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Influence of Coleridge on Wordsworth.

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Department of English
of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfil-
ment for the Degree of Master of Arts.

University of Manitoba.

April, 1930.

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INTRODUCTION.

i. Historical Sketch.

The old order changeth, yielding place to new;
And God fulfills Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.¹

The period we are considering lies between November 1783, when King George III recognized the independence of the United States of America, and 1832, when the Reform Bill became the law of the land. "The half century between these two events is one of great turmoil, yet of steady advance in every department of English life. The storm centre of the political unrest was the French Revolution, that fearful uprising which proclaimed the natural rights of man and the abolition of class distinctions. Its effect on the whole civilized world is beyond computation."²

At first England, led by Pitt the Younger, showed great sympathy for the Revolution, but as the excesses of the revolutionary party developed, the great majority of Englishmen arrayed themselves against imperialistic France. Even Pitt deemed this a blessing for the sudden zeal for fighting a foreign nation prevented a revolution at home.

The causes of this threatened revolution in England were not political but economic. The new inventions in steel and

1. Tennyson, The Passing of Arthur. 408-10.
2. W. J. Long, English Literature. Boston and London, Ginn and Company, 1909. p. 370.

machinery, the widening of markets by improved means of communication, and the rapid increase in the volume of her trade made England the workshop of the world. Her wealth had increased, but the unequal distribution of that same wealth was deplorable. While England increased in wealth, and spent vast sums on her army, and while her gentry, landowners, and manufacturers lived in luxurious ease, multitudes were clamoring for work, or again mothers and little children toiled a sixteen-hour day in a mine or factory for a mere pittance.

When the poor are hovell'd and hustl'd
together, each sex like swine,
When only the ledger lives, and when only
not all men lie;¹

Riotous mobs, composed of hungry men and women, took violent means of avenging their wrongs in every city. It was this terrible economic condition which occasioned the danger of another English revolution.

When the Continental War was brought to a close by the battle of Waterloo in 1815, England gave her attention to the work of reform at home. Among these reforms we record the prevention of child labor, the freedom of the Press the abolition of restrictions against certain religious sects, the establishment of schools under the leadership of such men as Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster, while in 1833 by the Emancipation Act all slaves within the British Empire were set free. Thus England unconsciously proclaimed her final emancipation from barbarism.

ii. Literary Characteristics of the Age.

Literature and language faithfully mirrored the age. The poets of the early eighteenth century lacked passion and imagination, and were fast bound by self imposed rules. Their favourite metre was the heroic couplet; their favourite themes were satire, compliment, and criticism. The tendencies of the times were best expressed in the exquisitely finished and polished verse of Alexander Pope (1688-1774). However, in Pope's followers the style, which a great artist could ennoble, became vapid, commonplace, and artificial.

A revolution came over English literature after the middle of the century. The style and subject of poetry equally changed. The way of writing became more varied and natural, and bit by bit the bondage of the heroic couplet was shaken off. Writers again began to revel in country life and beautiful scenery, and mountains, hitherto objects of horror, were described with enthusiasm and sympathy.

iii The Two Great Representatives of the Age.

Heralded by the revived study of the romantic past, through the means of such books as Bishop Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765) and by such precursors as James Thomson, the poet of the Seasons (1750), the new spirit took different shapes in the lyrics and satires of Robert Burns, the Ayrshire farmer; the delicate humor of William Cowper; the realistic pictures of Suffolk village life of George Crabbe; the strange prophetic vision of William Blake, and the stirring romances and tales

in verse of the Edinburgh lawyer, Sir Walter Scott. Towards the end of the century it came to a head in the so called Lake School headed by William Wordsworth (1770-1850), the lofty singer of Nature, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1774), a subtle poet and mystic thinker.

Yet to Coleridge as to Wordsworth, the great aim of poetry was to bring the mind of man into closer relation with God "who is our home."¹ In The Prelude Wordsworth states this aim:

Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
Is with infinitude and only there.²

The two poets, with whom Dorothy Wordsworth should be included as the "handmaid and interpreter of Nature" for her brother and his friend, were so interfused with each other's thoughts that it is not possible to separate every thought and ascribe every phrase to its real originator any more than it is possible to assign the spark to the flint or to the steel that when struck together produce it. "Had Wordsworth never known Coleridge, had Coleridge never known Wordsworth, we should never have had the essential Wordsworth, the essential Coleridge that we have; the history of English literature would have been far different, and far poorer."³

1. Wordsworth, Ode, Intimations of Immortality. 66.
2. Wordsworth, The Prelude. vi. 604-5.
3. Harold Littledale, Lyrical Ballads 1798.
London, Henry Frowde, 1911. p.xiii.

CHAPTER ONE.

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES ON COLERIDGE AND WORDSWORTH.

1. Coleridge.

We agree with the statement, once made by Coleridge, that a man carries within him his past as a tree the rings of its growth,¹ therefore this chapter shall be given to a brief resume of the childhood, youth, and early manhood of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth with reference to the effect of these formative years upon their subsequent development. In attempting to summarize the influence which Coleridge exerted over his friend, Wordsworth, we have endeavoured to eliminate all appearances of biography as connected with either poet except in so far as the earlier influences of parentage, environment, or school life developed in each certain characteristics of mind which enabled him, in after years, to discover, understand, and develop the other.

Strange as it may seem, the fact that Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the thirteenth child in the family of the Reverend John Coleridge, vicar of Ottery, in Devonshire, had a remarkable influence on the bent and development of his intellectual powers. His was the mind which afterwards gave to the world a Wordsworth at his best. Consequently we find it necessary to note, trivial

1. H.N.Hudson, *The Tempest*. p.9. New York, Chicago, London. Ginn and Company, 1909.

as they may seem, any details of life and environment which acted as creative, stimulating, and selective forces in the mind of Coleridge.

Coleridge's home associations prevented the development of initiative and self confidence. In his letters to Poole written 1797 he describes himself as a precocious and imaginative child; never mixing with other boys, a great favourite of both parents, therefore unpopular with his brothers, the result being that he took no pleasure in sports, but became a great reader. Even at six years he had read Belisarius, Robinson Crusoe, and the Arabian Nights' Entertainments. These books made such a deep impression upon him that he became a dreamer, never had the habits of a child, never thought as a child, never had the language of a child.¹ While he missed much that boys usually enjoy we see in this young dreamer the embryo philosopher.

Upon the death of his father in his ninth year we follow the lad Coleridge to Christ's Hospital, a charity school in London. Concerning this period of his life Coleridge states: "At a very premature age, even before my fifteenth year, I had bewildered myself in metaphysics and in theological controversy. Nothing else pleased me."² He goes on to explain how highly delighted he was if during his friendless wanderings on leave-days any passenger, especially if he were dressed in black, would enter with him into a conversation which he soon found means of directing to one of

1. Biog. Supplement to Biog.Lit. 1847, II. p.315.

2. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria.p.7.
London, George Bell and Sons, 1817.

his favourite subjects,

Of providence, fore-knowledge, will and fate,
Fixed fate, free will, fore-knowledge absolute,
And found no end in wandering mazes lost.¹

and no one will fail to see in this a preparation for the service he rendered his friend Wordsworth, when he met him, sick of soul, in later years at Racedown.

"During the years that Coleridge spent as a student in the upper school, metaphysics and controversial theology struggled for some time with poetry for the mastery; but in 1789 under the influence of Bowles, poetry became paramount."² Bowles, if not a great poet was a true one, and the young poet at Christ's Hospital recognized the genuine note when he heard it. Nor was he alone in this experience. Four years later, the same sonnets captivated William Wordsworth. How this influence affected Coleridge is illustrated by the youthful poems of 1790. On the occasion of his leaving Christ's Hospital for Cambridge he expresses the feeling of loneliness which enshrouded him as follows:

Farewell parental scenes! a sad farewell!
To you my grateful heart still fondly clings,
Tho' fluttering round on Fancy's burnished wings
Her tales of future Joy, Hope loves to tell.
Adieu, adieu! ye much loved cloisters pale!
Ah! would those happy days return again.
When 'neath your arches, free from every stain,
I heard of guilt and wonder'd at the tale!
Dear haunts! where oft my simple lays I sang,
Listening meanwhile the echoes of my feet,

1. Biog. Lit., p.7.

2. J.C. Shairp, Studies in Poetry and Philosophy, p.104.
Boston and New York, Houghton, Muffin and Company, 1868.

Lingering I quit you, with as great a pang,
As when erewhile, my weeping childhood torn
By early sorrow from my native seat,
Mingled its tears with hers . . . my widow'd
Parent lorn!¹

Coleridge is portrayed during the latter part of his sojourn at Christ's Hospital as a typical boy, unsettled and very changeable in his choice of vocation. At one time he planned to be a shoemaker; at another a doctor, but declined to be a clergyman, and this youthful vacillating temperament was but a foregleam of his later life. As he grew older much of his time was still spent poring over books, and it was well for him that amid his unsympathetic surroundings and the dogmatic rule of the Reverend James Bowyer, the head-master, that he was enabled to sink at will into himself and taste the experiences which rendered realism insignificant. At one time he devoured literature at the rate of two volumes per day until he had read through a whole circulating library. He read Voltaire and blossomed into an atheist, but as Professor Harper tells us, Coleridge himself said his infidel vanity never touched his heart. Perhaps much that he read might have been better left unread, yet experience fits us all to be teachers and sympathizers. While Coleridge's voracious reading led him into depths beyond his reach yet it helped to furnish him with a store-house of experience whereby he was enabled at a critical period to direct the current of Wordsworth's thought into sane channels.

1. Coleridge, Sonnet: On Quitting School for College.

The last years of his school life were filled with happier memories. His circle of friends included Middleton, Meyer, Horne, the cordial Robert Allen, and the gentle hearted Lamb. Surrounded by these friends Coleridge no longer withdrew into himself. His genius responded to their admiration. How often he was the centre of an enthusiastic group of listeners we can readily imagine. Lamb gives us the following well known pen picture of these days. "Come back into memory, like as thou wert in the dayspring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee . . . the dark pillar not yet turned . . . Samuel Taylor Coleridge . . . Logician, Metaphysician, Bard! How have I seen the casual passer through the Cloisters stand still, entranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the speech and the garb of the young Mirandula) to hear thee unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of Jamblichus, or Plontinus (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting Homer in his Greek, or Pindar. . . while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the inspired charity boy!"¹

ii. Wordsworth.

Wordsworth's early days were spent partly at Cockermouth, partly with his mother's family at Penrith on the eastern border of Cumberland. As a child he was left much to himself and reamed freely in a little world of natural pleasures, enjoying the license

1. Charles Lamb, Essays of Elia, Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago. New York, E. V. Lucas, 1903. Vol. II.

of the open air. . . the "seed time of his soul."¹ The river Derwent murmured lullabies to him when he was even yet in his nurse's arms.

giving me
Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind
A foretaste, a dim earnest of the calm
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.²

and when he arrived at the age of five, the wise young parents respected the savagery of childhood.

Oh, many a time have I, a five year's child
In a small mill-race severed from his stream,
Made one long bathing of a summer's day;
Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again
Alternate, all a summer's day, or scoured
The sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves
Of yellow ragwort; or when rock and hill
The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,
Were bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone
Beneath the sky, as if I had been born
On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport
A naked savage in the thunder shower.³

Wordsworth's mother understood her son and foresaw that he would be remarkable for good or evil. In his ninth year they were separated by her death and the following tribute from The Prelude is of considerable interest, especially in view of the unique importance of childhood instincts in Wordsworth's philosophy.

Early died
My honoured Mother, she who was the heart
And hinge of all our learnings and our loves;

1. The Prelude, I. 301.
2. Ib. 278-281.
3. I. 288-300.

She left us destitute, and as we might,
Trooping together. Little suits it me
To break upon the sabbath of her rest
With any thought that looks at others' blame;
Nor would I praise her but in perfect love.
Hence am I checked: but let me boldly say,
In gratitude and for the sake of truth,
Unheard by her, that she, not falsely taught,
Fetching her goodness rather from times past,
Than shaping novelties for times to come,
Had no presumption, no such jealousy,
Nor did by habit of her thoughts mistrust
Our nature, but had virtual faith that He
Who fills the mother's breast with innocent milk,
Doth also for our nobler part provide,
Under His great correction and control,
As innocent instincts, and as innocent food;
Or draws for minds that are left free to trust
In the simplicities of opening life
Sweet honey out of spurned or dreaded weeds.
This was her creed and therefore she was pure
From anxious fear of error or mishap,
And evil, overweeningly so called;
Was not puffed up by false unnatural hopes,
Nor selfish with unnecessary cares,
Nor with impatience from the season asked
More than its timely produce; rather loved
The hours for what they are, than from regard
Glanced on their promises in restless pride.
Such was she - not from faculties more strong
Than others have, but from the times, perhaps,
And spot in which she lived, and through a grace
Of modest meekness, simple-mindedness,
A heart that found benignity and hope,
Being itself benign.¹

During his formative years Wordsworth was more fortunate than most poet-boys of his day in finding sympathy and encouragement among his teachers, especially in the Reverend William Taylor, head-master during four years of his stay at Hawkshead. Of his influence Wordsworth writes when after a lapse of eight years he

1. The Prelude, v. 256-93.

made a pilgrimage to his tomb.

That very morning had I turned aside
To seek the ground where, 'mid a throng of graves,
An honoured teacher of my youth was laid,
And on the stone were graven by his desire
Lines from the churchyard elegy of Gray.
This faithful guide speaking from his death-bed,
Added no farewell to his parting counsel,
But said to me "My head will soon be low";
But when I saw the turf that covered him,
After the lapse of full eight years, those words,
With sound of voice and countenance of the Man,
Came back upon me, so that some few tears
Fell from me in my own despite. But now
I thought, still traversing that widespread plain.
With tender pleasure of the verses graven
Upon his tombstone, whispering to myself:
He loved the Poets, and, if now alive,
Would have loved me, as one not destitute
Of promise, nor belying the kind hope
That he had formed, when I, at his command,
Began to spin with toil, my earliest songs.¹

At Hawkshead he received a peculiarly valuable training.

The roving child grew up to exacting boyhood. He could take his share in "skating" (P.I.425). "kite-flying" (P.I.491) or "loo or whist" (P.I.515), but his spirit imperiously demanded frequent intervals of solitude. In The Prelude we can trace "the growth of the poet's mind."² We can picture the boy soulding beneath the stars and hearing in the "low breathings of the solitary hills"³ the footsteps of the furies of the night. Thus the fear of Nature was the first insistent emotion.

1. The Prelude, x.532-52.
2. Ib.
3. Ib. 322-3.

Later, the subtler sense of the beauty of Nature broke upon Wordsworth like an inspiration. He began to receive

a pure
Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths
Of curling mist, or from the level plain
Of waters colored by impending glours.¹

Amid the beautiful surrounding scenery the revelation came to this young boy of the infinite beauty of creation, and its eternal testimony of some divine standard higher than use, surviving the mistakes of men. This mood, derived from the evidence in Nature's simplest phenomena, of Nature's universal and unifying purpose, was attained when the lad had reached the age of seventeen. The foregoing instances of Wordsworth's limitless opportunities of revelling in Nature are recorded as bearing a part in the foundation of his powers and the texture of his mind.

In The Prelude Wordsworth pays a glowing tribute to the liberty extended to him in choice of books. "Such liberty Coleridge too, enjoyed, and to this Wordsworth refers when he rejoices for them both that they had escaped the interference of system-mongers with their surveillance, their examinations, their artificial standards."² "I will pour out" he says,

Thanks with uplifted heart, that I was reared
Safe from an evil which these days have laid
Upon the children of the land, a pest
That might have dried me up, body and soul.
This verse is dedicate to Nature's self,
And things that teach as Nature teaches: then

1. The Prelude, l. 563-5.

2. George McLean Harper, William Wordsworth: His Life Works and Influence. London. John Murray, 1916, l. 51.

Oh! where had been the Man, the Poet where,
Where had we been, we two, beloved Friend!
If in the season of unperilous choice,
In lieu of wandering, as we did, through vales
Rich with indigenous produce, open ground
Of Fancy, happy pastures ranged at will
We had been followed, hourly watched, and noosed,
Each in his several melancholy walk
Stringed like a poor man's heifer at its feed,
Led through the lanes in forlorn servitude;
Or rather like a stalled ox debarred
From touch of growing grass, that may not taste
A flower till it have yielded up its sweets
A prelibation to the mower's scythe.¹

But more important than any book-lore, more important than any skill in verse-making, or definite thoughts about poetry, was the free, natural life he led at Hawkshead. It was there that he was smitten to the core with that love of Nature which became the prime necessity of his being. Whatever stimulants Wordsworth had, came from within, awakened only by the common sights and sounds of Nature. All through his school time he says that in pauses of the giddy bliss he felt:

Gleams like the flashing of a shield, the earth
And common face of Nature spake to me
Remarkable things.²

On summer mornings he would rise, before another human being was astir, and alone from some jutting knoll, watch the first gleam of dawn kindle on the lake:

Oft in these moments such a holy calm
Would overspread my soul that bodily eyes
Were entirely forgotten, and what I saw
Appeared like something in myself, a dream,
A prospect in the mind.³

1. The Prelude, v. 225-245.
2. Ib. I. 586 -8.
3. Ib. II. 348-352.

"It is hardly possible to conceive two school-times more unlike than that of Coleridge at Christ's, pent up in the heart of London City, and that of Wordsworth at Hawkshead, with the freedom of Esthwaite Mere, and all the surrounding solitudes, and yet each as well in habits and teaching as in outward scenery and circumstances answers strangely to the character and after lives of the two friends."¹

Thou my Friend! wert reared
In the great city, 'mid far other scenes
But we by different roads at length have gained
The self-same bourne.²

The period of adolescence is the most critical in its possibilities. "As a man thinketh so is he"³ is never more true than at this period. The danger in this age is of leading two lives, the outside one with which parents and instructors are acquainted, and a very different inside one - not necessarily bad but egotistic, emotional, and imaginative. In the sympathy and understanding of a wise adult, however, lies safety for the development of the unstable, intense, imaginative, emotional life of the formative period.

iii. Coleridge at Cambridge.

In the further review of the intellectual training of the poets in question we next follow Coleridge to Cambridge where he was rather an indifferent student but where he developed to a greater degree his conversational, rhetorical, and argument-

1. Shairp, p. 105.
2. The Prelude, II. 452-5.
3. Proverbs xxiii.7.

ative talents. We read that his rooms were a centre of attraction, for he was a pleasing conversationalist. He seemed to hypnotize his audience without directly addressing them. Possibly it was the quality of his voice which had a sort of caressing intonation, possibly it was the flow of his words that later captivated Wordsworth and bound him to him as with cords of steel.

"Towards the end of 1795 Coleridge met Wordsworth's first publication, Descriptive Sketches, then newly issued. The old admiration of Bowles was now in large part transferred to Wordsworth. 'Seldom, if ever,' says Coleridge, was the emergence of an original genius above the literary horizon more evidently announced."¹ This admiration was of paramount influence in the lives of both poets for it led Coleridge but a few years later to visit the home of Wordsworth in order to become intimately acquainted with the author of Descriptive Sketches. The result of that acquaintance was the formation of an almost unparalleled friendship, a change, or rather a revival in English poetry, and the discussion of a more satisfying philosophy which greatly influenced the then unsettled mind of Wordsworth.

iv. Wordsworth at Cambridge.

In the study of the influence of his college career upon the life of William Wordsworth we glean that Cambridge had, in the last years of the nineteenth century, few attractions for the mountain lad. "In point of fact the tide of intellectual life

1. Hall Caine, Life and Writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, p.35. London and New York, The Walter Scott Publishing Co.Ltd.

the University, was at that time, at its lowest ebb."¹ Wordsworth felt that he was not for that hour nor for that place."² The course of study was as a fetter to him. He asked of Cambridge what it is to be feared no university ever gave - namely, "a great stimulus to the emotions coinciding with the steady advance in knowledge and intellectual strength."³

"Moreover, Cambridge was affected at this time by a reaction against the tendencies of free thought. Her disputations theologians confined their high argument to a narrow circle of Anglican gospel; and the literal restraint which the Hawkshead boy now for the first time experienced was repeated in the mental fetters which his tutors sought to impose on him."⁴

Nowhere is there a more disastrous effect on morality than in a college or school whose real religion does not heartily support its ceremonial of worship. Wordsworth comments on the practice of compulsory chapel service in a vein of satire:

Be Folly and False-seeming free to affect
Whatever formal gift of discipline
Shall raise them highest in their own esteem -
Let them parade among the Schools at will,
But spare the House of God. Was ever known
The witless shepherd who persists to drive
A flock that thirsts not to a pool disliked?
A weight must surely hang on days begun
And ended with such mockery. Be wise,
Ye Presidents and Deans, and till the spirit
Of ancient times revive, and youth be trained
At home in pious service, to your bells

1. L. Magnus, A Primer of Wordsworth, p.8. London, Methuen and Company, 1897.
2. The Prelude, III. 81.
3. Harper, I. 62.
4. L. Magnus, A Primer of Wordsworth, p.9.

Give seasonable rest, for 'tis a sound
Hollow as ever vexed the tranquil air,
And your officious doings bring disgrace
On the plain steeples of our English Church,
Whose worship, 'mid remotest village trees,
Suffers for this."¹

While university fetters and religious dogma had an injurious influence upon him at this time, yet he then did for himself what he has since done for thousands; he strengthened his heart by communing with Nature, first among the level fields of Cambridge, then among the grander scenes which had inspired his boyhood at Hawkshead. When on holiday, he retraced his old haunts, shook hands with old friends and old play-mates, and in the animal glow of youth and social impulse joined for a time in a round of trivial pleasures becoming one of a light crowd that spent days and nights in

Feast and dance, and public rivalry,
And sports and games (too grateful in themselves,
Yet in themselves less grateful, I believe,
Than as they were a badge glossy and fresh
Of manliness and freedom) all conspired
To lure my mind from firm habitual quest
Of feeding pleasures, to depress the zeal
And damp those yearnings which had once been mine—
A mild, unworldly-minded youth, given up
To his own eager thoughts.²

But to Wordsworth -

that heartless chase
Of trivial pleasures was a poor exchange
For books and nature at that early age,³

and one morning after having passed

1. The Prelude, iii. 401-18.
2. Ib. iv. 280-91.
3. Ib. iv. 297-9.

The night in dancing, gayety and mirth
With din of instruments and shuffling feet,
And glancing forms, and tapers glittering,
And unaimed prattle flying up and down;
Spirits upon the stretch and here and there
Silent shocks of young love-liking interspersed
Whose transient pleasure mounted to the head,
And tingled through the veins.¹

as he walked homeward at dawn the beauties and grandeur and glories
of the mountain landscape, "drenched in empyrean light"² so wrought
upon him, that suddenly overcome he bursts forth:

Ah! need I say, dear Friend! that to the brim
My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit. On I walked
In thankful blessedness, which yet survives.³

It was the hour of his baptism with the fire of poesy,
an hour memorable in his life and in the history of literature.
Alone with God, he accepted the call and henceforth he was
"a dedicated Spirit." "The true poet is the bard, the seer, the
minister; he has a Divine ordination, and is sacred by a Divine
anointing; he is a consecrated spirit, selected and commissioned
for the performance of a Divine behest."⁴

Refreshed and cheered Wordsworth returned to Cambridge,
but withdrew now for the first time in his life into something
like solitude. "He read copiously but without a settled plan.
He knew that he was a poet and was calmly happy in the present
sense of joy and the certain anticipation of future power.

1. The Prelude, iv. 312-19.

2. Ib. iv. 328.

3. Ib. iv. 333-8.

4. W.J.Dawson, Makers of English Poetry, p.102.

Then he first dared to hope that he might leave behind him some monument which pure hearts might reverence."¹ Perhaps Milton's example gave him courage. He declares that:

the dread awe
Of mighty names was softened down and seemed
Approachable, admitting fellowship
Of modest sympathy.²

During the winter evenings it was his habit to ramble above the College, charmed by the natural beauty.

All winter long, whenever free to choose,
Did I by night frequent the College groves
And tributary walks; the last and oft
The only one, who had been lingering there
Through hours of silence, till the porter's bell,
A punctual follower on the stroke of nine,
Rang with its blunt unceremonious voice,
Inexorable summons! Lofty elms,
Inviting shades of opportune recess,
Bestowed composure on a neighbourhood
Unpeaceful in itself. A single tree
With sinuous trunk, boughs exquisitely wreathed
Grew there; an ash which Winter for himself
Decked as in pride, and with outlandish grace:
Up from the ground and almost to the top,
The trunk and every master branch were green
With clustering ivy, and the lightsome twigs
And outer spray profusely tipped with seeds
That hung in yellow tassels, while the air
Stirred them, not voiceless. Often have I stood
Foot-bound, uplooking at this lovely tree
Beneath a frosty moon. The hemisphere
Of magic fiction, verse of mine perchance
May never tread; but scarcely Spencer's self
Could have more tranquil visions in his youth,
Or could more bright appearances create
Of human forms with superhuman powers,
Than I beheld loitering on calm clear nights
Alone, beneath this fairy work of earth.³

1. Harper, I. 83.
2. The Prelude, vi. 60-3.
3. Ib. vi. 66-94.

Athirst only for nature and freedom, Wordsworth devoted his last long vacation to a walking tour on the Continent, along with a college friend, Robert Jones. In France they saw a people, rising with jubilee to welcome in the dawn of a new era for mankind. They saw and sympathized, but their purpose being to see nature rather than man, they went on to see the high Alps and Italian lakes. Wordsworth states that the "woods decaying, never to be decayed,"¹ the "drizzling crags"² the cataracts and the clouds appeared to him no longer material things, but spiritual entities, "characters in a dread Apocalypse."³

In the spring of 1791 he was graduated Bachelor of Arts and quitted Cambridge for London. At that time he described himself:

By personal ambition unenslaved
Frugal as there was need, and though
self-willed,
From dangerous passions free.⁴

In these three lines is worded with intense condensation, the moral side of Wordsworth's nature.

At this point we discern the influence of his early teachers, for he tells us that during his sojourn in the great metropolis he was preserved from the evils about him by the remembrance of the kind of men he had first lived amongst. The good had come first and the evil, when it did come, did not stamp itself into the ground work of his imagination.

1. The Prelude, vi. 625.
2. Ib. vi. 632.
3. Ib. vi. 638.
4. Ib. vii. 63-5.

v. Early Manhood.

Another and a strong influence which gave a bent to the lives of these two men was the general uneasiness and moral disorder prevalent in Europe. The fascinations of revolution appealed to each of them. Coleridge was an enthusiast, and other enthusiasts found in him a rallying point. The air was full of many noises just then, and there were subjects aplenty for discussion. Coleridge was a man of astonishing intellectual activity. His feelings and imaginations could not remain unkindled. His sympathies were with the democracy in the great struggle for political regeneration that was going on in Europe.¹ He himself states, "No man was more enthusiastic than I for France and the Revolution; it had all my wishes, none of my expectations. Before 1793, I clearly saw and often enough stated in public, the horrid delusion, the vile mockery of the whole affair."²

His poem entitled France: An Ode was "first printed in the Morning Post April 16, 1793, under the title of The Recantation: An Ode, and with the following editorial introduction now reprinted for the first time: The Ode will be in unison with the feelings of every friend to Liberty and foe to Oppression . . . It is very satisfactory to find so zealous and steady an advocate for Freedom as Mr. Coleridge concur with us in condemning the conduct of France towards the Swiss Cantons . . . What we most admire is the avowal of his sentiments and public censure of the unprincipled and atrocious conduct of

1. Source: J. Dykes Campbell, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Chapt. II. London, Macmillan and Company, 1896.
2. Table Talk, July 23, 1832.

France. The poem is written with great energy. The second, third and fourth stanzas contain some of the most vigorous lines we have ever read."¹

When France in wrath her giant limbs upreared
And with that oath, which smote air, earth and
 sea
Stamped her strong foot and said she would be
 free.
Bear witness for me, how I hoped and feared!
* * * * *
Forgive me Freedom! O forgive those dreams!
I hear thy voice, I hear thy loud lament,
From bleak Helvetia's icy caverns sent - -
I hear thy groans upon the blood-stained
 streams!
Heroes, that for your peaceful country
 perished,
And ye that fleeing, spot your mountain-snows
With bleeding wounds; forgive me that I cherished
One thought that ever blessed your cruel foes!
To scatter rage and traitorous guilt
Where Peace her jealous home had built;
* * * * *
Oh France, that mockest Heaven, adulterous,
 blind,
And patriot only in pernicious toils!
Are these thy boasts, Champion of human kind?
To mix with kings in the low lust of sway,
Yell in the hunt, and share the murderous prey;
To insult the shrine of Liberty with spoils
From freemen torn; to tempt and to betray?²

The foregoing citation leads us through the conflict which gave to the world a Coleridge who had learned that mankind cannot so hastily cast off the heritage of the past without lapsing into brutality, and who had also through his own conflict been prepared to be an influence in the life of Wordsworth when his soul was called upon to endure the storm and stress of a world clamoring for emancipation.

1. Campbell, The Poetical Works of Coleridge, p. 607.
2. Coleridge, France: An Ode, 22-6, 64-73, 78-84.

The political upheavals in Europe likewise created a problem in Wordsworth's mind. From London he had been lured to France. He hoped and expected that a new era of liberty and happiness was about to dawn and at this time he was enabled to gather into the solidity of a system those first faint impulses of love for humanity which were stirring in him during his stay in London. His chief acquaintance in France was General Michael Beaupuy, who, according to Wordsworth's description of him in The Prelude, was a rarely gifted soul, pure and elevated in his aims - one of those clear, cordial men, whose moral sensibilities guide them to the right road.

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 had crushed them
. 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 woman;¹

They became close friends, had long intimate talks together, and were a mutual comfort and support. " No other man, save Coleridge, had so great an influence upon Wordsworth as this sweet and devoted patriot . . . With his more systematic philosophy tempered in the fire of persecution Beaupuy came to Wordsworth's

1. The Prelude, ix. 292-8, 306-13.

support. He turned the young man's idealism into firm principle. And at last the love of humanity which had not yet found equal place in the poet's heart with love of Nature, was raised to the double throne."¹

Wordsworth owns that he threw himself into the then burning question, without the needful preparation, knowing little of the past history of France or of her institutions, and wholly unversed in political philosophy. He only saw that the best ought to rule and that they did not.

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.²

Later he became convinced that some great work awaited him and in his agitated mood he

Seemed to hear a voice that cried
To the whole city, "Sleep no more."³

and concludes that he, William Wordsworth, was the proper person to rally the nation and conduct the revolution to a happy issue. Just at this crisis he was forced, by what he then termed "a harsh necessity"⁴ but afterwards owned to be a kindly providence, to return to England else doubtless he

should have then made common cause
With some who perished; haply perished too,
A poor mistaken and bewildered offering.⁻⁵

1. Harper I. 162.
2. The Prelude, ix. 121-4.
3. Ib. x. 86-7
4. Ib. x. 223.
5. Ib. x. 229-31.

Wordsworth now spent some time in London in great mental perplexity - a period of storm and stress. Although horrified with the excesses of the revolution, he yet clung to his republican faith, and, when at length Britain interposed, his indignation knew no bounds. Soon France entered on a war of conquest, and he was doomed to see his last hopes of liberty betrayed.

But now become oppressors in their turn,
Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence
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,¹

Overwhelmed with despondency at the shipwreck of his golden dreams he turned to probe the foundations on which all society rests. Demanding formal proof, and finding none, he abandoned moral questions in despair. This was the crisis of his malady. In this sickness of his soul, his only sister Dorothy came, like his better angel, to his side. To such a poet, such a sister, was what, just at that time he needed. She took him away from the logical debates of the city; she led him once more into the open fields, the mountains, and the lakes; she guided him back into the experiences of his youth where lay the true sources of his genius, and where once more began those former councils of the "head and heart."²

1. The Prelude, xl. 206-12.

2. Ib. xl. 353.

Then it was
Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good!
That the beloved Sister in whose sight
Those days were passed
.
Maintained for me a saving intercourse
With my true self;¹

but there were intellectual depths which the sister's influence could not fathom and it was left to Coleridge to rescue his friend from the mazes of his unsatisfying philosophical creed.

Thus far we have been following two souls travelling over different paths, subject to different influences, but who were destined in future years to meet and form a collation of poetic and philosophical productivity which has influenced the world even in our own time. It is left to subsequent chapters to show the result of a union of two intellects born under different circumstances, trained in different schools, surrounded by different environment, and forced under different circumstances to meet problems in philosophy and politics, yet neither knowing the height to which he might attain until he met the other. Of this meeting Wordsworth says--

nursed and reared
As if in several elements, we were framed
To bend at last to the same discipline,
Predestined, if two beings ever were,
To seek the same delights, and have one health,
One happiness.²

1. The Prelude, xi. 383-42.
2. Ib. vi. 254-9.

CHAPTER TWO.

INFLUENCE OF COLERIDGE'S FRIENDSHIP.

i. Personal Relationships.

In the preceding chapter we have been following as it were, two rivulets which were destined soon to unite, reacting upon and influencing each other, enlarging the capacity of both. It was at Racedown, where Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy had settled, that this union took place. Incidentally, we might mention that Calvert, by his bequest to Wordsworth, accomplished for the world more than he dreamed, as it was the means of bringing together two men, fostered in different elements, but, who were, in the immediate future, to form a friendship akin to that of David and Jonathan. Everyone who is familiar with the literary history of England at the beginning of the nineteenth century knows the closeness of the tie which bound Wordsworth and Coleridge to each other.

These two, together with Southey, forming the group known as the Lake poets, were first introduced to the literary world by Joseph Cottle, a bookseller in Bristol. Bristol, at that time, was one of the centres of literary life, and Mr. Cottle himself something of a poet. It is also interesting for us to know that he afterwards became the publisher of the Lyrical Ballads of 1798.

When Robert Lovell came to visit Cottle, bringing with him the two young men, Coleridge and Southey, Mr. Cottle at once accepted them as kindred spirits, for he, being a man of inner vision, detected genius of which there was yet so little proof.

"What an importation of life and hope they brought into the old Bristol street! Young Southey holding his handsome head high; young Coleridge with all the mystic future in his big dreamy eyes, and his mouth full of endless projects, one rising out of another like flowers from a stem; the first a refined and chivalrous gentleman at all times; the other an enchanter whose eloquence no man could withstand."¹

When Wordsworth visited Bristol it is estimated that he most probably encountered Southey and Coleridge, "as Cottle in his very natural desire to provide a market for their literary efforts, would be sure to talk about them."²

There is some little difficulty in arriving at the exact date of the first meeting of Coleridge and Wordsworth, but the consensus of the two greatest biographers of the poets in question, J. Dykes Campbell of Coleridge and Professor Harper of Wordsworth, is as follows: "The precise date of the first meeting of Coleridge and Wordsworth has not been ascertained, but a careful examination of all the evidence available, published and unpublished, has all but convinced me that it may have probably taken place as early as

1. George Saintsbury, A History of Nineteenth Century Literature, p. 203. New York and London, Macmillan and Company, 1896.

2. Harper, I. 282.

September 1795."¹

It was in the autumn of 1795 at Racedown in Dorsetshire that William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, on the strength of the nine hundred pounds, the Raisley Calvert legacy, set up house together. "This legacy from a young man who judged highly of Wordsworth's poetical powers must not only have released him from the fear of want but have made him renew his dedication to that art which had thus far proved almost too stubborn for him . . . Without some degree of independence and without the constant society of Dorothy, the years of fruitfulness could not have come to Wordsworth."²

A youth - (he bore
The name of Calvert - it shall live, if words
Of mine can give it life) in firm belief
That by endowments not from me withheld
Good might be furthered - in his last decay
By a bequest sufficient for my needs
Enabled me to pause for choice, and walk
At large and unrestrained, nor damped too soon
By mortal cares. Himself no Poet, yet
Far less a common fellower of the world,
He deemed that my pursuits and labours lay
Apart from all that leads to wealth, or even
A necessary maintenance insures,
Without some hazard to the finer sense:
He cleared a passage for me, and the stream
Flowed in the bent of Nature.³

More important, however, than any poetry composed at Racedown Lodge was the friendship which blossomed forth between the two poets. Perhaps no two such men had met anywhere on English ground during the nineteenth century. Coleridge, when at Cambridge, had read

1. Campbell, 64., Cf. Harper, I. 278.
2. Harper, I. 250.
3. The Prelude, xiv. 354-68.

the Descriptive Sketches and finding in them something he had never before found in poetry longed to know their author.

From the moment of their meeting at Racedown, early in 1797, the very atmosphere seemed to grow luminous about these two great figures, the group, which Dorothy, all soul and emotion, the most wonderful of sympathetic hearers, made complete. The friendship ripened rapidly and a great mutual affection developed. "Before long the ties of friendship had been fast knit and Wordsworth had gone further out of himself to meet Coleridge than ever he went before or after for the sake of any other human being."¹ Miss Wordsworth thus recorded her first impressions of the visitor: "He is a wonderful man. His countenance teems with soul, mind and spirit. Then he is so benevolent, so good-tempered and cheerful, and like William interests himself so much about every little trifle. At first I thought him very plain, that is for about three minutes; he is pale, thin, has a wide mouth, thick lips, and not very good teeth, longish, loose-growing, half-curling, rough black hair. But if you hear him speak for five minutes, you think no more of them. His eye is large and full, and not very dark, but grey - such an eye as should receive from a heavy soul the dullest expression; it has more of 'the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling' than I ever witnessed. He has fine dark eye-brows and an overhanging forehead."²

The poets walked about together over the downs, with their

1. Walter Raleigh, Wordsworth, London, Edward Arnold, 1903. p. 68.
2. Christopher Wordsworth, Memoirs of William Wordsworth, 1.99. London, Edward Moxon, 1851.

heads in the clouds, disclosing all their hopes and dreams to each other, visionary philosophers full of the highest thoughts as well as poets with the vision and the faculty divine in their youthful eyes. "When they parted Coleridge said, 'I felt myself a small man beside Wordsworth; while of Coleridge, Wordsworth, certainly no over-estimator of other men, said, 'I have known many men who have done wonderful things, but the only wonderful man I ever knew was Coleridge.'"¹ It is said that others who visited Coleridge left him with a feeling akin to the judgment indicated in the above remark. "Those who remember him in his more vigorous days can bear witness to the peculiarity and transcendent power of his conversational eloquence. It was unlike anything that could be heard elsewhere; the kind was different, the degree was different, the manner was different . . . His thoughts were, if we may so say, as the radii of a circle, the centre of which may be in the petals of a rose, and the circumference as wide as the boundary of things visible and invisible."²

The rapid conquest of each other, made by the three friends, advanced so quickly that, in a month after the beginning of the acquaintance, the Wordsworths removed from Racedown to a house called Alfoxden, near Nether Stowey, in which village Coleridge was living, as they longed to see more of each other. Cottle, in his Reminiscences, states that the Wordsworths spent the early part of July in the Coleridge home before settling at Alfoxden and during this time Coleridge wrote to Cottle: "Wordsworth

1. Shairp, p.32.

2. R. Brimley Johnson, Famous Reviews. London, New York and Melbourne, Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd., 1914.
The Quarterly Review, August 1839.

and his exquisite sister are with me. She is a woman indeed! in mind, I mean, and heart; for her person is such that if you expected to see a pretty woman, you would think her rather ordinary; if you expected to see an ordinary woman you would think her pretty! but her manners are simple, ardent, impressive. In every motion her most innocent soul outbeams so brightly, that who saw her would say,

Guilt was a thing impossible in her. Her information various. Her eye watchful in minutest observation of nature; and her taste a perfect electrometer. It bends, protrudes and draws in, at subtlest beauties, and most recondite faults. She and W. desire their kindest regards to you. - Your ever affectionate friend, S.T.G."¹

The period spent at Alfoxden was one of the most delightful in the lives of the poets, as the two young men were of one mind in their poetic tastes and principles, as well as in political and social views; while each admired the other more than he did any other living man. "As they wandered aloft on the airy ridge of Quantock, or dived down into its sylvan combs, what high talk they must have held! Theirs was the age for boundless, endless, unwearied talk on all things human and divine."²

That summer, under whose indulgent skies,
Upon smooth Quantock's airy ridge we roved
Unchecked, or loitered 'mid her sylvan combs,
Thou in bewitching words, with happy heart,
Didst chaunt the vision of that Ancient Man,
The bright-eyed Mariner, and rueful wees
Didst utter of the Lady Christabel:

1. Joseph Gottle, Reminiscences of Coleridge and Southey. p.144.
London, Houlston and Stoneman, 1847.
Shairp, p. 32.

And I, associate with such labour, steeped
In soft forgetfulness the livelong hours,
Murmuring of him who, joyous hap, was found,
After the perils of his moonlight ride,
Near the loud waterfall; or her who sate
In misery near the miserable Thorn;-1

ii. Literary Relations.

The intercourse between Coleridge and the Wordsworths was almost daily. Coleridge said they were three people but one soul. It was a rich and fruitful time for all three - seedtime at once and harvest; and its happy influence spread far beyond their own individual selves. The gulf stream which rose in the Quantocks warmed and is still warming distant shores. Solomon said, "As iron sharpeneth iron so doth the countenance of man his friend."² This was assuredly true of Coleridge and Wordsworth. It was during the close intimacy of this never-to-be-forgotten period that Coleridge's fine, active, penetrating mind stirred to its depths the receptive mind of Wordsworth and the world was enriched by the Lyrical Ballads of 1798. Wordsworth beautifully expresses his appreciation of Coleridge in The Prelude.

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,
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

1. The Prelude, xiv. 396-407.
2. Proverbs 27.17.

Her overweening 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 cares, such as become
A human creature, howso'er endowed,
Poet, or destined for a humbler name;
And so the deep enthusiastic joy,
The rapture of the hallelujah sent
From all that breathes and is, was chastened, stemmed
And balanced by pathetic truth, by trust
In hopeful reason, leaning on the stay
Of Providence; and in reverence for duty,
Here, if need be, struggling with storms, and there
Strewing in peace life's humblest ground with herbs,
At every season green, sweet at all hours.¹

The following lines composed by Coleridge after listening to the recitation of The Prelude by its author at Coleorton, Leicestershire, where the Wordsworths were living in the winter of 1806, prove that these feelings were equally strong, if not stronger, in the heart of Coleridge, for the innermost recesses of his being were filled with admiration, respect and love for Wordsworth.

Friend of the wise! and teacher of the good!
Into my heart have I received that lay
More than historic, that prophetic lay
Wherein (high theme by thee first sung aright)
Of the foundations and the building up
Of a Human Spirit thou has dared to tell
What may be told, to the understanding mind
Revealable; and what within the mind
By vital breathings secret as the soul
Of vernal growth, oft quickens in the heart
Thoughts all too deep for words! -

1. The Prelude, xiv. 275-301.

And when! O Friend! my comforter and guide!
Strong in thyself and powerful to give strength!
Thy long-sustained Song finally closed,
And thy deep voice had ceased - yet thou thyself
Wert still before my eyes, and round us both
That happy vision of beloved faces -
Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close
I sat, my being blended in one thought
(Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?)
Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound -
And when I rose I found myself in prayer.1

After the production of the Lyrical Ballads, with Wordsworth and his sister, Coleridge went to Germany where he learned the language and became interested in German philosophy. Upon his return he made his home in the Lake district near Wordsworth. And just as life was opening, for him, her richest possibilities he unfortunately took, for an attack of rheumatism, a quack medicine containing opium. We mention this here because it was the entering in, of the thin edge of the wedge which was, in future, one of the causes which led to the breaking up of the close intimacy of these two fast friends and kindred spirits.

When and how did this blight begin? That a great change had come over Coleridge soon after he went north in 1800, a change which affected his physical constitution, his imagination, and his moral nature - and which was, perhaps, largely physical to begin with - is known to every student of his life. The poem, Dejection: An Ode, is the pathetic record of that change. Coleridge had been a sufferer from boyhood and the damp climate of the Lake District probably aggravated his rheumatism. His resort to opium to alleviate his pain is best told in his own words. Writing in April 1826

1. Coleridge, To William Wordsworth, 1-11, 102-112.

he says:

"I had been ignorantly deluded by the seeming magic effects of opium in the sudden removal of a suppressed rheumatic affection attended with . . . palpitation of the heart and pains all over me, by which I had been bedridden for nearly six months. Unhappily among my neighbours' and landlord's books were a large number of medical reviews and magazines. . . . I met a case which I fancied very like my own, in which a cure had been effected by the Kendal Black Drop. In an evil hour I procured it; it worked miracles, the pains vanished. I was all alive, and all around me being as ignorant as myself, nothing could exceed my triumph. I talked of nothing else, prescribed the newly-discovered panacea for all complaints, and carried a little about with me not to lose any opportunity of administering 'instant relief and speedy cure' to all complainers, stranger or friend, gentle or simple. Alas! it is with a bitter smile, a laugh of gall and bitterness, that I recall this period of unsuspecting delusion, and how I first became aware of the Maelstrom, the fatal whirlpool to which I was drawing, just when the current was beyond my strength to stem."¹

While admirers of Coleridge regret his use of the drug, yet it relieves the situation to know that, if Coleridge had been a victim of opium, he ended by almost a victory over his failing. From the time that he voluntarily placed himself under the medical care of Dr. Gillman, he lived in constant self-command. The strife to overcome the craving for opium is an awful strife, and few there

¹ James Gillman, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. London, William Pickering, 1847. p. 246.

be that find power to live after it with intellectual and spiritual excellence. Coleridge did both for many years.

Stopford Brooke says, "The sins of the dead past should not be discussed, but forgotten, but the good, the things that are well done, what is beautiful and loving, should be brought into clearer and clearer light. Evil can never be clearly understood by us; we are wholly incompetent to moralize on the ill-doings of men. But good can always be understood, and its praise is possible on the lips of a child."¹

Professor Harper states that it must have been Wordsworth's natural gifts that won Coleridge's admiration, for certainly it was not his learning. "The plastic mind of Coleridge respected his guest's superior power of self-determination and above all, perhaps, the quality of spirit which made him regard his natural emotions with so much reverence that to dress them in buckram would have been impossible. 'Wordsworth is a very great man,' wrote Coleridge to Southey, 'the only man to whom at all times and all modes of excellence I feel myself inferior.'"²

During the autumn of 1797 Wordsworth, having written a play and being anxious for its acceptance, went to London where he remained for three weeks, but he returned to Alfoxden with a quickened appreciation of nature and realization that even the mighty metropolis held no man comparable in genius, attainments, and charm to his friend and neighbour at Nether Stowey.

1. Stopford Brooke, *The Golden Book of Coleridge*. p. 5. London, J. M. Dent and Company, 1895.
2. Harper, I. 313.

It is a pleasure to know that this mutual appreciation and friendship was continuous. In a letter written to Mr. Cottle dated 1807, Coleridge, in speaking of Wordsworth states: "He is one whom God knows I love and honour as far beyond myself as both morally and intellectually he is above me."¹

In June 1808 the Wordsworths moved to Allan Bank, some half mile distant, and, in September, Coleridge was invited to make his home with them as long as he cared to stay. Coleridge accepted the invitation of his generous friends though often hovering between Allan Bank and Gretna Hall.

This David and Jonathan friendship between Coleridge and Wordsworth continued until the autumn of 1810 when an estrangement took place. It was caused by one of those untoward incidents for which there is no way out, which depend on a tone of voice, or a turn of a phrase or a shade of ambiguity in meaning. Wordsworth said something to Basil Montagu, with the kindest motives and no doubt in the kindest terms, which Montagu indiscreetly repeated to Coleridge, who resented it as an unfriendly imputation of unsociable manners and morals. Coleridge was heart-broken that Wordsworth could have said such things of him - much more that he should have commissioned Montagu to repeat them.²

In a section of Christabel entitled Broken Friendship written 1800, we read a description of the sufferings of Coleridge caused by a difference he had with Charles Lamb.³

1. Cottle, Reminiscences, p.143.
2. Source: Harper, II. Chapt. xxv.
3. Source: Dr. Crawford, M.A.C. 1927.

Alas! they had been friends in youth;
But whispering tongues can poison truth;
And constancy lives in realms above;
And life is thorny; and youth is vain;
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain.
And thus it chanced as I divine,
With Roland and Sir Leoline.
Each spake words of high disdain
And insult to his heart's best brother;
They parted - n'er to meet again!
But never either found another
To free the hollow heart from paining;
They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs that had been rent asunder;
A dreary sea now flows between.
But neither heat nor frost, nor thunder
Shall wholly do away, I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been.¹

The foregoing lines might very fittingly be used to describe Coleridge's suffering of soul at the time of his estrangement with Wordsworth.

One of Wordsworth's lesser known poems has for its theme the estrangement from Coleridge. It is entitled the Complaint.

There is a change - and I am poor
Your love hath been, nor long ago,
A fountain at my fond heart's door,
Whose only business was to flow;
And flow it did; not taking heed
Of its own bounty or my need.

What happy moments did I count!
Blest was I then all bliss above!
Now, for that consecrated fount
Of murmuring, sparkling, living love,
What have I? shall I dare to tell
A comfortless and hidden well.

A well of love - it may be deep-
I trust it is - and never dry:
What matter? if the waters sleep
In silence and obscurity.
- Such change, and at the very door
Of my fond heart hath made me poor.

1. Coleridge, Christabel, 408-26.

'There is a change and I am poor.' "The words are truer than Wordsworth meant them to be or at any rate far wider in their application. He is poorer, not only in the wealth of the affections, but, in the riches of philosophic thought; and there lie before him more than forty years of this philosophic and poetic poverty - a long period illumined now and again by flashes of the old vision but, in the main lamentably dull and drab, the most dismal anti-climax of which history holds record."¹

The breach between the two poets remained open for two years when a reconciliation was effected. The close comrades of the olden days were outwardly reconciled, but each was conscious that their friendship could never be the same again. Such a thing never returns in human experience, when once it is overshadowed by a cloud. Throughout their subsequent years the poets continued as friends. When Wordsworth received the message of Coleridge's death, his voice faltered and then broke, but he seems to have said little except of his friend's genius calling him "the most wonderful man he had ever known."²

iii. Summary.

It was a great piece of good fortune that sent Coleridge across Wordsworth's path in 1797. The friendship began in the enthusiastic admiration whereby Coleridge stormed his way over all barriers of reserve. "Both were poets, both were specially

1. H. W. Garrod, *Wordsworth: Lectures and Essays*. p.137. Oxford, At the Clarendon Press, 1923.
2. William Knight, *Life of William Wordsworth*. III.235. Edinburgh, William Patterson. 1889.

intent on the new sources of sensibility, that were being opened to poetry, both were philosophers. The temptation of such conversation proved irresistible. Wordsworth was dragged forth from his self-centred meditations and enabled to define and develop his own ideas in the give and take of discussion."¹

They came closer to each other in sympathy than great poets are usually privileged to come, even in the happiest intimacies. "It was a time of more than ordinary friendship, growing out of a community of thought, feeling, sympathy, and affection; but this profound and in some respects unparalleled friendship, was quite consistent with a keen sense of the limitations of each other's genius, and even with a vivid critical exposure of these. It is a total mistake to suppose that the literary coterie at Grassmere and Keswick was a mutual admiration society . . . Coleridge's discernment of faults in the poetic work of his friend was as clear eyed, as his insight, into the unique greatness of that work, was profound, and his praise of it was generous and unstinted."²

It is difficult therefore, to assess the debts of Wordsworth to Coleridge while to each communion was the principle of their intellectual life. Coleridge was, no doubt, the apter to receive impressions, and it is safe to say that his influence quickened the critical powers of Wordsworth, and taught him to study the workings of his own imagination, in a more conscious and detached manner, for when Wordsworth was impressed by the thoughts of others, the

1. H. D. Traill, Coleridge. p. 45. London, Macmillan and Company, 1884.
2. Knight, II. 15.

influences permeated his whole being, and were so completely assimilated as to have become part of himself before any of their results came to the surface. However, "the chief benefit Wordsworth received from Coleridge's friendship, lay in the strength that comes from early appreciation. To be understood is a rare and great happiness; it helped Wordsworth to bear with equanimity many long years of public indifference and ridicule."¹

1. Raleigh, Life of Wordsworth, p. 85.

CHAPTER THREE.

COLERIDGE'S INFLUENCE ON THE POETRY OF WORDSWORTH
DURING THE GREAT DECADE.

i. Meeting of two Poetical Minds.

Nearly everything by which Wordsworth is supreme was written in a single decade of his life, in the period between 1797 and 1807. Outside these limits he wrote, of course, much that was interesting; but almost nothing that could bring him into the very first rank of poets, almost nothing that was of a piece with the splendid achievements of this decade. "Any student of literature who possesses Lyrical Ballads, the Poems in Two Volumes of 1807 and The Prelude, which, although published posthumously, belongs to the same period, has before him the best of Wordsworth. He has before him nearly all of Wordsworth that is supreme, and very little of that part of him which one would wish away. These three books together form, as it were, an oasis of power and splendour amid endless arid tracts of middling performance."¹

As previously stated, Wordsworth and his sister moved from Racedown to Alfoxden July 1797. This was a fortunate change and productive of the most fruitful chapter in Wordsworth's history. Here he was completely restored to mental and spiritual health.

1. Garrod, op. cit. p.14.

Here his brief acquaintance with Coleridge ripened into a warm friendship - a friendship destined to leave a permanent impression upon the pages of English poetry, and here the Lyrical Ballads were written. According to Miss Wordsworth, the motive for settling at Alfoxden, was a desire to have the society of Coleridge. On first thought it seems rather singular that two men so unlike in many respects should become intimate friends and prove to be so mutually helpful. However, there were affinities which drew these two men together and made each a power in the other's life. Both were in sympathy with the political movements of the time in behalf of a larger liberty for Man as against class distinctions and the privileged few. They were in sympathy with the fundamental principles which underlay the French Revolution, and both were more or less out of harmony with the home government at the time, but more important - both were poets.

Coleridge had been attracted by Wordsworth's poetry at Cambridge. He saw in him the promise of a great poet. When at Racedown he heard Wordsworth read The Ruined Cottage and The Borderers he wrote to Cottle, "I speak with heartfelt sympathy and I think with unblinded judgment when I tell you that I feel a small man by his side."¹

Some of Coleridge's best poetic work had already been done at Alfoxden, before the arrival of his friend, while wandering amongst the coombes or in his cottage at Stowey. "He, as

1. E. H. Sneath, Wordsworth: Poet of Nature and Poet of Man. p.88. Boston and London, Ginn and Company, 1912.

well as, perhaps at that time more than Wordsworth, felt that there was a Divine Life hidden beneath the raiment of the natural world. He had learned it from Plato and Plotinus; but he got it more especially through the intuition of his own soul in vital contact with external nature; and it was their community of thought on all the fundamental aspects of the universe - their common love of Nature as thus symbolically interpreted, and their consequent hidden agreement as to the root whence the noblest poetry springs - that brought the two men together more than anything else."¹
Compare the lines of Coleridge in his Eolian Harp,

And what, if all of animated Nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps,
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the soul of each and God of all?²

with the well-known passage in Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey,

I have felt
A presence 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.³

The poetic sympathy which Coleridge felt and manifested for Wordsworth and his work, and "his poetic way of apprehending

1. Knight, op. cit. I. 122.
2. Eolian Harp, 44-8
3. Tintern Abbey, 93-102.

Nature, which was so in harmony with Wordsworth's mental attitude, proved to be a source of encouragement and inspiration, and was responsible for much of Wordsworth's mental and spiritual progress as well as the progress of his art."¹

Coleridge, however, had not till now met with a literary aspirant whom he could feel in any sense his superior; and he met with very few in the course of his life who were at any single point his equal. He found more than an equal in Wordsworth, in point of insight into Nature, in force of character, self-control, and power of will although he was Wordsworth's superior in versatility and brilliance.²

At a tea-party, in 1844, Wordsworth described Coleridge's conversation as "a majestic river, the sound or sight of whose course you caught at intervals, which was sometimes concealed by forests, sometimes lost in sand, then came flashing out broad and distinct; and even when it took a turn which your eye could not follow, you always felt and knew that there was a connection in its parts and that it was the same river."³

Coleridge's impression upon Wordsworth was distinctively personal in its origin. It was by Coleridge's total individuality, by the sum of his vast and varied intellectual powers, rather than by the specific poetic element contained in them that Wordsworth was in the main attracted; but it is clear enough that this attraction was from the first most powerful. Wordsworth himself

1. Sneath, op. cit., p.88.

2. Source: Knight, op.cit. I. Chapt.viii.

3. Memoirs, I. 116.

gave the best possible proof of the fascination which had been exercised over him by quitting Racedown with his sister for Alfoxden near Nether Stowey within a few weeks after Coleridge's visit to his home.

"Coleridge and Wordsworth had then a lot divine. They lived together in a beautiful part of Somerset, where the soft orchard and cottage scenery ran up into the slopes of blue hills, with meadowy hollows and remote dells and lucent streams and wind-entangled woods. They walked all day, chanting their runs in gay or moralizing mood, cheering each other and cheered; their hopes, their aspirations, and their joys the same. Their minds in difference chimed together; each awoke the best in each; and both were rapt by the ineffable joy of healthy youth. Then, when the power of shaping imagination came upon them, all the world of Nature and her beauty, and all the world of humanity and its tenderness, took up abode in their souls, and desired to be upon their lips."¹

ii. Lyrical Ballads.

It was in their daily rambles among the Quantock Hills that the poets excogitated that two-fold function of the essence and theory of poetry, which was to receive such notable illustrations in their joint volume of verse, the Lyrical Ballads. The publication of this volume in the spring of 1798 was indeed, an event of double significance for English poetry. It marked an epoch in the creative life of Coleridge and a no less important

1. Brooke, op.cit. The Golden Book of Coleridge. p.27.

one in the critical life of Wordsworth. It was at a time when

Nature within me seemed
In all her functions weary of herself,

"when even Dorothy could not quicken Wordsworth's faith, but only sharpen sensibility, that Coleridge bounded down the pathless field and opened a way to self-escape. Wordsworth needed another's emotional faith to master creatively the bitter knowledge of fact, he had acquired. It was this, as he later gratefully acknowledged, that Coleridge gave."¹

O capacious Soul!
Placed on this earth to love and understand,
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;²

Although Dorothy Wordsworth produced nothing directly, her influence on both men was of the highest importance. Coleridge answered to many a touch which the slower Wordsworth could not feel; but Dorothy's quick sympathy, keen observation and rapid suggestion - qualities she possessed in greater measure than her brother - were invaluable to both. The best work of both poets was done alike by the Quantocks and by the Lakes, under the direct influence of her companionship. Nor was the influence, in action and reaction, of the men on one another less potent. Coleridge was by far the more active as well as the finer and more penetrating, and the immense receptiveness of Wordsworth must have acted

1. Hugh I'Anson Fausset, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, London, Jonathan Cape, 1926. p. 150.
2. The Prelude, xiv. 277-85.

as a strong incentive to its exercise. It was a consequence of Coleridge's quicker sense, that he took up readily the tone and accent as well as the substance of another's thoughts, whereas, in Wordsworth's case, everything that entered his mind from without underwent a slow process of assimilation and when it reappeared, substance and expression were equally his own.¹

"Neither did good work till they met. When they got together, their spirits took fire, and each wrote his best - complementary, each aiding the other."²

The zest of the lines in The Prelude, Book xiv, already referred to in the preceding chapter, in which Wordsworth reminds Coleridge of those golden days, might indeed bring the most phlegmatic of readers under the spell:

Thou in bewitching words with happy heart,
Didst chaunt the vision of that Ancient Man,
* * * * *
And I associate with such labour, steeped
In soft forgetfulness the livelong hours,
Murmuring of him who, joyous hap, was found,
After the perils of his moonlight ride,
Near the loud waterfall.³

It is to be expected that much of the nature of the conversation of these two friends was based on the nature and function of poetry. Here too, the happy influences of the place and season came in aid of their thought for most of the poetry of that wonderful year was picked up out of doors.

1. Source: Campbell, op. cit., chapt. iv.
2. Dr. A. W. Crawford, Lectures on Wordsworth. Summer School M.A.C., 1927.
3. The Prelude, xiv. 398-9, 402-406.

The one red leaf, the last of its clan
That dances as often as dance it can
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
On the topmost twig that looks up to the sky.¹

danced in the woods at Alfoxden. "And the Alfoxden moon - for how much was the moon not responsible? Half the magic of the Ancient Mariner was born during the moonlight nights in the Quantocks. The very theory and ground-work of the Lyrical Ballads was suggested, it seems, by the moon."²

The occasion of their making this joint literary venture was curious. Coleridge, Wordsworth, and his sister wished to make a short walking tour, for which the sum of five pounds was needed, but was not forthcoming. To supply this want they agreed to make a joint poem and send it to the New Monthly Magazine which would give the required sum. Accordingly, one evening as they trudged along the Quantock Hills, they planned the Ancient Mariner, founded on a dream which a friend of Coleridge's had dreamed. Coleridge supplied most of the incidents and almost all the lines. Wordsworth contributed the incident of the shooting of the albatross, with a line here and there but he tells us that their respective manners proved so widely different that it would have been quite presumptuous in him to do anything but separate from an undertaking upon which he could only have been a clog. The Ancient Mariner grew and grew, until it became too important for their first objective, beyond the desired five pounds' worth, so they thought of a joint volume.³

1. Christabel, 49-52.

2. Raleigh, op. cit., p.72.

3. Source: Knight, Campbell, Harper, Op. cit.

The fruit of this alliance was in Wordsworth a ten years' wonder of human achievement. "Wordsworth's matter-of-factness - the uninspired commonplace which alone survived when ten years later the fire had almost burned itself out - ensured him against the unsubstantial ecstasy which was all that Coleridge had to give. But it was Coleridge with his feminine generosity and infinitely subtler mind, who kindled the fire which Wordsworth's masculine limitations were to make effective. Coleridge himself wrote - "Of all the men I ever knew, Wordsworth has the least femininity in his mind. He is all man."¹

It is easy to see how from this first conception, the scheme of the Lyrical Ballads grew up, and how there were included in it the two types of poems. The accidents of light and shade affected the two poets in different ways. To Coleridge the rise of the moon made witchcraft credible and gave a basis for the boldest imagination. To Wordsworth these imaginations seemed superfluous; the moonlight was witchcraft enough; his interest and affections turned homeward to the things of every day. The two kinds of poems were not attempted by both poets. "It was agreed," says Coleridge, "that my endeavour should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth on the other hand was to propose to

1. Fausset, op.cit., p.152.

himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand."¹

The result of this idea was a volume of twenty-three poems, known as the Lyrical Ballads. Coleridge wrote for his share The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, The Nightingale, The Foster Mother's Tale, and The Dungeon while Wordsworth contributed the remaining nineteen. The volume opens with the Ancient Mariner, that masterpiece of balled minstrelsy, and ends with a poem of Wordsworth composed during a tour with his sister to Tintern. "The Lines Written above Tintern Abbey have become, as it were, the consecrated formulary of the Wordsworthian faith. They say in brief what it is the work of the poet's biographer to say in detail."²

When the Lyrical Ballads were first published only one question, the question of diction, was conspicuous in the preface but in the long preface to the second edition Wordsworth in wonderfully condensed language explains his own view of the principles of poetry. The most important paragraph of this famous apology

1. *Biog. Lit.*, op.cit., p.145.

2. F. W. Myers, *Wordsworth: English Men of Letters*. p.33.
London, Macmillan and Company Ltd., 1919.

is as follows:

"The principal object proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect, and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature; chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement."

We note that five different purposes are mentioned in the above paragraph. First we have the choice of incidents and situations and in making this choice from common life Wordsworth was doing only what English poets had done in all ages. Secondly, the language is to be that really used by man. The decision regarding the choice of subject and language was made by Wordsworth himself before he ever met Coleridge. Wordsworth's main purpose was to preserve reality, and he would brook no compromise with the fanciful or the romantic. Again ordinary things were to be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect. The relation of the unusual to poetic art was a subject that had been much discussed with Coleridge at Alfoxden. The poems were to be unusual and weird - Coleridgean - thus Wordsworth had yielded to the influence of his friend. The fourth part of the declaration states that he purposes to make the incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them

the primary laws of our nature and here the influence of Coleridge predominated. In psychology Wordsworth was dependent upon Coleridge but having once adopted, with his friend's assistance, a method of classifying the impulses he would be likely to turn it to great account. Coleridge might fail, years later, to recognize the child of his own fertile brain.

The fifth and final proposal is even more Coleridgean than the fourth; the primary laws of our nature are to be traced chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. ¹ "All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling."²

"As regards the history of English literature, these Lyrical Ballads exemplify the complete development of the English Romantic School. Coleridge - the platonic leader of the Bristol circle - introduced realistic imagination into supernatural subjects; Wordsworth into natural subjects. Each was aware of his power to supplement the other, and they accordingly, as they themselves relate, divided the realm of poetry between them. Both had now attained the summit of their capacity. What they composed after the Lyrical Ballads is in many respects beautiful and great, but it opened no new paths, being only a further application of the art each had already acquired."³ "The Lyrical Ballads resemble stray leaves from an inventory of the mind's treasure house; they are like fragments from a survey of the vast, ill-explored continent of

1. Source; Harper, op.cit., I. Chapt. xvii.

2. Ib. I. 431.

3. Alois Brandl, Life of Coleridge. p. 218. London, John Murray, 1887.

Mansoul. And on the leaves many a precious thing, hitherto despised or forgotten is lovingly appraised; in the fragments many green islands, many fertile valleys and delectable mountains are depicted in plain but telling words."¹

iii. Subsequent Influence of Coleridge.

Coleridge and his friends spent the winter of 1798 in Germany, and the fact, that he was separated from the Wordsworths had an unfavourable bearing on the poetry of William Wordsworth. During the following autumn the two poets spent almost a month together on a tour through the Lakes and Grasmere "in the closest intercourse renewing their old love, and rekindling the flame of poetic inspiration, which, in Wordsworth's case at least, was soon to glow more brightly than ever. It was one more of those epochs in his life like the old Alfoxden days, when his heart grew strong with faith in his own powers, and his mind opened to fresh influences. He was subject to great physical and mental depression; composition exhausted him; the physical art of writing made him ill; if left long to himself he doubted his own powers. Many of the poems 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

1. Thomas Hutchinson, *Lyrical Ballads*, p. xliii. London, Duckworth and Company, 1907.

Coleridge to stimulate his sympathetic powers he saw things in their connection with one another . . . Analysis had gone to an almost perilous length, and the time had come when a fresh speculative impulse was needed, a fresh impulse to sympathize, to view nature and mind under the aspect of eternal co-existence."¹ As a result of this visit of Coleridge and their communion together the year 1800 was one of the most prolific of all Wordsworth's years. In it he probably finished the first and second books of The Prelude besides composing that great fragment of The Recluse which was not published in full until 1888, as well as many other poems."Wordsworth's genius had rapidly matured under the genial sun of Coleridge's friendship."²

When Wordsworth is at his best, he stands quite on the level of the very highest, but he is often not at his best. His inspiration is lacking in continuity, and he is apparently unable to distinguish when he is inspired and when he is not. He feeds us at one time with angels' food, and, at another time, with the homeliest bread-and-butter of moral commonplace. The following extract, from the Star-Gazers, composed 1806, shows the abruptness with which he falls and rises, from prose to poetry, from poetry to prose.

The Showman chooses well his place, 'tis
Leicester's busy Square;
And is as happy in his night, for the
heavens are blue and fair;
Calm, though impatient is the crowd;
each stands ready with the fee,
And envies him that's looking;- what an
insight must it be.

1. Harper, op.cit. I.390.
2. George, op.cit. The Prelude, p.xxi.

Does then a deep and earnest thought
the blissful mind employ
Of him who gazes, or has gazed? a grave
and steady joy,
That doth reject all show of pride, admits
no outward sign,
Because not of this noisy world, but
silent and divine!¹

Sometimes we are tempted to think that he composed a few lines in the first heat of vision and afterwards coolly filled in the rest when the vision had departed.

"Such shocks of transition we do not often meet with even in second-rate poets; for when poetic inspiration fails, they generally have rhetorical resources to help them over the difficulty. But Wordsworth is almost entirely free from rhetoric; he has no ability to disguise the union of the products of pure imagination with less valuable materials. His poetry is sometimes like a geological stratum, which has been partially transformed by fire, but in which unchanged masses of sand and pebbles are embedded. The baldest matter of fact and the barest moral commonplace are, in not a few of his poems, put side by side with thoughts that breathe and words that burn."²

Wordsworth's dependence upon Coleridge is well illustrated, as early as 1805, by a letter which he wrote to Beaumont, with reference to The Recluse. "Should Coleridge return," Wordsworth writes, "so that I might have some conversation with him, I should go on swimmingly."³

1. Wordsworth, *Star Gazers*, 5-8, 25-28.
2. Edward Caird, *Essays on Literature and Philosophy*, p.186. London and New York, Macmillan and Company, 1892.
3. *Letters I*. 196.

iv. Wordsworth's Decline.

The great Ode which closes the two volumes of 1807 is said to be "the one really, dazzlingly, supremely great thing Wordsworth ever did."¹ "Why is it that thereafter we pass into the dark, or, at any rate, out of the fullness of light, that we are conscious that 'where'er we go' (l.17) 'there hath passed a glory' (l.18) from his poetry, and that the things which we have seen with his eyes 'we now can see no more' (l.9)? In this early decay of a faculty abnormally employed, I am inclined (leaving the faculty itself unexplained in its origin and nature) to seek at least a partial explanation of the extraordinary decline in poetic power which begins with the ending of the Ode. Wordsworth did cease to see things."²

There are two passages of Wordsworth which should always be read in connection with the Ode: and in both of which we have a somewhat pathetic expression of his sense of lost vision. The first passage is found in the concluding portion of the twelfth book of The Prelude:

Oh! mystery of man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours! 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 can 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,

1. Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 54.
2. Garrod, p. 119.

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

Lines 280 to 283 are sufficiently significant. Biographers tell us that these lines were composed about the time at which the Ode was brought to completion. By the side of this may we place a stanza of the Ode written in 1818.

Such hues from their celestial urn
Were wont to stream before mine eye,
Where'er it wandered in the morn
Of blissful infancy.
This glimpse of glory, why renewed?
Nay, rather speak with gratitude;
For if a vestige of those gleams
Survived, 'twas only in my dreams.
Dread Power, whom peace and calmness serve
No less than Nature's threatening voice,
From Thee if I would swerve;
O, let thy grace remind me of the light
Full early lost, and fruitlessly deplored;
Which at this moment on my waking sight
Appears to shine, by miracle restored;
My soul, though yet confined to earth,
Rejoices in a second birth!
'Tis past, the visionary splendour fades;
And night approaches with her shades.²

"With a few notable exceptions, the products of his genius after this period are the imperfect echoes of the old music; or, as in the case of the Sonnets on Ecclesiastical History, they are a kind of poetical exercises, which are rather a burden than an addition to his earlier works. One of the advantages of a chronological arrangement of the poems would be the separation of this

1. The Prelude, 272-86.
2. Ode composed upon an Evening of extraordinary Splendour.
3. and Beauty, 61-80.

feebler aftermath from the first rich harvest of the muse."¹

V. Summary.

In our rationalistic age, it is thought old-fashioned and fanciful to speak of a poet as inspired. Yet, if the word did not already exist, it would have to be invented. Some word or other is necessary by which to express the sudden upsoaring of a plodding minstrel from the flat and dusty earth into the lark's heaven. When the voice of a deadly-dull drone suddenly rings out like a golden trumpet, one cannot help feeling that some bright power is possessing him and speaking through him. Coleridge was that power.

"In *The Prelude* and elsewhere, Coleridge may fairly be thought of as the guardian angel of Wordsworth's poetical genius. Perhaps, indeed, Coleridge's greatest work is *Wordsworth* and, like all his other work, Coleridge left it unfinished. If there was any medicine for the decline of power which stole over Wordsworth's poetry after 1807, it was perhaps to be sought from Coleridge. From Coleridge Wordsworth had derived the elements of his metaphysic; and his genius died of a metaphysical atrophy. It is hardly an accident that the period of the decline of power coincides with the period in which Wordsworth's gradual estrangement from Coleridge began."¹

1. Caird, p. 167.
2. Garrod, p. 30.

CHAPTER FOUR.

INFLUENCES OF COLERIDGE'S PHILOSOPHY UPON
THE MIND OF WORDSWORTH.

1. Introduction.

The world into which Wordsworth was born was one deeply influenced by Rousseau, and it was inevitable that the young poet should imbibe many of the ideas of this great teacher. The ways of thinking, the individual attitude toward the world of the senses and emotions, were determined in a measure for Wordsworth by virtue of his environment. "But there is another aspect of Wordsworth which is not Rousseauistic, and it is that part of him which gives him originality and distinctness, for Wordsworth is original and distinct in his reasoned reaction against the surrounding ideas and influences which earlier in his career determined his thinking and action."¹

Wordsworth in his reasoned expression, does not acquiesce, but revolts. He is a reactionary in the fullest sense of the term, and his reaction was toward those earlier authors and philosophers whose teachings and practice had been distorted by later practitioners. In doctrine he revolts against Rousseau and Godwin, and appeals

1. Arthur Beatty, William Wordsworth: His Doctrines and Art in Their Historical Relations. p.16. Madison, University of Wisconsin, 1922.

to Hartley, Locke, and the general tradition of English philosophy. But his reaction is not merely negative. He does not merely revolt against the attitude of life approved by the Revolution, for in The Prelude we have a record of personal readjustment in accordance with another code of ethics.

The term of Wordsworth's life from 1793 to 1797 is most obscure. We have almost no written record of that period, as Wordsworth wrote but few letters, and only a few, from the whole Wordsworth family, survive. His sister Dorothy's Journals do not begin until 1798, but with the aid of The Prelude we shall endeavour in this chapter to follow the process by which Wordsworth went over to Godwinism, to trace the influences that acted on the mind of Wordsworth during this crucial period of his life, and to ascertain to what extent Coleridge wielded an influence more adequate to his mental needs than did, perhaps, the more profound philosophers.

ii. Nature.

During the earlier part of his life it is not Wordsworth who seeks Nature; it is rather Nature who, at certain hours in the midst of his sport, thrusts herself upon him. He tells us that:

even then I felt
Gleams life the flashing of a shield;- the earth
And common face of Nature spake to me
Rememberable things.¹

The scenes of Nature remain imprinted on his mind and are daily visible before his eyes, then there springs up within him an affection born of gratitude. He says he loved the sun because

1. The Prelude, I. 585-8.

I had seen him lay
His beauty on the morning hills, had seen
The western mountain touch his setting orb,
In many a thoughtless hour, when, from excess
Of happiness, my blood appeared to flow
For its own pleasure, and breathed with joy.
And, from like feelings, humble though intense,
To patriotic and domestic love
Analogous, the moon to me was dear;
For I could dream away my purposes,
Standing to gaze upon her while she hung
Midway between the hills, as if she knew
No other region, but belonged to thee,
Yea appertained by a peculiar right
To thee and thy grey huts, thou one dear Vale!¹

Towards the close of his life at Hawkshead, when he is seventeen years old, gratitude yields to pure love, love of Nature. He enters into direct communion with her, and dedicates to her the adoration of a devoted fervent heart. Nature is now primary. He walks with Nature, and he conceives his communion with her to be not merely passive but a creative condition. For Wordsworth, the senses from the beginning are creative. Even in childhood in his contemplation of the external world, the object contemplated lost its dependence upon sense-perception, its externality fell away. He states:

bodily eyes
Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
Appeared like something in myself, a dream
A prospect in the mind.²

We shall interpret the above lines in the light of the following passage wherein Wordsworth states: "I was often unable to think of external things as having eternal existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but

1. The Prelude, II. 183-97
2. Ib. II. 349-52.

inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. . . . To that dreamlike vividness and splendour which invest objects of sight in childhood every one, I believe, if he would look back, could bear testimony."¹

These experiences are with Wordsworth strong and constant, but in tabulating the influences affecting his mind we must not ignore Rousseau. It has often been remarked that Wordsworth's works, particularly The Prelude, show him to have been a reader of Rousseau, and although it might be difficult to quote many passages in which Rousseau's teaching is distinctly traceable there can hardly be any doubt that he was. "To anyone fresh from reading the first, second and fourth books of The Prelude, the laws of Rousseau sound familiar and that, too, in spite of Wordsworth's effort in the fifth book to express his disapproval of the artificial systems of education suggested by the Emile."² He speaks scornfully of those

who have the skill
To manage books, and things, and make them act
On infant minds as surely as the sun
Deals with a flower; the keepers of our time,
The guides and wardens of our faculties,
Sages who in their prescience would control
All accidents, and to the very road
Which they have fashioned would confine us down,
Like engines; when will their presumption learn
That in the unreasoning progress of the world
A wiser spirit is at work for us,
A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
Of blessings, and most studious of our good,
Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?³

When Wordsworth passed through France in 1790 en route for

1. Rev. A. B. Grosart, Wordsworth's Prose Works, III. 195.
London, Edward Moxon, Son and Company, 1876.
2. Harper, op.cit., I. 47.
3. The Prelude, v. 350-63.

Switzerland, his interest in the Revolution was no greater, perhaps even less, than that of any other Englishman who talked the ordinary English cant of Liberty. He himself states:

Nature then was sovereign in my mind.¹

Man and man's work took a second place, "his hour being not yet come."²

iii. Godwinian Influence.

During his second visit to France the poet comes under the influence of General Michel Beaupuy, and through him "the love of humanity which had not yet found equal place in the poet's heart with the love of nature, was raised to the double throne. No other man save Coleridge had so great an influence upon Wordsworth as this sweet and devoted patriot."³

Oft in solitude
With him did I discourse about the end
Of civil government, and its wisest forms;
Of ancient loyalty, and chartered rights,
Custom and habit, novelty and change;
Of self-respect and virtue in the few
For patrimonial honour set apart,
And ignorance in the labouring multitude.⁴

Beaupuy was a man rich in the knowledge of the philosophers and political writers with whose teachings Wordsworth was little acquainted. Wordsworth loved man with the imagination, Beaupuy with the heart. For nearly three months the two men were inseparable, and in the end Wordsworth became the most ardent disciple, ready to give

1. The Prelude, vi. 333.
2. *Ibid.* viii. 356.
3. Harper, *op.cit.*, I. 162.
4. The Prelude, ix. 321-8.

even life itself to ameliorate the cause of mankind.

Wordsworth, fresh from the Rousseauistic and revolutionary teaching of General Michel Beaupuy, who had first awakened his slumbering humanitarian sentiments, settled in London. He was at once hurled into the turmoil and contradictions of English sentiment regarding the Revolution, and became angry when war was declared against the new republic of France. "when with open war Britain opposed the liberties of France."¹ In his resentment against his country he even went so far as to hope for her defeat; however, his anger soon changed to despair for very soon "Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defense for one of conquest."² Then it was that the young poet turned from man, as he is, to man as he ought to be, or from theory to books - he turned for comfort to the Political Justice of William Godwin.

This book was published in February 1793, and we learn our poet's appreciation of it from Hazlitt who reports Wordsworth as saying to a Temple student, "Throw away your books of Chemistry and study Godwin on Necessity."³ The outstanding feature of the book is its extreme simplicity. All the complex world of thought is reduced to one sole principle, namely, reason. Before this principle all else sinks into insignificance. Truth and truth alone is supreme.

Wordsworth appreciated Godwin's idea of revolutionary humanitarianism. He is a leveller, and in his book gives a vision of an emancipated humanity. Another theory which found a re-echo

1. The Prelude, xi. 174-5.

2. Ib. xi. 207-8.

3. W. Hazlitt, The Spirit of the Age, vol. v. Philadelphia,

J.B. Lippincott and Company, 1864.

in the heart of Wordsworth was his anti-military doctrine, as he did not hesitate to connect autocracy with war which is contrary to the very nature of democracy. He states that the foster mother of Anarchy is despotism. Destroy despotism, and you destroy war and anarchy together. This is his final word of Reason on this subject. The concluding aspect of Godwin's doctrine is his necessitarianism. This doctrine makes the progress of the race an inevitable one, taking place by reason of the nature of things and independent of the whim of individuals. That this belief in necessity was taken up by Wordsworth and made his own is evident in the following famous lines.

A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought
And rolls through all things.¹

Wordsworth's Godwinian period might well be separated into two divisions - the first and longest - the epoch of semi-Godwinism lies between the spring of 1793 and the summer of 1795. Wordsworth describes himself as having, during this period, "lent but a careless ear" to the pretensions of Godwin which were, however, "sedulously urged" upon him.

Meantime,
As from the first, wild theories were afloat,
To whose pretensions, sedulously urged,
I had but lent a careless ear, assured
That time was ready to set all things right,
And that the multitude so long oppressed
Would be oppressed no more.²

During the summer of 1795 it would appear that Wordsworth became a Godwinian to the exclusion of all other forms of belief.

1. Tintern Abbey, 100-102.

2. The Prelude, xi. 188-94.

The nature of the change is given in detail in the eleventh book of The Prelude, lines 222-319. The Godwinian doctrine, that the sole guide of action is the reason of the individual, is expressed thus:

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.¹

Throughout this period Wordsworth was a disciple of Godwin. He not only accepted his master's political theory, but his system as a whole. "To many practical statesmen, as well as to Rousseau and Godwin, it seemed that the sole question of government was to secure liberty of action to the individual. Wordsworth was prepared for Godwin's uncompromising enunciation of this principle by his previous acceptance of Rousseau's doctrine that every individual is by nature independent."²

We now arrive at the third step of the poet's Godwinian progress. It is the period of disaster, the time when despair came to him. He describes it thus:

So I fared,
Dragging all precepts, judgments, maxims, creeds,
Like culprits to the bar; calling the mind,
Suspiciously, to establish in plain day
Her titles and her honours; now believing,
Now disbelieving; endlessly perplexed
With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
Of obligation, what the rule and whence
The sanction; till, demanding formal proof,

1. The Prelude, xi. 238-44.
2. Harper, op. cit., I. 256.

And seeking it in everything, I lost
All feeling of conviction, and in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarities,
Yielded up moral questions in despair,
This was the crisis of that strong disease,
This the soul's last and lowest ebb;¹

iv. Influence of Coleridge's Philosophy.

Just how he recovered from this moral crisis we do not know from the poet himself; for Wordsworth's usual reticence in The Prelude here becomes absolute silence. He says, however, that it was his sister Dorothy who maintained for him a saving intercourse with his true self. However great and important the influence of Dorothy was upon him, it cannot have been in the direction of furnishing the poet with a philosophy and an aesthetic. Yet, during this crucial period of his life he was furnished with both; so the problem of the critic is to cast about in search of the source whence Wordsworth drew his inspiration and his knowledge. "Just as in the first stage of which we have spoken . . . the important fact is his devotion to the system of Godwin, so in this second stage is his meeting with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the intellectual stimulus which resulted from his intercourse with Coleridge and the Bristol group which led to a renewed devotion to a line of other English thinkers and philosophers, chiefly David Hartley."²

The good fortune which had thrown Wordsworth into his sister's society just when he needed rescuing from a melancholy

1. The Prelude, xi. 293-307.

2. Beatty, op. cit., p.91.

philosophy, provided him also with a friend who was able to accompany and even precede him in the path of speculation, at the very time when he required a new philosophical creed. This friend was possessed of precisely those qualifications in which Dorothy was lacking; breadth of view, a disposition to systematize, and penetration as deep in the sphere of thought as was Dorothy's in that of feeling. Wordsworth's intimacy with Coleridge was as opportune as it was beneficial. Coleridge is the only person besides Dorothy by whom Wordsworth has admitted that he was deeply influenced. He has said that his intellect had contracted an important debt to him, and that the influence of Coleridge had penetrated to his "heart of hearts."¹ He called Coleridge the most wonderful man he had ever known, "wonderful for the originality of his mind, and the power he possessed of throwing out in profusion grand central truths from which might be evolved the most comprehensive systems."² "It was Coleridge who provided or rather assisted him to find the only thing still needful to make him the poet he finally became, namely, a philosophy."³

As we do not seem to have any authentic record of Wordsworth's thoughts during the years 1797-8, we shall turn to Coleridge, and read, as it were, his thoughts to learn what Wordsworth was absorbing and laying up for future use in poetry and theory. Critics and biographers agree that what interested Coleridge the

1. The Prelude, xiv. 281.

2. Knight, op. cit., iii. 235.

3. Emile Legouis, The Early Life of William Wordsworth, p. 319.
London, J. M. Dent and Company, 1897.

most during these years, and for some future time was philosophy. Likewise they agree that the individual philosophers who attracted him most were Hartley and Berkeley, with the precedence clearly given to the former. A few references will suffice to substantiate this statement. His friend, Joseph Cottle, tells us that Samuel Taylor Coleridge "generally contrived either by direct amalgamation or digression, to notice, in the warmest encomiastic language, Bishop Berkeley, David Hartley or Mr. Bowles. . . . He urged the purchase of three works, indispensable to all who wished to excel in sound reasoning, or a correct taste; namely; Simpson's Euclid; Hartley on Man; and Bowles' Poems."¹

In Religious Musings, a poem written by Coleridge during the years 1794-6, we have the following well-known tribute to Hartley:

and he of mortal kind
Wisest, he first who marked the ideal tribes
Down the fine fibres from the sentient brain
Roll subtly - surging.²

As further evidence let it be remembered that Coleridge christened his first-born son David Hartley after the great master of Christian philosophy, and his second son for Berkeley, the idealist. Clement Carlyon, a leading German authority for Coleridge, narrates conversations belonging to the spring of 1799 which are based entirely on the Hartleian philosophy.³ Again, Hazlitt tells us that it was his privilege to visit Wordsworth and Coleridge at Alfoxden in the summer of 1798 when they were actively engaged

1. Cottle, op. cit., p.21.

2. Coleridge, Religious Musings. ll 368-371.

3. Clement Carlyon, Early Years and Late Reflections, I. 33.

Autobiography in four volumes. Vols. I. II. and III published 1856.
Vol. IV. 1858.

on the composition of the Lyrical Ballads. He gives us a very enlightening report of his two weeks' stay when he states "that he engaged in metaphysical argument, . . . that he had already adopted the characteristic opinions of what later became his Essay on the Principles of Human Action; Being an Argument in favour of the natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind. To which are added, Some Remarks on the Systems of Hartley and Helvetius, published in 1805. The main thesis of this book is in substance one of the cardinal doctrines of Hartley, and the whole argument is impregnated with Hartleian influences."¹

Professor Knight records a letter written by Wordsworth to Richard Sharp in 1808 wherein he speaks of Hartley as one among the "men of real power who go before their age."² It is thus clear that Coleridge was a disciple of Hartley and through him Wordsworth was familiar with the great philosopher.

The Lyrical Ballads of 1798 present to us a radiant and settled health of soul. Indeed, notwithstanding what is new and wonderful in the collection, nothing is more wonderful than that it should have come from the Wordsworth whom we have hitherto known, who yielded up moral questions in despair after seeking in vain for formal proof. In the Lyrical Ballads, in conjunction with Coleridge the revolt from Godwin, and the comfort in a more satisfying philosophy, are both plainly to be seen. Godwin emphasized justice as the greatest virtue of society, and decried the more

1. Beatty, op. cit., p.94.
2. Knight, op.cit., I.379.

human virtues like pity and piety. Likewise, Godwin decreed property to be an evil, but we find Wordsworth protesting against this principle in Michael and The Last of the Flock. Again, in the poet's revolt against Godwinianism he expresses himself in poems which have to do with "the primary laws of our nature." In this class we would place The Mad Mother founded on maternal passion; We Are Seven, a picture of the child's inability to understand what death is; and Goody Blake and Harry Gill, an account of a soul under a curse. This subject of a soul under a curse is also the subject of The Ancient Mariner.

The poems entitled Lines Written in Early Spring, Expostulation and Reply, The Tables Turned, and Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey are really Wordsworthian. As one writer has said, these poems are not so much titles as a roll-call of glory, for in them we find the first statement of the newly-found solution of the universe based on Hartleian philosophy, and the poet's first satisfying aesthetic which gave theoretical support to his own insistent need of joy and hope and pleasure.¹ The result of having attained this higher region is a noble moral life, a life of liberty and blessedness.

Such minds are truly from the Deity,
For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss
That flesh can know is theirs - the consciousness
Of Whom they are, habitually infused
Through every image and through every thought,
And all affections by communion raised
From earth to heaven, from human to divine;
Hence endless occupation for the Soul,
Whether discursive or intuitive:

Hence cheerfulness for acts of daily life,
Emotions which best foresight need not fear,
Most worthy then of trust when most intense.
Hence, amid ills that vex and wrongs that crush
Our hearts - if here the words of Holy Writ
May with fit reverence be applied - that peace
Which passeth understanding, that repose
In moral judgments which from this pure source
Must come, or will by man be sought in vain.¹

Here is established the harmony between God, Man, and Nature. In this experience he found the guide and anchor of his being. The rapture which he feels in the presence of the life of Nature is a deep religious consciousness, it is love and worship.

"It is certain that Coleridge did materially influence Wordsworth, and not the least part of the influence exerted by him was due to his philosophical mind, with its large perspective, its mystical vision, and its spiritual interpretation of Reality."²

iv. Decline in Wordsworth's Thought.

Coleridge ceased to be a direct formative influence in Wordsworth's life and thought, from the time when the breach in friendship began to develop between the two poets. With that gift which he had for enabling others to assume great undertakings from which by a constitutional infirmity of will he was himself perpetually inhibited, Coleridge had placed Wordsworth's feet in the path of philosophy, and in 1807 Wordsworth would have seemed to be advancing in a sure and straight course. But no sooner is Coleridge withdrawn than he not merely falters in an unfinished work, he not merely stops, he turns back. "Perhaps only Coleridge

1. The Prelude, xiv. 112-29.

2. Sneath, op. cit., p. 90.

could have helped him, Coleridge with his careless gift of bestowing benefits with the fine air of a man who receives them. Coleridge was, in any case, one of those minds which startle other minds out of the ordinariness which so easily besets most men, and besets at fitful intervals even genius. We have noticed how Wordsworth was conscious of, and even emphasizes the presence of, a certain ordinariness in his own nature and habits. Yet he beheld always, as it were, a silver thread of vision variegating this ordinariness. Coleridge also saw the ordinariness . . . He was one of those men in whose presence it is difficult to be ordinary. He had that generosity of temper which rouses others to their proper greatness, the mere sound of his voice, as Hazlitt says, was the music of thought. The withdrawal of his influence carried with it for Wordsworth not only philosophical impoverishment but a kind of relapse into ordinariness. From 1807 on, Wordsworth sinks deeper and deeper into ordinariness; he drugs himself with the humdrum of political and social and religious orthodoxy; and only now and again in some mysteriously appointed casual reawakening does he shake off the influence - else ever intensifying - of the deadly opiate."¹

v. Summary.

Passion, sensitiveness, volition - these were the powers that were with Wordsworth when a child hidden away among the silences of the Westmoreland hills, long before the terrible rumblings of

1. Garrod, op. cit., p. 90.

the French Revolution broke upon his ears. Later he was extremely susceptible to the influences of social and political systems of philosophy. In France with Beaupuy, his constant theme of conversation was how to build liberty. Then followed his experiences with Godwinian and rational philosophy. His sceptical analytical habit, his demand that each thing should prove itself at the bar of the abstract reason, only brought the very "crisis of his strong disease."¹

His cure was brought about by his again taking up, through the influence of Coleridge, a true relation to things, and by a right use of his powers in their apprehension, since the only cure for a malady that has arisen through thought is a deeper and truer thought. "It is probably in his reflective thinking, and in the rational interpretation of things and life, more than in any other way, that Coleridge influenced Wordsworth. Coleridge's large way of looking at things, the comprehensive sway of his vision and thought had a tendency not only to wean Wordsworth away from what too often seemed to be mere pettiness of theme and an exaggerated interest in the commonplace, but also to arouse him to a consideration of the larger and deeper problems of human life and thought."²

1. The Prelude, xi. 306.

2. Sneath, op. cit., p. 90.

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