

The Man

William Wordsworth was born on April 7th, 1770 in Cockermouth in Cumberland, a mountain district in the north of England. His father, John Wordsworth, was a lawyer and agent to Sir James Lowther who owned a big estate. His mother Anne was a daughter of a small trader named Cookson. Five children were born to the couple :

Richard
William
Dorothy
John
Christopher.



Wordsworth's early childhood with his parents was quite happy. The family's comfortable house stood on the bank of the River Derwent where the children played and bathed. Wordsworth called it "my sweet birthplace" and said,

Oh! many a time have I, a five years' child,
In a small mill-race severed from his stream,
Made one long bathing of a summer's day;
Basked in the sun, and plunged, and basked again
Alternate, all a summer's day,

(The Prelude, Book I, Lines 288-292)

When he was a little boy, nature was his playground. He enjoyed himself running in the fields, walking in the groves and climbing the hills and mountain crags. From then on, nature became more and more important to him.

Of the parents, the mother was closer to the children. The father seemed to be silent by nature and was always quite busy. The mother was kind and loving and her death in 1778 was a great loss to him. He writes :

Early died

My honoured Mother, she who was the heart
And hinge of all our learnings and our loves: .

(The Prelude, Book V, Lines 256-258)

His father was so sad that he never recovered from his sorrow. The children had to separate. Wordsworth was sent to his grandparents' house. In 1783 the father died and left the children quite poor because Sir James Lowther refused to pay the money owed to their father. The Cooksons and Richard Wordsworth, their uncle, became the children's guardians. It seems that the grandparents were not very kind to the children. Wordsworth never mentioned this part of his life, but Dorothy wrote that it was a bitter time.

During that time, Wordsworth went to a grammar school at Hawkshead in the vale of Esthwaite. Except for his grandparents' unkind treatment, he was entirely happy. He took pleasure in the sports and pastimes of the mountain country. He was a rambler, climber, skater, kite-flyer, nutter and fisherman. He loved that time and called the place "that beloved Vale" and "thou one dear Vale." In The Prelude, he says,

'twas my joy
With store of springes o'er my shoulder hung
To range the open heights where woodcocks run
Along the smooth green turf. Through half the night,
Scudding away from snare to snare, I plied
That anxious visitation;

(The Prelude, Book I, Lines 309-314)

Besides this, he went rowing alone on the lake at night and went riding, "beating with thundering hoofs the level sand." He began to love nature because it made him happy. Its importance became greater and greater as he grew older.

Since boyhood, Wordsworth had shown strong sensibility and violent passion. His mother who died when he was only eight years old once made a remark that among her children, Wordsworth alone would be outstanding, either for good or evil. Once when his grandparents scolded him, he intended to kill himself but finally did not

have enough courage to do so. He once hit a family portrait to show his brother that he was brave enough, knowing that he would be severely punished for doing so. This characteristic may have come from his northern ancestry. As for his sensibility, it was very strong. He called his feeling towards nature "animal appetite". His love for his sister and brothers was deep and tender. However, he was always calm, almost hard, ~~hiding~~ his feelings from people. Hazlitt who met him in 1798 gave a clear picture of his personality : "There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an intense, high narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling,¹" As a boy, and even when he grew older, he was an introvert and liked to withdraw himself from friends to stay alone. He always enjoyed himself in solitude. In The Prelude, he said :

"And I was taught to feel, perhaps too much,
The self - sufficing power of Solitude.

(Book I, Line 75-76)

and

"How gracious, how benign, is Solitude."

(Book IV, Line 357)

His imagination was so strong that he could see a dark mountain walking after him when he went rowing at night :

a huge peak, black and huge,
As if with voluntary power instinct
Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me."

(The Prelude, Book I, Lines 378-385)

1. William Hazlitt, "My First Acquaintance with Poets,"

Selected Essays of William Hazlitt 1778 - 1830, p. 516.

As a boy he used to have trances which he tried to resist. In his note to "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood", he said "I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality."

Physically he was very healthy and was apparently never sick. This was, no doubt, due to constant exercise in the open air.

Wordsworth's poetic career began very early. At the beginning his father made him learn Spenser, Milton and Shakespeare by heart. The The Prelude tells clearly when his interest in poetry began. In the fifth book he wrote :

Twice five years
Or less I might have seen, when first my mind
With conscious pleasure opened to the charm
Of words in tuneful order, found them sweet
For their own sakes . . .

(Book V, Lines 552-556)

At Hawkshead School, he liked to walk along quiet roads with a friend, "repeating favourite verses with one voice." He called poetry "that delicious world of poesy". He was stirred to ecstasy by "glittering verse". He found joy in nature around him and also in "Great Nature that exists in works of mighty Poets".

Wordsworth's awareness of his unusual capacity to see into nature stimulated him to take up poetry. At the age of fourteen when he was walking at sunset, he saw the infinite variety of natural appearances. Poets had never noticed these, therefore he decided to make up for it by writing poetry. This is quite an important turning point in his life.

At school, students had to write poetry as an exercise. Wordsworth wrote so well that one of his friends asked, "How is it, Bill, thee doest write with such good verses? Doest thee invoke Muse?"¹ His first known poem was the lines

1. F. W. Bateson, Wordsworth, A Re-Interpretation, p. 65.

" Written as a School Exercise at Hawkshead, annoetatis 14 " in 1785. In 1786 he wrote " Written in very Early Childhood ".

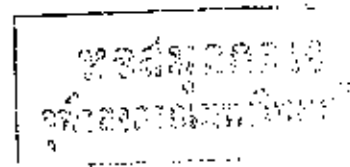
The first man to have decisive influence on Wordsworth's poetic growth was the Rev. William Taylor who was the headmaster of Hawkshead School from 1782 to 1786. He strengthened Wordsworth's interest in poetry and encouraged him to write. According to F. W. Bateson, Wordsworth's habit of revising and re-writing his poetry came from Taylor's influence. The poems "Matthew", "The Two April Mornings" and "The Fountain" about a good, kind school-teacher, written in 1799, were probably based on Taylor.

The precursors of the Romantic Revival like Gray, Collins or Cowper had little influence on Wordsworth because he was very original. Robert Burns, the Scottish poet, alone gained Wordsworth's admiration. In 1803 Wordsworth dedicated "At the Grave of Burns" and "To the Sons of Burns" to the poet. In Wordsworth's opinion, Milton was the greatest poet of all time. As we shall see he spoke much and often of Milton.

At this time Wordsworth had already become a nature lover. We know from The Prelude that his "animal delight" in nature changed into a deeper feeling and that when he was very young, he felt a "giddy bliss" in nature but at this time he began to see a "Presence" in nature and he learnt to hear "The ghostly language of the ancient earth". He said, in "Tintern Abbey" that nature was part of his "moral being" and he was aware of his "visionary power". Natural scenes had left a deep impression on his mind.

In 1787 his guardians decided to send him to Cambridge. He entered St. John's College in November. When he first arrived there, he was attracted by university life. He made friends and went to parties and mixed with the thoughtless and idle young men around him. He was drawn into the noisy crowd and he did not know what he was doing. He said, "I was the Dreamer, they the Dream; I roamed delighted through the motley spectacle."¹ He was glad to be where Chaucer, Spenser, Milton and Newton had been. He was not much interested in his studies, but went drifting aimlessly with his friends, reading

1. The Prelude, Book III, Lines 30-31



"lazily in lazy books", riding and sailing. But from time to time he was worried about his future. In spite of the things he did with his friends, he felt sometimes "A strangeness in the mind, a feeling that I was not for that hour, nor for that place."¹ He often withdrew from the crowd and went pacing alone in the fields. At the end of his first year at Cambridge, he said that he had spent his time in "submissive idleness".² It is clear that he was not very happy and when summer vacation came, he rushed back to his home in the north country.

There he enjoyed himself near nature which he had missed. At the same time, he became aware of the freshness of country life:

"A freshness also found I at this time
In human life, the daily life of those
Whose occupations really I loved;"³

Consequently, he began to feel sorry for busy people in the city.

During this vacation, he wrote his first long poem, "An Evening Walk" which was a series of descriptions of Esthwaite and Hawkshead. The description of nature as he saw it is a revolt against classical poetry but the heroic couplets used in this poem show that he was still under the influence of eighteenth century poetic style.

During his second summer vacation in 1789 he wandered on foot in his native country with his sister Dorothy and Mary Hutchinson. Mary was his childhood friend and Dorothy was the sister whom he loved. Wordsworth and his sister had shared the unhappy time at their grandparents' house and were very close to each other. Wordsworth was very happy to see her after long separation. He was happy to be back in the country and to live among the hills and wander in the dales but,

Above all joys, that seemed another morn

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1. The Prelude, Book III, Lines 80-82.
 2. The Prelude, Book III, Line 632.
 3. The Prelude, Book IV, Lines 191-193.

Risen on mid noon; blest with the presence, Friend!
 Of that sole Sister, her who hath been long,
 Dear to thee also, thy true friend and mine,
 Now, after separation desolate,
 Restored to me—such absence that she seemed
 A gift then first bestowed.

(The Prelude, Book VI, Lines 197-203)

At this time, he loved wandering most of all. His other interest was poetry. Except for these two interests, he did not have any special preferences. He did not know what profession to choose.

At the end of the second vacation, Wordsworth went back to Cambridge where he was as unhappy as he had been the first year. He took no interest in his studies but he worried about his future and was fond of walking alone at night. In 1790 he and his friend, Robert Jones, went on a walking tour in France, Italy, Switzerland and Germany. They had little money but enjoyed themselves a lot. When they arrived in France, people were enjoying the freedom newly won by the French Revolution. He felt the joy of the people in the countries he walked through. The success of the revolution made him feel optimistic. He hoped that it would bring perfect happiness to these people who had long been under tyranny. In his opinion,

Europe at that time was thrilled with joy,
 France standing on the top of golden hours,
 And human nature seeming born again.

(The Prelude, Book VI, Lines 339-341)

He left the joyful people and went on to the Alps. To him as before, "Nature was sovereign in my mind."¹ In a letter to Dorothy, he said he enjoyed every sight he saw and wanted to print it in his memory, and that he enjoyed even the memory of what he had seen on the mountains. This tour provided the material for his "Descriptive Sketches taken during a Pedestrian Tour among the Alps," written in 1793.

1. The Prelude, Book VI, Line 333.

While he was crossing the Simplon Pass, he was suddenly aware of the unusual power of his imagination.

"Imagination—here the Power so called
Through sad incompetence of human speech,
That awful Power rose from the mind's abyss
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
At once, some lonely traveller."

(The Prelude, Book VI, Lines 592-596)

The gloomy scenes along the pass made him see nature more vividly. The winds, the waterfalls and the wood looked "as if a voice were in them." The stream, the clouds, the noise and silence, darkness and light

"Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end."

(The Prelude, Book VI, Lines 636-640)

In Switzerland he found that people were having

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

(The Prelude, Book VI, Lines 754-758)

Sharing their feelings, he wrote, "new delights spread round my steps like sunshine o'er green fields."

He returned to Cambridge and took his degree in 1791. Then instead of choosing a profession and settling down, he went to London, not knowing what to do.

He was :

Well pleased to pitch a vagrant tent among
The unfenced regions of society.

(The Prelude, Book VII, Lines 56-57)

He became acquainted with people of all classes. He saw people living in luxury and he saw miserable beggars in the streets. He found that London was a city of "blank confusion" and its people living in a "perpetual whirl of trivial objects." He was confused and in The Prelude he said,

"How oft, amid those overflowing streets,
Have I gone forward with the Crowd, and said
Unto myself, "The face of every one
That passes by me is a mystery."

(The Prelude, Book VII, Lines 626-629)

In London as well as at Cambridge, he never felt at home because he was far from nature.

"The Spirit of Nature was upon me there;
The soul of Beauty and enduring Life
Vouchsafed her inspiration. . ."

(The Prelude, Book VII, Line 766-768)

But his love of nature does not end in itself. His interest in a blind beggar in London shows that he had begun to love man. The title he gave to the eighth book of The Prelude was "Love of Nature Leading to Love of Man." First of all he loved nature. Then he began to love country people living near nature. Later his love developed into love for all human beings. He wrote,

"Even then the common haunts of the green earth,
And ordinary interests of man,
Which they embosom, all without regard
As both may seem, are fastening on the heart
Insensibly, each with the other's help.
For me, when my affections first were led
From kindred, friends, and playmates, to partake
Love for the human creature's absolute self,"¹

and

"My thoughts by slow gradations had been drawn
To human-kind, and to the good and ill

1. The Prelude, Book VIII, Lines 116-123.

Of human life: Nature had led me on;"¹

During this time, his guardians worried much about him. His uncle wanted him to become a clergyman and settle down, but he refused. Another guardian suggested oriental languages, but Wordsworth again refused. These facts indicate that he was a rather rebellious and obstinate young man. Finally, however, he agreed to go to France to study the language and hoped to come back and become a tutor. At the end of 1791, he went to Paris, Orleans and then Blois. There he met a republican officer named Michel Beaupuis. Beaupuis had an admirable personality and was intelligent. Beaupuis' impassioned ideas strengthened Wordsworth's faith in the Revolution and the people's poverty resulting from the Revolution made him love and pity all people. He became an enthusiastic supporter of the Revolution. The fact that Beaupuis, despite his noble birth, served the public faithfully and loved "man as man" made Wordsworth love "man as man", too. Herbert Read said that at the time "Wordsworth was converted, It was the personal contact with this glowing sincerity in a man whom he could not but admire that roused Wordsworth's enthusiasm for the rights of humanity."² Beaupuis' death on the field of battle impressed him even more. One notices that Wordsworth seems to have been influenced more by nature and by direct contact with people than by books.

After much fighting and many executions, the confusion seemed to calm down. The republican ideal spread all over France. Wordsworth was full of hope for the people and wrote,

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven!

(The Prelude, Book XI, Lines 108-109)

Meanwhile, he fell in love with a French girl, Annette Vallon. Judging by the course of events, his love for her must have swept him off his feet but, strangely enough, he never mentioned it,

1. The Prelude, Book VIII, Lines 677-679.

2. Herbert Read, Wordsworth, p. 82.

"Vaudracour and Julia", the episode of a tragic love, was written in 1805 and was incorporated in The Prelude. There is a parallel between this story and his love affair with Annette but he disguised it as being told to him by Beaupuis. Vaudracour's father would not let him marry Julia. When Julia was going to have a baby, the lovers were separated. Julia was sent to a distant place where she could give birth to her illegitimate child among strangers. Later, she thought that if she went back home, she would be forgiven. When she actually returned, she was put into a convent. Vaudracour took the baby to live with him and an old nurse in a forest. The baby soon died and Vaudracour went insane. The story does not arouse our sympathy and Wordsworth's solutions are unrealistic, but it is interesting because the story resembles this part of his life.

The Reign of Terror (May 1793 - July 1794) began to take shape in France. There were massacres and all kinds of violence. Wordsworth was unhappy to see this. His faith in the Revolution was shaken. Finally, lack of money and probably the danger caused by his getting involved with the Girondists forced him to go back to England. Thus, he was unable to wait until the birth of Caroline, his illegitimate daughter. A few weeks after his return, England declared war on France and Wordsworth could not go back to France at that time.

Wordsworth was disillusioned to see that English people were against the Revolution and the British Government sided with France's enemies :

Britain put forth her free-born strength in league,
Oh, pity and shame! with those confederate Powers.

(The Prelude, Book X, Lines 264-265)

The people's attitude shocked his optimistic idea of the Revolution. This shock, together with the remorse he carried with him because of deserting Annette and Caroline, depressed him deeply. For the time being, except for writing "Descriptive Sketches", "Guilt and Sorrow" and "The Borderers" and making a tour in the West of England, he did not do anything in particular. "Guilt and Sorrow", a story about a

woman tramp, reflects his thoughts on pain caused by war. The heroine may have been suggested by the thought of Annette whom he had left behind. "The Borderers" which he called a tragedy is based on human injustice which he considered as existing in the anti-revolutionist's mind.

In 1795, a dying friend named Raisley Calvert left Wordsworth a sum of money which enabled him to settle down at Racedown Lodge, Dorsetshire. This is the period of his mental recovery. Dorothy, "the sister of his soul", who had long been separated from him was able to come to live with him. Her presence brought him great contentment. Mary Hutchinson, a friend whom both Wordsworth and Dorothy loved, also moved to Racedown. Moreover, Coleridge who had made friends with him sometime before this came to live near by.

It was a stimulating time for both poets. Coleridge's letter to Joseph Cottle, the publisher, shows how much he admired Wordsworth. It says, "Wordsworth admires my tragedy, which gives me great hopes. Wordsworth has written a tragedy himself. I speak with heartfelt sincerity, and (I think) unblinded judgement, when I tell you that I feel myself a little man by his side, and yet do not think myself the less man than I formerly thought myself. His drama is absolutely wonderful. There are in the piece those profound touches of the human heart. He is the greatest man¹ His faith in the genius of the Wordsworth had some good effect on Wordsworth's depressed mind. At the same time, Coleridge did not mean less to Wordsworth who called him "Capacious soul".

Coleridge was,

"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."

(The Prelude, Book XIV, Lines 278-282)

1. Herbert Read, Wordsworth, p. 95.

The two poets inspired each other and collaborated on Lyrical Ballads, a book which, because of its profound influence on subsequent English poetry, marks the starting point of the Romantic Revival.

Nature was the most important factor in Wordsworth's restoration. In his youth he rejoiced in "excellent and fair" nature and now he felt the soul of nature that

"by laws divine
Sustained and governed, still dost overflow
With an impassioned life,"

(The Prelude, Book XII, Lines 102-104)

In the thirteenth book of The Prelude, he told how his imagination and taste were restored after having been impaired :

"From Nature doth emotion come, and moods
Of calmness equally are Nature's gift:
This is her glory; these two attributes
Are sister horns that constitute her strength.
Hence Genius, born to thrive by interchange
Of peace and excitation, finds in her
His best and purest friend; from her receives
That energy by which he seeks the truth,
From her that happy stillness of the mind
Which fits him to receive it when unsought.

(The Prelude, Book XIII, Lines 1-10)

Nature both aroused his emotions and blessed him with tranquillity which is the strength by which he found truth. Nature made him feel as if he had been born again.

He said :

I breathe again!
Trances of thought and mountings of the mind
Come fast upon me: it is shaken off,
That burthen of my own unnatural self,
The heavy weight of many a weary day
Not mine, and such as were not made for me.

(The Prelude, Book I, Lines 18-23)

He began to forget all the trouble and feel encouraged. He found that he was now "a sensitive being" and "a creative soul."¹

Dorothy played an important part in Wordsworth's recovery. She helped him to find nature. She and Wordsworth were equally fond of nature. She joined his daily long walk and went rambling with him by night. She was as sensitive as Wordsworth. Her reaction to nature was immediate while Wordsworth's was profound and meditative. She gave him "eye and ear" by which he afterwards saw and heard what he had contemplated. Her presence made him think of Annette less and less and that enabled him to look into nature with peace of mind. When Wordsworth and his sister moved from Racedown to Alfoxden so as to be near Nether Stowey, Somersetshire, where Coleridge lived, these three became "three persons with one soul". Dorothy was intelligent enough to share the thoughts of her brother and his friend. The two men enjoyed her company and were grateful to her sensibility which enlarged theirs. They went on several walking tours. Wordsworth was more and more satisfied by Coleridge's intellectual intercourse and Dorothy's love, and his "creative soul" grew bigger. Besides the plan of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth had a plan to produce a more reflective and philosophical work: "The Recluse". He hoped that people would remember him by this work. It would interest mankind because it would show men the way to wisdom and happiness. Its subtitle "Views of Man, Nature and Society" shows what it was to have been about.

Wordsworth wanted to produce this work because by then love of nature had led him to love of man. While Dorothy made him turn his eyes to the landscape, she made him take interest in the peasants and the country people. Their close relation with nature made him find :

Once more in Man an object of delight,
Of pure imagination, and of love;

(The Prelude, Book XIII, Lines 49-50)

1. The Prelude, Book XII, Line 207.

He thought that as a poet, he might

boldly take his way among mankind
Wherever Nature leads; that he hath stood
By Nature's side among the men of old,
And so shall stand for ever.

(The Prelude, Book XIII, Lines 296-297)

In 1798, Coleridge went to study philosophy in Germany. Wordsworth and Dorothy accompanied him, but they stayed at Goslar, Saxony, and Coleridge went to Göttingen. During his stay in Germany, he liked neither the climate nor the people but Dorothy and the peaceful scenery enabled him to work. He began The Prelude, the first part of his future work "The Recluse" and wrote many of his better poems such as "There Was A Boy", "Lucy Poems" and "Lucy Gray" which he published in the 1800 edition of Lyrical Ballads. In 1799 the trio went back to England. After a short visit to the Hutchinsons, Wordsworth and Dorothy moved to Dove Cottage in Townend, Grasmere. Dorothy said in her journal that their daily meal consisted of bread and milk, but they read Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton and studied Italian and Greek. In other words, their life was characterized by "plainliving and high thinking".

At the new house, their brother John who was a sailor came to stay with them from time to time. Like his brother and sister, John loved nature. This common love bound him closer to Wordsworth than the other brothers. John loved the countryside and Grasmere Vale was "his heart's delight, his quiet heart's selected home!"¹ "The Brothers", written in 1800, represents his love and John's strengthened by the common love of nature. 008907

Meanwhile, the friendship between Wordsworth and Mary Hutchinson grew stronger though Wordsworth had not made any decision. In 1801, the Treaty of Amiens made travel between France and England possible. Wordsworth and Dorothy went to meet Annette and Caroline at Calais. Wordsworth and Annette found that the long

1. "Elegiac Verses" (1805).

interval of absence, their different religious and political beliefs had ended their love. Annette therefore granted him freedom to marry.

With the end of his affair with Annette, Wordsworth's passionate love died. His love for Mary cannot be compared with that for the French woman. It was more like a love between understanding friends or between two persons who share a responsibility. Mary never demanded more than that. She was even content to be second to Dorothy in Wordsworth's love.

Though everything was final with Annette and the passionate love was forgotten, according to Read, guilty conscience and remorse were too deep-rooted to be erased. The anxiety caused by remorse stirred him and inspired him when it was new. But later it haunted him and affected his intellect. This is what Herbert Read called "the deeper malady", one of the causes of his poetic decline.

He came back and married Mary Hutchinson in 1802. Mary was a tender woman, domestic and submissive. She was a good wife, sharing happiness and sadness with him in a quiet way. In his "Lucy Poems", Wordsworth, possibly referring to Mary, said :

She I cherished turned her wheel
Beside an English fire.

According to Muriel Spark and Derek Stanford, Mary "appears only to have gratified the physical and social nature of the man."¹

The case of Beaupuis shows how easily Wordsworth was influenced by personal contacts. Mary's unambitious and yielding character was no inspiration for Wordsworth. Being married, he began to seek a more "defined position in society"²; simultaneously, he became more involved with household concerns as the size of his family increased. Five children,

John	1803
Dora	1804

1. Muriel Spark and Derek Stanford, Tribute to Wordsworth, p. 15.

2. Idem.

Thomas	1806
Catherine	1808
William	1810

were born to them.

He had to move from happy Dove Cottage to a bigger house in Allan Bank. Better fortunes like the payment of debt by the second Lord of Lonsdale and the position of stamp distributor gave him greater peace of mind. His domestic feeling "outwardly stabilised the man".¹

All these circumstances, however, "inwardly assassinated the poet."² Wordsworth said himself that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". The intensity of his passion resulted in his early poems which seemed to be more "the productions of nature than of man and have the lastingness of such, delighting our age with the same startle of newness and beauty that pleased our youth".¹ But now he seemed to be incapable of feeling so intensely. The violent rebel and the passionate lover were of the past. Already in 1803 when he wrote his great "Ode," he complained of the loss of imaginative power. He said,

But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

and asked,

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

The conviction seemed to depress him badly. Dorothy's journal shows that as time passed, he wrote poetry with increasing difficulty. He even looked forward to failure with fear. In "Resolution and Independence," he thought of :

Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshy ills;
And mighty Poets in their misery dead.

1. Spark and Stanford, p. 15.

2. Idem.

and said :

We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

Fortunately, he was optimistic in his resolution.

He was quite happy at that time. He went on a walking tour in Scotland with Dorothy. Coleridge started with them but became sick and could not go all the way. In Scotland, he met Sir Walter Scott, one of his admirers, and found materials for his memorable poems like "To A Highland Girl" and "The Solitary Reaper."

In 1804 Dora was born. When she was a month old, he wrote in "Address to My Infant Daughter, Dora" :

Frail, feeble Monthling! - by that name, methinks,
Thy scanty breathing-time is portioned out
Not idly.

She was to be the last woman to win great affection from him.

In 1805, Wordsworth concluded The Prelude which he had begun a few years before. Its completion and considerable success satisfied him. But another of the most tragic events, John's death in a shipwreck, immediately followed. Wordsworth's grief was extreme and Dorothy and Mary shared it with him. His letters written at the time contain evidence of his profound sorrow. To Sir George Beaumont, he wrote, "This calamitous news we received at 2 o'clock to-day, and I write to you from a house of mourning. My poor sister and wife who loved him almost as we did (for he was one of the most amiable of men), are in miserable affliction, which I do all in my power to alleviate; but Heaven knows I want consolation myself."¹ To his brother Christopher he wrote "We (he), Dorothy and Mary) have done all that could be done to console each other by weeping together."² In "Elegiac Verses in Memory of My Brother, John Wordsworth" he said,

Affecting type of him I mourned!
With calmness suffer and believe,

1. Early Letters of William and Dorothy, Wordsworth (1787-1805),

Ernest De Selincourt, editor, p. 447.

2. Ibid., p. 449.

And grieve, and know that I must grieve,
Not cheerless, though forlorn.

John's death had a great effect on his *mind*. In "Elegiac Stanzas, suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm, painted by Sir George Beaumont" (1805), he said,

"A power is gone, which nothing can restore."

John's death turned his idea towards human beings. Instead of living alone in nature, he turned to men. He said:

"A deep distress has humanised my soul."

He became more human and learned how to suffer. He was able to speak about his loss "with mind serene." Though he had been happy to be alone, that kind of happiness :

Is to be pitied; for 'tis surely blind.

He said to his former self :

Farewell, farewell the heart that lives alone,
Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind:

"When, to the attractions of the busy world" (1805) was also written in memory of John. When he was tired of the busy world, he retired to a peaceful vale. On the hill near his house there was a fir-grove that he and John loved. John's eyes were "practised" with the beautiful scenery and when he went to sea, he enjoyed the recollection of it. Wordsworth went up to the grove.

Mingling most earnest wishes for the day
When we, and others whom we love shall meet
A second time, in Grasmere's happy Vale.

John's death marked a turning point towards conventionalism. Death made Wordsworth turn to god and religion, to long-established institutions.

Moreover he was reconciled with conservative politics. French aggressive policy and Napoleon destroyed his faith in the Revolution. His poems like "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic" and "Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland" show how much against France he was. He then became a staunch nationalist. His patriotism was already apparent when he came back from Calais after his last meeting with Annette and Caroline in

1802. He wrote,

I with many a fear
For my dear Country, many heartfelt sighs,
Among men who do not love her, linger here.

(Composed by Sea-side near Calais, August 1802)

and

Thou art free
My country! and 'tis joy enough and pride
For one hour's perfect bliss, to tread the grass
Of England once again, and hear and see,

(Composed in the Valley near
Dover, on the day of landing, 1802)

His love for his countryman neighbours further strengthened his patriotism.

About this time his "creative soul" seemed to decline in creativity. The older he grew, the less inspiration he had. After 1808, he never again wrote poems with such freshness as that in "Tintern Abbey", "Lines written in Early Spring" or "To a Skylark." Many critics agreed that that year was the end of Wordsworth's better poetry. Helen Darbishire said, "Now his claim to the title of great poet rests upon the work of a single decade : his poetic genius expressed itself in what he wrote between 1798-1808. What he wrote before and what he wrote after that period, and it is a solid and heavy output, is, with very few exceptions, the work partly of a lesser poet, partly of a capable and practised versifier." Matthew Arnold said, "Wordsworth composed verses during a space of some sixty years; and it is no exaggeration to say that within one single decade of those years, between 1798 and 1808, almost all his really first-rate work was produced!"²

Though the date and cause of his decline vary according to different critics, it is the fact that his poetic powers did decline that is most interesting. We cannot help admitting that he did not go on writing great poetry till the end of his life. It is regrettable that the decline really happened. Willard L. Sperry said that the

1. Darbishire, Helen, The Poet Wordsworth, (1950), p. 3.

2. Matthew Arnold, Essays in Criticism, Second Series, p. 81.

last forty years of Wordsworth's life are "the most dismal anti-climax of which the history of literature holds record."¹ The causes of his decline. Some attribute it to his conversion to orthodox Christianity and conservative politics. Others, led by Herbert Read, said it was because of repressed passion and his marriage to Mary Hutchinson. But Herbert J. C. Grierson and J. C. Smith wrote, "The Nightmares that afflicted him continually for years after his return from France came not from repressed passion but from remembered terrors."² They proceeded, "The proximate cause of the withering of his genius, we believe, was over-work."³

This is one of the most probable causes. Wordsworth once said, "I yield to none in love of my art. I therefore labour at it with reverence, affection and industry."⁴ The "industry" with which he "laboured" might have affected him physically at first and intellectually later. Quite early, Dorothy "begins to record the pains of literary travail. Wordsworth works at all hours and with the utmost concentration. He makes himself tired and physically ill. There are many references in the Journals and Letters of this kind :

1800. September 10th. (Letter to Mrs. Marshall) : 'William's health is by no means strong . . . and he writes with so much feeling and agitation that it brings on a sense of pain.'

1801. 23rd December. ' . . . William worked at "The Ruined Cottage, and made himself very ill'

'On Saturday, 30th, Wm. worked at "The Pedlar" all the morning. He kept the dinner waiting till four o'clock. He was much tired'

'Tuesday, 2nd February William wished to break off composition, but was unable, and so did himself harm.'⁵ Therefore, after having made himself "ill" and "tired" for about ten years, he must have been exhausted. Already in 1810, he was "a man who was

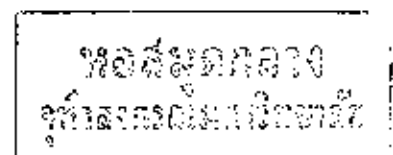
1. Willard L. Sperry, Wordsworth's Anti - Climax, p. 29.

2. Herbert J. C. Grierson and J. C. Smith, A Critical History of English Poetry, p. 351.

3. Idem.

4. Darbishire, p. 7.

5. Read, p. 145.



nervously burnt out at forty."¹ In such condition, his power and inspiration could not but decrease. But Wordsworth was not the kind of man who would yield. He "laboured the more assiduously the less the inspiration came,"² and that was even worse for him. His hard attempt was almost in vain. "Laodamia," written in 1814, according to Herbert Read, is only "very nearly a great poem" though it is one "which Wordsworth tells us (in the Fenwick Notes published by Grosart) cost him more trouble than almost anything of equal length he ever wrote."³

The separation from the people who inspired him most - Dorothy and Coleridge, is considered another cause of his decline.

H. W. Garrod said, "If there was any medicine for the decline of power which stole over Wordsworth's poetry after 1807, it was perhaps to be sought from Coleridge It is hardly an accident that the period of the decline of power coincided with the period in which Wordsworth's gradual estrangement from Coleridge began."⁴ Wordsworth's "Stanzas written in my Pocket - copy of Thomson's "Castle of Indolence" and "To R. C." (1802) show his love for Coleridge and even for Hartley, Coleridge's six years old boy. But in 1806, he wrote "A Complaint", suggested by a change in Coleridge's manner :

There is a change -- and I am poor;
Your love hath been, not long ago,
A fountain at my fond heart's door,
Whose only business was to flow;
And flow it did : not taking heed
Of its own bounty, or my need.

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

A well of love - it may be deep -

1. Sperry, p. 38.

2. Darbishire, p. 5.

3. Read, p. 146.

4. H. W. Garrod, Wordsworth, p. 30.

I trust it is, - and never dry;
 What matter? if the waters sleep
 In silence and obscurity.
 — Such change, and at the very door
 Of my fond heart, hath made me poor.

Coleridge had become a cause of anxiety to Wordsworth. Coleridge became an opium addict and his health failed. Wordsworth was worried by his friend's behaviour. Finally in 1810, a mutual friend proposed to invite Coleridge to stay with him. Wordsworth told the friend that Coleridge's presence would cause him trouble. Coleridge was heart broken when he knew what Wordsworth had said. They quarrelled and Coleridge went away. Without Coleridge who "helped to make Wordsworth intellectually conscious of his own nature and his own achievement",¹ Wordsworth was more aware of his decline. He missed Coleridge's intellectual influence. It was Coleridge who checked him when he clung too much to his dogma of poetic diction. The broken friendship seemed to affect Wordsworth very much. Coleridge's death in 1834 caused him pain though he and Coleridge had never been completely reconciled after their quarrel.

Other critics said that Wordsworth would not have declined if he had always stuck to Dorothy and not married Mary. That was impossible because Dorothy's case was even more unhappy than Coleridge's. By the time Wordsworth began to decline, her reason was not very clear. In 1829, she became insane. This was very hard for him because all his life she had been more dear to him than anyone. He had spent the happiest part of his life with her. She was the inspiration of his early works. They were united by strong affection. There is no doubt that he was deeply affected by her tragic fate. From then on until she died, Dora was his only confidante and companion.

There are more conclusions about the cause of Wordsworth's decline. Edith Batho, one of the devoted Wordsworthians, said it was because of his headaches and eye trouble. Another (Helen Darbishire) concluded, "My answer to the obstinate questioning about Wordsworth's

1. Spark and Stanford, p. 129.

poetic decline is simply, The spirit bloweth where it listeth - When it ceases to blow, or blows but feebly and fitfully, what is a poet to do?"¹ Nobody denies the fact that he declined, not even Wordsworth himself because in his old age he recited his own verses "with awe and reverence as if they were the work of another man."²

However, the latter part of his life was not entirely unhappy. Mary was always beside him. Dora was the beloved companion of his old age as Dorothy had been of his youth. It was Dora who accompanied him on one of his tours of the continent. His love for her was passionately jealous. At first, he would not allow her marriage, and finally when he yielded, it made him unhappy. When she died in 1847, a year after her marriage, he felt it was his greatest loss. Unfortunately, in spite of its intensity, Dora's love was unable to inspire Wordsworth as Dorothy's had. As for his poetry, though he endeavoured and "fell more below himself and even below many poets his inferiors",³ from time to time, he also produced many good poems which were appreciated and welcomed. Lowell said, "Everywhere his genius is wrapped in clouds, the unconquerable lightning of imagination struggles through, flashing out unexpected vistas"⁴ Sperry added, "There are fine passages in "The Excursion" (1814), which may not be overlooked. There are noble lines, like those at the end of the "Duddon Sonnets" (1820), as authentic as any Wordsworth ever wrote. "The memorials of a Tour in Italy (1837) reaffirms, at times, his earlier power over words. As late as 1842 "To the Clouds" recovers something of the imperious mood of the great decade"⁵

The income for the Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland enabled him to live quite comfortably. In 1843, he accepted the position of Poet Laureate after having refused when it was first proposed. His genius was recognized, and the critics became less unfavorable. He became a prominent figure. People came from far and near to pay their respects and visit. When the visitors came, he liked to read his poetry to them and he monopolized the conversation. In

1. Darbishire, p. 4.

2. Ibid., p. 5.

3. Spark and Stanford, p. 123.

4. Idem.

5. Ibid., p. 29.

March 1850 he fell ill and died on April 23.

It is interesting to remark that Wordsworth who wrote great poetry and whose work began a new movement in poetry never became a popular poet. He was always criticized, only less severely near the end of his life. Besides his poetry, the point that critics liked to attack was his unpleasant personality. The common people who were his favorite theme and whom he observed and described accurately in his poetry never liked him. They hardly read what he wrote. The position of the poet laureate did not make people love him. However, he is highly appreciated by certain groups of people. Students of poetry think that he is one of the three greatest English poets. They put him next to Shakespeare and Milton.