapes they wear,
There is no end." (2)

Again, in 1802, contrasting the "vanity and parade" of London and other English towns with the quiet and desolation in France, he trembled even for England. Was not the canker of plutocracy

(1) The Statesmanship of Wordsworth, Dickey, p.71.

(2) The Prelude vii, 578-583.

already eating at her heart?

"O Friend! I know not which way I must look
For comfort, being, as I am, oppress'd,
To think that now our life is only dress
For show; mean handy-work of craftsman, cook,
Or groom!-- We must run glittering like a brook
In the open sunshine, or we are unblest:
The wealthiest man among us is the best:
No grandeur now in nature or in book
Delights us. Repine, avarice, expense,
This is idolatry; and these we adore;
Plain living and high thinking are no more:
The homely beauty of the good old cause
Is gone; our peace, our fearful innocence,
And pure religion breathing household laws." (1)

And in similar vein:

"Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea;
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duty on her self did lay." (2)

Perhaps in none of the Patriotic Sonnets does the poet speak so plainly as in this, written in 1803, of England's "trespasses", of her "offences" in the past:

"England! the time is come when thou shouldst wean
Thy heart from its emasculating food;
The truth should now be better understood;
Old things have been unsettled; we have seen
Fair seed-time, better harvest might have been
But for thy trespasses; and, at this day,
If for Greece, Egypt, India, Africa,
Aught good were destined, thou wouldst step between.
England! all nations in this charge agree:
But worse, more ignorant in love and hate,
Far--far more abject, is thine Enemy:
Therefore the wise pray for thee, though the freight
Of thy offences be a heavy weight:
Oh grief that Earth's best hopes rest all with Thee!" (3)

(1) Works of Wordsworth, p. 181 (Macmillan, 1913).

(2) Ibid., p. 181.

(3) Ibid., p. 201.

One of the most effective of Wordsworth's sonnets at this time burst into imaginative strength like a sudden flame on a mountain top:

"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bears her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.-- Great God; I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this present lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn." (1)

In 1802 when, as he thought, the brief security from the Peace of Amiens was lulling Englishmen into indifference to all noble ends, he wrote a group of sonnets unequalled by any in English since Milton's. No more ringing call to a higher national life was ever heard in English verse than in some of these sonnets. For example,

"It is not to be thought of that the flood
Of British freedom, which, to the open sea
Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity
Hath flowed, "with pomp of waters, unwithstood"
Roused though it be full often to a mood
Which spurns the check of salutary bands,
That this most famous Stream in bogs and sands
Should perish; and to evil and to good
Be lost for ever. In our halls is hung
Armoury of the invincible Knights of old:
We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals held
Which Milton held.--In every thing we are sprung
Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold." (2)

Shortly after the declaration of war, Pitt, as Warden of the Cinque Ports, undertook to raise the Cinque Ports Volunteers.

"Wordsworth himself volunteered at Gramere. His sister Dorothy,

(1) Works of Wordsworth, p. 353. (Macmillan, 1913).

(2) Ibid., p. 182.

writing in October, 1803, says: 'William has gone to volunteer--- with the greatest part of the men of Grassmere-----, Surely there never was a more determined hater of the French, nor one more willing to do his utmost to destroy them if they really do come.'" (1) The poet's attempt to stir up the military zeal of the men of Kent is expressed thus:

"Vanguard of Liberty, ye men of Kent,
Ye children of a Soil that doth advance
Her haughty brow against the coast of France,
Now is the time to prove your hardiment!
To France be words of invitation sent!
They from their fields can see the countenance
Of your fierce war, may ken the glittering lance,
And hear you shouting forth your brave intent.
Left single, in bold parley, ye, of yore,
Did from the Normen win a gallant wreath;
Confirmed the charters that were yours before;--
No parleying now, in Britain is one breath;
We all are with you now from shore to shore;--
Ye men of Kent, 'tis victory or death!" (2)

At the critical moment when a French invasion was expected, he wrote:

"Come ye--who, if (which Heaven avert!) the Land
Were with herself at strife, would take her stand,
Like gallant Falkland, by the monarch's side,
And, like Montrose, make Loyalty your pride--
Come ye--who, not less zealous, might display
Banners at enmity with regal sway,
And, like the Pym and Miltons of that day,
Think that a State would live in sounder health
If Kingship bowed its head to Commonwealth--
Ye too--whom no discreditable fear
Would keep, perhaps with many a fruitless tear,
Uncertain what to choose and how to steer--
And ye--who might mistake for sober sense
And wise reserve the plea of indolence--
Come ye--whate'er your creed-- O waken all,
Whate'er your temper at your Country's call;
Resolving (this a free-born Nation can)
To have one Soul, and perish to a man,
Or save this honoured Land from every Lord
But British reason and the British sword." (3)

- (1) Wordsworth's Patriotic Poetry, Acland, p. 82.
- (2) Works of Wordsworth, p. 201. (Macmillan, 1913).
- (3) Ibid., p. 202.

The Excursion directs our attention to the same situation:

"From the coast
Of France a boastful Tyrant hurled his threats,
Our Country marked the preparation vast
Of hostile forces; and she called with voice
That filled her plains, that reached her utmost shores
And in remotest vales was heard--to arms!
Then for the first time here you might have seen
The shepherd's grey to martial scarlet changed,
That flashed uncouthly through the woods and fields." (1)

Wordsworth's Sonnets to Liberty "are worthy of comparison with the noblest passages of patriotic verse or prose which all our history has inspired--the passages where Shakespeare brings his rays to focus on 'this earth, this realm, this England,'--or where the dread of national dishonour has kindled Chatham to an iron glow,-- or where Milton rises from the polemic into the prophet, and Burke from the partisan into the philosopher. The armoury of Wordsworth, indeed, was not forged with the same fire as that of these 'invincible knights of old'. He had not swayed senates, nor directed policies, nor gathered into one ardent bosom all the spirit of a heroic age. But he had deeply felt what it is that makes the greatness of nations; in that extremity no man was more staunch than he; no man more unwaveringly disdained unrighteous empire, or kept the sight of moral forces more steadfastly in view." (2) "They are the finest war songs ever composed by a patriot to stir up the valour and the nobility of his country; they might be termed the psalms of England, and like the psalter they combine penitence for past errors with confidence in final victory based on the belief in the final triumph of righteousness." (3)

Wordsworth's English patriotism is patent in every line written by him in reference to the Napoleonic war, but its depth is splendidly illustrated in the following sonnet, referring to the defeat of Prussia.

(1) The Excursion, vii, ll. 758-766.

(2) Wordsworth, Myers, p. 79.

(3) The Statesmanship of Wordsworth, Dacey, p. 84.

at Jena, in 1806:

"Another year;--another deadly blow!
Another mighty Empire overthrown!
And We are left, or shall be left, alone;
The last that dare to struggle with the foe.
'Tis well! from this day forward we shall know
That in ourselves our safety must be sought;
That by our own right hands it must be wrought;
That we must stand unpropped, or be laid low.
O dastard whom such foretaste doth not cheer!
We shall exult, if they who rule the land
Be men who hold its many blessings dear,
Wise, upright, valiant; not a servile band,
Who art a judge of danger which they fear,
And honour which they do not understand." (1)

The conquests of Napoleon in Germany, the Low Countries, and Italy, had been made against governments. His projects in the Iberian peninsula were resisted by the Spanish and Portuguese peoples. It was plain in this case that he was the enemy of liberty. When the British cabinet sent an army, under Sir Arthur Wellesley, to oppose the French in Portugal, the most ardent advocates of democratic and anti-military principles in England were, with few exceptions as enthusiastic as any others in support of the movement. In August, 1808, Wellesley defeated Junot at Vimiero, but was immediately superseded by Sir Hew Dalrymple and Sir Harry Burrard, who signed a convention or military treaty at Cintra, according to which the French army was allowed to return to France with its arms and booty. They had lost a great chance to free both Portugal and Spain and to cripple Napoleon. The news was received in England with indignation, but the government endeavoured to stifle the voice of the people.

"Few persons, though actually engaged in the great struggle of that period, felt more deeply than Wordsworth did in his peaceful retreat, for the calamities of European nations suffering at that

(1) Works of Wordsworth, p.356(MacMillan,1913).

time from the imbecility of their governments, and from the withering oppression of a prosperous despotism." (1)

Towards the end of May, 1809, he published in London a long pamphlet or tractate, entitled "Concerning the relations of Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal, to each other, and to the common enemy, at this crisis; and specifically as affected by the Convention of Cintra; the whole brought to the test of those principles by which alone the independence and freedom of nations can be preserved or recovered." The author's "style is as heroic as his theme. It has a volume and weight unequalled even by Burke, and matched only by Milton. Every sentence is like a gun of huge calibre. The detonation stuns and bewilders. One loses sight of the object in the smoke that follows each discharge. For immediate effect this artillery is far too great, and it is no wonder that a small edition of five hundred copies failed to sell. But a reader who has intellect to understand these tremendous volleys and candour enough to admit his own deficiency will be slow to hold Wordsworth responsible for the failure-----". A student of rhetoric or of logic will find here a noble example, in the grand style, of both arts." (2) Christopher Wordsworth in his Memoirs maintains that "if Mr. Wordsworth had never written a single verse this essay alone would be sufficient to place him in the highest rank of English poets." (3)

In the Tract the poet appears before the world as depressed in mind and indignant in spirit because the war in the Peninsula was not carried on by England against France with sufficient vigour, and because, when it was, as he believed, in the power of England to have emancipated Spain and Portugal from French bondage, she

(1) Memoirs of Wordsworth, C. Wordsworth, Vol. 1, p. 383.

(2) Wordsworth: His Life, Works, and Influence, Harper, Vol. II, p. 177.

(3) Memoirs of Wordsworth, C. Wordsworth, Vol. 1, p. 399.

allowed the enemy to escape by a retreat similar to a triumph .

In the beginning of his treatise Wordsworth takes pains to show that he and others, who felt as he did, were not inconsistent in approving of the war:

"This just and necessary war, as we have been accustomed to hear it styled from the beginning of the contest in the year 1793, had, some time before the Treaty of Amiens, viz., after the subjugation of Switzerland, and not till then, begun to be regarded by the body of the people as indeed both just and necessary; and this justice and necessity were by none more clearly perceived or more feelingly bewailed than by those who had most eagerly opposed the war in its commencement, and who continued most bitterly to regret that this nation had ever borne a part in it. Their conduct was herein consistent: they proved that they kept their eyes steadily fixed upon principles; for though there was a shifting or transfer of hostility in their minds as far as regarded persons, they only combated the same enemy opposed to them under a different shape; and that enemy was the spirit of selfish tyranny and lawless ambition." (1)

Referring to the Convention, the disappointed poet again cries out:

"O sorrow! O misery for England, the Land of Liberty and courage and peace-----. For what hath been done? Look at it: we have looked at it; we have handled it; we have pondered it steadily; we have tried it by the principles of absolute and eternal justice; by the sentiments of high-minded honour---- by the rules of expedience; by the maxims of prudence, civil and military; we have weighed it in the balance of all these and found it wanting; in that, which is most excellent, most wanting." (2)

He "gathers triumph" when he thinks of Spain:

"Not 'mid the World's vain objects that enslave
The free-born soul--that World whose vaunted skill
In selfish interest perverts the will,
Whose factions lead astray the wise and brave--
Not there; but in dark wood and rocky cave,
And hollow vale which foaming torrents fill
With omnipresent murmur as they rave
Down their steep beds, that never shall be still;
Here, mighty Nature! in this school sublime
I weigh the hopes and fears of suffering Spain;
For her consult the auguries of time,
And through the human heart explore my way;
And look and listen--gathering, whence I may,
Triumph, and thoughts no bondage can restrain." (3)

(1) Wordsworth: His Life, Works, and Influence, Harper, Vol. II, p. 178.

(2) Prose Works of Wordsworth, Grosart, Vol. I, p. 112.

(3) Works of Wordsworth, p. 387 (Macmillan, 1913).

In a note dictated more than thirty years later, Wordsworth says:

"It would not be easy to conceive with what a depth of feeling I entered into the struggle carried on by the Spaniards for their deliverance from the usurped power of the French. Many times have I gone from Allan Bank in Grasmere Vale, where we were then residing, to the top of the Raisse-Cop, as it is called, so late as two o'clock in the morning to meet the carrier bringing the newspaper from Keswick."(1)

The Bulwark in the Soul is the outcome of his enthusiastic interest in the Spanish Rising:

"And is it among rude untutored Dales,
There, and there only, that the heart is true?
And, rising to repel or to subdue,
Is it by rocks and woods that man prevails?
Ah no! though Nature's dread protection fails,
There is a bulwark in the soul. This knew
Iberian Burghers when the sword they drew
In Zaragoza, naked to the gales
Of fiercely-breathing war. The truth was felt
By Palafox, and many a brave compeer,
Like him of noble birth and noble mind;
By ladies, meek-eyed women without fear;
And wanderers of the street, to whom is dealt
The bread which without industry they find."(2)

Writing again of the Spanish and Portuguese people, the poet says:

"They have submitted as far as human nature could bear;----- at last these millions of suffering people have risen almost like one man, with one hope; for whether they look to triumph or defeat, to victory or to death, they are full of hope--despair comes not near them--they will die, they say--each individual knows the danger, and strong in the magnitude of it, grasps eagerly at the thought that he is himself to perish; and more eagerly, and with higher confidence, does he lay to his heart the faith that the nation will survive and be victorious."(3)

The Indignation of a high-minded Spaniard hits sharply the vile falsehood by which Napoleon most defamed the Revolution when he declared that he came as the apostle of freedom to the nations over whom, the moment they were lured into his hands, he set up an exhausting tyranny:-

(1) Prose Works of Wordsworth, Grosart, Vol. III, p. 72.

(2) Works of Wordsworth, p. 389 (Macmillan, 1913).

(3) Prose Works of Wordsworth, Grosart, Vol. I, p. 64.

"We can endure that He should waste our lands,
Despoil our temples, and by sword and flame
Return us to the dust from which we came;
Such food a Tyrant's appetite demands;
And we can brook the thought that by his hand
Spain may be overpowered, and he possess,
For his delight, a solemn wilderness
Where all the brave lie dead. But, when of bands
Which he will break for us he dares to speak,
Of benefits, and of a future day
When our enlightened minds shall bless his way;
Then, the strained heart of fortitude proves weak;
Our groans, our blushes, our pale cheeks declare
That he has power to inflict what we lack strength
to bear." (1)

"The intoxicated setter-up of kings may fill his diary with pompous stories of the acclamations with which his solemn puppets are received; he may stuff their mouths with impious asseverations; and hire knees to bend before them and lips to answer with honied greetings of gratitude and love: these cannot remove the old heart and put a new one into the bosom of the spectators." (2)

And as early as 1809, Wordsworth, believing in the principles of truth, justice, and righteousness, confidently predicted the downfall of the tyrant:

"Look now on that Adventurer who hath paid
His vows to Fortune; who, in cruel-slight
Of virtuous hope, of liberty, and right,
Hath followed wheresoe'er a way was made
By the blind Goddess,--ruthless, undismayed;
And so hath gained at length a prosperous height,
Round which the elements of worldly might
Beneath his haughty feet, like clouds, are laid.
O joyless power that stands by lawless force!
Curses are his dire portion, scorn, and hate,
Internal darkness and unquiet breath;
And, if old judgments keep their sacred course,
His from that height shall Heaven precipitate
By violent and ignominious death." (3)

In one of his sonnets the poet points out the difference between moral and physical force, showing that an army, however well disciplined is powerless against a people contending for its independence:

"The power of Armies is a visible thing,
Formal, and circumscribed in time and space;
But who the limits of that power shall trace
Which a brave People into light can bring

- (1) Works of Wordsworth, p. 392, (Macmillan, 1913).
- (2) Prose Works of Wordsworth, Vol. I, Grosart, p. 149.
- (3) Works of Wordsworth, p. 390, (Macmillan, 1913).

Or hide, at will,-- for freedom combating
By just revenge inflamed? No foot may chase,
No eye can follow, to a fatal place
That power, that spirit, whether on the wing
Like the strong wind, or sleeping like the wind
Within its awful caves.-- From year to year
Springs this indigenous produce far and near;
No craft this subtle element can bind,
Rising like water from the soil, to find
In every nook a lip that it may cheer." (1)

He thus, expresses himself in the essay:

"It is manifest that, though a great army may easily defeat or disperse another army, less or greater, yet it is not in a like degree formidable to a determined people, nor efficient in a like degree to subdue them, or to keep them in subjugation-- much less if this people, like those of Spain in the present instance be numerous, and, like them, inhabit a territory extensive and strong by nature." (2)

And again in forceful, eloquence language he writes:

"Was there ever--since the earliest actions of men which have been transmitted by affectionate tradition, or recorded by faithful history, or sung to the impassioned harp of poetry--was there ever a people who presented themselves to the reason and the imagination, as under more holy influences than the dwellers upon the Southern Peninsula; as roused more instantaneously from a deadly sleep to a more hopeful wakefulness; as a mass fluctuating with one motion under the breath of a mightier wind; as breaking themselves up, and settling into several bodies, in more harmonious order; as reunited and embattled under a standard which was reared to the sun with more authentic assurance of final victory?" (3)

Wordsworth interposes a warning against too much complacency and confidence in mechanical skill and power, and too sanguine expectations of national progress and elevation from material discoveries and improvements. These, he observes, may co-exist with national decline, degradation, and debasement.

"The great end and difficulty of life for men of all classes, and especially difficult for those who live by manual labour, is a union of peace with innocent and laudable animation. Not by bread alone is the life of man sustained; not by raiment alone is he warmed;--but by the genial and vernal inmate of the breath, which at once pushes forth and cherishes; by self-support and self-sufficing endeavours; by anticipations, apprehensions, and active remembrances; by elasticity under insult, and firm resistance to injury; by joy and by love; by pride which his imagination gathers in from afar; by

(1) Works of Wordsworth, p398 (Macmillan, 1913).

(2) The Tract, p. 14.

(3) Ibid., p.112.

patience, because life wants not promises; by admiration; by gratitude, which--debasing him not when his fellow-being is its object--habitually expands itself, for his elevation, in complacency towards his Creator" (1)

It is clear that national independence is, according to Wordsworth, essential to the possession of civil liberty:

"The difference, between inbred oppression and that which is from without (i.e. imposed by foreigners), is essential; inasmuch as the former does not exclude, from the minds of a people, the feeling of being self-governed; does not imply (as the latter does, when patiently submitted to) an abandonment of the first duty imposed by the faculty of reason.....

If a country have put on chains of its own forging; in the name of virtue, let it be conscious that to itself it is accountable; let it not have cause to look beyond its own limits for reproof; and--in the name of humanity--if it be self-depressed, let it have its pride and some hope within itself. The poorest Peasant, in an unsubdued land, feels this pride. I do not appeal to the example of Britain or of Switzerland, for the one is free, and the other lately was free (and, I trust, will ere long be so again); but talk with the Swede; and you will see the joy he finds in these sensations. With his animal courage (the substitute for many and the friend of all the manly virtues) has space to move in; and is at once elevated by his imagination, and softened by his affections; it is invigorated also; for the whole courage of his country is in his breast." (2)

"Again, no state ought to possess irresistible military power so as to menace the legitimate independence of other countries. On this point the language of Wordsworth is emphatic:

'See be to that country whose military power is irresistible: I deprecate such an event for Great Britain scarcely less than for any other land.....If a nation have nothing to oppose or to fear without, it cannot escape decay and concussion within. Universal triumph and absolute security soon betray a state into abandonment of that discipline, civil and military, by which its victories were secured. If the time should ever come when this island shall have no more formidable enemies by land than it has at this moment (1811) by sea, the extinction of all that it previously contained of good and great would soon follow.'

Moreover, the French Empire under Napoleon possesses irresistible power, and is opposed to the very principle of national independence; England, therefore, ought to wage war with France until French power is reduced within reasonable bounds." (3)

"When the Peace came to an end and certainly after the appearance of Wordsworth's pamphlet, the war commanded the warm support of

(1) The Tract, pp. 164-165.

(2) Ibid., pp. 167-169.

(3) The Statesmanship of Wordsworth, Dacey, pp. 89-90.

England; and those Whigs who still opposed it rapidly sunk into a faction. The war was transformed from a war against France into a national war for the defence of England. This transformation was due in no small degree to Wordsworth's patriotic sonnets and to his Tract on the Convention of Cintra." (1)

Wordsworth composed the Tract in the discharge of what he regarded a sacred duty, and for the permanent benefit of society, rather than with a view to any immediate results. He foresaw and predicted that his words would be to the public ear what midnight storms are to men who sleep:

"I dropped my pen, and listened to the wind
That sang of trees uprooted and vessels lost--
A midnight harmony, and wholly lost
To the general sense of men by chains confined
Of business, care, or pleasure, or resigned
To timely sleep. Thought I, the impassioned strain,
Which without aid of numbers I sustain,
Like acceptance from the world will find." (2)

(1) The Statesmanship of Wordsworth, Dicey, p. 95.

(2) Works of Wordsworth, p. 387 (Macmillan, 1913).

CHAPTER VI

NATURE AND MAN

Wordsworth settled in Grasmere with his sister towards the close of 1799. He had come here on Nature's invitation. The natural environment was so attractive, appealing so powerfully to his aesthetic sense, and promising such aid to his poetic mind, that, added to the possibilities of a simple life, it constituted a motive sufficiently persuasive to lead him to a decision. Here he entered upon what may be regarded as the most productive period in his life--a period in which his poetic genius reached the very height of its development and power, and gave to the world a body of verse that entitles him to high rank among English poets.

The poems already referred to, do not represent Wordsworth's most important contributions to literature during his residence in Grasmere Vale. A large part of his time and effort was spent on more ambitious productions, including the autobiographical poem, The Prelude; the famous Ode to Duty; the well-known poem, Character of the Happy Warrior; and the great Ode on Intimations of Immortality. These poems throw a searching light on the development of Wordsworth, both as a poet of Nature and as a poet of Man.

In the Ode to Duty (1805) may be found the poet's conception of the nature of Man in his highest endowment. Here we have a statement of his view of the ultimate source of Duty, and of his belief in the physical world as governed by moral law. He holds our thought before this "stern daughter of the Voice of God" whose function is to guide Man, to check the erring, to reprove, to guard, and to calm us in "the weary strife of frail humanity." He turns an eye of steadfast contemplation inward, directly upon the central truths of our being. "It is Wordsworth and Wordsworth only who can

make us feel the power or charm of a moral in its sheer naked simplicity." (1)

Duty also seems to be a power in Nature, a Power "that preserves the stars from wrong"--that strengthens the very heavens themselves:

"Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face:
Flowers laughed before thee on their beds
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens, through Thee,
are fresh and strong." (2)

"It appears, therefore, that Wordsworth, in this majestic ode, has really something more in mind than what ordinarily might be regarded as a highly poetic representation of the moral law in its relation to his own spirit, or, more generally speaking, to the spirit of Man, as well as in its relation to the so-called physical world. He seems, in short, to identify Duty with the voice of the omnipresent Spirit which, in this poem, he calls God.....What he really means is, that all law, whether governing souls of things, is, in the final analysis, moral law. The Power that upholds the human world, as well as the Power that holds the stars in their courses, is a Power that makes for righteousness." (3)

"In the Ode to Duty, the poet cannot forget, and is unwilling to condemn, the innocent souls who by their birthright, their divine heritage of essential goodness, live 'without reproach or blot'. The disciple of Rousseau and Godwin, still in revolt against the doctrine of innate depravity, even while recognizing that some natures fall, and need thenceforth the discipline of conscience, reserves a limbo

(1) Wordsworth: How to Know Him, Winchester, p.221.

(2) Ode to Duty, Sixth Stanza.

(3) Wordsworth; Poet of Nature and Poet of Man, Eneath, p.201.

of the innocents. I like to think he had in mind his sister. " (1)

"There are who ask not if thine eye
Be on them; who, in love and truth,
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth:
Glad Hearts! without reproach or blot;
Who do thy work, and know it not;
Oh! if through confidence misplaced
They fail, thy saving arms, dread Power! around
them cast." (2)

This poem seems to have been written just before the death of his brother John. Wordsworth expressly says that he is still "untried", and moved by "no disturbance of soul". When the trial came that darkened the world for him, he made it his chief task to struggle against grief. He resolutely bade farewell to "the heart that lives alone, housed in a dream". He welcomed "fortitude and patient cheer". His themes now, more exclusively than before, will be the sorrows and tragedies of life. But he must find "blessed consolations in distress", and tell of "melancholy fear subdued by Faith". The consequence is that his exploration of human woes will henceforth be guarded and cautious. He now lacks the bold spirit of youth that can haunt the worst infected places without giving a thought to the danger of infection. He is the depressed visitor of the sick, who must needs beware, and be provided with preservatives.

"I doubt whether Wordsworth, in his best period, ever abandoned the doctrine that the highest moral achievement is that which presents itself as an inspiration, that which is part of our natural life, that which is bound up with childhood and its unthinking 'vision'. Duty is a second-best; we seek support from that power when higher and freer powers fail us. The purer moral life is that which so binds together our days that the vision of childhood suffices

(1) Wordsworth: His Life, Works, and Influence, Harper, Vol. II p. 116.

(2) Ode to Duty, Second Stanza.

to later years." (1)

The Happy Warrior (1806) is a portrait of duty embodied in heroic character. When the poem was first published, Lord Nelson was the hero of the hour in the thought of all Englishmen, and some traits in character of Wordsworth's warrior may have been suggested by him; but the person most prominent in the poet's mind as the model for his hero, was his brother John, who was captain of an East Indiaman and perished in shipwreck in 1805. The poet was unwilling to obtrude his private grief upon the world; with lofty and solemn reticence, he utters in this poem no direct word about his brother; his grief and consolation are raised to a noble generality.

The poem needs recognition here only because of the light that it throws on the human side of Wordsworth's genius, and on the genuine patriotism of the man, as well as presenting, in a large measure, his ethical view of the life of a true warrior, and his exalted ideal of what a servant of the nation should be. It is severely plain in style, but it shows in every line a profound insight into the way in which moral character is formed and nurtured.

The warrior, by his profession, is brought into daily contact with the grimmest of facts and laws; it is his duty to make them subservient to the law for which he stands. He is one

"Who, doomed to go in company with Pain,
And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!
Turns his necessity to glorious gain;
In face of these doth exercise a power
Which is our human nature's highest dower;
Controls them and subdues, transmutes, bereaves
Of their bad influence, and their good receives;
By objects, which might force the soul to abate
Her feeling, rendered more compassionate;
Is placable--because occasions rise
So often that demand such sacrifice;

(1) Wordsworth by N. W. Garrod, p.124.

More skilful in self-knowledge, even more pure,
As tempted more; more able to endure,
As more exposed to suffering and distress;
Thence, also, more alive to tenderness." (1)

He is the gentle, generous spirit,

"Whose powers shed round him in the common strife,
Or mild concerns of ordinary life,
A constant influence, a peculiar grace;
But who, if he be called upon to face
Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
Is happy as a Lover;" (2)

The Happy Warrior is the optimist, who confidently looks ahead, ever pressing forward from good to better, making daily progress; who, whether he be destined to earthly applause, or to sink into his grave unknown, finds comfort in himself and in his cause, and in the hour of death confidently awaits the applause of Heaven. He is, in fact, one who has bound his days together; who

"when brought
among the tasks of real life, hath wrought
Upon the plan that pleased his boyish thought."

He has so bound up his life that the pure and free expressions of childhood, its visionary experiences, are the inspiration of his mature age. The poem takes us from the natural to the moral world but Wordsworth does not part these two worlds so sharply as we do.

No poet of the century is more trumpet-tongued when he speaks of liberty. But even in his revolutionary youth liberty never meant with him a revolt against law. It rather implied a lofty and willing fidelity to it, and his Happy Warrior not only has a "sense and faculty for storm and turbulence", but "through the heat of conflict keeps the law in calmness made, and sees what he foresaw".

(1) The Happy Warrior, ll. 12-26.

(2) Ibid., ll. 45-51.

The Ode on Intimations of Immortality (1803-6) was probably conceived immediately after Wordsworth had written the nine lines which are its germ, and of which he used the last three as its motto:

"My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky;
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety."(1)

This Ode, in the judgment of some critics, more than any other poem of the numerous creations of his genius, entitles him to a seat among the Immortals.

"In an interesting note to Miss Fenwick the Poet says: 'This was composed during my residence at Town-end, Grasmere. Two years at least passed between the writing of the four last stanzas and the remaining part. To the attentive and competent reader the whole sufficiently explains itself; but there may be no harm in adverting here to particular feelings or experiences of my own mind on which the structure of the poem partly rests. Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being. I have said elsewhere--

A simple child,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death!--

But it was not so much from feelings of animal vivacity that my difficulty came as from a sense of the indomitableness of the Spirit within me.....I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature.

(1) Works of Wordsworth, Pl71 (Macmillan, 1913).

Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality." (1)

In a prose note to the Ode, written in his later years, the poet thought it right to protest against a conclusion which, he says, had given pain to some good and pious persons, namely, that he meant to inculcate a belief in a prior state of existence. Nevertheless, he seems to incline to the doctrine of pre-existence as a personal conviction. It appears elsewhere in his poetry, and constitutes the very basis of the ode on immortality. In the Prelude he says:

"Our childhood sits,
Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne
That hath more power than all the elements.
I guess not what this tells of Being past,
Nor what it augurs of the life to come." (2)

In the Excursion he virtually affirms the doctrine:

"Ah! why in age
Do we revert so fondly to the walks
Of childhood--but that there the Soul discerns
The dear memorial footsteps unimpaired
Of her own native vigour; thence can hear
Reverberations; and a choral song,
Commingle with the incense that ascends,
Undaunted, toward the imperishable heavens,
From her own lonely altar?" (3)

This must be borne in mind in interpreting the poem, which hinges so much on this conception and apparent belief.

The Platonic doctrine of reminiscence in childhood of a pre-existent state may be only a beautiful fancy, though one wiser than Plato has said that some things divinely hidden from the wise and prudent have been divinely revealed unto babes; but it is an admitted fact that most men feel a certain freshness and charm die out of life as the quickness and confidence of early perceptions

(1) Wordsworth: Poet of Nature and Poet of Man, Sneath,
p. 205.

(2) The Prelude, v, 507-511.

(3) The Excursion, ix, 36-44.

our exchange for the slower reasoning of our maturer years.
Human infancy is nearer to the Divine Glory.

"But for Wordsworth, it should be made clear, the doctrine has both a different foundation and a different significance from that which it has in Plato. Wordsworth.....is a pure sensationalist. Plato, on the other hand, is a pure intellectualist. To Plato the doctrine of reminiscence is a theory of knowledge; an explanation of how we get to know and think. The senses are the source of all error.....But to Wordsworth the truth of things comes in flashes, in gleams of sense-perception; and in abstraction the truth dies. Wordsworth's doctrine is, in fact, not a theory of knowledge, but a romance of sensation..... Our pre-natal existence is guaranteed for Plato by the fact that we can reason at all; by the power in us to form class-conceptions. It is guaranteed to Wordsworth by a passivity of response to sense-impressions" (1)

How beautiful the poet's words, and how definite his description, of the progress of the soul from its pre-existence state through its earthly career:

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home;
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid

(1) Wordsworth, by H. W. Garrod, p. 117-118.

is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day." (1)

Not the man, but the child, is the best philosopher; and the thought of these years of childhood breeds in the poet "perpetual benediction", and he raises the song of praise, not for the delight, freedom, and new-fledged hope which are so peculiar to these first years, but rather for those powerful intimations of the spiritual world behind the physical world. The song of praise is raised

"for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised;
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!
Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore." (2)

These words are exceedingly significant in the study of Wordsworth as a poet of Nature and a poet of Man. We are reminded here that matter is not the true Reality. Spirit is the one great fact--the true and ultimately real thing. Nature is something more than lifeless substance; it is matter endowed with Spirit.

(1) Ode on Intimations of Immortality, ll. 58-76.

(2) Ibid., ll. 145-171.

The knowledge of the child consists largely of the "shadowy recollections" of a previous state of existence. These remembrances fade by degrees out of the experience of mature man; they are dominated and driven out by the operation of the reasoning powers, and by the necessity laid upon man of adapting himself to this present world. But the fading of childhood's vision does not depress the poet. Its radiance and splendour are gone, but he will not grieve. The "philosophic mind" of later years is regarded as a compensation for the loss of the earlier ecstasy. He will find strength

"in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind." (1)

And although Nature does not wear in maturer years the aspect of the "glory and the dream" of childhood, her might is felt, and his love for her has grown stronger and richer. It has been humanized by "hearing oftentimes the still, sad music of humanity"

"The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
Is lovely yet;
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." (2)

It should be noted that the faculty which replaces the senses is not reason, as ordinarily understood, but the mysterious faculty which in the Prelude Wordsworth calls "Spiritual Love" or "Reason in her most exalted mood". "The glory of the senses passes into a glory of the imagination precisely by being 'fastened to the

(1) The Ode on Intimations of Immortality, ll. 184-190.

(2) Ibid., ll. 198-207.

affections'. That is why in the fourteenth book of the Prelude imagination is identified with 'Spiritual Love' (and Intellectual Love). Lines 188-205 of that book are of first-rate importance. Wordsworth has been speaking of the beauty of Nature, in its widest sense, as seen first in the fields, then in the beasts of the field and their dumb affections, and finally in what he calls 'the earth-born passions of men', i.e., the love that is of the senses. These achieve value only in so far as they are quickened by 'Spiritual Love', and pass into the imagination:

'This Spiritual Love acts not nor cannot act
Without Imagination, which, in truth,
Is but another name for absolute power,
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.
This faculty hath been the feeding source
Of our long labour; we have traced the stream
From the blind cavern whence it faintly heard
Its natal murmur; followed it to light
And open day; accompanied its course
Among the works of nature; for a time
Lost sight of it bewildered and engulfed;
Then given it greeting as it rose once more
In strength, reflecting from its placid breast
The work of man and face of human life;
And lastly from its progress have we drawn
Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought
Of human being, eternity and God.' " (1)

The splendour of youth's vision does indeed die away, but the primary instincts which generate it persist as indestructible elements in all experience--clues by which the soul may in a moment recover in thought the divinely apparelled universe it once beheld. Thus a new and striking meaning was given to the Wordsworthian aphorisms, 'the child is the hiding-place of man's power'--'the father of the man'. The concluding portion of the twelfth book of the Prelude should be read in connection with the Ode:

(1) Wordsworth by H. W. Garrod, pp. 128-129.

"Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth
proceed thy honors. I am lost, but see
in simple childhood something of the base
on which thy greatness stands; but this I feel,
that from thyself it comes, that thou must give,
else never canst receive. The days gone by
Return upon me almost from the dawn
of life: the hiding-places of man's power
Open; I would approach them, but they close.
I see by glimpses now; when age comes on,
May scarcely see at all; and I would give,
while yet we may, as far as words can give,
Substance and life to what I feel, enshrining,
Such is my hope, the spirit of the Past
For future restoration." (1)

"Age is not desolate then. The unutterable dewy light of joy
is gone, it rests no longer on Man or Nature. But the love which
has come of suffering, the long union with the human heart, the
sad but hope-lit experience, do not make him love Nature less than
when he tripped as lightly as the brooks that fret their channels,
but more; he can still enjoy the innocent brightness of a new-
born day; the beauty of all things is not less, but more, because
touched with the sentiment of mortal sorrow and mortal victory;
they take a sober, but not less lively colouring; and the meanest
flower that blows, to a heart so trained, leads him beyond itself
to live in the eternal, in the land where men weep not for either
joy or sorrow, for the thoughts that are there are too deep for
tears." (2)

Old age is then great--raised above the thralldom of the passions
that beset guilt, the ambitious worldliness which made the light
such common day, the very world of sense that made us forget our
ancient spiritual home:

"Rightly it is said
That Man descends into the Vale of years;
Yet have I thought that we might also speak,
And not presumptuously, I trust, of Age,

(1) The Prelude, XII, 272-286.

(2) Theology in the English Poets, Brooke, p.230.

As of a final Eminence; though bare
In aspect and forbidding, yet a point
On which 'tis not impossible to sit
In awful sovereignty; a place of power,
A throne, that may be likened unto his,
Who, in some placid day of summer, looks
Down from a mountain-top,--say one of those
High peaks that bound the vale where now we are.
Faint and diminished to the gazing eye,
Forest and field, and hill and dale appear,
With all the shapes over their surface spread:
But, while the gross and visible frame of things
Relinquishes its hold upon the sense,
Yea almost on the Mind herself, and seems
All unsubstantialized--how loud the voice
Of waters, with invigorated peal
From the full river in the vale below,
Ascending? For on that superior height
Who sits, is disencumbered from the press
Of near obstructions, and is privileged
To breathe in solitude, above the host
Of ever-humming insects, 'mid thin air
That suits not them. The murmur of the leaves,
Many and idle, visits not his ear;
This he is freed from, and from thousand notes
(Not less unceasing, not less vain than these,)
By which the finer passages of sense
Are occupied; and the Soul, that would incline
To listen, is prevented or deterred.

And may it not be hoped, that, placed by age
In like removal, tranquil though severe,
We are not so removed for utter loss;
But for some favour, suited to our need?
What more than that the severing should confer
Fresh power to commune with the invisible world,
And hear the mighty stream of tendency
Uttering, for elevation of our thought,
A clear sonorous voice, inaudible
To the vast multitude, whose doom it is
To run the giddy round of vain delight,
Or fret and labour on the Plain below." (1)

How man differs from man! And he himself is responsible for
it. He has established a social order that gives us the oppressor
and the oppressed, the wise and the ignorant, the rich and the poor.
This is not Nature's method. There is a natural equality
that belongs to men. It is fundamental. The common joys of Nature

(1) The Excursion, ix. p. 520 (Works of Wordsworth,
Macmillan, 1913).

exist for all. All possess the same gifts of reason and imagination, will and conscience. All must taste death, but all, too, can conceive an immortality for him who proves worthy of it:

"Strange, then, nor less than monstrous, might be deemed
The failure, if the Almighty, to this point
Liberal and undistinguishing, should hide
The excellence of moral qualities
From common understanding; leaving truth
And virtue, difficult, abstruse, and dark;
Hard to be won, and only by a few;
Strange, should He deal herein with nice respects,
And frustrate all the rest! Believe it not:
The primal duties shine aloft-- like stars;
The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless,
Are scattered at the feet of Man-- like flowers.
The generous inclination, the just rule,
Kind wishes, and good actions, and pure thoughts--
No mystery is here! Here is no boon
For high--yet not for low; for proudly graced--
Yet not for meek of heart. The smoke ascends
To heaven as lightly from the cottage-hearth
As from the haughtiest palace. He, whose soul
Ponders this true equality, may walk
The fields of earth with gratitude and hope;
Yet, in that meditation, will he find
Motive to sadder grief, as we have found;
Lamenting ancient virtues overthrown,
And for the injustice grieving, that hath made
So wide a difference between man and man." (1)

"Nature and human life, then, together make up a book of wonder and power, composed in a strange language, unlike the speech that men use for the business of life, and written in unknown characters. The book has never been read, but glimpses of its meaning are obtainable by those who pore over it lovingly and long, and who do not despise small and chance suggestions towards its interpretation." (2)

All that the poet had seen in what is called the known world had been revealed to him by his emotions--by admiration, and fear, and hope, and love. In these emotions he found the secret and spring of man's life--that is, of his existence. When, therefore, they arise mysteriously in the mind he was not prepared to call them idle

(1) The Excursion, ix, ll. 229-254.

(2) Wordsworth, Raleigh, p. 177.

and unmeaning because no rational cause, as the phrase goes, was assignable to them. His wide imagination, which refused to recognise the arbitrary boundary set between Nature and Man, sought for correspondences everywhere. The stars are kept in their places by the law of duty; the humblest fears and hopes of man tenant the same universe as the stars, and move to the same music. A flower in its place, as it grew, was more to him than any symbol; it was a part of the eternal order, and, if it could be understood, a key to the whole. This thought is expressed in the Primrose of the Rock:

"The flowers, still faithful to the stems,
Their fellowship renew;
The stems are faithful to the root,
That worketh out of view;
And to the rock the root adheres
In every fibre true.

Close clings to earth the living rock,
Though threatening still to fall;
The earth is constant to her sphere;
And God upholds them all;
So blooms this lonely Plant, nor dreads
Her annual funeral." (1)

"Two convictions penetrate Wordsworth's work: the dignity of man in himself, and the moral and intellectual strength which comes to him in communion with Nature. The first was the common possession of the revolutionary period, the second he shared with Rousseau. But Wordsworth interpreted both with a subtle profundity entirely his own. Both in Nature and in Man he saw the 'hiding-places of infinite power', and sometimes the one, sometimes the other, seems to be the focus of his thoughts. Nature was veritably alive, a universal chorus of 'things forever speaking' which of themselves impress the mind opened to them 'with a wise passiveness'." (2)

(1) Works of Wordsworth (Macmillan, 1913), p. 690.

(2) The Age of Wordsworth, Merford, p. 155.

Wordsworth saw how Nature consecrated and made grand the human life which was lived among her beauty and sublimity. He felt also that the visible world and all its forms gave teaching and pleasure to the mind in proportion as human passion worked upon them, and that, in turn, the forms

"Of Nature have a passion in themselves,
That intermingles with those works of man
To which she summons him; although the works
Be mean, have nothing lofty of their own;
And that the Genius of the Poet hence
May boldly take his way among mankind
Wherever Nature leads; that he hath stood
By Nature's side among the men of old,
And so shall stand for ever .

And he dares to hope

That unto him hath also been vouchsafed
An insight that in some sort he possesses,
A privilege whereby a work of his,
Proceeding from a source of untaught things,
Creative and enduring, may become
A power like one of Nature's." (1)

Feeling, hoping thus, he looked into the world of Nature, and felt within it a living spirit, moving unseen, but making all its life. He threw on Nature the light and emotion he had won from knowledge of the sorrows, passions, battles, and destiny of Man, till she trembled not only with her own emotion but with his. He saw in her--thus infinitely sympathetic to those who loved her, and brought the power of humanity to her--the teacher, the guide, and yet the servant of Man. And in this light, the intercourse he had with her was not, as in boyhood, a wild passion, not a solitary one--it had now a softer, gentler, more enduring feeling, as if felt to a lover or a friend. She was no longer apart from Man, but thrilled through all her veins with sympathy for Man in good; no longer apart from God, but a life whose life was that of God; and as such the external master, guide, and anchor of his being.

(1) The Prelude, xiii, 291-312.

Wordsworth has learned that Man may be found at his best where life is most simple--where the conventionalities, customs, and institutions of society have not rendered it artificial and complex, and where he pursues his vocation close to Nature's heart. Again, since Man is a moral being, no order of society is permissible that treats him as a tool--a mere means to an end. "Tyranny and injustice must be overthrown, and the essential rights of men must be zealously guarded. A nation's greatness does not lie in its material possessions, nor in its conquests, but in its moral ideals, in its righteous rule, in the lofty character of its statesmen, and in its moral achievements or progress."

And, finally, the "resources of Divine Providence are at the command of the human soul in every condition of human need. Faith in God, in duty, and in a glorious destiny for the worthy, is the key to the solution of the problem of our earthly life, with its varied vicissitudes, and its large portion of physical and mental suffering." (1)

(1) Wordsworth, Sketch, p. 305.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

We have noted that, in 1791, Wordsworth crossed the Channel, wandered through France and Switzerland, resided for a time in Blois and Paris, mingled freely with the leaders of the Revolution, identified himself with the Girondins, and narrowly escaped the guillotine. He would fain lead humanity

"to the eternal city
For the perfected spirits of the just." (1)

Twelve years after this tour, in 1803, we find him writing a panegyric on that Rob Roy who fought for the common people of Scotland against their oppressors. At thirty-three he still manifests sympathy with violent and material revolution. In the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, written mostly in 1821-1822, we discover the same hatred of tyranny, so that it is not an exaggeration to assert that at fifty-two Wordsworth was still a revolutionist. In these Sonnets he traces the history of the Christian religion in England from the time of the Druids. He denounces luxury, especially foreign luxury; he applauds the Crusaders; he chastises the clergy, and especially the monks, for self-indulgence and pride; he rejoices in the intellectual and spiritual emancipation of the Reformation; and it is quite evident that in 1821 he was, as ever, in revolt against tyranny and oppression, material, intellectual, and spiritual.

There is a widely-spread opinion that Wordsworth towards the middle of his life underwent a great change, and that he apostatized from his earlier faith, both in politics and religion. "It is, of course, quite true that he was a Radical in his youth and a Tory in his old age. But the truth is that neither his youthful Radicalism

(1) Ecclesiastical Sonnets, No. 47.

nor his elderly Toryism affected very much more than the outskirts of his mind. The essential Wordsworth who wrote great poetry and who lives, was not a great deal affected by either. Of the poet who saw more, believed more, loved more than other men, it is simply untrue to say, as Mr. Harper says, that 'in the second half of his life he cursed what he once blessed and blessed what he once cursed'. The truth of that saying is entirely confined to the contrast between the writer who complacently echoed political theorists in his youth and the writer who ill-temperedly echoed frightened property owners later on. What moved him in the French Revolution was not its abstract theories, but its passion of life, its energy of love and hope and faith in the future of man. And never, even in any of his prose, or any of it that counts, did he renounce that sympathy."⁽¹⁾

Wordsworth never changed his view that the original war against the French Republic was a sin against the light. But, when once France had, as he believed, given her soul away, when she had betrayed the cause of freedom and sold her honour to a despot for a blare of victorious trumpets, he had no doubt at all on which side the spiritual hopes of the world lay. He is never a mere patriot of the 'my country right or wrong' type; he never blinds his eyes to England's faults, about which his Sonnets use harder words than they ever use about her enemy.

The poet's joy in the Revolution "was never that of the abstract and cosmopolitan rationalist. It was a joy mixed with an agony of pain; the joy of a man who goes to the scaffold for his country, or, more nearly, of one who changes his faith, knowing that in doing so he stabs the mother, whom he loves, to the heart.

(1) John Bailey in Quarterly Review, July, 1916.

The misery that Wordsworth suffered between 1793 and 1795 or 1796 was that of a tragic struggle between his heart and his mind. For the moment, the thoughts mastered the feelings; and with silent despair in his heart he tried to live in the belief that an abstract liberty, equality, and fraternity could take for men the place of the old humanities of father, son and brother, friend and lover and fellow-countryman. He

'Zealously laboured to cut off (his) heart
From all the sources of her former strength'." (1)

"Wordsworth never deserted the Whigs, for he had never been a Whig. In his youth he was a Republican, and, from 1802, for thirteen years at least, he had been the ally and friend of Tories, with whom he agreed on the leading question of the day. He looked upon the Whigs as men who at the supreme crisis of England's fate had failed as a party in their duty to their country.....It is easy to dispose of the charge that he was in any true sense a political renegade.....However this may be, it is worthwhile to adduce direct evidence that Wordsworth's interest in public affairs did not really die out during any part of his later life, and that he remained till near the day of his death far more the Wordsworth of his youth than, between 1815 and 1850, was realized by the Whigs or the Liberals....." (2)

"His interest in the course of English politics was never keener than in the thirties and forties. The disappointment of his early political enthusiasms had made him mistrustful of all measures of legislative reform; but that mistrust only made him the more watchful of the tendencies in English public life. 'The evils that he foresees from this dreadful Reform Bill,' wrote his daughter in 1831, 'quite

(1) John Bailey in Quarterly Review, July, 1916.

(2) The Statesmanship of Wordsworth, Dicey, pp. 107, 110, 112.

weigh his spirit down'; and she was glad to get him into Scotland for a walking tour which might 'drown his political thoughts and feelings for a time in his poetical ones.' The events of the next ten or fifteen years, the movement for the repeal of the Corn Laws, the Chartist agitation, the wide-spread discontent among the laboring class, all gave him grave concern for the cause of ordered liberty and religion in England." (1)

In a sonnet published in 1835 we find him denouncing agrarian oppression. Here we see the primeval soul of the poet still on fire. But the sonnets of 1842 are as dull in matter as they are in form. The fires were dying. The creative spirit had spent itself. He could no longer often express his joy as he had once, and it had become oftener "serious" and "pensive" than "tumultuous" and "fierce", but it was still in him. The Leech-Gatherer and The Cumberland Beggar are far greater poems than that about the old Man and the Robin written in 1846; but the unique Wordsworthian sympathy with the heart of the poor is as plain in this as in its greater predecessors.

The apparent conservatism of his later years was the result, partly of the increasing feebleness of his intellectual power or (as it might be more just to say) the decreasing energy of his creative powers, added to a growing and more confirmed belief in the supremacy of the spirit. Men and nations must emancipate themselves by emancipation of the soul. Humanity must give the "Immanent God" a chance in his own world.

Wordsworth was not a genial man. He lived in the quietude of thought. His poetry will never speak to the busy crowd. But it can render us better service than that. It can take us out of all passionate striving, away from the dreary intercourse of life, and set us

(1) Wordsworth: How to Know Him, Winchester, p. 268.

in the solitude of nature as in a sanctuary filled with "the breathing balm, the silence and the calm of mute insensate things"; it can infuse a healthy sympathy for the essential virtues of men, however homely; and it can dilate the soul with thoughts as lofty and as pure as the naked open sky.

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