

THE RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

-By-

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FOREWORD

The writer of this thesis does not wish to be so ungrateful as to close this study without certain acknowledgments. Let me say that my indebtedness relates itself to many aspects of the work and to a number of very kind friends as well as to many able and scholarly books.

The book which has been the basis of my study is "The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth", edited by Thomas Hutchinson. Professor de Selincourt's edition of "The Prelude" has been found most useful. "The Prose Works of William Wordsworth", edited by Rev. Alex. B. Grosart, has proved to be a mine of valuable evidence.

"William Wordsworth - His Life, Works, and Influence" by Professor George McLean Harper has been regarded as the definitive life of the poet. It will be noted as one reads the thesis that Professor Harper has been regarded and used as an authority. For the first part of the poet's life Professor Legouis' "The Early Life of William Wordsworth, 1770-1798" has been of the very greatest service. The writer is only sorry that he was unable to consult the second edition of this work. Such book reviews as were read served to greatly intrigue one's interest in the revised edition.

One cannot fail to express one's appreciation of the courtesy of Miss Falconer and the other members of the staff in the library. Their kindness has gone the length of indulgence - which indulgence has proved very helpful at critical times.

Above all else the writer wishes to acknowledge the guidance and help of Professor A.W. Crawford, Ph.D. Failing his ready encouragement and able assistance this thesis would not have been written. One feels a very real sense of gratitude for one has gained far more than the very valuable discipline of writing the thesis - that is to say, the writer feels that he has been brought to a truer appreciation of a great poet.

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THE RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

CHAPTER I

THE MAN AND THE POET

William Wordsworth has assured himself of a place among the immortals. Like the great masters in the realm of art he has achieved such position as makes the praise or blame of the individual critic of relatively small value. Even the great literary critic can do little to add to, or take from, his fame. By our appreciation or the lack of it we judge, not the poet, but ourselves. Professor Harper, has well said, "His excellence as an artist, the special work he performed in renovating the spirit and the style of English poetry, and his pre-eminent position as interpreter of the Revolution, assure for Wordsworth an enduring place among the greatest of our poets. He acknowledged Milton as his master. That he equalled or perhaps surpassed Milton in the quality and variety of his best achievements may be the opinion of Wordsworthians, though it is hardly the judgment of mankind. But more and more the conviction is growing that he is the greatest of our poets since Milton."¹ With this assured position in mind, then, it is our business in the study of the poet, not to appraise, but to interpret.

One of the questions which must inevitably arise in connection with the criticism of any great poet is his religious life. Since a poet speaks of the things of the soul he must of necessity be a religious man, if we interpret the word "religious" to mean, having an interest in spiritual things.

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1. Harper, Wordsworth, p. 17.

A poet may be "irreligious" from the orthodox point of view, he may be heterodox rather than orthodox in his opinions, yet he cannot but have an interest in things religious. Religion and those things which pertain to religion can never be matters of indifference to your true poet. The religious life of the poet is always a matter of great interest but in the case of Wordsworth we have a special concern since his religious faith underwent gradual but profound changes in the course of his life. What is more, these changes in religious faith inevitably found expression in his poetry and we should be at a loss to explain the change in emphasis with Wordsworth at the various periods of his life without knowing how greatly his religious outlook had altered during these same periods of time. These considerations lead us to believe that "The Religious Development of William Wordsworth" may be made a very profitable subject of study and ^{that} this religious life is one aspect of the life of the poet which has received all too little exact study and attention.

We believe that it is very rightly felt that a study of the life of a poet is of great service in the interpretation of his poetry. We are told that "It is often said that poetry is its own interpretation - or it is bad poetry". With this pronouncement we do not hesitate to disagree. Poetry is a sincere expression of the appreciations and convictions of a man's own soul - or it is nothing. Poetry is born of a man's own deep and rich experiences in life and therefore we may be sure that the better we understand and know the poet's life the better we shall appreciate and understand the poet's message. The genius of poetry is its originality and that originality is inherent in personality. It is necessary, then, that we should do our best to solve the riddle of that personality. "All poetry begins from the beginning; it creates its own world, and presents the

eternally novel matter of experience in words that charm the ear of the simplest listener. Criticism must do the same; it must follow the poet, if he gives any token of being worth the following, step by step, recreating his experiences, hanging on his words, disciplining itself to the measure of his paces, believing in him and living with him, until, looking back on the way that it has led, it shall be able to say whether the adventure is good and the goal worthy."¹

If we are convinced that one of the first tasks of criticism as far as poetry is concerned is the study of the life of the poet we can have no doubt but that we may learn much that is useful in the interpretation of Wordsworth's poetry from a thoughtful study of his life. It has been asserted by some that Wordsworth's life was for the most part extremely uninteresting and uneventful. It seems to be true that when Edward Fitzgerald referred to the poet as "Daddy Wordsworth" he did the poet's reputation no little damage. This term called up a picture of a placid and innocuous old gentleman whose life had been without interest and whose poetry could have little significance. This was a false image and gave rise to still more false impressions. We do not only the poet but ourselves a very grave injustice if we allow ourselves to be deceived into the acceptance of the attitude summed up in this unfortunate appellation. It is true that Wordsworth's later years were spent in quiet retirement for the most part but it is equally true that the earlier years of his life - which all critics acknowledge to be the most significant ones - were years of stirring activity and experience. Professor Harper defends the poet with all the fervor of an advocate in court. "If contact with supremely important public affairs and intimacy with great spirits make a life

1. Walter Raleigh, Wordsworth, p. 11.

eventful, we may say, indeed, that no other English poet, since the years when Milton sat at the council table with Cromwell, has undergone experiences so heart-stirring as those which came in a few years to the quiet young poet from the North Country. What would not any student of history give to have walked across France in the inspiring summer of 1790? In the calendar of great days, what lover of literature would not mark as memorable above all others one on which he had met Coleridge and won his heart forever? How many occurrences in any man's life could have been reckoned so notable as making friends with Charles Lamb and Walter Scott? And we have now come to an epoch in Wordsworth's personal history which had all the charm of adventure and romance, together with a spice of danger, and in which he touched, as with his bare hand, the vast coils that were generating heat and light for a world that was to move faster than ever before and through clearer spaces. ---- One of the most decisive periods of that life was the thirteen or fourteen months of his second visit to France. From the seclusion of Hawkshead, the sheltered luxury of Cambridge, the slow pace and quiet tone of English and Welsh parsonages and country-houses, he stepped in a single day into the brilliancy, the hardness, the peril, and excitement, of Revolutionary France."¹ And it was not the years of the Revolution alone but those which came after which are of deepest significance. Wordsworth and his contemporaries not only witnessed and experienced a great revolution in human affairs and in human thought but they had also to readjust their lives and their thought following that revolution. The poet lived eighty years. He was in the very pride of youth in the days when the French Revolution burst upon an astonished Europe with all its flaming light and fury. Wordsworth experienced the very keenest disappointment

1. Harper, ^{Vol. I.} Wordsworth, pp. 124-125.

over the failure of that Revolution. He saw the star of Napoleon rise and fall. He had a share in the battles of the first half of the nineteenth century for and against the reform of the British Constitution and State. Wordsworth lived in a great age and he writes with a background of great experiences. Indeed it is not too much to say the eighty years of the poet's life cover a period which is as tremendous in its import as any eighty years in all the history of the world since the first century of the Christian Era. With this in mind we can understand his biographer saying, "His words were acts. His decisions, even in so quiet an affair as the choice of subjects and words for pastoral poems, were based on principles of the widest scope, and were in truth momentous, as he supposed. He breathed with joy and awe, the spirit of a glorious time. And the time found in him its most glorious interpreter."¹

There are biographies of every great man and assuredly there are many biographies and criticisms of Wordsworth. These of course vary greatly in standpoint and in value and must be used with caution since they must inevitably represent a certain more or less characteristic point of view on the part of the writer. We are most fortunate, however, in having the greatest possible assistance in the study of Wordsworth's life in a voluminous and remarkable autobiographic poem. "The Prelude" is a poem quite unique in the history of literature. No other poet has left such an authentic and detailed poetic biography as that found in this great poem. The sub-title of the poem assures us that we have to do here with that most difficult of all riddles, the "Growth of a Poet's Mind." "With the superb self-assurance of a great artist, he has made his own experience the image of his time, and to him we owe the one permanent, universal history of the

1. Harper, Wordsworth, Vol. 1, p. 15.

French Revolution on the mind of man."¹ We may gather his intent in writing this poem from his own words, "Unable to proceed with this work, I turned my thoughts again to the Poem on my own Life, and you will be glad to hear that I have added 300 lines to it in the course of last week. -- It will be not much less than 9,000 lines, - not hundred but thousand lines long, - an alarming length! and a thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself. It is not self-conceit, as you know well, that has induced me to do this, but real humility. --- Here, at least, I hoped that to a certain degree I should be sure of succeeding, as I had nothing to do but describe what I had felt and thought; therefore could not easily be bewildered."² Many a man has left a goodly amount of autobiographic material, some have written prose autobiography, but no one else as far as we know has written such a poetic autobiography as "The Prelude." This poem, as a great modern Wordsworthian scholar has said, is "the essential living document for the interpretation of Wordsworth's life and poetry."³ We need to add further that "The Excursion" is hardly less autobiographic than "The Prelude". There seem to be three heroes in "The Excursion", the "Wanderer", the "Solitary", and the "Pastor", and each one of these in turn expresses or seems to express the mind of the poet himself. Indeed they seem not only to express his mind but also to recall some of his life's experience. Having then this wealth of material which the poet himself has given us we can do no less than make the best possible use of it. We are forced to conclude that the poet is more likely to understand himself than is anyone else. The poet himself must be taken as the authority in almost every case. We are merely at liberty, however, it would seem, to fill in those gaps in the narrative where it appears that the poet has been

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1. "Rousseau, Godwin, and Wordsworth", Harper. The Atlantic, May, 1912.
 2. Wordsworth, Prose Works, Vol. II. p. 165.
 3. De Selincourt, "Wordsworth's Prelude", p. xv.

unduly reticent and to add the later chapters of the story after "The Prelude" and "The Excursion" were finished. For the most significant period of the poet's life his own poetry, properly read, gives us the best and most accurate record of his life, impressions, and experiences.

In attempting to trace the course of the religious development of William Wordsworth it seems ^{that} the greater amount of attention should be centered on the story of his life as we find it depicted in his poetry, and more particularly as we find it in "The Prelude". It is true that this poem does not carry the story farther than the first thirty years of the poet's life but beyond all question these are the most important and most significant years. Even the most idolatrous of the lovers of Wordsworth must be constrained to admit that the greatest of his poetry was written in the earlier years and that his real contribution to the world of art grew out of the experiences of the years whose history is told in "The Prelude". "The Prelude" must ever be the best interpretation of those feelings and experiences out of which came the poetry which has made the name of Wordsworth great among men. The religious life of the poet will find expression here if at all and to this poem we must go for our final authority.

CHAPTER II

THE RELIGION OF CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

We have good warrant for going back to earliest childhood for a study of the religious opinions of the poet Wordsworth. As the motto of one of his greatest and best known poems we find the words - and we cannot but regard these words as the exact and beautiful expression of the thought of the great poet -

The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each in natural piety.
("Intimations of Immortality")

And again we read in "The Prelude" as he tells the story of his own childhood:-

Our childhood sits,
Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne
That hath more power than all the elements.
("Prelude", V., 507-9.)

Wordsworth believed and affirmed with great emphasis that the experiences and impressions of childhood had the very greatest influence upon later life. When we turn to the story of his childhood days we see that the poet had good reason to affirm this for he could read the proof, as it were, in his own life.

As is well known, William Wordsworth was a child of the Lake Country of Northern England. Thus he fell heir, not only to the charm of its marvelous beauty, but also to the simple piety which was characteristic of the people of this district. Years later we find him writing to a friend and he makes reference to the habits of the people who were his neighbors,

these poor but independent farmers and villagers among whom he passed his boyhood:- "For Sabbaths, he goes to church with us often or mostly twice a day; on coming home someone turns to the Bible, finds the text, and probably reads the chapter whence it was taken, or perhaps some other; and in the afternoon the master or mistress frequently reads the Bible, if alone; and on this day the mistress of the house almost always teaches the children to read, or, as they express it, hears them a lesson; or if not thus employed, they visit their neighbors, or receive them in their own houses as they drop in, and keep up by the hour a slow and familiar chat."¹ We may judge from this picture of rural life that these people were quietly but sincerely devoted to the church, that is to say, the Church of England.

Wordsworth lost his mother at the early age of nine but it is evident that the memory of his mother was very sweet and precious to him. It seems further that the mother was a woman of genuine piety. In the all too brief "Autobiographical Memoranda dictated by William Wordsworth, P.L., at Rydal Mount, November 1847", there is a reference to the mother's interest in her son's spiritual welfare. The incidents are in no way remarkable in themselves and yet we cannot but feel how much richer was the poet's life with these simple but beautiful memories of his mother. "I remember my mother only in some few situations, one of which was her pinning a nosegay to my breast when I was going to say the catechism in the church, as was customary before Easter. I remember also telling her on one week day that I had been at church, for our school stood in the churchyard, and we had frequent opportunities of seeing what was going on there. The occasion was, a woman was doing penance in the church in a white sheet. My mother commended my having been present, expressing a hope that I should remember the circumstance for

1. Christopher Wordsworth, Memoirs of Wordsworth, Vol. II., p172.

the rest of my life. 'But,' said I, 'Mama, they did not give me a penny, as I had been told that they would.' 'Oh,' said she, recanting her praises, 'if that was your motive, you were very properly disappointed.'¹ The poet paid tribute to his mother by recalling the first scene in one of his Ecclesiastical Sonnets".

How fluttered then thy anxious heart for me,
Beloved Mother! Thou whose happy hand
Had bound the flowers I wore, with faithful tie:
Sweet flowers! at whose inaudible command
Her countenance, phantom-like, doth re-appear:
O lost too early for the frequent tear,¹
And ill requited by this heartfelt sigh!
("Ecclesiastical Sonnets", Part III.,
Sonnet XXII.)

After the mother's death the poet with his brothers and his sister Dorothy were dispersed among the relatives. The father, John Wordsworth, was reasonably prosperous in his business and a man of taste and culture but he was not able to do all that he might for the care and education of his children. It is said that he early set William to learn portions of the great English poets by heart, so that when very young he could repeat large portions of Shakespeare, Milton and Spenser. We have no record to the effect that he took any great interest in his son's religious welfare, however, and does not seem to have left any great or lasting impression on his son's life and character. Following his mother's death William was sent to the grammar-school at Hawkshead and there he spent the formative years between nine and eighteen.

The years spent in this quiet village and at this school made their impress on the life of the poet. Hawkshead was a typical Lake Country village. There was no great wealth in evidence and little poverty; there were no mansions and no hovels. The one building of mark in the town was a noble Gothic church of considerable antiquity and relatively large size. It was the good

1. Wordsworth, Prose Works, Vol. III., pp. 219-220.

fortune of the lad to be lodged with one Dame Tyson, who gave the boy the very best of motherly care. The poet always held Dame Tyson in high regard and he has preserved her memory in a tribute in "The Prelude,"

Her smooth domestic life,
Affectionate without disquietude,
Her talk, her business, pleased me; and no less
Her clear though shallow stream of piety
That ran on Sabbath days a fresher course;
With thoughts unfelt till now I saw her read
Her Bible on hot Sunday afternoons,
And loved the book, when she had dropped asleep
And made of it a pillow for her head.

("Prelude", IV., 222-230.)

All in all Wordsworth was remarkably fortunate in spending the formative years of his boyhood where he did. Dame Tyson was but typical of the simple, frugal, godly folk who were the friends, and more or less unconsciously, the teachers of the growing boy. In the days when Wordsworth was a boy there were few if any distinctions of rank in this remote and rather sparsely settled district. Most if not all of the dalesmen were "statesmen" - that is to say, they were the owners of the small holdings which they tilled. The atmosphere of town and country alike was that of sturdy independence and neighborly friendliness. A few years later when the battle cry of the French Revolution - "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" became the watchword of the hour, Wordsworth failed to be thrilled as with the promise of a far-off dream of the golden future for he had known a community and society which had exemplified these ideals in a perfectly happy and natural way. Wordsworth was born and bred a democrat and his political and social thinking, even his religious viewpoint, was very largely influenced by the impressions made in the days of his boyhood.

There was another great formative influence peculiar to the Lake District which made a lasting impression upon the boy Wordsworth. More potent even than the influence of this democratic society was that of the magnificent

scenery with which he was daily surrounded. The scenery of the Lake District was such as could hardly fail to make a profound impression upon the mind and spirit of a sensitive soul. "Austere but not rugged, its mountains lofty enough to be awful, its dales and valleys secluded and peaceful but not lonely, - the whole region invites to serene but lofty thought."

"Ye Presences of Nature in the sky
And on the earth! Ye Vision of the hills!
And Soul of lonely places!"
("Prelude", I, 464-6.)

We think it too much to say that Wordsworth would not have been a poet had he spent his boyhood amid less rugged and beautiful surroundings but we may say that Wordsworth would never have been the same kind of poet, he could not have had the same message for the world had he been reared elsewhere. We must emphasize this in our study of the religious life of the poet for it was these "Presences of Nature" which were in these years of boyhood, ministers and teachers. We need not deny the obvious fact that his was a religion of nature, nor need we be dismayed because we find little reference to the Church as such. The boy William Wordsworth worshipped the God of Nature in God's own great out-of-doors. It may be that his religion was not the conventional type, it may be that he could not be called orthodox in his views or in his expression of them - since originality was the very genius of his thought and work. It may be that one could not with justice and accuracy call the religion of his youth Christian but neither can one call it unchristian. It was a great free love of Nature and Nature's God, and through this love there was mediated to the eager heart of the lad that peace, calm, joy, which lies at the heart of all true religion. We may quote passage after passage which give us a sense of the power of the impression which the beauty and the sublimity of these natural surroundings had on the soul of the boy poet. We turn to "The Prelude" and we read:-

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
 Fostered alike by beauty and by fear:
 Much favoured in my birth-place, and no less
 In that beloved Vale to which ere long
 We were transplanted; - there were we let loose
 For sports of wider range.

("Prelude", I., 301-306.)

A little further on we read words of poetic insight and beautiful imagery:-

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
 Like harmony in music; there is a dark
 Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
 Discordant elements, makes them cling together
 In one society.

("Prelude", I., 340-344.)

It was not in the Church or in the offices or ministries of the Church that the boy found his religion but in the open fields and among the mighty mountains. We have his testimony over and over again and never more strikingly than in the passage so often quoted:-

If this be error, and another faith
 Find easier access to the pious mind,
 Yet were I grossly destitute of all
 Those human sentiments that make this earth
 So dear, if I should fail with grateful voice
 To speak of you, ye mountains, and ye lakes
 And sounding cataracts, ye mists and winds
 That dwell among the hills where I was born.
 If in my youth I have been pure in heart,
 If, mingling with the world I am content
 With my own modest pleasures, and have lived
 With God and Nature communing, removed
 From little enmities and low desires --
 The gift is yours;

 - the gift is yours,
 Ye winds and sounding cataracts! 'tis yours,
 Ye mountains! thine, O Nature! Thou hast fed
 My lofty speculations; and in thee,
 For this uneasy heart of ours, I find
 A never-failing principle of joy
 And purest passion.

("Prelude", II., 419-432, 445-451.)

In still more lofty terms do we have this thought in the ascription to the "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe":-

farther and say that the poet was not merely passive under the power of Nature, he had begun to give back a glory to Nature. Nature and Mind had begun to interact. He had begun to make the influence of his own soul felt upon Nature. He had begun to commune with Nature and with the God of Nature and communion implies the give and take of fellowship. He knew the influence of Nature upon himself but he also felt his own power which imposed itself on Nature. Nature and himself were living powers acting on each other. We can prove this from Wordsworth's own words and we need to bear this in mind lest we should be deceived into thinking that the young poet had unconsciously become a Pantheist.

'Twere long to tell
 What spring and autumn, what the winter snows,
 And what the summer shade, what day and night,
 Evening and morning, sleep and waking, thought
 From sources inexhaustible, poured forth
 To feed the spirit of religious love
 In which I walked with Nature. But let this
 Be not forgotten, that I still retained
 My first creative sensibility;
 That by the regular action of the world
 My soul was unsubdued. A plastic power
 Abode with me; -----

 An auxiliary light
 Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
 Bestowed new splendor; the melodious birds,
 The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on
 Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
 A like dominion, and the midnight storm
 Grew darker in the presence of my eye;
 Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
 Hence my transport.

("Prelude", II., 352-363, 368-376.)

We may say, then, that the education of Nature had given the youth a sense of calm serene strength. From this Spirit - of God - in Nature he drew his strength and power and no less his morality and his peace. He had with Nature harmony and communion. He sensed a power and spirit in Nature and a power over Nature.

With this priceless heritage Wordsworth passed from the freedom of his native Lake Country into the scholarly seclusion of Cambridge University. His heart was high with hope and anticipation on that "dreary morning" when first he saw "the long-roofed chapel of King's College" lift its turrets and pinnacles above the trees in the distance:-

My spirit was up, my thoughts were full of hope;

 I was the Dreamer, they the Dream; I roamed
 Delighted through the motley spectacle;
 Gowns grave, or gaudy, doctors, students, streets,
 Courts, cloisters, flocks of churches, gateways, towers;
 Migration strange for a stripling of the hills,
 A northern villager.

("Prelude", III., 18, 30-35.)

Sad to relate, however, his high hopes and expectations were not fully realized. The University failed to hold his interest. He had little care for the prizes and examinations and he refused to be carried along with the regular current of University life. He did the necessary work and passed the examinations - he read rather widely especially among the poets - but in general it may be said that he ^{led} ~~liked~~ his own life. Thus early he displayed that stubborn independence which was at once his strength and his weakness in later life. Even here his love of Nature followed him, he created his own world and lived in it. In the fen-country he turned back again to Nature for strength and inspiration. The human element with its greater breadth and sympathy began almost imperceptibly at first to creep into his life with Nature still in the ascendancy. Gradually the human element grew in power and Nature began to wear a different aspect for him, Nature and Man became linked together. "He had loved rocks and brooks and stars as one angel might love another - now human feelings and changes were connected with them, and a pervasive shade stole over Nature. It was no longer only sublimity or calm which he felt, but something kinder, sweeter - an inner touch of love, delight, or

hope. His human soul, awakened by life among men, began to wed Humanity to Nature, and out of that came the first emotional feeling of a personal religion."¹ It is perhaps of real significance that the emotional crisis which came to him during the first summer vacation came as it were as the result of the opposing currents of interest in his life. He was returning home after a night spent in merry-making and in the quiet splendor of the dawn he comes into a great experience:-

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.

("Prelude", IV., 333-337.)

As the intellectual life of the University failed to grip the young student so also failed the religious life of the place. We are told that the religious life of the colleges was in a state of spiritless stagnation. Cambridge was at this time a stronghold of Anglicanism and there was every effort to restrain rather than to promote religious discussion. It is true that there were currents of Unitarianism and even a taint of Rationalism in the University but it was not until some few years later than men holding these views were able to raise an issue in the University itself. It is quite evident that Wordsworth's religious life did not prosper at Cambridge. The University seems to have made him the more critical of religious ordinances, though perhaps not more so than is common to University students. He took special exception of the rule of compulsory attendance at College chapel and there is more than a little sting in these lines:-

Was ever known
The witless Shepherd who would drive his Flock
With serious repetition to a pool
Of which 'tis plain to sight they never taste?
A weight must surely hang on days begun
And ended with worst mockery: be wise,

1. Brooke, Theology in the English Poets, p. 123.

Ye Presidents and Deans, and to your Bells
 Give seasonable rest; For 'tis a sound
 Hollow as ever vex'd the tranquil air;
 And your officious doings bring disgrace
 On the plain Steepes of our English Church,
 Whose worship 'mid remotest village trees
 Suffers for this.¹

("Prelude", III., 407-421.)

So it was that University life failed or seemed to fail to make any profound impression on the mind of the young poet. It may well have been that the influence of his University life was more subtle and more significant than he had supposed but certainly the poet is ^{not} disposed to admit of having derived any great value from his Cambridge studies and associations. He seems to have felt himself to be out of touch with it all and he complains of a lack of reality in University life and work. His studies failed to enthuse him, the religious life failed to grip him. He was thankful that his morals were unimpaired - as he might well have been for it seems that there was not a little loose living among the students:-

happy is the gown'd youth,
 Who only misses what I missed, who falls
 No lower than I fell.

("Prelude", III., 491-493.)

It is indeed remarkable that the young poet, of all men, drew more of religious value from the study of geometric science and meditation on the laws of Nature than from anything else connected with his University course and yet this was so:-

More frequently from the same source I drew
 A pleasure quiet and profound, a sense
 Of permanent and universal sway,
 And paramount belief; there, recognized
 A type, for finite natures, of the one
 Supreme Existence, the surpassing life
 Which - to the boundaries of space and time,
 Of melancholy space and doleful time,
 Superior and incapable of change,
 Nor touched by welterings of passion - is,

1. This quotation is from what we believe to be the original version of "The Prelude", of date 1805-6. See de Selincourt, Wordsworth's 'Prelude', p. 92.

And hath the name of, God. Transcendent peace
And silence did await upon these thoughts
That were a frequent comfort to my youth.
("Prelude", VI., 129-141.)

There had evidently been some thought that William might be taking orders and entering the service of the Church. That he himself ever had any settled intention of doing so we can find little or no evidence. His sister and his relatives would have been pleased no doubt if he had settled on taking orders - they would have been glad to have been assured that he had some reasonable prospects for the future but Wordsworth himself seems to have felt no enthusiasm for the Church and no undue anxiety concerning this uncertain future. Dorothy Wordsworth is quoted as having written, "I am very anxious about him just now, as he will shortly have to provide for himself. Next year he takes his degree. When he will go into orders I do not know, nor how he will employ himself. He must when he is three-and-twenty, either go into orders or take pupils. He will be twenty in April."¹ Dorothy's hopes were not realized, however, and her anxiety was to be greatly prolonged. It was many years before William Wordsworth settled upon a profession and that a rather hazardous one and in the meantime he was to undergo certain experiences which were almost as bitter as they were remarkable. Long years afterward Wordsworth said that "wandering" was his passion² and this is borne out by a sudden decision to spend his last long vacation at the University, not in study - as was more or less the custom - but in a walking tour on the Continent. That this was the year 1790 makes this decision the most momentous in the life of William Wordsworth for this quiet student tour became an introduction to the most significant event in modern history, the French Revolution.

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1. Harper, Wordsworth, p. 182.
2. Wordsworth, Prose, Vol. III., p. 196.

With this background of experience Wordsworth could not have been, however, a disinterested spectator of so great a movement as the Revolution. The two comrades set out on a "march of military speed" across France to the Rhone and down the Rhone for a little distance and then across country into Switzerland. Everywhere they met the fervent joy and enthusiasm of those who looked to the dawn of a great new day in human affairs. Wordsworth's heart responded to the challenge of the hour:-

"Honour to the patriot's zeal!
Glory and hope to new-born Liberty!
Hail to the mighty projects of the time!"
("Prelude", VI., 441-443.)

Once in Switzerland Nature came into its own once more - once more enthralled his spirit. He says in a letter to his sister Dorothy, "Among the more awful scenes of the Alps, I had not a thought of man, or a single created being, my whole soul was turned to Him who produced the terrible majesty before me!"¹ "Descriptive Sketches" which were written in 1791 and 1792 while on his second visit to France are the best record we have of this pedestrian tour and the feelings evoked by the experiences thereof.² This poem reflects the passion of a heart on flame for Wordsworth at this time was at the height of his Revolutionary ardor. Indeed we are told that this is the one poem which Wordsworth wrote in the full faith of the French Revolution and it is memorable for this rather than for any great intrinsic merit or the expression of any profound philosophical or religious tenets. Of far greater significance is the passage in "The Prelude" which refers to one of the experiences of this tour. The two travellers were making their way through the pass in the mountains when to their amazement they found that they had already crossed the Alps. Wordsworth

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1. Harper, Wordsworth, p. 93.
2. The original text of "Descriptive Sketches" was very considerably altered in the editions succeeding the first one and it has been felt by many competent critics - altered for the worse since the poet seemed to wish to moderate the glowing descriptions which were the heart and soul of the poem, descriptions which throbbed with a noble enthusiasm for liberty. Happily enough the Oxford Wordsworth gives us a reprint of the 1793 Edition of this poem.

was struck with the fact that at such a juncture his own mind had a reality all its own and distinct from Nature. In a flash he saw that his soul rose triumphant over sense and time.

But to my conscious soul I now can say -
 "I recognize thy glory:" in such strength
 Of usurpation, when the light of sense
 Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
 The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
 There harbours; whether we be young or old,
 Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
 Is with infinitude, and only there;
 With hope it is, hope that can never die,
 Effort and expectation, and desire,
 And something evermore about to be.
 ("Prelude", VI., 597-608.)

It seems that there was little of import in the record of Wordsworth's last year at the University and in February, 1791, the poet, not yet the twenty-one years of age, went down to London to spend some little time. As yet the young man had settled on no profession and no occupation; he had no plans and it seems that he was taking one more vacation before he fixed on his work in life. In another sense, consciously or unconsciously, Wordsworth was completing his education. In this great "ant-hill on the plain" ^{as} he calls London - there was laid on his soul the weight of the great burden of humanity. Wordsworth began to take an active interest in the events of his time. Burke had already begun to thunder forth his denunciations of the French Revolution and the city was seething with excitement. Wordsworth mingled with the crowds in the theatres, the courts, on the streets; he observed with keenest interest the pulsing life and varied interests of a great city. He went to hear the popular preachers of the day but we are not led to believe that any of these men made any marked impression upon him. Indeed he seems rather scornful of the efforts of these men and inclined to satirize their affectations, their elaborate dressing, their domineering harangues. It appears that his relatives had not given up hope that he might be induced to take orders

but Wordsworth was still obdurate. It was not that he had conscientious scruples against the service of the church but rather that he had not the slightest call toward it. Interest in Man as well as Nature had been roused in his heart by his University and French Revolution experiences but Nature was still in the ascendancy. It is significant that the title of the Eighth Book of "The Prelude" is "Retrospect - Love of Nature leading to Love of Man". Wordsworth was watching and studying his fellowmen from the beggars and the prostitutes on the street to the leading men in Church and State but he did not forget that Nature had a message for humanity.

Attention springs,
And comprehensiveness and memory flow,
From early converse with the works of God
Among all regions; chiefly where appear
Most obviously simplicity and power.

- even so, its powers and aspects
Shape for mankind, by principles as fixed,
The views and aspirations of the soul
To majesty.

This did I feel, in London's vast domain.
The Spirit of Nature was upon me there;
The soul of Beauty and enduring Life
Vouchsafed her inspiration, and diffused,
Through meagre lines and colours, and the press
Of self-destroying, transitory things,
Composure, and ennobling Harmony.

("Prelude", VII., 740-771.)

Nature was still first in his life but the poet had begun to more fully interpret its power and message to the human soul, to Man and the time was not far distant when Man and not Nature would hold first place.

The next decision in Wordsworth's life was a momentous one. It was not a decision to take up a profession as his relatives had hoped but to make another tour of France - this time to spend some considerable time there. Whatever the ostensible objects of the visit to France it seems more than probable that the real reasons were a young man's love of adventure and sympathy with

a great movement in human affairs. It has been said of Wordsworth that "One of the most decisive periods of that life was the thirteen or fourteen months of his second visit to France." We believe that we can go farther and say that this was indeed and beyond all question the one most decisive period in his life. All the later crises of his life grew out of the experiences of this visit to Revolutionary France. When Wordsworth entered France in November, 1791, he was plunged into the heart of the most perilous and weighty series of events in modern history.

We are unfortunate in having a very inadequate record of his thoughts and inner experiences during this period. Wordsworth tells us very little about external events and experiences. "The Prelude" becomes vague, sketchy, and unsatisfactory at this point. Nor does his first biographer, Christopher Wordsworth, the Bishop of Lincoln, enlighten us greatly. It almost seems indeed as if there had been a conspiracy of silence with regard to the poet's actions and opinions during these critical years. This is the more to be regretted because it was during this very period that Wordsworth began a series of deep and searching experiences of soul which made him a prophet to humanity. The good Bishop does arouse our suspicions, however, by a carefully worded and non-committal statement as to Wordsworth's dangers in France and we read all the more into the words since the story of Wordsworth's love affair with Annette Vallon has come to light, a story to which we shall subsequently refer. The Bishop says in so many words and no more: "Wordsworth's condition in France was a very critical one: he was an orphan, young, inexperienced, impetuous, enthusiastic, with no friendly voice to guide him, in a foreign country, and that country in a state of revolution; and this revolution, it must be remembered, had not only taken up arms against the monarchy and other ancient institutions, but had declared war against Christianity. The most licentious theories were propounded; all restraints were broken; libertinism

was law. He was encompassed with strong temptations; and although it is not the design of the present work to chronicle the events of his life as far as they illustrate his writings, yet I could not pass over this period without noticing the dangers which surround those who in an ardent emotion of enthusiasm put themselves in a position of peril without due consideration of the circumstances which ought to regulate their practice."¹

That Wordsworth was soon face to face with these dangers and temptations is abundantly evident. Wordsworth had undoubtedly been greatly influenced by one of the great Revolutionary thinkers - that is to say, Rousseau - before he ever left England. Rousseau's thinking and philosophy have left their trace in Wordsworth's poetry. The principal emphases of Rousseau's philosophy was that of individualism and that the essential condition of a good life was a free development towards nature. Along with this there was the teaching that the condition of the good lay in the self-expression of the general will. The first of these principles would make a peculiar appeal to Wordsworth who had such an exalted view of Nature and its power over the human soul. Once in France he would feel the influence of Rousseau and the other great thinkers of the day to be immeasurably greater. What is more, he found himself in a great ferment of new and startling ideas; men were intoxicated with liberty and with joy.

'Twas in trugh an hour
Of universal ferment; mildest men
Were agitated; and commotions, strife
Of passion and opinion, filled the walls
Of peaceful houses with unquiet sounds.
The soil of common life was, at that time,
Too hot to traad upon.

("Prelude", IX., 161-167.)

And elsewhere we read:-

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven! O times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways

1. Christopher Wordsworth, Memoirs, Vol. I., pp. 74-75.

Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
 The attraction of a country in romance!
 ("Prelude", 108-112.)

Wordsworth having crossed to the Continent was soon in Paris where he lingered for some time and then went on to Orleans. At Orleans, Blois, and Paris he passed some fourteen months. It was at Blois that Wordsworth met one Captain Beaupuis, an officer of the garrison at Blois, a man of noble character and sterling virtue. Beaupuis was dominated and inspired by the principles which were the ideals of the Revolution and he set Wordsworth on fire with the flame of his own revolutionary ardor. Coleridge alone of all Wordsworth's friends exerted a greater influence upon the poet than did Beaupuis. He turned the poet's vague idealism into firm principle and at last humanity, that is to say, Man, found a place in Wordsworth's heart which was on the same plane with Nature. There is no finer description in "The Prelude" than that of the character of Captain Beaupuis. "The annals of the Revolution present no purer spirit, none more gallant, unselfish, genial, and hopeful."

Among that band of Officers was one,
 Already hinted at, of other mould -
 A patriot, thence rejected by the rest,
 And with an oriental boathing spurned,
 As of a different caste. 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,
 Where foot had crushed them. He through the events
 Of that great change wandered in perfect faith,
 As through a book, an old romance, or tale
 Of fairy, or some dream or actions wrought
 Behind the summer clouds. --

 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: ---

("Prelude", IX., 288-302, 305-312.)

Beaupuis and Wordsworth discoursed about the ends of civil government and its wisest forms, of how great nations had been formed in the past, of the mighty hopes of the present hour. Beaupuis did indeed set his friend's soul on fire with his own passion. He pointed out the tremendous challenge of the hour:-

And when we chanced
One day to meet a hunger-bitten girl,
Who crept along fitting her languid gait,
Unto a heifer's motion, by a cord
Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane
Its sustenance, while the girl with pallid hands
Was busy knitting in a heartless mood
Of solitude, and at the sight my friend
In agitation said, "'Tis against that
That we are fighting, " ---

("Prelude", IX., 509-518.)

We may say with conviction that it was Beaupuis and his influence which brought Wordsworth to the point where he could place Man and Nature on the same level in his affection and esteem. We have his confession in the following significant lines:-

Yet deem not, Friend! that human kind with me
Thus early took a place pre-eminent;
Nature herself was at this unripe time,
But secondary to my own pursuits
And animal activities, and all
Their trivial pleasures; and when these had dropped
And gradually expired, and Nature, prized
For her own sake, became my joy, even then -
And upwards through my late youth, until not less
Than two-and-twenty summers had been told -
Was Man in my affections and regards
Subordinate to her, her visible forms
And viewless agencies: a passion, she,
A rapture often, and immediate love
Ever at hand; he, only a delight
Occasional, an accidental grace,
His hour had not yet come.

("Prelude", VIII., 340-356.)

But if Beaupuis led Wordsworth into a keener interest in Man he, on the other hand, weakened his faith in orthodox Christianity. Beaupuis, like William Godwin who came into the life of Wordsworth a little time later, was an enthusiastic votary of Reason and it appears that by degrees Wordsworth was losing more and more of his faith. He was becoming, not only a Revolutionary in his political thinking, but a Radical and a Rationalist in his religious attitude.

From Orleans and Blois Wordsworth went back to Paris and we might suppose that this chapter in his life was to become a closed book, that we have recounted everything of importance which has to do with this period of the poet's life. Not so, however! Comparatively recently it has come to the knowledge of the general public that during this stay in France, Wordsworth became involved, and very deeply involved, in a love affair. There is much in this story that is still a mystery but the name and the character of the sweetheart are well known. Annette Vallon, later known as Madame Vallon, the lady in question, was of a royalist family and quite evidently a woman of no little strength and worth of character. We have no reason to assess praise or blame as regards any aspect of this affair as a biographer might be expected to do. It does seem advisable, however, to mention the incident and to suggest that Wordsworth, having made the mistake, did his best to make such amends as it were possible for him to make. There is nothing to prove that the young couple did not intend to marry and that the troublous times, difficult circumstances, or clash of political opinions had not made such intentions impossible of fulfillment. In any case it must be said that although Wordsworth was very careful not give any information to the world at large, he did not keep the secret from the woman who had the best right to know the story, namely, his future wife.

In conclusion and by way of comment on this affair we can hardly do better than to quote the words of Legouis who has a pertinent criticism to make:-

"As a poet he was, at least from an artistic point of view, reticent to a fault. He retained his autobiographical recollections and presented to the public a partial, incomplete, and to a certain extent, enfeebled, image of his life and feelings. He was, of course, fully justified in refusing to tell a story the secret of which did not belong to him alone. But a more open avowal, in general terms, of his youthful passions could have harmed neither him, nor Annette, nor the reader."¹ It need not be inferred that this love affair had any great or lasting effect on Wordsworth's religious attitude but on the other hand we feel any study of the life of Wordsworth could hardly fail to mention this incident, at least in passing.

From the comparative quiet of central France Wordsworth turned his steps toward Paris. There he seems to have become immersed in politics having linked up with a faction called the "Brissotins" and we can only conjecture as to what might have been his fate had he not been recalled to England. These were stirring and dangerous times in the French capital and men who interested themselves in politics were taking their lives in their hands. Wordsworth apparently left France very unwillingly but at no later date than that of the writing of "The Prelude" he was ready to acknowledge that it had been for the best. We find him saying:-

In this frame of mind,
 Dragged by the chain of harsh necessity,
 So seemed it, - now I thankfully acknowledge,
 Forced by the gracious providence of Heaven, -
 To England I returned, else (though assured
 That I both was and must be of small weight,
 No better than a landsman on the deck
 Of a ship struggling with a hideous storm)
 Doubtless, I should have then made common cause
 With some who perished; haply perished too,
 A poor mistaken and bewildered offering, -
 ("Prelude", X., 221-231.)

1. Review of Second Edition, Legouis, Early Life of Wordsworth. The Times Literary Supplement, Sept. 5, 1921.

It is evident from the tone of the record which the poet left in "The Prelude" and from the statement of his nephew in the "Memoirs" that Wordsworth was in a stubborn frame of mind when he left France to go back to his native land. His hopes were bound up in the Revolution and in Revolutionary France; so much so indeed that he at first rejoiced in the defeat of the British by the French in various battles of the war which soon broke out. We are also to believe that Wordsworth's religious faith had been badly shattered by his experiences in France. His attachment to Christianity, or shall we say to the Christian Church, had not been a very vital one at the time he had left the University. His stay in London had done nothing to strengthen his faith, had rather tended to undermine it. Then the plunge into the white heat of the French Revolution and the contact with ^{men} notably Captain Beaupuis, whose religious thinking inclined to rationalism, had confirmed his religious doubts. We are not able to say whether Wordsworth had as yet given his allegiance to the "goddess of Reason" but it is certain that his religious faith was at a very low ebb when he left France. The storm and stress of soul which was to mark the story of the next few years had already begun to break over his head when he turned his reluctant feet toward England.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERIOD OF STORM AND STRESS

The next chapter in the life of the poet is a most difficult and momentous one, difficult because we have such scanty records, autobiographical or otherwise, which bear on this period, and momentous because during the next few years the poet had to work out his soul's salvation. Under the circumstances we must make the most of available evidence and endeavor to piece together the story of fateful years. This "Period of Storm and Stress" may be said to begin with Wordsworth's return from France. Here at the very beginning we are at a loss which it comes to the determination of the exact date. What we do know is that it must have been about the very end of the year 1792. Wordsworth says in his Autobiographical Memoranda, "I came home before the execution of the King, and passed the subsequent time among my friends in London and elsewhere, till I settled with my only sister at Racedown in Dorsetshire, in the year 1796."¹ These years between 1793 and 1796 which Wordsworth dismisses in one sentence are perhaps the most interesting in his life as far as his thought was concerned. It was during these years that he went through that intense agony of spirit that made his message to the world deep and profound. "It was largely because of what he underwent between 1792 and 1796 that he became one of the voices of the age."² It is most unfortunate for those who have wished to make a critical study of Wordsworth's life and poetry that there is so little account of these formative years either in the poet's own words or in the

1. Wordsworth, Prose Works, Vol. III., p. 222.

2. Harper, Wordsworth, p. 182.

contemporary records. We must all agree with de Selincourt when he says, "there is no part of his life of which we know so little as that which intervened between his departure for France and his settlement at Raceown and there is none of which we would fain know more."¹

We do know for a certainty, however, that the years following the return to England were very difficult years. We can be very sure that the experiences of these years were bitter and heartsearching. There were many difficulties to be encountered and many doubts to be vanquished. Wordsworth brought back from France certain extreme and irregular opinions. He had now ceased to be orthodox either in his religious or his political attitude. His sister Dorothy and some of his other relatives were still hopeful that William might be persuaded to enter the ministry but this was manifestly impossible. Yet it was imperative that he should find something in the way of an occupation or profession. He repeatedly refused to accept opportunities along professional lines and soon brought upon himself the bondage of poverty. Money matters were not the least of the poet's worries during these critical years. Indeed it seemed at times as if he would be obliged by his financial exigencies to take up some settled occupation whether he would or no. His slender patrimony was soon exhausted and his uncles and guardians having lost patience with him because of what seemed to them to be inexcusable idleness, left him very much to his own resources.² To these relatives the poet's actions were all the more difficult to pardon just because they had good reason to suspect William of holding these irregular and radical views. It was too much to ask of human nature that they should contribute to his support under such circumstances and in view

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1. De Selincourt, Wordsworth's "Prelude", p. liii.
 2. Legouis, Early Life of Wordsworth, p. 281.

the stubborn attitude adopted by Wordsworth himself. Wordsworth worked out a plan for a frugal and independent life but he could not even carry out this unambitious program without at least something in the way of a settled income and so he was forced to abandon this plan.

We may pause here to ascertain if we can what these unorthodox opinions ~~was~~ which brought the poet into disfavor with his family. We might further inquire whether he was able to hold these views with any lasting satisfaction but it goes almost without saying that this was the very thing he was not able to do. The Revolution had made Wordsworth a convinced republican; it had given him a new theory of politics, changed his whole conception of the powers and obligations of the State. Yet by his training and education he had been prepared for the acceptance of these principles and he could hold these principles without undue strain or stress. The real crisis had to do with spiritual things. Legouis seems to put the emphasis in the right place when he says, "But these political feelings, however violent, were after all merely the superficial disorders of Wordsworth's mind at this period of his life. The Revolution did more than ruffle its surface with these waves; it convulsed the groundwork even of his moral being."¹ In Book Eleventh of "The Prelude" we have the record of different phases of this profound upheaval in his inner nature. What makes the record the more valuable is the fact ~~that~~ Wordsworth was so largely typical of his generation in having to face these critical questions in the realm of thought and religion. In "The Prelude" then, we have more than the individual biography, we have a picture which is something of an epitome of what thousands upon thousands of his generation experienced. His biographer is justified in saying, "His biography becomes almost an inward history of his generation."

1. Legouis, Early life of Wordsworth, p. 253.

had quite definitely arrived at the point where they recognized no personal God in the world. It was Reason which was acknowledged as the final court of appeal. Reason was to revolutionize not only France but the whole world; the world was to be remade under the might of her power. We have already quoted a part of the passage from "The Prelude" which spoke of the high hopes of the early days of the Revolution and as we read a little farther in this same passage we note that Reason and Reason alone was the divine enchantress which was to make all things new:-

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven! O times
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute took at once
The attractions of a country in romance!
When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights
When most intent on making of herself
A prime enchantress - to assist the work,
Which then was forward in her name.

("Prelude", XI., 108-116.)

Now as time passed it became increasingly clear that all these high hopes were doomed. Wordsworth and his fellow idealists suffered disappointment after disappointment. They were thrown adrift in the world of thought and they must look for guidance. In Wordsworth's case this guidance came from a strange and unexpected quarter, that is to say, from the philosophical teaching of William Godwin.

After Wordsworth's return from France it seems that the first great impact upon his life and thought was made by the rationalist philosopher, Godwin. We cannot be sure when exactly Wordsworth first began to read and follow Godwin but that his is the influence of greatest importance in this period of the poet's life is proved beyond question. It was in February, 1793, almost simultaneously with the outbreak of the war between France and England - the event which marked the beginning of the more serious conflicts in Wordsworth's soul - that Godwin published his "Inquiry

concerning Political Justice, and its influence on general virtue and happiness." This book, commonly known as "Political Justice", is now practically forgotten but in its day it was a work of note and marked an epoch in contemporary history. It is impossible to state Godwin's philosophy in any great detail in this present study or indeed to make anything like an accurate summary of his leading ideas - we can merely suggest that Godwin, like many of the French thinkers, was a devotee of the goddess of Reason. His whole appeal was to Reason to the exclusion of all other standards. He had gathered up inot a more or less rigid system most of the revolutionary ideas which were to be found in the philosophical works of his time. Godwin had thus arrived at an extreme form of atheism. We are told that he taught that there were no innate ideas and that moral freedom was a popular fiction. The real fact of the matter was, according to Godwin, that man pure intelligence, a reasoning machine. Men had only to give Reason free play and they would be assured of truth as the reward of inquiry and justice as the attainment of liberty and freedom in the relations of men. Workingg these principles out to their logical conclusion Godwin arrived at a kind of philosophical, moral, and political anarchy. This system of thought with its supreme exaltation of Reason carried with it the seeds of some very dangerous heresies and errors and those who accepted this line of thought often became deeply involved and suffered most disastrous consequences.

It happened that William Godwin had the faculty of appealing to the enthusiasm of young men. Young people hungson his words as if they had been those of a prophet. He numbered among his disciples at one time or another such ardent spirits as Shelley, Bulwer Lytton and Wordsworth. Harper points out the strong appeal in that quiet statement of Godwin's, "It is

impossible
 in the nature of things/that the man who has determined with himself never to utter the turths he knows should be an intrepid and indefatigable thinker. The link that binds together the inward and outer man is indissoluble; and he that is not bold in speech will never be ardent and unprejudiced in inquiry." ¹ William Wordsworth was one of the first, and quite possibly the greatest, of those who were converted to the Godwinian system. We cannot say when this happened nor indeed how suddenly or how gradually it took place. We know that Wordsworth was living in London at the time when "Political Justice" was the book of the day. We also know that Wordsworth sat under the preaching of a dissenting minister Joseph Fawcett who was associated with Godwin at the time "Political Justice" was written. Fawcett was a rather unique character and we find him all the more interesting because many of the characteristics of the "Solitary" in "The Excursion" were drawn from Wordsworth's remembrance of Fawcett. As regards Wordsworth's direct connection or relations with Godwin we have only that oft quoted sentence from Hazlitt, which we find in his essay on Godwin, "Throw aside your books of chemistry," said Wordsworth to a young man, a student in the Temple, "and read Godwin on Necessity." ² Coleridge, who was first an adherent and then a vehement antagonist of Godwinism, said that he never knew a more obstinate supporter of Necessitarianism than Wordsworth.

Wordsworth, who seems to have embraced Godwinism somewhere about 1793 or 1794 ³ began at once to follow Godwin's suggestion and to put everything to the test of reason. He would no longer take anything on authority, he would bring all his convictions, his religious faith, to the bar of reason and the re weigh ^{their} its value. It was many long years before he relinquished

1. Harper, Wordsworth, p. 259. ^{Vol. 1.} 2. Hazlitt, Spirit of the Age, p. 20.
 3. We can never be very exact about dates during this period, and as it happens, we know less about the years 1793 and 1794 than practically any other years in the poet's life.

- 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,
 And seeking it in every thing, I lost
 All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
 Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
 Yielded up moral questions in despair.
 ("Prelude", XI., 297-305.)

As Wordsworth goes on himself to say, this was the crisis of his soul's disease, the last and lowest ebb of the tide. With this low ebb there came the beginning of a long and slow recovery. One might infer from Book Eleventh of "The Prelude" that the recovery was accomplished rapidly but such was not the case. It took much heart-searching and many years before his soul's health was finally and fully restored. We get a truer picture from lines in Book Thirteenth "Imagination and Taste, How Impaired and Restored" where he says:-

Long time in search of knowledge did I range
 The field of human life, in heart and mind
 Benighted; but, the dawn beginning now
 To re-appear, 'twas proved that not in vain
 I had been taught to reverence a Power
 That is the visible quality and shape
 And image of right reason; --
 ("Prelude", XIII, 16-22.)

It is interesting to note that Wordsworth was never guilty of flippant scoffing even in the days when there might have been a temptation to relieve his feelings in this manner. He was determined to fight this thing through to conviction and conclusion. His was a serious, earnest purpose.

Depressed, bewildered thus, I did not walk
 With scoffers, seeking light and gay revenge
 From indiscriminate laughter, nor sate down
 In reconciliation with an utter waste
 Of intellect; -----
 ("Prelude", XI., 321-325.)

This was the time when Coleridge referred to his friend Wordsworth as a "semi-atheist" - which might or might not mean an agnostic.¹

1. White, An Examination of the Charge of Apostasy Against Wordsworth, p. 25.

The goal Wordsworth had in mind seems to have been:-

- the virtue to exist by faith,
As soldiers live by courage; as, by strength
Of heart, the sailor fights with roaring seas.
(*"The Excursion"*, IV., 201-203.)

While Wordsworth was going through these agonies of spirit - and we are assured that his mental struggles were indeed of the most agonizing nature - it happened that his personal affairs and financial position had vastly improved. He had by no means attained wealth but he had obtained a measure of frugal independence. For some years following 1790 Wordsworth had not been allowed to see his sister Dorothy who was staying with a Rev. Mr. Cookson, a clergyman of the Church of England. Through these troubled years both William and Dorothy had cherished a fond hope that they might be reunited and that they might establish a quiet little home. Their mutual pleasure in one another's society was such that it had been the great dream of their lives to have a home of their own and live together. It happened that Wordsworth became intimate with a family by the name of Calvert and Raisley Calvert who was very ill with consumption feeling that only poverty and anxiety prevented Wordsworth from giving to the world some work of genius decided to leave Wordsworth a legacy. Raisley Calvert died very shortly after, early in the year 1795, and Wordsworth thus became heir to some £900. Long afterward the poet described this generosity as "an act done entirely from a confidence on his part that I had powers and attainments which might be of use to mankind." It was only a small legacy but it was sufficient for the simple tastes of the Wordsworths.¹ It was truly "plain living and high thinking" which they practiced in their little cottage at Racedown in Dorsetshire. Two years were spent in this quiet haven

1. We find Wordsworth's tribute to Raisley Calvert in Book Fourteenth of *The Prelude*, lines 354-369.

and it was here that Wordsworth really began to find himself, both as a poet and as a religious man.

The tide in his religious life had begun to turn. Wordsworth slowly won his way back to faith, not however, without a hard struggle and not without a good deal of assistance and consideration on the part of two people in particular, namely, his sister Dorothy and his friend Coleridge. Of these two it is probable that Dorothy had the greater influence with the young poet and did the most to reclaim him from his state of depression and unbelief. It was a severe battle for it was no light matter. Wordsworth had been in a very serious state. With perhaps a touch of exaggeration Garrod says of him, "There was a period in which Wordsworth was a republican --, a pacifist, a disciple of Godwin, a necessitarian, a 'semi-atheist', a youth cast off by his relations, an object of suspicion to Government spies and good men generally, lax in moral principles and practice."¹ It is small wonder then that he was not cured immediately he returned to Racedown. He could not even return to his old love, Nature. It is probably true that he had never lost all love of Nature, but it is nevertheless certain that for a long time Nature had no saving message for him. He had reached such depths of despair latterly as had not only brought him to the stage where he

"Yielded up moral questions in despair"

but he had come to think of man himself as

"The dupe of folly, or the slave of crime."

He was saved, so one critic tells us reading the lesson from "The Prelude", by two things, "First, by the common sense so characteristic of him among the poets. It led him to employ his puzzled reason on some subject whose elements were not disturbed by human passion. He took to the study of

1. Garrod, Wordsworth, p. 22.



abstract science, and in realising its realities his mind grew calm. He was saved, secondly, by the influence of human love, which restored to him that reverence for the heart which he had lost."¹

It was Dorothy who roused in the poet his old and fervent love of Nature. She led him out into the open. She gave him her eager sympathy. She made him see things through her own eyes and she had priceless gifts of vision in the realm of natural beauty. With her at his side it was true that "The lonely roads were open schools to him." Her method of treating his dread disease of scepticism was the one most calculated to restore him to faith and health. "In this sickness of the soul, this 'obscuration of the master vision', his sole sister Dorothy came, like his better angel, to his side. Convinced that his office on earth was to be a poet, not to break his heart against the hard problems of politics and philosophy, she led him away from perplexing theories and crowded cities into the open air of heaven."² Again the poet began to come under the spell of Nature only now he saw in the great processes of earth and sky with their unchanging laws an image of right reason. He learned much also not only of interest but of truth from the common people whom they met on the roads. He found a pith of sense and judgement in the travellers on the highroad. His gratitude is voiced in a memorable passage in Book Eleventh of "The Prelude":-

Then it was -
 Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good!-
 That the beloved Sister in whose sight
 Those days were passed, now speaking in a voice
 Of sudden admonition - like a brook
 That did but cross a lonely road, and now
 Is seen, heard, felt, and caught at every turn,
 Companion never lost through many a league -
 Maintained for me a saving intercourse
 With my true self; for, though bedimmed and changed
 Much, as it seemed, I was no further changed
 Than as a clouded and a waning moon:

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1. Brooke, Theology in the English Poets, pp. 202-203.
 2. Shairp, Studies in Poetry and Philosophy, p. 23.

She whispered still that brightness would return;
 She, in the midst of all, preserved me still
 A Poet, made me seek beneath that name,
 And that alone, my office upon earth;
 And, lastly, as hereafter will be shown,
 If willing audience fail not, Nature's self,
 By all varieties of human love
 Assisted, led me back through opening day
 To those sweet counsels between head and heart
 Whence came that genuine knowledge, fraught with peace,
 Which, through the later sinkings of this cause,
 Hath still upheld me, and upholds me now -
 ("Prelude", XI., 333/356.)

It was a notable service which Dorothy Wordsworth performed for her brother. It needs not be added that in saving him she did the world also a very notable service. As Morley says in "Studies in Literature", "The character of Dorothy Wordsworth has long taken its place in the gallery of admirable and devoted women who have inspired the works and thoughts of great men."¹ Well could Wordsworth pour forth his "thanks in sincerest verse" to this "Sister of my soul"!

The only other person whose influence at this time was at all comparable to that of Dorothy was that of Coleridge. It is true that Coleridge did not do as much as Dorothy for the restoration of the poet but we may yet believe that he did a very great deal. There is some little difficulty in arriving at the exact date of the first meeting of the two poets but the consensus of the two greatest biographers of the poets in question, J. Dykes Campbell of Coleridge and Professor Harper of Wordsworth, seems to be that the first meeting was about September 1795.² Coleridge had been an admirer of Wordsworth's poetry for some time and they had had many friends in common but their first actual meeting was for some time delayed. Once they met, however, the friendship ripened rapidly and there sprang up a great mutual affection, a bit more fervent it must be confessed on the part of

1. Morley, Studies in Literature, p. 11.

2. Campbell, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, p. 64 and Harper, William Wordsworth, Vol. I., pp. 278 and 283.

Coleridge than of Wordsworth. Coleridge had taken up residence near Wordsworth and there was a great deal of visiting back and forth between these two friends. Coleridge's enthusiastic appreciation of Wordsworth's poetry and his faith and philosophy were of the greatest possible support to our poet in these critical days. Coleridge played the role of a "generous admirer, enthusiastic critic, and intimate friend" and all these roles proved to be helpful to Wordsworth. It was not long before the two poets conceived the idea of publishing a joint book of verse and that book "Lyrical Ballads" marks a new era in the realm of English poetry. Coleridge's encouragement and assistance at a time of depression were invaluable to Wordsworth in his work as a poet.

What is more Coleridge was fitted to be of very great assistance to Wordsworth in resolving his religious difficulties. Coleridge himself had been a Godwinian but we are told that he broke away from him about the spring of 1796 having come to regard, "his Principles as vicious, and his book as a Pandar to Sensuality."¹ Coleridge had dabbled in many systems of philosophy and religion but he had remained a deeply religious man. He was still to pass through many varied phrases of opinion and Hartley, Berkley, as well as a half dozen other philosophers and religious teachers held, one after another, first place in his affections. It was not until 1801, or thereabouts that he got a thorough grasp of Kant and began to work out a system which made Kant's philosophy the basis of a reconstruction of the religion of the Church of England. It may well have been that Coleridge was the better able to help Wordsworth to reshape and reform his religious thinking simply because he himself had not as yet worked out a perfected, finished system. At any rate in Coleridge Wordsworth had a friend who was a profoundly religious man. Before

1. Legouis, Early Life of Wordsworth, p. 325.

Coleridge had come into his life his two most intimate friends had been Beaupuis and William Matthews and both these men had held religion to be superstition and had regarded it as an enemy of liberty and progress.¹ It is said that both Matthews and Beaupuis had attacked religion in the name of reason. Coleridge was beginning to feel his way toward a system which attacked reason in the name of religion. Coleridge's poetry seems to have been always expressive of sincere and fervent piety. When these two poets first met it is significant that while Wordsworth read "Guilt and Sorrow" - a poem which is expressive of very little in the way of religious faith, Coleridge brought his "Religious Musings" which speak of a strong and vital faith in a God of Love. There is one line at least which is prophetic of many that Wordsworth was later to write, one which asserted that God was "Nature's essence, mind, and energy". It may be conjectured whether or not a large part of Wordsworth's mystical conception of nature as the expression of the Spirit of God was not derived from the thought and influence of Coleridge. Certain it is that it was while he was under the spell of Coleridge that Wordsworth wrote his greatest, his most profound, his most prophetic poetry. It is well that we have the expression of Wordsworth's indebtedness in "The Prelude" - indeed it may be said that the whole poem is really an expression of his great debt to his friend, since it was dedicated to Coleridge and written in his honor. One of the more characteristic passages in which the debt is acknowledged in so many words is in Book Fourteenth:-

With such a theme,
Coleridge! with this my argument, of thee
Shall I be silent? O capricious 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. Legouis, Early Life of Wordsworth, p. 327.

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 closelier gathering cares, such as become
 A human creature, howsoever 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 the reverence for duty,
 Here, in need be, struggling with storms, and there
 Strewing in peace life's humbles ground with herbs,
 At every season green, sweet at all hours.

("Prelude", XIV, 275-301.)

With Dorothy Wordsworth we must also link as one of the good angels, though perhaps of lesser influence, the name of Mary Hutchinson. Years passed before William Wordsworth and Mary Hutchinson were married and although there seems to have been little of passion and romance in this union, little of the unique and unusual which might be expected in the love affair of a poet, it must nevertheless be said that Mary Hutchinson early began to bring a quiet strength and serenity into the life of Wordsworth which was of inestimable value when the poet was depressed and overwrought and when he was slowly fighting his way to religious peace and faith. Very sincere and very touching in his quiet, thoughtful tribute to the influence of his wife in the days when she as Mary Hutchinson was Dorothy's friend and a frequent visitor in the Wordsworth home.

Thereafter came
 One whom with thee friendship had early paired;
 She came, no more a phantom to adorn
 A moment, but an inmate of the heart,
 And yet a spirit, there for me enshrined
 To penetrate the lofty and the low;
 Even as one essence of pervading light
 Shines, in the brightest of ten thousand stars
 And the meek worm that feeds her lonely lamp
 Couched in the dewy grass.

("Prelude", XIV, 291-200.)

Thus it was from the influence of his loyal friends and through the healing power of Nature was Wordsworth brought slowly back to peace and faith and prepared for the great work of the next decade of his life. He ceased to give whole allegiance to Reason as such and once more recovered that power of deep feeling which was at once his strength and his genius. The great glory and final outcome of this storm and stress of woul was,

Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought
Of human Being, Eternity, and God.
("Prelude", XIV., 204-205.)

When the crisis had passed Nature had come into its own again in his heart but with this subtle difference, Nature had regained power while being shorn of its old despotism. "It was subdued to a dominant scheme of thought, and became fellow-inmate in his mind with the love of man, and with a deep sense of the pathos of things."¹

Wordsworth now began to exert power over Nature in very truth and out of that power came the great poetry of the years 1797-1807. He tells us how in early life he had loved whate'er he saw. He had not judged, he had never thought of judging, was satisfied, too easily, with the glory of what he saw and felt.

I had known
Too forcibly, too early in my life,
Visitings of imaginative power
For this to last: I shook the habit off
Entirely and for ever, and again
In Nature's presence stood, as now I stand,
A sensative being, a creative soul.
("Prelude", XII., 201-207.)

It was this "creative soul" which was to make its mark upon the mind and soul of his fellow-men as we shall see as we turn to the story of the next few years of his life.

1. Raleigh, Wordsworth, p. 40.

CHAPTER V

THE GREAT DECADE

It goes without saying that the work of even the greatest of poets has a tendency to be strangely unequal in its worth and value. A poet cannot always attain the same heights of thought and expression and must certainly drop on occasion to a lower plane than that attained in his best work. What is true of poets in general is unusually true of William Wordsworth. Even the most loyal of Wordsworthians are forced to confess that practically all of the poet's greatest and most significant work was produced during a single decade, the years between 1797 and 1807. Wordsworth had written some excellent poetry before this period and much more following these ten years but certainly his greatest and most enduring work, that by which he has lived and by which he will continue to live in years to come, was written during the decade above mentioned. There is no other English poet whose life story is characterized by the same remarkable phenomenon. It is, then, in the poetry of these years that we may expect to find Wordsworth's true message.

We have seen how Wordsworth had passed through the period of storm and stress and had found his way back to strength, joy, and faith. Nature and Man were now sharing equal thrones in his heart and above all he worshipped a God of Love, Power, and Spirit by whose mighty acts the world of Man and Nature was being governed. We have no reason to believe that he had become an ardent supporter of the orthodox Christian faith or that he was, as yet, a loyal and devoted Churchman. It was a mystical rather than a theological religion; it was a religion of Nature rather than doctrinal Christianity.

Nevertheless the poet had achieved or was achieving a strong and resolute faith. It was this mystical faith which now found expression in some of his greatest poetry.

The first work of real power which Wordsworth gave to the world was the poetry included in the book called "Lyrical Ballads". As is well known this was a joint work and contained two almost equally great poems, Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" and Wordsworth's "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey". "Lyrical Ballads" is one of the highwater marks of English poetry; it was indeed "one of the most gallant adventures in literary history". Other poems by Wordsworth which appeared in this book for the first time are worthy of great praise but "Tintern Abbey" is the poem which has achieved the highest place in the affections of the world at large. It seems, then, that we should turn our attention more particularly to this poem in our endeavor to penetrate the mind of the poet and to interpret his religious life and message. Indeed it has been asserted by at least one competent critic that "Tintern Abbey" of all Wordsworth's poems is the one which gives us the best expression of the fundamentals of the poet's faith.¹ Certain it is that this poem is a very frank expression of what is best and most characteristic in Wordsworth's thought. We are the more interested in the poem because it was written at the time when the poet had only just recovered his joy and peace of heart through the fellowship which Coleridge immortalized when he said, "We are three people but only one soul". Wordsworth himself said of "Tintern Abbey", "No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering

1. Sneath, Wordsworth - Poet of Nature and Poet of Man, p. 125

Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days with my sister."¹

The interpretation of this poem is no easy task. It is patent, however, that this is a Nature poem and that we have here an expression of the effect of Nature upon the mind and the emotions of the poet. We must proceed from this conviction to the determination of what precisely this relation between Nature and the poet really were. We remember that it was in 1798 after a considerable acquaintance with Wordsworth and being most kindly disposed toward him that Coleridge spoke of Wordsworth as a "semi-atheist". Certain it is that "Tintern Abbey" contains nothing of theological or dogmatic Christianity. What we do find is a mystical view of Nature which is very closely akin to pantheism. Under the circumstances it does not seem ~~that~~ this close resemblance to pantheism need cause us any great concern. Whatever one might call this mystic conception of Nature it must be seen to be of an elevating and uplifting ~~nature~~^{type}. If it be pantheism it is none the less great and noble and unless it be emphasized to the exclusion of all other conceptions there is room for a certain measure of this conception in our Christian faith. Many modern Christian thinkers find themselves in agreement with Wordsworth when he speaks of a living spirit or presence in Nature. In any case we must read his words and judge for ourselves whether or no we ^{can} make his faith as regards Nature our own. We turn to those great lines where Wordsworth speaks of that great spirit in the heart of Nature and we read:-

And 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,

1. Wordsworth, Prose Works, Vol. III., p. 45.

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.

("Tintern Abbey", 93-102.)

And the poet goes on to say that Nature is also his guardian and his teacher:-

Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,
 And mountains; and of all that we behold
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world
 Of eye, and ear, - both what they half create,
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.

("Tintern Abbey", 102-111.)

It must be readily admitted that there is much here that closely resembles pantheism, that might indeed be called a form of pantheism, but there is another thought which proves the saving grace. We note the reference to the creative power of the mind of man. Man is not completely lost in Nature, he may, in the words of the poet, "half create". It seems that we may say and with utmost conviction that Wordsworth has so accurately weighed the issues as to retain the truth and exclude the error of that philosophical system we call pantheism. In so doing he has done us no little service. He has not lost himself completely in Nature and yet he has sensed that mighty spirit and presence in Nature and drawn power and wisdom from it. The poet is still in a sense detached for he "sees" rather than is "lost" in the life of things.

-- we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things.

("Tintern Abbey", 45-49.)

Nor had the poet forgotten Man and his problems. Man had become and would remain the poet's great interest in the world.

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity, -
("Tintern Abbey", 88-91.)

"Tintern Abbey" was written and published in 1798 and this poem was followed in 1799 and 1800 by other poems of worth and merit. In September, 1798, William and Dorothy Wordsworth and Coleridge went off to Germany to spend some little time studying the language. It cannot be definitely determined exactly when Wordsworth began to write "The Prelude" but it seems probable that this poem had its beginning in Germany. On their return from the Continent the Wordsworths went to the Lake District to live, settling at the now famous "Dove Cottage" at Grasmere. Wordsworth was now back in his native country which had meant so much to him in the past and would mean increasingly more in the days of the future for here he was to spend practically all the rest of his life. At Grasmere he went on with "The Prelude" and although there were long periods when no advance was made, Wordsworth kept at his task, year in and year out, and finally finished the message he felt he had been charged to give to the world. It may be said in passing that these years were not marked by any noteworthy events - at least until 1805 - but rather by quiet work and thought. The year 1801 was comparatively unproductive but in 1802 and 1803 Wordsworth wrought out more of his finest work on "The Prelude" and other poems.

It was in 1802 that Wordsworth married. It was a strangely conventional and prosaic affair for a poet but it seems wholly in keeping with the character of both William Wordsworth and Mary Hutchinson that they should be married as unostentatiously as they were. Wordsworth was already settling

into the quiet and conservative ways of his friends and neighbors; he had ceased to be the Revolutionary either in conduct or in thought. Dorothy Wordsworth's account of the wedding in her "Journal" is a restrained and rather cheerless one and the poet himself speaks of this notable event in a most amazingly matter-of-fact way in his Autobiographical Memoranda. He says in part, "In the year 1802 I married Mary Hutchinson, at Brampton, near Scarborough, to which part of the contry the family had moved from Sockburn. We had known each other from childhood, and had practised reading and spelling under the same dame at Penrith, a remarkable personage, who had taught three generations, of the upper classes principally, of the town of Penrith and its neighborhood."¹ We can understand the trend of Wordsworth's life a little better now that we know that just before the marriage he paid a visit to Calais to meet his French sweetheart of former days. It was the last time the poet ever saw Madame Vallon and by his marriage with Mary Hutchinson Wordsworth made a sharp break with his once romantic past. Gradually but surely his morals and his religion were assuming the modes of convention.

Wordsworth continued to turn back to "The Prelude" from time to time and he worked more or less steadily at other poetry as well. It was in 1803 that he wrote the first four stanzas of the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," but this poem was not finished until some two years later. The year 1805 was notable for two things in the life of the poet. As regards the family relationships it was marked by the death of the poet's beloved brother, John Wordsworth, and in the field of poetry it was marked by the completion of "The Prelude". The death of the sailor brother was a shock which had a lasting effect on William and Dorothy

1. Wordsworth, Prose Works, Vol. III., p. 223-224.

Wordsworth. This brother John had been a remarkably noble character and he had had the very greatest confidence in the genius of William Wordsworth. The two men were as congenial as it is possible for men to be. It had been John's great ambition to earn enough to guarantee his brother's support and then to retire and share the family life with him. Then without warning the news of his death was brought to a family which had expected to hear the good news of a prosperous voyage. At first Wordsworth was left numb with grief, then, a little later he seems to have turned to work to ease his mind and heart. He resumed work on "The Prelude" and shortly finished it. Not long after he wrote his great "Ode to Duty" and the next year, "The Happy Warrior". Certainly in the second of these poems and probably in both he had his brother's character in mind as he wrote. Grief turned Wordsworth's heart to the great questions of life and immortality. Indeed it seems that we are justified in believing that as a result of this sorrow did Wordsworth take the first step toward a positive acceptance of the orthodox Christian faith. Up to this time one may find but little trace of any theological terms or language in his writings, not enough indeed to support the supposition that the writer was a Christian believer. Now, however, we begin to find traces of positive faith in his letters and in his writings though the terms used even now are seldom those of Churchmen, more often those of deists rather than orthodox believers. We find in a letter to Beaumont: "A thousand times have I asked myself, 'why was he taken away?' and I have answered the question as you have done. In fact there is no other answer which can satisfy and lay the mind at rest. Why have we a choice, a will, and a notion of justice and injustice, enabling us to be moral agents? Why have we sympathies that make the best of us so afraid of inflicting pain and sorrow, which yet we see dealt about so lavishly by the supreme Governor? Why should our notions of right towards each other, and to all sentient beings within our

influence, differ so widely from what appears to be His notion and rule, if everything were to end here? Would it not be blasphemy to say that, upon the supposition of the thinking principle being destroyed by death, however inferior we may be to the great Cause and Ruler of things, we have more of love in our nature than He has? The thought is monstrous; and yet how to get rid of it, except upon the supposition of another and better world, I do not see."¹ In the life of Wordsworth, as in the life of many^a/lesser man, grief and sorrow over the loss of a loved one has thrown the mourner back upon God and the comfort of the hope of eternal life in God.

The "Ode to Duty" which Wordsworth wrote in the year 1805 ranks as one of Wordsworth's greatest poems. Here we have, if I interpret the poem correctly, a noble theism, though not Christianity. We can well imagine these ^{words} in the mouth of one of the old Stoics:-

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!
O Duty! if that name thou love
Who art a light to guide, a rod
To check the erring, and reprove;
Thou, who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe;
From vain temptations dost set free;
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity.

Of all the criticism of this poem the one which seems most appropriate is the word of R.H. Hutton, "Wordsworth alone, of all the great men of that day, had seen the light of the countenance of God, shining clear into the face of duty."

One of the finest of Wordsworth's poems and one which is of great significance in proving Wordsworth's new interest and belief in the immortality of the soul is that exquisite little ballad; "Yes, It Was a Mountain Echo". This is a poem which should be more widely known and it must certainly rank as one

1. Harper, Wordsworth, Vol. II., pp. 88-89.

of the finest lyrics in our language. The thought here is not unlike the theme of the "Intimations Ode", it is alike and yet different for here the voices are said to come from beyond the veil, "Echoes from beyond the grave."

Yes, it was the mountain Echo,
Solitary, clear, profound,
Answering to the shouting Cuckoo,
Giving to her sound for sound!

Unsolicited reply
To a babbling wanderer sent;
Like her ordinary cry,
Like - but oh, how different!

Hears not also mortal Life?
Hear not we, unthinking Creatures!
Slaves of folly, love, or strife -
Voices of two different natures?

Have not we too? - Yes, we have
Answers, and we know not whence;
Echoes from beyond the grave,
Recognized intelligence!

Such rebounds our inward ear
Catches sometimes from afar -
Listen, ponder, hold them dear;
For of God, - of God they are.

"The Happy Warrior" is one of the greatest of Wordsworth's poems as it is one of the best known but there is not a great deal in it to further our knowledge of Wordsworth's religious opinions or development. Duty and conscience are to be the guide of the happy Warrior,

Whose high endeavors are an inward light
That makes the path before him always bright

We find a reference to Wordsworth's once dominant thought and ideal, the law of reason,

- 'Tis he whose law is reason; who depends
Upon that law as on the best of friends.

Only at the close do we have any hint of hope in the Christian faith,

And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause:-

When we now turn back to the "Intimations Ode" which Wordsworth finished in 1806 after an interval of two or three years, we find one of the most interesting and most original of Wordsworth's poems. Whether we agree with the poet or not in his thesis - and it seems that some disagree most violently - and whether we can justify this thesis in the light of Christian revelation or no we must freely admit that in this poem we have a work of art and genius. To use the oft repeated words of one of Wordsworth's contemporaries, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever" and this is truly a work of art which is of rare beauty. It may well be that the great theme of the poem is found in the words which stand as the motto of the poem as a whole. Surely it is not without significance that they are so placed. "The Child is father of the Man" is the thought which runs through the whole poem. The first four stanzas form the first division of the poem and the poet himself tells us that they were written some two years before the rest of the poem. They could stand by themselves nor would we necessarily judge them incomplete. Yet without the remaining seven stanzas they leave us with a question, a statement and a question.

The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

The following seven stanzas lead us into a maze of speculation; it is a maze of wondrous beauty but it is a maze nevertheless. Still in pursuit of

--- those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,

The poet brings us to the place where

Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither.

Yet at the last we are left very much to our own conclusions. The poem

finishes with an appeal to the joy, ~~and~~ the faith, and the truth of Nature. All in all the poem seems more like the vague and beautiful whisperings of fancy, a Spanish Castle of the mind, than the proof of any philosophical or theological tenet. Every man is left to his own interpretation and the explanation of the poet himself written long years afterward is not as helpful as onemight hope and expect. He says in part:- "I think it right to protest against a conclusion, which has given pain to some good and pious persons, that I meant to inculcate such a belief". (that is a belief in a prior state of existence) -"It is far too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith, as more than an element in our instincts of immortality. But let us bear in mind that, though the idea is not advanced in revelation, there is nothing here to contradict it, and the fall of man presents an analogy in its favour."¹ Perhaps we had better leave this idea of the pre-existence of the soul where the poet wishes it to be left, as an element in the instincts of immortality, and draw no further conclusions. Suffice it to say that we have to do with a most beautiful poem and a most ingenious speculation. For sheer poetic genius and insight we may say that there is no other of Wordsworth's poems to compare with the "Intimations Ode" and it is fitting that we should close this chapter and our study of this period of the poet's life with a comment on this masterpiece of the poetic art.

1. Harper, Wordsworth, Vol. II., pp. 121-122.

CHAPTER VI

THE PASSING YEARS

During the years that followed the period of storm and stress and the finest flowering of his poetic genius, Wordsworth began to turn more definitely to the Christian faith. One man of letters has written a book in which he sets out to prove that there is no foundation in the charge that Wordsworth underwent a great change toward the middle of his life, that he fell away from his earlier faith both in politics and religion.¹ This critic admits that this is a widely-held opinion but he believes that this is error nevertheless and sets out to disprove this common view. We confess, however, that we find his arguments unconvincing. We believe that the opinion above mentioned was founded on fact and that Wordsworth did most certainly change his views during the latter half of his life, that he became more conservative in his politics and more orthodox and more theological in his religious beliefs. This is a tendency which is noted in the lives of many men, great and humble alike, and this tendency seems to have been more than usually pronounced in the case of Wordsworth. We shall not concern ourselves with the change in the poet's political opinions since they lie outside the province of our present study but when we follow the course of his religious habits and thinking during the latter half of his life we think that it will become abundantly clear that Wordsworth did most certainly become more of an orthodox Christian and more of a loyal Churchman as time went on. It seems as if he came to regard custom and security as of great moment

1. William Hale White, (Mark Rutherford), in An Examination of the Charge of Apostasy against Wordsworth.

in religious things and we are told that he long pondered that phrase of the poet Daniel, where he called religion "Mother of Form and Fear". A growing conviction of the profound truth of this phrase led him to turn his mind toward the Church as the embodiment of the most potent of all traditions, and to her public offices as the expression of the most socially humanising of all habitudes.¹ A study of the "Life and Letters" of the poet in the years following the "Great Decade" will, we believe, furnish a very considerable body of most convincing evidence to prove this point. We can find no better statement of the nature of this slow and subtle but momentary change in the poet's religious life than that given by Stopford Brooke, "Apostate, renegade, were terms equally unjust and unworthy to be applied to one who had done so much for Man. Still he suffered from the charge. I have already said that with the decay of his natural republicanism, and with the loss of the ideas of republicanism as the leading thoughts of life, decayed his poetical power when he spoke of Man, even to a certain degree when he spoke of Nature. With their overthrow decayed also that larger Christianity in him, which was not personal, but human; but at the same time his personal Christianity grew deeper."²

Professor Harper sees these changes in the religious outlook of Wordsworth from a different standpoint and a standpoint which it must be admitted does not reflect a great deal of credit on the poet.³ Harper maintains that the poet did not go over to popular Christianity, that he merely learned to include it within the circle of his sympathies. It was not the elements of Christianity which were common to Nonconformity and the Established church which appealed to him, it was rather the principle of establishment itself, the idea of a national conscience voicing its adherence to whatsoever things are

1. J. Russell Lowell's Address as President of "The Wordsworth Society" in the year 1884. See Wordsworthiana, p. 171.

2. Brooke, Theology in the English Poets, p. 191.

3. Harper, Wordsworth, p. 131.

true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. When in later years he wrote religious poetry it was expressive, not so much of Christian sentiments as such but was rather Anglican and with special reference to national welfare. In thus becoming the supporter of a system he surrendered his freedom and in accepting a tradition he lost the gift of prophecy. Nature and the human heart spoke to him less of their divine mysteries.

A poem which had its genesis during the great decade but which was not finished until some years later, a poem of very considerable significance from a religious point of view is "The White Doe of Rylstone". This poem was begun in 1807 although it was not completed and published until 1815. We have in it Wordsworth's philosophy of suffering - it is a story of a soul brought nearer to God through acute and long drawn-out suffering. "This is the song of one who had hoped for the success of a lost cause." It is a song of renunciation, ascetic and Oriental in its nature. We might believe, if we accept the thesis of the poem, that all human endeavors will pass into oblivion and that nothing but Nature and Mind and the Peace of God endure. Wordsworth has generally been known, and we feel rightly known, as the poet of joy. In this poem we find Wordsworth on the opposite theme and we find it hard to reconcile with the rest of his writing. Indeed it seems impossible so to reconcile it and we are constrained to explain the poem more as the expression of a mood rather than as a settled conviction of a principle of action on the part of the poet. Through it all there is a shining hope of immortality. We might note as the dominant note the lines:-

Her duty is to stand and wait;
In resignation to abide
The shock, and finally secure
O'er pain and grief a triumph sure

("White Doe of Rylstone", 1069-1072.)

We are glad to note the strong and confident note at the close:-

And aye, methinks, this hoary Pile,
 Subdued by outrage and decay,
 Looks down upon her with a smile,
 A gracious smile, that seems to say -
 "Thou, thou art not a Child of Time,
 But Daughter of the Eternal Prime!"
 (White Doe of Rylstone", 1905-1910.)

Apart from finishing "The White Doe of Rylstone", some prose work, and some few political sonnets, Wordsworth's principal writing during the eight years between 1807 and 1815 was "The Excursion". The great work in the years that immediately followed 1807 was most certainly this second philosophical and autobiographical poem. The relative place which this work should hold among Wordsworth's poems has always been a matter of controversy and there seems room for some difference of opinion. Our principal concern, however, is not with its poetic merit but its autobiographic value. We feel that we are on firm ground when we say that we may gather more of Wordsworth's thought and opinion from this poem than all the rest of his later poetry taken together. It is not as frankly autobiographical as "The Prelude" yet one must feel from even a casual reading of the poem that one or more of the characters is voicing the opinion of the author himself. "The Excursion" was the second part of a most ambitious plan of the poet to write a long and labourous work to be called "The Recluse" and which was to consist of three parts. The first and third parts were never completed, hardly even begun and so we are left to form our opinions from the considerable fragment which he called "The Excursion". Wordsworth himself says in that well known preface to the edition of 1814 that he was not putting forward a system: it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting

the system for himself."¹ Whether or not Wordsworth's confidence in the ability of the reader to "extract the system for himself" is justified or not we shall turn to the poem and see what we make of Wordsworth's opinions as we find them here expressed. First of all, however, it seems advisable to find out what the poet himself had to say about the three leading characters in this poem.

Writing on the leading characters and scenes of "The Excursion" the poet says that wandering had been his great passion in life and that this propensity was only counteracted by lack of fortune to fulfil his wishes. Had he been born in a class where he would have been deprived of a liberal education he would have taken to a way of life such as that in which the "Pedler" of the poem passed the greater part of his days. In spite of the fact that much of what the "Wanderer" said and did had an external existence we may well believe that in the main this character voiced Wordsworth's own opinions. The "Solitary" we are told was largely drawn from the character of one Mr. Fawcett, a preacher in a Dissenting meeting-house in Old Jewry, a man who, like Wordsworth, fell under the spell of the lax and extreme opinions which were in vogue at the time of the French Revolution. It may well be, then, that we might expect the "Solitary" to voice on occasion what had once been Wordsworth's own opinions on politics and religion. The "Pastor" in the poem as Wordsworth tells us, was supposed to portray the character of a country clergyman of more than ordinary talents, born and bred in the upper ranks of society so as to partake of their refinements and who at the same time was brought by his pastoral office and love of rural life into intimate connection with the peasantry of his native district. Even in the "Pastor" then we may expect the expression of ideas and doctrines which Wordsworth

1. Wordsworth's Poetical Works, Oxford Edition, p. 754.

would be willing to acknowledge as his own.¹

We may now turn to the poem to notesuch expressions of religious faith as may appear from book to book of the story. Some of the first passages which strike us as being characteristically Wordsworthian are the ones which refer to the "Wanderer's" education among the hills,

Early had he learned
To reverence the volume that displays
The mystery, the life which cannot die;
But in the mountains did he feel his faith.
("Excursion", I, 223-226.)

Among the hills
He gazed upon that might orb of song,
The divine Milton.
("Excursion", I, 248-250.)

We note, however, that there is a new emphasis coupled with the old, the emphasis of the Word of God which helps the lonely Herdsman to find his faith. When Wordsworth comes to describe the Wanderer's religion he speaks of a religion which is in a measure self-taught:-

That sometimes his religion seemed to me
Self-taught, as of a dreamer in the woods;
Who to the model of his own pure heart
Shaped his belief, as grace divine inspired,
And human reason dictated with awe.
("Excursion", I, 409-413.)

Nevertheless he also gives much credit to "The Scottish Church" which had been responsible for his upbringing. It seems as if Wordsworth had begun to balance the Church and the orthodox faith against vision and the religion taught by nature and had begun to make the effort to include both. No longer, however, does Wordsworth give any place to pure scepticism, indeed it seems as if he dismisses it with something less than justice. He refers to a novel of Voltaire as

--- this dull product of a scoffer's pen,
Impure conceits discharging from a heart
Hardened by impious pride.
("Excursion", I, 484-486.)

1. Wordsworth, Prose Works, Vol. III., pp. 196-197.

Wordsworth's faith in Providence had been growing through the years if we may take for proof some of the lines which are to be found at the beginning of Book Fourth, the words of the Wanderer,

"One adequate support
For the calamities of mortal life
Exist - one only; an assured belief
That the procession of our fate, how'er
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power; -
("Excursion", IV., 10-15.)

Duty and Conscience are still held in high esteem. Duty remains though possessions vanish and opinions change. Conscience is to be revered and obeyed as "God's most intimate presence in the soul".

That Wordsworth was not yet too rigidly orthodox as he might have been is evident from a striking passage which refers to a question raised by the "Solitary".

Religion tells of amity sublime
Which no condition can preclude; of One
Who sees all suffering, comprehends all wants,
All weakness fathoms, can supply all need;
But is that bounty absolute? - His gifts,
Are they not, still, in some degree, rewards
For acts of service? Can his love extend
To hearts that own not him? Will showers of grace
When in the sky no promise may be seen,
Fall to refresh a parched and withered land?
Or shall the groaning Spirit cast her load
At the Redeemer's feet?
("Excursion", IV., 1089-1100.)

Here if ever there was a chance for Wordsworth to make through the mouth of the Wanderer a distinct avowal of his faith in the Atonement. Here was the opportunity but he did nothing of the sort. His reply was of a general nature and the gist of it is summed up in the words:-

So manifold and various are the ways
Of restoration, fashioned to the steps
Of all infirmity, and tending all
To the same point, attainable by all -
Peace in ourselves, and union with our God.
("Excursion", IV., 1112-1116.)

Even now the faith of the poet is less in the Redeemer than in Nature. We note this when he speaks of faith in immortality,

I have seen
 A curious child, who dwelt upon a tract
 Of inland ground, applying to his ear
 The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell;
 To which, in silence hushed, his very soul
 Listened intently; and his countenance soon
 Brightened with joy; for from within were heard
 Murmurings, whereby the monitor expressed
 Mysterious union with its native sea.
 Even such a shell the universe itself
 Is to the ear of Faith; and there are times,
 I doubt not, when to you it doth impart
 Authentic tidings of invisible things;
 ("Excursion", IV., 1132-1144.)

We see also how Wordsworth continues to emphasize the living principle in Nature, that pure principle of love that speaks to the understanding heart.

The poet is constrained to condemn pure reason and all that it stands for. Having suffered so long and so keenly under the spell of reason he is not disposed to lose any opportunity to show its deceptive and dangerous power. We hear the Wanderer say, and we are sure that it is really Wordsworth himself who is speaking:-

"And in your judgement, Sir! the mind's repose
 On evidence is not to be ensured
 By act of naked reason. Moral truth
 Is no mechanic structure, built by rule;
 And which, once built, retains a steadfast shape
 And undisturbed proportions; but a thing
 Subject, you deem, to vital accidents;
 And, like the water-lily, lives and thrives,
 Whose root is fixed in stable earth, whose head
 Floats on the tossing waves.
 ("Excursion", V. 562-569.)

We come to the new Wordsworth when we turn to the salutation to the Church of England at the beginning of Book Sixth. We find here a passage which we would not be able to assign with any degree of certainty to the Wordsworth of the "Great Decade". The poet hails the State and then he turns to the State Church:-

-- Hail to the State of England! And conjoin
 With this a salutation as devout,
 Made to the spiritual fabric of her Church;
 Founded in truth; by blood of Martyrdom
 Cemented; by the hands of Wisdom reared
 In beauty of holiness, with ordered pomp,
 Decent and unproved.

("Excursion", VI., 6-12.)

This note of exaltation as applied to the Established Church was one which was to become increasingly evident in Wordsworth's thought and writings and with this in mind we can the better understand the portrait of the Pastor whose opinions are given in such detail in the course of the three or four books of "The Excursion". We cannot be sure whether Wordsworth himself was willing to subscribe to all the doctrines and dogmas of the Church of England but it is very certain that by the time this poem was written he was concerned that the people at large should submit themselves without question to the teaching and government of the Church.

The way is marked,
 The guide appointed, and the ransom paid.
 Alas! the nations, who of yore received
 These tidings, and in Christian temples meet
 The sacred truth to knowledge, linger still;
 Preferring bonds and darkness to a state
 Of holy freedom, by redeeming love
 Proffered to all, while yet on earth detained.

("Excursion", IX., 650-657.)

Following the publication of "The Excursion" the next work of importance from the point of view of religious interest in the life of Wordsworth is the series of poems called "Ecclesiastical Sonnets". These Sonnets were written in 1821 and 1822 and reveal the poet as a convinced Churchman. One critic goes so far as to say that they lack genuine inspiration and that "They are the work of a loyal and pious churchman rather than that of a great poet." Wordsworth had by this time reached a stage where he was no longer challenging men to freedom and virtue. Instead we have the calm voice of the devout

Christian resting securely and serenely upon "the venerable sanctities of a national religion." Truly Wordsworth had travelled far since he wrote of the mystic rapture and spiritual power of Nature in "Tintern Abbey" and proved immortality by those "Intimations" of childhood!

The purpose of writing the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" was to trace by a series of studies of eminent men and noteworthy events the history of the Christian Church in England. As Wordsworth worked out the scheme attention was devoted to the main stream, that is to say, the story of the Established Church of England, but within these self-imposed limitations the poet tried to be generous. As appears during the course of the series, Wordsworth had not only become a Churchman, he had become avowedly high-church in his sympathies. In the Sonnets Archbishop Laud is spoken of in terms of the highest respect and admiration. As might be expected the Sonnets are unequal in power and beauty and those which have to do with system, forms, and ceremonies are the least successful of all - with the notable exception of the one on "Catechising" which contains that sweet and beautiful reference to the poet's mother. We are glad to note a very large measure of tolerance on the part of the poet. There is a special sonnet in praise of "Clerical Integrity" which in this case refers to "Those Unconforming". There is a sonnet in honor of the Scottish Covenanters, another in honor of the Pilgrim Fathers. In the sonnet which has as its subject "American Episcopacy" we find the poet's praise of unity and conformity:-

Patriot's informed with Apostolic light
Were they, who, when their country had been freed,
Bowed with reverence to the ancient creed,
Fixed on the frame of England's Church their sight,
And strove in filial love to reunite
What force had shattered.

("Ecclesiastical Sonnets, Part III., Sonnet XV.)

In the sonnet on "The Sacrament" we hear the voice, as it were, of the

Anglican priest:-

By chain yet stronger must the soul be tied;
 One duty more, last stage of this ascent,
 Brings to thy food, mysterious Sacrament!
 The Offspring, haply, at the Parent's side;
 But not until They, with all that do abide
 In Heaven, have lifted up their hearts to laud
 And magnify the glorious name of God,
 Fountain of grace, whose Son for sinners died.
 Ye, who have duly weighed the summons, pause
 No longer; ye whom to the saving rite
 The Altar calls, come early under laws
 That can secure for you a path of light
 Through gloomiest shade; put on (nor dread its weight)
 Armour divine, and conquer in your cause!
 ("Ecclesiastical Sonnets", Part III., Sonnet XXV.)

In the old days, that is to say before William was married, Dorothy and her brother had not been in the habit of attending Church. Not long after the marriage, however, it appears that both became regular attendants - this we may gather from letters to the Beaumonts who were intimate friends of the Wordsworth family.¹ This new habit, as might have been expected, had borne fruit in a settled conviction that the support of the Established Church was one of the first duties of all loyal and patriotic Englishmen. It is not strange therefore, that we find the poet writing in comment on one of his Sonnets, "Attendance at church on prayer-days, Wednesdays and Fridays and holidays, received a shock at the Revolution. It is now, however, happily reviving. The ancient people described in this sonnet are among the last of that pious class. May we hope that the practice now in some degree renewed will continue to spread."² In a much earlier bit of evidence, a letter dated February 9, 1814, we have abundant evidence of the subtle change which had been taking place in Wordsworth's religious outlook. Writing to his patron, Lord Lonsdale, he says in part:- "Everyone knows of what importance the equestrian order was in preserving tranquillity and a balance and

1. Harper, Wordsworth, Vol. II., p. 161.

2. Wordsworth, Prose Works, Vol. III., pp. 55-56.

gradation of power in ancient Rome; the like may take place among ourselves through the medium of an armed yeomanry; and surely a preservative of this kind is largely called for by the tendencies of things at present. --- If the whole island were covered by a force of this kind, the Press properly curbed, the Poor Laws gradually reformed, provision made for new Churches to keep pace with the population (an indispensable measure) - if these things were done and other improvements carried forward, as they have been, order may yet be preserved among us, and the people remain free and happy.¹ Well does Harper exclaim:- "What a respectable old Tory he has become, with his fear of disorder and a free Press, his dependence on the Church as an ally of the State, his disapproval of 'the tendencies of things at present,' his willingness to see an armed force ~~w~~cover the land for the sake of 'a balance and gradation of power!'" Truly Wordsworth had travelled far since he returned to England "a citizen of the world." This man who was once a poet of the Revolution wants the laws, the yeomanry, the Press, and above all the Church to be used to preserve order in the land! The pendulum has swung from Revolution to Reaction. The ardor and fire of youth are no more. We are little inclined to trust the guidance of the prophet whose first concern is the preservation of order in Church and State and who is willing and anxious that the Church should be used as an instrument to keep the mass of the people content in their present condition. Truly he is no prophet - and it more than likely that he will prove to be without inspiration as a poet. Wordsworth was a man who had promised in his prime to lead the vanguard but "he turned aside and turned back". "Seeking substitutes for the social religion of his prime, he accepted a political theory and theological creed which were not auxiliary

1. Harper, Wordsworth, Vol. II., p. 208.

to the finest feeling and the hardest thinking of the age."¹ Wordsworth had now begun to use the conventional terms of orthodox religion such as "revelation". These began to appear in his letters and in his prose works when he was about forty years of age. This would not have been in the least remarkable had it not been, as we have already noticed, that he had not been in the habit of using such terms either in his writings or in his personal letters. The mysticism which had once been his most characteristic note was beginning to be lost in doctrine and theology. We have only to add that neither poets nor prophets are in the habit of using the terms of conventional piety and orthodox theology.

Yet with all this loss there was at least some small gain, not a little indeed, from the standpoint of Wordsworth's own personal life. The poet gradually turned more consciously to the Christian faith and there he found a comfort and a peace which his soul had craved. Beginning with the death of his brother John - and we cannot but feel that this was one of the crises of his religious life - there followed a long series of bereavements and losses. Wordsworth's life was, it may be, no more marked with sorrow than that of the average person but it seemed that his sensitive soul needed more of comfort and more of consolation. In any event it appears that his old religion of Nature was no longer sufficient for his soul's needs. In his need he turned to the Church. It seems that we are justified in saying that except for one comparatively short period of his life Wordsworth had never been an active opponent of the Church nor of the things for which the Church stands. Yet during the days when he had had the greatest power as a poet, when he had given his greatest message to the world, he had found in the Church no saving message for his own soul. He had not consciously

1. Harper, Wordsworth, Vol. II., p. 331.

held himself aloof from the Church but he had been more or less unconsciously indifferent. With advancing years and the weight of loss and sorrow on his soul, feeling the sense of need, Wordsworth, like many a lesser man, turned to the Christian faith and to the Church for the consolation and help which his religion of Nature could not give him. It seems as if he had silently recognized many of these Christian truths but now came home to him consciously and with power. The poet was gradually feeling his way toward a definite and outspoken belief in the story of Christian Redemption. Wordsworth did not say a great deal about this subtle change in his religious attitude and we have his own testimony - of later date it is true but which bears on the story of the years of middle life - which explains how it was that he ~~was~~ only gradually came to use the conventional religious terms and why even latterly he used so few of them. He says in a letter to the Rev. Henry Alford, "For my own part, I have been adverse to frequent mention of the mysteries of Christian faith; not from a want of a due sense of their momentous nature, but the contrary. I felt it far too deeply to venture on handling the subjects as familiarly as many scruple not to do. I am far from blaming them, but let them not blame me, not turn from my companionship on that account. Beside general reasons for diffidence in treating subjects of holy writ, I have some special ones. I might err in points of faith, and I should not deem my mistakes less to be deprecated because they were expressed in metre."¹ It seems highly probable that only later in life did the poet come to the point where he was so concerned about the fine points of faith and doctrine but we may well believe that he had ~~long~~ been consciously debtor to the mysteries of the Christian faith for long before he began to speak of these things or to refer to them even in his prose. It was only

1. Christopher Wordsworth, Memoirs of Wordsworth, Vol. II., pp. 364-365.

when he was past middle age that he began to use the conventional terms when he spoke of faith and religion.

We may now turn back to his poetry and here we find, as we might expect, more and more of the religious note as time goes on. What he had in the days of his young manhood expressed in terms of a mysticism of Nature he now expressed in the phraseology of the orthodox Christian faith. One of the noblest poems of his later years is the one entitled, "The Primrose of the Rock". Indeed Principal Shairp maintains that we have in the concluding stanzas of this poem the fullest expression of Wordsworth's religious faith.¹ It is a nature poem but we no longer have that mystical interpretation in all its unique power. The poet rather moralizes than interprets. We have in the opening stanzas a picture of the primrose growing in the cleft in the rock, watched over and preserved by the God who upholds all. But as the poet goes on to give us an "after-lay" and the message of this after-lay is the same as that which we hear from the pulpits of our Christian churches - the poet has become the preacher, albeit a poetic and able preacher.

Sin-blighted though we are, we too,
The reasoning Sons of Men,
From one oblivious winter called
Shall rise, and breathe again;
And in eternal summer lose
Our three score years and ten.

To humbleness of heart descends
This prescience from on high,
The faith that elevates the just,
Before and when they die;
And makes each soul a separate heaven,
And court for Deity.

About this same time Wordsworth wrote his "Devotional Incitements" and his "Evening Voluntaries". Here we have the picture of the poet growing a bit older but full of calm strength and faith. "Not with weakness, complaint,

1. Principal Shairp, "Wordsworth and 'Natural Religion'", Good Words, May, 1884.

or fretfulness, but with calm benignity and steadfast aspiration; as passing, not into any valley of shadows, but to the clearer light of the great uplands of life."¹ In this hour Nature still speaks to him of heavenly things. There is more in his earlier manner and more of his earlier message than we might expect. With the background of his life's experiences and the story of the great French Revolution in mind he says:-

as creeds
And humours change, are spurned like weeds:
The priests are from their altars thrust;
Temples are levelled with the dust;
And solemn rites and awful forms
Founder amid fanatic storms.

("Devotional Incitements", 48-53.)

Yet amid all these changes Nature has a message nor does she lose her power over the heart of Man:-

Kind Nature keeps a heavenly door
Wide open for the scattered Poor.
(“Devotional Incitements”, 58-59.)

And this message of Nature is for all who see:-

-- still
Conforming to the eternal Will,
Whether men sow or reap the fields,
Divine monition Nature yields,
That not be bread alone we live,
Or what a hand of flesh can give;
That every day should leave some part
Free for a sabbath of the heart;
So shall the seventh be truly blest,
From morn to eve with hallowed rest.
(“Devotional Incitements”, 68-77.)

The note we find in the "Evening Voluntaries" is the one we might well have expected, that of quiet faith and resignation. One among these Voluntaries, "On a High Part of the Coast of Cumberland", was written, as the sub-title tells us, on the poet's sixty-third birthday which on this occasion fell on Easter Sunday. Again we find first the picture in Nature,

1. Winchester, Wordsworth - How to Know Him, p. 256.

then the lesson which the poet draws therefrom. Wordsworth once said in a letter, "Every great poet is a teacher. I wish to be considered as a teacher or nothing."¹ This ambition seemed to grow upon the poet in later life and we can only say that it did his poetry far less harm than might have been expected. In this ~~summary~~^{poem}, then, we have first the quiet picture:-

'Tis the still hour of thinking, feeling, loving.
Silent, and steadfast as the vaulted sky,
The boundless plains of waters seems to lie:-

Then follows the devout appeal to the Supreme Being:-

Teach me with quick-eared spirit to rejoice
In admonitions of thy softest voice!
Whate'er the path these mortal feet may trace,
Breathe through my soul the blessing of thy grace,
Glad, through a perfect love, a faith sincere
Drawn from the wisdom that begins with fear,
Glad to expand; and for a season, free
From infinite cares, to rest absorbed in Thee!

If we turn back again to the story of the poet's personal life we find that Wordsworth became more and more of the conventional country gentleman as far as his religious life was concerned. He may still have ~~been~~ puzzled his neighbors, and more particularly the common people, by some of his personal habits, but as regards church-going he came to be unusually conventional. About the time that Wordsworth wrote the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" he wrote two poems addressed to Lady le Fleming on the preparations made for the erection, at her sole expense, of the Chapel at Rydal. This chapel was consecrated in 1825 and here Wordsworth and his family were regular attendants for more ~~than~~² a quarter of a century. The Wordsworths had a family ~~poem~~ and we are led to believe that they were seldom absent from the services. That the poet came to have strong convictions on, and loyalty to, the principles of Establishment is evident from a letter which he wrote to

1. Quoted by Morley, "Studies in Literature", p. 34.

2. Christopher Wordsworth, "Memoirs of Wordsworth", Vol. II., p. 114-115.

the Venerable Archdeacon Wrangham of date, February 2, 1835. In this letter he says:- "The mind of every thinking man who is attached to the Church of England must at this time be especially turned to reflections upon all points of ecclesiastical polity, government, and management, which may tend to strengthen the Establishment in the affections of the people, and enlarge the sphere of its efficacy."¹

We might sum up the story of the change in Wordsworth's attitude toward religion and religious things by saying that he had passed from a poetic and mystical faith to a religious faith which was expressed in terms of the Church creeds and the Church services and sacraments. It was not that the faith itself had greatly changed but it had come to rest on new foundations and it had found a different expression. Mingled with this change in his personal faith was an increasing concern for the morals and religion of his neighbors, particularly of the masses. That he might have sure guidance for his own soul and because of his sincere concern for the religious life of the people and the security of the State, Wordsworth turned to the Established Church. His churchmanship grew more zealous as years passed by. He came to adopt the viewpoint of the typical matter-of-fact Englishman of the educated class. He had become the typical Englishman and the typical Anglican. That very fact gave Wordsworth power but at the same time imposed limitations. He could appeal and he does appeal to the Englishman and to the English-speaking world. As one critic has said, "Just as there was a Marcus Aurelius in the soul of the Roman, so there is a Wordsworth in the soul of the Englishman."² On the other hand just because the poet is so typically English he fails at times to speak a universal language and to reach the hearts of men

1. Christopher Wordsworth, Memoirs of Wordsworth, Vol. II., pp. 292-293.

2. Eglinton, "Wordsworth at Rydal Mount", Fortnightly Review, February, 1914.

who are not English or who are not Anglican. Wordsworth's religious faith was, in this sense, something of self-imposed limitation.

As we have already suggested it is not only true that Wordsworth became an outspoken Anglican, he became one of the high-church group or party in that Church. We find that he was in sympathy with many of the aims and ideals of the Oxford Tract Movement many years before the formation of this group at Oxford. As far back as the publication of the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" in 1822 we find that Wordsworth was an admirer of Laud and his methods and ideals. Indeed it appears that he at that time incurred censure on account of his favorable estimate of the Archbishop as expressed in his Sonnet on Laud.¹ We are glad to note, however, that the poet was always tolerant in his attitude toward other groups and parties in the Established Church and hardly less so in his attitude toward Nonconformists. Though Wordsworth had a great deal of sympathy with the Catholic Revival he never became a member of the Tractarian party nor did he show any of the animus which was all too evident in that party's general attitude. We are glad to note from the "Ecclesiastical Sonnets" that the poet never expressed any aversion to Ridley, Latimer, and Cramner, whom we regard as Protestant martyrs. With regard to Scotland and its religion he showed a like tolerance. He deplored the martyrdom of the Scotch Covenanters and paid them a noble tribute. One of the finest of his later sonnets was entitled, "On the Sight of a Manse in the South of Scotland," which any Presbyterian might read with pleasure and approval. In his comment on the sonnet there is a quiet and polite hint that the writer is not sure but that the Kirk of Scotland might have more of refinement and ornament in its services. He says, "I once heard a conversation, in which the Roman Catholic religion was decried on account of its

1. Wordsworth, Prose Works, Vol. III., p. 135.

abuses: 'You cannot deny, however,' said a lady of the party, repeating an expression used by Charles II., 'that it is the religion of a gentleman.' It may be left to the Scotch themselves to determine how far this observation applies to the (religion) of their Kirk; while it cannot be denied (that) if it is wanting in that characteristic quality, the aspect of common life, so as concerns its beauty, must suffer."¹

Wordsworth took the middle ground as between Roman Catholicism and Nonconformity. The poet strongly opposed to The Catholic Relief Bill by the use of his pen and his influence.² He speaks in no flattering terms of the "peculiar and monstrous power of its priesthood" and he expresses his hope that "It is, we trust, the intention of Providence that the Church of Rome should in due time disappear." Yet while he does not place Dissent in precisely the same class as Roman Catholicism he does seem to regard it as a very stubborn enemy of the "true Church" and the very question which he raises startles one. "The Church of England, in addition to her infidel and Roman Catholic assailants, and the politicians of the anti-feudal class, has to contend with a formidable body of Protestant Dissenters. Amid these several and often combined attacks, how is she to maintain herself? From which of these enemies has she most to fear?"³ The fact that Wordsworth brings forward this question is in itself alarming but we are somewhat reassured by the fact that he comes finally to the conclusion that the Church of England has much more to fear from Rome than from Dissent.

One of the things which is most significant in marking the change in Wordsworth's religious outlook is the attitude which he took to his own earlier poetry. As years passed by he spent no little time on the revision of his

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1. Wordsworth, Prose Works, Vol. III., p. 141
 2. Ibid., Vol. I., pp. 261-270.
 3. Ibid., Vol. I., p. 262.

earlier work, some of it before publication and some of it after publication. It is well known that he kept "The Prelude" in manuscript for some forty-five years and only allowed it to be published after his death. What has been brought very effectively to our attention recently is the fact that there were a great number of changes made in various poems by Wordsworth. Professor de Selincourt's edition of Wordsworth's "Prelude" is a piece of careful and accurate scholarship and we find in this book concrete examples of the type of change which characterized Wordsworth's revisions. These revisions are, of course, important from an artistic point of view but they are also very interesting and enlightening from the religious standpoint with which we concern ourselves. A study of the changes in question at once reveals the fact that many of these revisions were made with the more or less definite purpose of making the text of the poem more definitely orthodox and Christian.

When we turn, then, to de Selincourt's book we may readily see from the examples given that the editor was right when he says that "the revised 'Prelude' represents another, less independent creed."¹ Part of his published poetry had been misunderstood, "Tintern Abbey" being a notable example of this. Wordsworth therefore wished to avoid further misunderstanding and moreover to give expression to his Christian faith. He toned down the religion of joy and we get literary expression which is more orthodox but less vital. The first draft of "The Prelude" was written when Wordsworth was still in the faith expressed in "Tintern Abbey" but the 1850 edition represents another and vastly different faith. We may note, for example, the subtle difference between the versions given below:-

1. De Selincourt, Wordsworth's "Prelude", p. lxi.

The mind of man is framed even like the Breath
Of harmony in music.

("Prelude", I., 340-1. 1805-6.)

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music.

("Prelude", I., 351-2. 1850.)

Again we note the change from what seems to be pantheism to something which seems no more than a possibility or suggestion.

A soul divine which we participate
A deathless spirit,

("Prelude", V., 16-17. 1805-6.)

becomes in the later published edition

As might appear to the eye of fleeting time,
A deathless spirit,

("Prelude", V., 16-17. 1850.)

There is little of conventional piety in the original "Prelude"; there is not a little of it in the revised.

I worshipped then among the depths of things
As my soul bade me ---
I felt and nothing else.

("Prelude", XI., 234-8. 1805-6.)

Worshipping then among the depths of things
As piety ordained ---
I felt, observed, and pondered.

("Prelude", XII., 184-8. 1850.)

One might multiply these illustrations almost indefinitely but those which are given are sufficient to show what Wordsworth was attempting to do and what that attempt reveals in the changed life of the poet himself.

When one turns to his other poetry one finds similar significant revisions all of which tend to show that the religious outlook of the poet had vastly altered during the passing years. During the latter part of the eighteenth century Wordsworth had written the story of Margaret and published it with his other works. This story was later incorporated in "The Excursion" in practically the same form in which it had first appeared. From 1845 on,

however, this story appeared with a significant change and addition. In the earlier edition we have a passage which is without reference to the Christian faith.

The old man, noting this, resumed, and said,
 "My friend! enough to sorrow you have given,
 The purposes of wisdom ask no more;
 Be wise and cheerful, and no longer read
 The forms of things with an unworthy eye.
 (Early Edition.)¹

The later and revised edition makes a very pointed reference to the Christian faith.

Nor more would she have craved as due to One
 Who, in her worst distress, had oftentimes felt
 The unbounded might of prayer; and learned, with soul
 Fixed on the Cross, that consolation springs
 From sources deeper far than deepest pain,
 For the meek Sufferer. Why then should we read
 The forms of things with an unworthy eye?
 ("Excursion", I., 934-940.)

A few lines farther on in the same story we have the words of the Wanderer.

That which we feel of sorrow and despair
 From ruin and from change, and all the grief
 The passing shows of Being leave behind,
 Appeared an idle dream that could not live
 Where meditation was.
 (Early Edition.)

In the 1845 edition revision and an addition change the whole import of the passage.

Appearer an idle dream, that could maintain,
 Nowhere, dominion o'er the enlightened spirit
 Whose meditative sympathies repose
 Upon the breast of faith.
 ("Excursion", I., 952-955.)

Principal Shairp says of these revisions "Changes such as these in a passage here and there, cannot alter the main drift of the "Excursion" which while recognizing Christian revelation by the way, throws the chief stress on that religion which is gathered by the heart from brooding over the solemn facts

1. Shairp, Studies in Poetry and Philosophy, pp. 86-87.

of human life. But they do tend to show that as the pressure of life grew heavier, and his days were closing in, the need of definite Christian truths came more home to him."¹

It but remains to tell how the days did close in at last and how he faced the end. Surely it was with more than "Roman confidence", it was with the strength of Christian faith. There was much of sorrow in the last years of his life. His sister Dorothy had long since lost her mind and her presence in the home was but a melancholy reminder of what a terrible loss had been sustained, of what a wonderful woman she once had been. One after another of Wordsworth's friends dropped away as he approached three score and ten and then the four score. The heaviest blow of all was the death of his favorite daughter Dora in 1847. He wrote not long after to his friend, Mr. Moxon:- "Our sorrow, I feel, is for life; but God's will be done."² He never recovered from the bitterness of this loss. Gradually he grew weaker in body although his mind remained strong and virile to the very last. It was on Sunday, March 10, 1850, that William Wordsworth attended service at Rydal Chapel for the last time. During the same week he took ill and was placed under the Doctor's care. On the 7th of April Wordsworth completed his eightieth year and he was prayed for in the Chapel, morning and afternoon. On Saturday, April 20th, he received Communion at the hands of his son John. While the hour was striking twelve noon, Tuesday, April 23, 1850, the soul of William Wordsworth passed quietly into the Great Beyond. As he had faithfully lived so he peacefully died in the full faith of the Christian Gospel.

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1. Shairp, "Wordsworth and 'Natural Religion'", Good Words
 2. Christopher Wordsworth, Memoirs of Wordsworth, Vol. II., p. 435.

CHAPTER VII

THE RELIGIOUS CONTRIBUTION

In closing this study it seems that we might take the trouble to discover, if we may, the contribution which Wordsworth made to religious thought. We have traced as best we can the history of the poet's religious life, its phases, growth, moods, and development. It has been the more interesting and the more significant because in Wordsworth we get the action and reaction of one of the greatest events in human history on the religious life on a poetic and religious soul. In the story of his life we have read, as it were, the epitome of the life of the many thousands who, it may be, under the stress of this same upheaval, thought as deeply and suffered as intensely, but were unable to give the world the "Sturm and Drang" of their souls. It took the song of the poet to tell the story to the waiting world. From a religious point of view it may well be that there is no other contemporary record which is comparable to the poet's in interest and value.

We have studied Wordsworth then as a religious man. It remains to gather up, if we may, his religious message. And it is at this point that we come to the question of moment. As Principal Shairp says, "The question has often been asked how far Wordsworth was a religious poet; that he was a religious man no one doubts."¹ We are now concerned to point out and to maintain that Wordsworth was a religious poet and then to show what religious message he gave to the world. We are also concerned to find out how closely this religious message, if it be such, corresponded to Christian doctrine as we find that doctrine taught in the typical evangelical Christian Church.

1. Shairp, Studies in Poetry and Philosophy, p. 84.

We believe that Professor Henry Van Dyke put the case very happily when he said that the central theme, the great significance of Wordsworth's poetry is "the recovery of joy".¹ And we may say that we are to lay as much stress on the word "recovery" as upon the word "joy". This was a joy which had been regained and rewon. Wordsworth passed through a season of storm and stress. He saw the dreams and hopes of youth shattered and dissipated. He went down to the depths of black despair. It was a long hard climb back to the mountain heights of joy but he made that ascent, he achieved that joy and because he knows that road he has a message for those who are still imprisoned in Doubting Castle. He has been over the road before us and he can point us along the way. His peace and serenity is not the unthinking calm of an uneventful life which has never known doubt or suffering, on the contrary, it is the peace that comes after conflict, as the crown won on a hard-fought field. It was the peace after storm. He had found that virtue of which he had dreamed,

- the virtue to exist by faith
As soldiers live by courage; as, by strength
Of heart, the sailor fights with roaming seas.

This is an inner joy. It is a spiritual joy which has to do with the things of the heart and soul. Verse after verse and line after line of his poetry tell us of that exquisite joy of the heart in things beyond itself. There is the verse from "The Daffodils" which is so well known, so often quoted:-

They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude
And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils.

There are the well known lines from "Tintern Abbey"

With an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy
We see into the life of things.

1. Van Dyke, Companionable Books, p. 193.

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime.

We are told of the Stock-dove,

He sang of love, with quiet blending,
Slow to begin and never ending;
Of serious faith, and inward glee
That was the song - the song for me.

We know further that these selections are but a few of the scores of references in Wordsworth's poetry to this deep joy of the soul. This note of joy is not/accidental one, it is the deep fundamental melody which runs like a golden thread through all his great poetry.

Wordsworth was a poet of Nature and it was in Nature that he first of all found this joy. The fundamental and original theme with Wordsworth was that this inward joy was born of Nature. In later years Wordsworth, as we have seen, was wont to use the conventional terms of the Christian faith but in the days of his finest poetic inspiration it was Nature herself which gave him his message and his joy. Wordsworth will always be remembered as the great Nature poet. There are others whose descriptions of Nature may be more accurate or more moving but there is no other who so nobly interprets the soul of Nature or wins from her so prophetic a message. We are told and with truth that "Wordsworth's province was the religion of Nature and there he was great."¹ There was for the poet, as line after line will prove, an active principle, a living soul, in Nature.

With this emphasis of joy in Nature as coming from the deep heart of a living spirit Wordsworth also emphasized that quiet and serene strength that Nature had to offer. This led further to an original thought which we find expressed in many, many of his poems but most characteristically and at greatest length in "Tintern Abbey" - the thought that Nature will be

1. Strong, The Great Poets and Their Theology, p. 345.

a teacher to the responsive heart. Nature will through communion give joy to the heart of man and not joy alone but peace and wisdom and still more daring thought, Nature will discipline the soul in duty and right.

Come forth into the light of things
Let Nature be your teacher.

Wordsworth was not only a poet of Nature; he was also a poet of Man. We hear in his poetry "the still, sad music of humanity." His poetry is all the more memorable because he so often found his message in common life and among the common people. No other poet has found so much of the divine in the people that he met on the highroad, the beggars, the labourers, the rustics, the children. It is a strange and wonderful company which is immortalized in Wordsworth's poetry. It was a conviction with Wordsworth which he maintained with all the strength of his resolute and stubborn will, that these common folk had a message and a lesson for all.

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

Some have pointed out, and with truth, that Wordsworth did not use the language of these rustic folk that he immortalized yet he did to a very great degree catch their spirit and win from them a message. He won more of truth and joy from the story of everyday life than did any other great poet with the single exception of Robert Burns. He has made the common man immortal. The conviction that he could find truth in the lives of humble folk is stoutly maintained in the famous preface to the "Lyrical Ballads". "Humble and rustic life was usually chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and consequently may be more

accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manner of rural life germinated from these elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of Nature."¹ Out of these "essential passions" he wove the thread of his wonderful message! As A.C. Bradley says in "Oxford Lectures on Poetry" - "It was not Wordsworth's function to sing, like most great poets, of war, or love, or tragic passions, or the actions of supernatural beings. His peculiar function was to open out 'the soul of little and familiar things' alike in nature and in human life."²

Wordsworth was the poet of Nature and the poet of Man. His great prophetic message was to point to "the recovery of joy". If this, then, is the is the great contribution what shall we say of the relation of this message to the Christian gospel? Was this or was this not a Christian message? Was Wordsworth a Christian poet? We think the answer is to be given in the negative. ~~XXX~~ It is true that his greatest poetry is inspired by a religious spirit and carries a spiritual message. It has the prophetic note, it rings with a truth that all men need. The poet is no pagan; he shows the influence of Christian teaching. Professor Masson says of him:- "His meditations on Man, Nature, and the Future, are not those of a Pagan sage, however his language may sometimes seem to be consistent even with a lofty Pagan view of the universe: on the contrary, he seems to think throughout as one in whose manner of transacting those great and paramount conceptions that form the necessary matter of all real contemplation that sweet modification

1. Wordsworth, Prose Works, Vol. II., p. 81.

2. Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 107.

had been wrought which Christianity had rendered possible."¹ Wordsworth's poetry is not subservient of the highest Christian truth but neither is it distinctly and unmistakably Christian. We may say this - that it ^{is} not orthodox Christianity yet it is beauty and truth and these are great and good things.

Wordsworth brings us the note of joy from God's great out-of-doors. He brings us joy which has heard "the still, sad music of humanity" which has fought the great battles of doubt, which has won the victory. He is the prophet of joy, joy in Nature and in Nature's God. "What earth's far-off lonely mountains do for the plains and the cities, that Wordsworth has done and will do for literature, and through literature for society; sending down great rivers of higher truth, fresh purifying winds of feeling, to those who least dream from what quarter they come. The more thoughtful of each generation will draw nearer and observe him more closely, will ascend his imaginative heights, and sit under the shadow of his profound meditations, and, in proportion as they do so, will become more noble and pure in heart."²

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1. Masson, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Other Essays, p. 54.
 2. Shairp, Studies in Poetry and Philosophy, p. 89.

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