

WORDSWORTH'S
JOY IN NATURE
AND ITS
CONTEMPORARY
RELEVANCE

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I

INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth was the poet of joy. No reader of his poems can fail to be impressed by this constantly recurring note, particularly in the poems of the great decade of his writing, 1798-1808. This joy, of which he so frequently speaks, was the inspiration of his best work, and when the brightness of his joy waned, his poetic effort faltered.

Nature was the source of the joy that inspired Wordsworth. His poetry was, however, the fruit of reflection upon that which was given by nature through eye and ear. The poet's mind was stimulated and quickened by joy, not only at the moment of sensation, but frequently months or years afterwards. "Emotion recollected in tranquillity", as Wordsworth puts it himself in the famous Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, gave rise to poetry. He was capable of being emotionally stimulated by the memory of past experiences, and no doubt the intervening months were a time of incubation during which his own mind worked over the original stimulus. Abercrombie sums it up thus: "His theme is always essentially the same; it is the joy on which his whole poetic life rested".¹

This joy derived from nature through personal

¹Lascelles Abercrombie: The Art of Wordsworth, Oxford University Press, 1952, p.104.

experience and recollection not only proved to be the inspiration of much of Wordsworth's best work; it was an integral element in his outlook on, and attitude towards, life. We might even say that his mature philosophy of life consisted of an integration of this primary impulse of joy with the varied experiences of our human lot. Wordsworth learned from nature to accept life, or as we may say, to make an affirmative response to it. Life is good, because nature is good, being the giver of joy, and much else as well. Though Wordsworth's Christianity has been much questioned, in this at least he was profoundly Christian, as opposed to the life-denying philosophies of the east.

Wordsworth's joy coloured his approach also to the practical issues of his time. His criticism of materialism and industrialism is consistent with his love of nature and simplicity. He championed human dignity, for the natural man as he knew him among the dales of the Lake Country was full of dignity. He championed the liberty and independence of the individual. He raised his voice against the prevalence of the acquisitive and luxury-loving temper of his time. In these and many other respects he speaks for all time.

It is our belief that Wordsworth has a word for our generation, growing out of his deep sense of joy in nature. Mallaby, in a tribute to him, speaks of being able "to distil from his best work those fresh and generous principles by which a wise man may still live".²

²George Mallaby, Wordsworth, a Tribute, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1950, p.4.

This is a worn and frustrated age. Multitudes are oppressed by the weary weight of this unintelligible world, having no integrated philosophy of life capable of standing against the pressures of our time. Men are more than half in love with easeful death; many contemplate with equanimity the possibility of the complete destruction of civilization. Their equanimity is derived not from faith, but from indifference to all but immediate satisfaction of desires. The cult of peace of mind, the over-emphasis on physical comfort, come dangerously close to being a death-like resignation to forces which we feel incapable of mastering. The mad pursuit of pleasure is an index of our fundamental sadness. The tendencies which Wordsworth observed in the life of his time have become more prominent in the last century. His protest is still relevant; his glad acceptance of life's gifts, and its joy, may still point to a better way for us. While it may be too much to say that Wordsworth has the answer to our ills, it is safe to say that he has set up guide-posts along the way to an answer.

The purpose of this essay is to examine Wordsworth's joy in nature by first tracing its development in the poet's life; then ~~to look at~~ the mature concept in some detail; and finally to suggest its limitations; and throughout the discussion to keep in mind the relevance of this principle to the life of today.

This introductory section may be fittingly brought to a close by quoting these words from one of the great names in Wordsworthian criticism, Walter Raleigh:

It was happiness that Wordsworth taught (. . .) His poems are one long and various exposition of 'the grand elementary principle of pleasure' as he calls it, 'by which man knows, and feels, and lives, and moves'. (. . .) He found this principle of joy animating all nature, and, so far as his contemplations carried him, he saw it in all human life.³

³Walter Raleigh, Wordsworth, London, Edward Arnold & Co., 1932, pp.143-4.

II

JOY IN NATURE: ITS ORIGIN AND GROWTH

One of Wordsworth's most complete expressions of his joy in nature is found in Tintern Abbey (Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey). If we are to have a clear idea of this subject, we cannot do better than to recall some of these words as an introduction to a discussion of the origin and growth of this conception. Here is portrayed the developed idea:

that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened - that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, 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, 37-49)

Here, then, are the principal elements in Wordsworth's sense of joy in nature: a mood of happiness that lifts him above the petty annoyances of life; a mood of almost mystical rapture in which the senses no longer obtrude, and in which he seems gifted with a more than normal insight. But we must begin at the beginning and endeavour to trace the growth of this sense in the poet.

Wordsworth was fortunate in his childhood environment. Both at home at Cockermouth, and later at school at Hawkshead, he lived in the midst of natural surroundings to the influence of which he often paid tribute in late years. If we may take The Prelude at face value, as a reasonably

accurate account of Wordsworth's personal development, and I think we are quite justified in doing so, we may call to mind such lines as these, in which he attributes to the "music" of the Derwent River,

A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves, ¹
(I, 275-281)

while yet "a babe in arms". "The earth", he says,

And common face of Nature spake to me
Rememberable things; (I, 586-8)

What were these things? The poet answers in these words:

Those chiefly that first led me to the love
Of rivers, woods, and fields. (II, 4-5)

No reader of The Prelude can escape the sense of joy that Wordsworth felt in the presence of the sights and sounds of nature. As a boy, he confesses, (II, 178), he loved the sun, not as the giver of life,

But for this cause, that I had seen him lay
His beauty on the morning hills, had seen
The western mountains touch his setting orb,
In many a thoughtless hour, when from excess
Of happiness, my blood appeared to flow
For its own pleasure, and I breathed with joy. ~~xxx~~
(II, 183-8)

If we may adduce one more quotation from The Prelude, this apostrophe to nature may serve as a summary:

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. (II, 447-451)

The most complete outline of Wordsworth's developing appreciation of nature is found in Tintern Abbey, particularly

1Quotations from The Prelude are taken from the 1850 edition as contained in the Oxford Standard Authors: The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. by de Selincourt. Any exceptions are noted.

in lines 65-111. We can find three or four stages of this growth, depending on our classification. It has been suggested² that Wordsworth was at this time following the Hartleian psychology, applying it to his own mental life. Hartley distinguished three stages of development: childhood, the period of pure sensation; youth, the age of simple ideas; and maturity, a time of complex ideas. In any event, such a scheme approximates the course of Wordsworth's growth as here given. Through it all there breathes an ecstasy of joy.

There is the sensuous delight of boyhood passing into the absorption of youth:

For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all. (72-75)

Youth is marked by strong, aesthetic feeling: "The sounding cataract Haunted me like a passion", (76-7). The sights and sounds of nature were then

An appetite, a feeling, and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. (80-84)

But "that time is past"; a new stage has followed:

~~For~~ 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. (88-91)

This is the stage of contemplative response to nature, in which sensation is worked upon by other ideas. Finally, Wordsworth passes to a more mystical view of nature, in which

²Herbert Read: Wordsworth, (New York, Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931) discusses this at some length, pp. 147-9.

he finds life in all things, and in which he shares in the joy which is in nature:

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,
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. (93-102)

In the Ode on Intimations of Immortality, Wordsworth makes a great deal more of the contrast between his youthful pleasure in nature, and the more sober and thoughtful appreciation of mature years. He confesses his sadness because the ecstasy of youth has given way to "years that bring the philosophic mind". But we have here also a fuller expression of his sense of boyhood joy in nature. The Ode is an exposition of the text placed beneath the title: "The child is father of the man". It is a celebration of Wordsworth's early joy in nature, so beautifully and convincingly told, that the reader finds himself in sun-bathed fields of an English May. "Heaven lies about us in our infancy", (67). But "shades of the prison-house begin to close Upon the growing boy" (68-9) as they did in the experience of the poet. This raises questions for us which we shall not attempt to answer here. At this point, we shall content ourselves with asking; Was there some defect or limitation, in Wordsworth's sense of joy in nature which decreed that it should not last?

It is not possible, within the compass of this essay,

to delineate the bearing of all of Wordsworth's experiences on his developing response to nature. He went to Cambridge in 1787, and was graduated in 1791. It would seem that his university life was a minor factor in his emotional and poetic growth, and in The Prelude (Bk.III), he pays but slight tribute to its influence. However, his return to the Lake District for the summer vacations of 1788 and 1789, (the latter spent with Dorothy), gave great stimulus to his love of nature, and the joy he felt amidst natural surroundings. "Perfect joy of heart" (IV,135), was his phrase for some of these vacation experiences.

When first I made
Once more the circuit of our little lake,
If ever happiness hath lodged with man,
That day consummate happiness was mine,
Wide-spreading, steady, calm, contemplative.
(IV,137-141)

It is relevant to the theme to note one reference to the vacation period which he spent with Dorothy, for her influence in future years was to be a notable one. Concerning this occasion, a passage addressed to Coleridge says:

I. . . was blest
Between these sundy wanderings with a joy
Above all joys, that seemed another morn
Risen on mid-noon; blest with the presence, Friend,
Of that sole sister. . . (VI,194-9)

A later vacation period took him, in company with his friend Robert Jones, on a walking tour through France and Switzerland. It was then that France was "standing on the top of golden hours" (VI,340). It was in connection with the crossing of the Alps that Wordsworth pays tribute to the power of the imagination, and the greatness of the soul. The entire

passage, (Prelude VI, 592-616), is noted here for its significance in relation to Wordsworth's developing attitude to nature. These lines are especially noteworthy:

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.
Under such banners militant, the soul
Seeks for no trophies, struggles for no spoils
That may attest her prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward,
Strong in herself and in beatitude
That hides her, like the mighty flood of Nile...
(VI, 604-614)

The 1805 version of The Prelude is stronger in its phrasing, having, for example, "access of joy" instead of "beatitude". Lacey³ notes the "similarity of this experience to that given in Tintern Abbey and a significant difference in Wordsworth's attitude to it." There seems to be here a growing tendency to look beyond what is immediately given in nature: our home is with infinitude; and, perhaps, a stoical sense of self-containment.

It was ~~On~~ On his first vacation that there occurred an experience which he never forgot. It was after a night of country sociability and dancing that Wordsworth was returning home amid "the sweetness of a common dawn" (IV, 330). In a familiar passage, he records this decisive point in his life, his dedication, not so much to the art of poetry as to the gospel of joy in nature:

³ Norman Lacey, Wordsworth's View of Nature, Cambridge, University Press, 1948. These quotations are on pp. 28 and 29.

I made no vows, but vows
 Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
 Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
 A dedicated spirit. On I walked
 In thankful blessedness which yet survives. (IV, 334-8)

But we must now turn to the consideration of a course of events which resulted in the eclipse, for a time, of all this blessedness - that dark passage in the poet's life when he sank into the abyss of despondency and despair. In 1791 Wordsworth returned to France where he spent many months. The country was in a ferment of revolutionary zeal. To the young poet it was a time of intellectual and emotional stimulation. He spent much of his time at Orleans, where he was subjected to the currents of discussion and thought eddying about the new ideas of the time. A company of officers was stationed there. Most of them were unsympathetic to the revolution, but one among them, Michel Beaupuy, was a supporter of it. He and Wordsworth became close friends, spending hours walking by the riverside and discussing the revolutionary cause. Through Beaupuy, the world of human relationships, and a sense of sympathy for the oppressed and under-privileged, were brought home to Wordsworth's mind in a vivid manner. His latent sympathy for man was awakened and strengthened:

my heart was all
 Given to the people, and my love was theirs.
 (Prel. IX, 123-4)

Wordsworth believed, or seemed at one time to believe, that nature was all-sufficient as a teacher of virtue. Book VIII of The Prelude is entitled: "Retrospect: Love of Nature Leading

to Love of Man". He felt that one of the early fruits of his joy in nature was a faith in humankind. Speaking of his early contacts with men of noble and dignified mien, the dalsmen^e of the Lake Country, he says in The Prelude :

Thus was man
Ennobled outwardly before my sight,
And thus my heart was early introduced
To an unconscious love and reverence
Of human nature. (VIII, 275-9)

God is addressed as the "God of Nature and of Man", and he expresses his gratitude for his early influences thus:

Happy, and now most thankful that my walk
Was guarded from too early intercourse
With the deformities of crowded life. (VIII, 330-3)

For a time Wordsworth became absorbed in the revolutionary cause in France. His early faith in human nature was strengthened by the influence of humanistic ideas underlying the revolutionary cause. That faith was shifted from its original foundation in nature, and placed upon a new and much less stable foundation, belief in reason. What faith he may have had in a transcendent God gave way to a man-centred religion.

A sovereign voice subsists within the soul,⁴
Arbiter undisturbed of right and wrong.
(X, 183-4)

And in his new-found faith, he asserts

That nothing hath a natural right to last
But equity and reason. (X, 265-6)

During his sojourn in France, Wordsworth met and fell in love with Annette Vallon. She bore him a child, Caroline.

⁴Italics mine.

It is an incident concerning which Wordsworth is strangely silent. This silence has led critics, particularly those who love psychological explanations, to attribute much in the poet's later life to this experience. It is mentioned here mainly to fill in the picture of this disturbed time in his life. Wordsworth doubtless felt the experience most keenly, and later was troubled to make a satisfactory financial adjustment, when it was clear that marriage would be unwise. It is altogether likely that it made up part of the cloud of darkness about to descend upon him, but its effects were not of a permanent nature.

When Wordsworth returned to England, he became acquainted with William Godwin, and accepted his ideas, among which was a belief in reason and its ascendancy over emotion. Godwinism was a purely this-worldly, humanistic doctrine. Whatever its merits, it was not for Wordsworth, and the attempt to graft it into his basic life-outlook was disastrous. The confusion in his mind grew; he sank deeper into the mire until this sole dependence on reason yielded the fruit of despair,

till, demanding formal proof,
 And seeking it in everything, I lost
 All feeling of conviction, and, *in fine*,
 Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
 Yielded up moral questions in despair. (Prel. XI, 301-5)

The foundations of his inner life were again subjected to great strain when war broke out between England and France in 1793. His espousal of the cause of man, which he identified with the cause of revolutionary France, made it impossible for him to support his country in the conflict.

At the same time, Wordsworth was an Englishman with a deep love for his own land, a love without jingoism, based simply on what the Lake District and its people meant to him.

A strong case can be made out for the view that this inner conflict was decisive for the poet. Middleton Murry finds in it the explanation for Wordsworth's tumult of mind: "He became a divided man for the first time when his love for his own country and his love for humanity were suddenly opposed to each other".⁵ The Prelude bears out this judgement:

No shock
Given to my moral nature had I known
Down to that very moment; neither lapse
Nor turn of sentiment that might be named
A revolution, save at this one time. (X, 268-71)

Why should the outbreak of war have proved so great a shock to Wordsworth? Murry thinks that as "a natural and concrete equalitarian", he had simply accepted the aims of the revolution as being quite compatible with the English way of life. He felt that the French peasantry were attempting to achieve somewhat the status already enjoyed by the dalesmen of Cumberland and Westmoreland, and to Wordsworth this was wholly good and right. For awhile he became a man without a country.

However, I think we must go beyond this analysis, without denying the force of what Murry has said. To go beyond it, we must interpret the shock as a phase of that eclipse of his true self suggested in his description of the nadir of his development, the yielding up of moral questions in despair. Wordsworth had drifted far from his original impulse from nature; he had lost touch with the joy that nature gives. Perhaps it would not be too much to say that

⁵ J. Middleton Murry, Heaven and Earth, London, Jonathan Cape, 1938, p. 272.

he had forgotten his dedication and what he was dedicated to. His slow, unconscious defection had brought him to the abyss of despair because there was no anchor to hold him steady. This is no suggestion that he should have been indifferent to the sufferings of humanity, or unconcerned about the issues of the day; rather, that he had somehow failed to find in nature all that he needed; perhaps that this joy as Wordsworth felt and conceived it was not wholly adequate to the world of action and affairs.

Wordsworth was a man of deep feeling, and it is clear that his inner life was nourished by feeling, derived from the sights and sounds of nature, and from contemplation based on them. The arid rationalism of this period of eclipse could never feed his soul. Nevertheless, Wordsworth came through this crisis to enter upon the most fruitful and creative period of his poetic career. I think we must acknowledge that this dark passage of his life was not without its influence for good upon him, even if that influence was only of a negative sort. At least, the recoil from despair, when it came, carried him forward rapidly; and the experience of darkness, during which he heard some of "the still, sad music of humanity" deepened his perception of life and mankind. But the rebound was not unassisted, and now we must turn for a moment to the sequence of events which led to ~~his~~ his restoration.

In 1795, Wordsworth's friend, Raisley Calvert, died, ~~leaving~~ leaving him a legacy of £900. The gift was a god-send which enabled him to fulfill a dream of his life, and establish a home

with Dorothy. There followed their residence at Racedown, in Dorset, and later at Alfoxden for a brief period. In 1799, they took Dove Cottage at Grasmere, the commencement of residence in the Lake District which was to be William's home for the rest of his life. A visit to Germany of some months' duration came between Alfoxden and Grasmere. In company with Dorothy, and through his growing friendship with Coleridge, whom he met at Racedown, the healing processes were at work in his mind, restoring to Wordsworth the joy in nature which was the gift of his childhood.

The Prelude abounds in passages paying tribute to the influence of Dorothy at this time. Immediately following his description of the abyss of despair, we have these lines:

Then it was -
Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good -
That the beloved Sister in whose sight
Those days were passed
Maintained for me a saving intercourse
With my true self.
She in the midst of all, preserved me still
A poet

The relationship between brother and sister was very close. William loved Dorothy with an almost passionate love; but more, he saw in her that happy, unquestioning acceptance of life which was for him the mark of a true human personality. Dorothy, in a letter to Jane Pollard⁶ said:

He was never tired of comforting his sister, he never left her in anger, he always met her with joy, he preferred her society to every other pleasure, or rather, when we were so happy as to be within each other's reach, he had no pleasure when we were compelled to be divided.

On the other hand, Dorothy made William's welfare, and his poetic career her first consideration. The atmosphere created

⁶Quoted by H.C.Duffin, in The Way of Happiness, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1947, on p.29

by her in the home at Racedown nursed his soul back to health, and led him again to nature as the fountain-head of joy and serenity. The point is well expressed in The Prelude:

And lastly . . . Nature's self, by human love
Assisted
Gave me that strength and knowledge full of peace,
Enlarged and never more to be disturbed,
Which through the steps of our degeneracy,
All degradation of this age, hath still
Upheld me, and upholds me at this day.
(X, 908-930, 1805 edition)

Duffin then adds: "Presently he points with exactitude to that secret and invulnerable happiness which is the characteristic of the 'way'!"⁷

In Nature still
Glorying, I found a counterpoise in her,
Which when the spirit of evil was at its height,
Maintained for me a secret happiness.

Much might be written of the beneficent influence which Coleridge exercised at this time. The younger poet brought to this adventure in friendship a great deal which was well-suited to the needs of the convalescent soul of Wordsworth: appreciation for his poetic genius, and psychological and philosophical insight. Miss Darbishire says: "There is no doubt that Coleridge's subtle, all-embracing mind brought help to Wordsworth in his struggle to adjust and repair his thought from the damaging effect of his recent experiences in France".⁸ The two saw each other frequently at Racedown, and even oftener at Alfoxden. Coleridge frankly admired Wordsworth's poetic ability as revealed in Salisbury Plain

⁷Duffin, The Way of Happiness, p.32

⁸Helen Darbishire, The Poet Wordsworth, (Clark Lectures, 1949), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950, p.30.

and The Borderers; and his enthusiasm and encouragement, added to Dorothy's unfailing faith, led Wordsworth out of the gloom of "the disease of Godwinism" to a healthy mind and outlook.

The blossoming of Wordsworth's genius followed at once. He and Coleridge collaborated in Lyrical Ballads, published in 1798. The years following were rich in creative productivity. Tintern Abbey, with which we began this account of Wordsworth's joy in nature, occupied a significant place in Lyrical Ballads, being the final poem in the book. There we have one of the finest expressions of this joy which the poet found in nature. For Wordsworth, his new-found happiness was essentially the restoration of ^{the memory of} his childhood joy in the presence of nature, "those first affections" and "shadowy recollections"

Which be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet the master light of all our seeing.

(Ode: Immortality, 150-3)

He had found an inner strength to offset and overcome the forces of decadence of the age. In the strength of his new-found joy, he felt equal to whatever life might bring. In one important sense, he had found a message for his own and every age, namely, that our salvation lies not in the multiplication of outward diversions, but in what Lord Tweedsmuir once referred to a "invisible means of support". Wordsworth found these in nature, and the God of nature. Whether such a philosophy would prove adequate in all circumstances is another question, but for the time it proved so to Wordsworth.

III

JOY IN NATURE - THE MATURE CONCEPTION

In the foregoing section, an attempt has been made to trace in outline the development of Wordsworth's joy in nature up to the period of his greatest creativity. This period was ushered in following the dark days of despondency, the "black-out" of joy due to the combination of events which befell him during the years 1793-1795: the French Revolution which diverted his mind from its true matrix in nature, and which, in its failure, finally disillusioned him with respect to utopian hopes for man; his love affair with Annette Vallon; and the arid rationalism of Godwinism. Now in the rebound from this depression, under influences which we have noted, his genius flowered and bore its finest fruit. Lacey says of the Race-down period: "It was then, when his attitude to nature was most nearly natural, being the legitimate joy of the convalescent at renewed health, that he wrote his best lyrics."¹ We must now turn to a closer examination of the mature conception of joy in nature, and to ask of what elements it was composed. The endeavour to do this will lead us to refer frequently to the poetry of the time of Wordsworth's supreme inspiration: Lyrical Ballads, and ~~the poems of~~ 1807.

We must first ask whether this Wordsworthian response to nature was something unique in kind, or was a sense which

¹Lacey: Wordsworth, p.67.

he shared with mankind at large, though possessing it himself in a very unusual degree. I do not think we can read Wordsworth without feeling that he was speaking for mankind and not for himself alone. When he says in the great Ode on Immortality:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,

 Trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home,

he is undoubtedly including all men. It may be objected that it is the way of philosophers and poets to think that all men are as they are, and all men perceive what they perceive. In so far as they are concerned with the traits of our common humanity, they are right. It is our belief that there is in all men, as a native endowment, a response to nature which is made up of appreciation and joy. While this response may be deadened by custom and the artificiality of life, if not completely killed, it is still the heritage of every child in some degree.

Having said this however, it is necessary to add that Wordsworth possessed a more than ordinary sensitivity to the sights and sounds of nature. Note these lines from The Prelude:

. whate'er of Terror or of Love
 Or Beauty, Nature's daily face put on
 From transitory passion, unto this
 I was as sensitive as waters are
 To the sky's influence; (III,133-7)

It is difficult to say how much of this sensitivity was native endowment, how much the result of early environment. Childhood amid scenes of beauty, childhood uncluttered by confusing and

distracting influences, could not fail to have exercised a strong formative bearing upon him. Eye and ear became early attuned to what nature had to give. The Lucy poems celebrate this early influence of nature on human development. Wordsworth was himself the living example of the truth he proclaimed. He became a close observer of nature through the two senses, sight and hearing.

The eye - it cannot choose but see;
We cannot bid the ear be still.
(Expostulation and Reply, 17-18)

It was one of Wordsworth's characteristic beliefs that nature and the mind of man are in close correspondence with each other. Herbert Read refers to "the exquisite functioning of this interlocked universe of Mind and Nature".² Basic to this conception is the belief that man and nature are separate entities, but the mind and the external world mesh, as gears, being perfectly suited to each other. Perhaps the finest expression of this belief in his poetry occurs in the fragment of The Recluse:

For the discerning intellect of man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.
(Conclusion of Book I) (p. 300)

I take these words to mean that through the correspondence of mind and nature, the common sights and sounds of every day shall be able to give such joy as we imagine to have existed in the golden age of the past. This union of mind and nature is made

²Herbert Read, Wordsworth, p.184.

even more explicit a few lines further on:

While my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual mind
 to the external world
Is fitted - and how exquisitely, too -
The external world is fitted to the mind.
 (Recluse, Book I) . . . p. 590)

Yet Wordsworth did not observe nature scientifically, though he did observe quite accurately. Nor was he a slave to the senses. Bradley speaks of "a certain hostility to sense"³ in Wordsworth. The senses with him were auxiliary to feeling, and were valued for what they stimulated in the mind. Readers of The Prelude will recall the well known passage in which he expresses disappointment at the sight of Mt. Blanc, because the reality did not measure up to the picture in his mind, (VI, 525-8); he

 grieved
To have a soulless image on the eye
That had usurped upon a living thought
That never more could be.

The implication is plain that the "living thought" in this case was a more fruitful source of joy than the "soulless image".

The same theme recurs in Yarrow Unvisited. Here William argues with Dorothy in favour of by-passing the Yarrow, and says,

Be Yarrow stream unseen, unknown,
It must, or we shall rue it.
We have a vision of our own;
Ah, why should we undo it?

For when we're there, although 'tis fair,
'Twill be another Yarrow. (49-56)

However, the harvest of the eye and, to a less extent, ~~of the ear~~ of the ear remain the foundation of Wordsworth's joy in nature.

³Bradley, Oxford Lectures on Poetry, London, Macmillan & Co., 1955, p. 130.

In that great poem, Tintern Abbey, which is a philosophical exposition of Wordsworth's views, we have the senses put in their true place in his experience:

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. (105-111)

Here is the poet, not only receiving from nature through the senses, but also contributing to sensation through the mind, and finding the result wholly satisfying to mind and moral sense.

A mood of receptivity is essential if we are to receive the sensations which are the gift of nature. Wordsworth's expression for this receptivity is "wise passiveness":

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

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

(Expostulation and Reply: 21-28)

This mood of wise passiveness is contrasted with the approach of mere curiosity, or scientific reason. The latter is not to be intruded upon the process, or it will surely destroy the worth of the experience:

Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things -
We murder to dissect. (The Tables Turned, 26-8)

We thus have not only a complete rejection of Godwinism, but the conviction that nature, rightly approached, can give all that is needful to the life of man.

that is needful to the life of man.

We have already implied that Wordsworth was more than a mere sensationalist. He believed we must go beyond the senses. The senses, indeed, point beyond themselves, and are but channels of a deeper kind of experience. There is, no doubt, much satisfaction in the simple observation of natural beauty, particularly when we are at a certain stage of life, that of unreflecting and unself-conscious receptivity. But the joy that meant so much to Wordsworth had a deeper origin; it arose in a kind of mystical, or semi-mystical experience induced by the observation of beauty and wonder in nature. When we say a "mystical" in this connection, we do not wish to suggest any theological implications; we simply mean to say that, for Wordsworth, such experiences of nature stimulated a heightened emotional response which suffused his whole being with a sense of happiness. Claydon, in an article on this aspect of Wordsworth's experience, refers to them as "numinous", and says that they come from the stimulation of the faculty by appropriate sense impressions.⁴ In a passage in the concluding book of The Prelude, following his description of the ascent of Snowdon, Wordsworth enlarges upon the influence of sense upon thought and feeling. Speaking of men who are capable of receiving such impressions, he says:

⁴W.A. Claydon, The Numinous in the Poetry of Wordsworth, The Hibbert Journal, Vol. XXVIII, July 1930.

in a world of life they live,
 By sensible impressions not enthralled,
 But by the quickening impulse made more prompt
 To hold fit converse with the spiritual world.

 Such minds are truly from the Deity,
 For they are Powers; and hence the highest bliss
 That flesh can know is theirs. (XIV, 105-114)

This passage but reflects the sense of the passage in The Prelude (II, 302ff) where Wordsworth speaks of the "sublimar joy", "by form or image unprofaned," i.e., a deeper joy that is independent of the senses. Wordsworth's joy in nature is thus not the simple pleasure which many have in looking at the picturesque; it is a joy stimulated in the mind by the beauty and awful grandeur of nature, when these sense impressions are assimilated in the mind, and worked upon by the imagination. When we speak of the imagination, we are dealing with an activity of the mind which played a great part in Wordsworth's life and conception of joy in nature. For him, imagination was the faculty or activity of the mind by which sense impression/s are transmuted, glorified, made the fitting material for poetry, and the source of joy in life.

Wordsworth's own estimate of the place of imagination in his response to nature is described thus in The Prelude:

.... imagination which in truth
 Is but another name for absolute power
 And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
 And Reason in her most exalted mood. (XIV, 189-192)

Or we may take the passage

Imagination - here the Power so called
 Through sad incompetence of human speech,
 That awful Power (VI, 592-594)

He and ^{his friend} Jones had just crossed the Alps, and the moment was one of great feeling for Wordsworth. It was a moment of vision, vision beyond the sight of the awe-inspiring grandeur of the scene

the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world. (VI, 600-602)

And what does he see? Inwardly, this conviction lays hold of him:

Our destiny, our beings 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. (VI, 604-609)

Books XII and XIII of The Prelude are entitled, "IMAGINATION AND TASTE", HOW IMPAIRED AND RESTORED". It is necessary to comment briefly on some passages here.

Wordsworth's account of the eclipse of his joy in nature is given in terms of the perversion of the power of the imagination:

What wonder then, if, to a mind so far
Perverted, even the visible Universe
Fell under the dominion of a taste
Less spiritual. (XII, 88-91)

Imagination had begun to exercise her power early in his life. He speaks of "visitings of imaginative power". Imagination had been stimulated not only by the beautiful forms and sounds of nature, but also by the fearful and awe-inspiring. The impact of the gibbet on Penrith Beacon on his mind is recounted here, (XII, 225-266), but there are many others to indicate such influences. He was "fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (I, 302) The night he stole the boat, and saw a huge peak rise like dark accusing forms; and of a different order, the sudden sight

of the moon shining on clouds pierced by mountain peaks as they ascended Snowden, both these and many more such experiences were part of the impressive setting in which his imagination developed. Referring to this latter incident and the comments that follow the account in The Prelude (XIV, 1-129), Miss Darbishire says, "You may say that this is a very vague account of the functions of the imagination, but it is the best you will ever get from Wordsworth".⁵ Nevertheless, she calls attention to certain elements in the account: "the mysterious link with infinity"; the creative power of the imagination; and the use of the senses as the "gateway for the soul". These are all functions of the imagination as Wordsworth conceived it, functions which make it creative, and the channel of joy to the mind possessing the faculty.

Reference has already been made to the fact that Wordsworth was a man of feeling. He seemed to live by feeling, and when rationalism superseded emotion in his experience, the inner life ^{was} suffocated. Feeling is constantly set over against reason, i.e. reason as a dry logical process. Without the warmth of feeling he could not write poetry, nor could he truly live. Poetry for Wordsworth is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", taking its rise [more often than not] from "emotion recollected in tranquillity". Wordsworth possessed the imaginative power to recreate in memory the beauty and the glory of past experiences - to feel again,

⁵ Darbishire, Wordsworth, p. 117.

probably in a more intense manner, the emotion originally associated with nature. One of the most joyous of his lyrics, "I wandered lonely as a cloud," based on the sight of daffodils along Ullswater, ends thus: "

For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

And in what is surely one of the greatest short poems in the language, The Solitary Reaper, the concluding lines are

The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

The imagination is a power capable of rekindling the feelings of the past, and of re-creating the joy originally given by the direct experience of nature. So it is a factor of the first importance in relation to Wordsworth's response to nature. Both feeling, and serenity of soul are thus given by nature.

From nature doth emotion come, and moods
Of calmness, equally are nature's gift.
(Prelude XIII, 1&2)

Moreover, it is through the imagination that Wordsworth found nature to teach man wisdom. It is this wisdom which may constitute a message for this anxious and distraught age of ours, now aroused to hope, now depressed, by reports of passing events. Nature

gives birth
To no impatient or fallacious hopes,
No heat of passion or excessive zeal,
No vain conceits; provokes to no quick turns
Of self-applauding intellect; but trains
To meekness, and exalts by humble faith;

Holds up before the mind intoxicate
 With present objects, and the busy dance
 Of things that pass away, a temperate show
 Of objects that endure; and by this course
 Disposes her to seek
 In man, and in the frame of social life,
 Whate'er there is desiresable and good
 Of kindred permanence." (Prelude XIII, 23-37)

Wordsworth was a visionary. "Vision was his greatest gift", says Raleigh.⁶ He looked long and intently at nature and human life, with the result that he saw things hidden from the general view. His visionary powers have been rightly described as mystical. He was a mystic, but in using this word which is so variously interpreted, it is necessary to make clear what is meant by it. Miss Batho⁷ attempts to equate Wordsworth's mysticism with that of the great religious mystics, as being of the same general pattern. This seems an unnecessary elaboration and complication of what is essentially an instinct for the invisible. Wordsworth described his own mysticism without using the word when he said in 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.

This ability to see into the life of things, and, to use Arnold's phrase about Sophocles, "to see life steadily
 "and to see it whole", is the truest fruit of a profound and sane mysticism. One likes to think that it is a native

⁶Walter Raleigh, Wordsworth, London, Edward Arnold & Co., 1932, p.219.

⁷Edith C. Batho, The Later Wordsworth, Cambridge, The University Press, 1933. See pp.306-311

passion of the soul, too often smothered as Wordsworth saw by the sordid experiences of life. In Wordsworth this native passion was fostered by his early association with nature. As we have mentioned, he doubtless brought to nature a more than ordinary intelligence, gifts for seeing and feeling keener than those possessed by most men. But the joy which he experienced in association with nature quickened insight, and stimulated the imagination which is one aspect of the mystical sense.

Wordsworth's mysticism is not asceticism. It does not despise the senses in favour of the spirit. It simply sees beyond sense. One of the secret's of Wordsworth's joy was his readiness to see the natural world as instinct with life. The universe was the living garment of God. "Everywhere a vital pulse was felt", (Prelude VIII, 480). The Prelude seems to vibrate with life in many passages, life which is eager and hopeful, ever ready to break forth in beauteous forms and motions. So Wordsworth attributed to the things of nature the power to feel emotions akin to those of human beings.

And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.
(Lines Written in Early Spring)

Imagination thus enables the poet to enter sympathetically into the life of nature, and to see nature and man as parts of a larger whole. An element in his joy is this deepened sense of oneness with nature, and his ability to relate his own feelings to the imagined feelings of natural objects. In Hartleap Well Wordsworth adds this to the theme:

Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.

Here he has expressed a sentiment to which Albert Schweitzer, the great exponent of reverence for life, would have given full approval. I think we may say that one of the fruits of Wordsworth's joy was reverence for life. Without going as far as Schweitzer, we may still agree that here too is a word relevant to contemporary life. If man in his present artificial civilization could restore the bonds that link him to nature, he might well experience a rebirth of a true reverence for every living thing.

We are now led another step forward in our understanding of the function of the imagination. H. W. Garrod calls attention to a passage in The Prelude, (I, 597-612) in which Wordsworth says that the memory of things experienced long before became

By the impressive discipline of fear
By pleasure and repeated happiness, (603-4)

"habitually dear" and were "fastened to the affections". He comments thus: "The glory of the senses passes into a glory of the imagination precisely by being fastened to the affections."⁸

This theme is taken up again in Book XIV of The Prelude. And here Wordsworth introduces the word love and the concept of intellectual love:

Imagination having been our theme,
So also hath that intellectual Love,
For they are each in each, and cannot stand
Dividually. (XIV, 206-9)

It may be true, as Lacey says: "It was a gain in depth to speak of 'love' rather than 'nature',"⁹ but it is by no means clear

⁸H. W. Garrod, Wordsworth, Lectures and Essays, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1925, p.128

⁹Lacey: Wordsworth's View of Nature, p.55.

that the two should be contrasted in this way. The passage which relates love and imagination might well be quoted in full:

This spiritual Love acts not nor can exist
Without Imagination, which, in truth,
Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.
This faculty hath been the feeding source
Of our long labour: we have traced the stream
From the blind cavern whence is faintly heard
Its natal murmur; followed it to light
And open day; accompanied its course
Among the ways of Nature, for a time
Lost sight of it bewildered and engulfed;
Then given it greeting as it rose once more
In strength, reflecting from its placid breast
The works of man and face of human life;
And lastly, from its progress have we drawn
Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought
Of human Being, Eternity, and God. (XIV, 188-205)

It is clear from this passage that Wordsworth understood love as working with the imagination to inspire his poetry: "the feeding source of our long labour"; and also to quicken faith in human life, immortality, and God. This is a tall order, and yet, perhaps not without reason. Nature is still the source of all that sustains the true life of man - but nature must be worked upon by imagination and love if it is to yield its finest fruits. Joy is the issue of this union, and joy would seem to sum up all the best that nature gives. That such a union can take place, with such results, is due to the fact that the mind and nature are perfectly fitted to each other. Herbert Read has said, "Wordsworth's philosophy is therefore not restricted to a philosophy of nature; it is a theory of the Mind and its relations to the external world."¹⁰

¹⁰Read: Wordsworth, p. 181

He adds on the next page, "The mind with him is always the creative masculine principle; Nature is always the feminine or reproductive principle"; which is but a further elaboration of Wordsworth's use of the word "wedded" in the same connection. Thus all the fine fruits of nature are realized through its union with the mind of man.

There is certainly another question to which we are inevitably led by this whole consideration of mysticism and the mind's relationship to nature: did Wordsworth believe in God? And how did this belief enter into his joyous response to nature? There is no doubt that the answer to the first question is "yes", but from there on, we find ourselves in a region of some uncertainty. If we were to ask, In what sort of God did Wordsworth believe, the answer is by no means clear. Inasmuch as we are not primarily concerned here with Wordsworth's religion, we are not bound to answer in detail. We can be sure that he believed in a God who was the spiritual Being behind all life and existence. He was no pantheist, even though he sometimes spoke in terms that suggested a vague spiritualism or animism. If we may turn to Read again, we have this statement of the case, "For Wordsworth, however, nature had her own life, which was independent of ours, though a part of the same Godhead."¹¹ Whatever this may be, it is certainly not pantheism, the doctrine that all things are God, or God is the sum of all things. It is however, a doctrine of an immanent God, and this is evident in much that Wordsworth wrote.

¹¹Read, Wordsworth, p. 184.

The God who is immanent in nature, is also immanent in the mind of man.

One key passage in this connection is surely this from Tintern Abbey:

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,
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.

This is a noble and beautiful passage, in which Wordsworth carries the mind of the reader with him. It would not satisfy the Christian theologian, looking for a doctrinal statement, but it would dissatisfy him rather by what it does not say than by what it does. It is far removed from gross naturalism, and could only be said by a man who was convinced of the spiritual nature of the universe - a universe instinct with life and meaning. Wordsworth's universe is permeated with joy, and gives joy to man because God is in it. He goes much beyond this in the direction of the Christian view of God and the universe in other writings. The closing books of the Prelude contain examples, such as the following in which he approaches a personal view of God as a transcendent spirit:

this I speak
In gratitude to God, who feeds our hearts
For his own service; knoweth, loveth us,
When we are unregarded by the world. (XIII, 275-8)

No consideration of Wordsworth's mature conception of joy in nature, would be complete without some reference to The Excursion, the only completed portion of his projected philosophical poem "On man, on nature, and on human life," (Recluse 1). The poetical worth of this poem has been sufficiently debated; its significance for us is as a thoughtful statement of the poet's mature response to nature. "It represents", says Lacey, "the only comprehensive statement of his mature view of life."¹² The major portion of the early books was written by 1806, but with the exception of Book I, it was later than Tintern Abbey. The work as a whole has been criticized as an attempt to bring his views of nature more into line with Christian orthodoxy. No doubt we have here a re-statement of his views in more orthodox form; the "first fine careless rapture" of his response to nature is largely missing; but it is still open to debate whether he has denied the implications of his earlier statements, or simply added to them.

The Excursion is in semi-dramatic form, making use of the conversational device to express the poet's philosophical views. The characters are: the Wanderer, who is the mouthpiece for the poet's ideas; the poet himself who interjects remarks which often provide a setting for the Wanderer's speeches; The Solitary, who is "the personification of the restless, intellectual Wordsworth of the Godwinian

¹² Lacey: Wordsworth's View of Nature, p.105.

days, and also the lover of Annette;"¹³ and the Pastor, spokesman for the church.

In the early books, (I - IV) Wordsworth relived his own experience of the eclipse of his joy in Godwinian rationalism, and his recovery of lightness of heart. Books III and IV are entitled respectively, "Despondency" and "Despondency Corrected". However laboured, and as some would say, uninspired, these may be as poetry (though there are passages of beauty and worth), they do possess great significance in the light they throw on Wordsworth's maturing thought. It may be true, as Lacey says, that the "ideas of The Excursion are not those by which Wordsworth influenced the world",¹⁴ yet, insofar as these ideas are a development of his earlier views, they cannot be dismissed as of no relevance. I think that it is quite safe to say that The Excursion, for all its difference of mood and approach, represents no sharp and divergent break with the views we have been discussing.

The Wanderer's childhood and youth followed lines beloved by Wordsworth,

So the foundations of his mind were laid.
In such communion, not from terror free,
~~While yet a child, and long before his time,~~
While yet a child, and long before his time,
Had he perceived the presence and the power
Of greatness; (Excursion, I, 132-6)

He too felt the impress of nature's beauty on his mind, and it spoke to him its mystical message of the divine:

¹³ Lacey, Wordsworth's View of Nature, p.108.

¹⁴ Lacey, op. cit., p.106

in them did he live,
 And by them did he live; they were his life.
 In such access of mind, in such high hour
 Of visitation from the living God.... (I, 209-212)

In one further reference we feel again the pulse of living joy
 which fed on nature:

by nature tuned
 And constant disposition of his thoughts
 To sympathy with man, he was alive
 To all that was enjoyed, where'er he went,
 And all that was endured. . . ~~xxxx~~ (I, 362-367)

There is a great deal more which might be invoked to
 show that, in the main, The Excursion is an elaboration of
 ideas already present in germ in other writings. In many cases
 these ideas are more explicit than elsewhere, particularly the
 conception of God in nature, and the divine Providence. Yet,
 underlying all is the same delight in nature, though given in
 more sober tones; and the same confidence in nature's sufficien-
 cy for the life of man. Nature may not here be the sole support
 of our life, but it is an indispensable one. Serenity and joy
 are still the lot of man who derives his true life from nature.

The Solitary, in his account of his own despondency,
 which is an expression of the failure of rationalism in the life
 of man, asks where man may find

a better sanctuary
 From doubt and sorrow, than the senseless grave?
 (III, 223-4)

and he confesses his dejection in the words:

Night is than day more acceptable; sleep
 Doth, in my estimate of good, appear
 A better state than waking; death than sleep.
 (III, 277-9)

Such is the nemesis of life divorced from nature. Such love
 of death comes when life is cut off from the joy that nature
 gives.

~~As evident in the solitary's despondency is his in-~~

An element in the Solitary's despondency is his inordinate love of peace of mind. He praises the

" prime object of a wise man's aim,
Security from shock of accident,
Release from fear; (III, 362-4)

and speaks again of

craving peace,
The central feeling of all happiness.
(III, 381-2)

This seems to be an expression of escapism, pure and simple. It is a desire, not to solve problems, but to be rid of them. It comes close to the experience of the poet when he "yielded up moral questions in despair". Peace of mind is undoubtedly good, but when the pursuit of it becomes an obsession, it is symptomatic of a failure in adjustment to life, particularly in the handling of adversity. A modern psychologist has referred to it as "a thinly disguised longing for death." In the Solitary's words, this longing for death is explicit. He, as the purely intellectual and rational man, as opposed to the man of feeling, was at the end of his tether. The love of life has yielded to despair.

Now all this was a transcript of Wordsworth's own experience. He too descended to the depths, but under the influences of nature and Dorothy and Coleridge, he was restored to his normal, healthy, love of life. In the role of the Solitary, as in that of the Wanderer, he is able to speak out of his own experience. Indeed, the Solitary's position is stated so convincingly that one wonders whether the attraction of escapism is not the source of a continuing conflict in the poet's mind.

There seems no doubt that Wordsworth loved his independence, and solitude, and peace, and his own way. The choice of The Recluse as a title for his projected poem is indicative of a bias in that direction. Wordsworth recognized this leaning in Elegiac Stanzas, when he said:

Farewell, farewell, the heart that lives alone,
Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind.
Such happiness, wherever it be known,
Is to be pitied; for 'tis surely blind.

But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
And frequent sights of what is to be borne.
Such sights, or worse, as are before me here.--
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

This poem was ^{written} in memory of Wordsworth's brother John who was lost at sea. The greatness of Wordsworth as a man lay partly in this, that he was able to accept and use the tragic experiences of life, and build them into his own character. There appears here also, one of those early indications that nature alone is not the all-sufficient support for life. The Wanderer, in his answer to the Solitary embodies Wordsworth's later thinking:

One adequate support
For the calamities of mortal life
Exists - one only; an assures belief
That the procession of our fate, howe'er
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power; ~~ix~~
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to good.
(IV, 10-17)

Wordsworth never fully overcame his love of retirement, of "distance from the Kind". Perhaps he reacted too strongly from ^mthe disillusionment of his brief excursion into the affairs of the day at the time of the French Revolution.

This is no criticism of Wordsworth, for he was able to make his own great contribution to mankind. Moreover, he was essentially a lover of life, and in his works he represents the affirmative approach - the yes-saying attitude of the Christian, as distinguished from the negative attitude of the East, the longing for Nirvana.

Perhaps these two tendencies exist in all of us. In our day, the retreat from active participation in the responsibilities of life, and the overwhelming desire for freedom from care need to be met by the Wordsworthian confidence in man's ability to confront all the situations of life, and to find his joy in living. In many of his poems in Lyrical Ballads, and the 1807 volumes, the instinct for life is dominant. Laurence Housman noted this when in his introduction to A Wordsworth Anthology he said, "The Old Cumberland Beggar, The Two Gypsy Boys, are characters independent of morality, but they have a hold on life which makes them attractive."

A belief in the essential goodness of nature, and hence of life, must be a starting point for good, useful, and happy living. Our present-day insulation from the life of nature has too often blinded us to this elementary fact. Wordsworth never doubted this. Garrod puts it this way: "Wordsworth starts then, from the position not only that nature is good, but that it is from the natural goodness of the senses, operating simply and directly, that we derive 'the fountain-light of all our day'".¹⁵

¹⁵ Garrod, Wordsworth, Lectures and Essays, p.99

This belief, and its relevance for a philosophy of life is well implied in these great words from The Prelude, already quoted, but worthy of repetition:

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. (VI,604-8)

One final word needs to be said before we lay aside The Excursion. The Wanderer, in his answer to the Solitary, puts before man as a life objective "attainable by all; "Peace in ourselves, and union with our God" (IV,1116). We are not to think that this is merely a repetition of the craving for peace. It is evident that this peace has a different basis. It is the peace of faith, of harmony with nature, and with the Spirit of the universe. It is a peace nourished by constant intercourse with nature as divine. It is the response heard by the child with his ear to the sea-shell, hearing "authentic tidings of invisible things" (IV,1144).

Even such a shell the universe itself
Is to the ear of Faith. (IV,1141-2)

This mystical relationship with nature feeds the soul with peace and joy, because nature is the living garment of God.

IV

JOY IN NATURE - ITS LIMITATIONS

An attempt has been made to indicate some of the elements that entered into Wordsworth's mature conception of joy in nature. This Wordsworthian response to nature was at its purest in the Racedown period of his life, that time when his own recovery from despondency was taking place. Then, in the rebound ~~from~~ from despair, in the first rapture of conversion, if we may so call it, from arid rationalism, he was possessed by joy. For the time it absorbed his being, and found expression in such well-known lines as "One impulse from a vernal wood" from the poem The Tables Turned, and the lines of To My Sister:

There is a blessing in the air
Which seems a sense of joy to yield
To the bare trees and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field.

.
Love now a universal birth,
From heart to heart is stealing,
From earth to man, from man to earth,
It is the hour of feeling.

The Lyrical Ballads contains many expressions of this whole-souled joy in nature. The poet seems almost impatient of any suggestion that this is not a complete and fully satisfying philosophy of life. He repudiates the intellect, (Books, 'tis a dull and endless strife- The Tables Turned) as a channel of truth, now that feeling is all-pervasive. He was completely given to nature.

But indications have already been noted that Wordsworth did not long remain in this state of unreflecting joy. Other

notes began to appear in his poetry. The simple, unself-conscious response to nature began to prove less than adequate to all his knowledge and experience of life. Garrod puts the question thus: "Can nature keep her child?"¹ The answer to that question can only be "no", even if that "no" must be somewhat qualified. The rapture of conversion inevitably fades. The tomorrows bring new problems, new truths, which cannot be fitted into a framework composed entirely of feeling. From the time that Wordsworth took up residence at Grasmere, he was increasingly aware of the inadequacy of spontaneous joy in nature. In a number of poems he grapples nobly and manfully with the problem. He must continually go beyond the sense of joy. It is surely part of the greatness of Wordsworth that he recognized that this initial response to nature was inadequate, and some of his finest poems bear witness to the concern he felt over this problem. At the same time, it may not be out of place to suggest here that part of his failure lay also in his unwillingness or inability to work out a consistent philosophy of life, in which his basic dependence on nature was fully integrated with his increasing experience of life. There seems to have been in Wordsworth a wistful looking back to the time of his childlike joy, a tendency from which he never wholly freed himself. Did he allow himself to be too tightly bound to the past? Did this lingering desire

¹Garrod; Wordsworth Lectures and Essays, pp. 104, 106.

for a rapture no longer possible, hold him back from the fulfilment which his poetic genius promised?

It is not possible within the compass of this essay to examine all the evidence in the poems relative to this change in Wordsworth's outlook. As early as Tintern Abbey, the more chastened note had made its appearance, as in the lines referring to "the still, sad, music of humanity." ^eReference will here be made to some of the better known poems of the period, commencing with Resolution and Independence.

In this poem we have set forth the old unalloyed joy in nature, but it is not unmingled with sadness. It is a poem of the out-of-doors. The sun shines in a cloudless sky. The morning joy of nature is portrayed as only Wordsworth can do it:

All things that love the sun are out of doors;
The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;

But an unforeseen cloud arose, eclipsing the sun of gladness, the cloud of the poet's "fears and fancies". Life's business may not always be a summer mood:

There may come another day to me -
Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.

It is clear that his erstwhile joy is not quite sufficient for the evil that is feared, or even for the fear itself. It is in this mood, that the words and example of the Leech Gatherer come as an answer to the poet's sadness. He took courage as he realized the power of the human mind to triumph over circumstances.

"God", said I, "be my help and stay secure;
I'll think of the leech-gatherer on the lonely
moor."

Resolution and Independence, written in 1802, shows Wordsworth's early suspicion of the inadequacy of unaided nature. He had been living

As if all needful things would come unsought
To genial faith, still rich in genial good;

but it is not enough. Lacey comments: "He takes encouragement from the decrepit old man, but that he should need to, hints that the religion of nature has fallen on difficult days." ²

There are two poems composed in 1805 which are relevant to this theme: Ode to Duty, and Elegiac Stanzas. In both of them we are confronted with Wordsworth's growing feeling that nature is not enough to support and guide the life of man through the maze of human problems and difficulties. The former of these poems represents a rather sharp break with the general tenor of Wordsworth's subject matter up to this time, inasmuch as he invokes Duty, "Stern Daughter of the Voice of God" as a "light to guide, a rod to check the erring, and reprove." There is a less easy confidence in the inherent goodness of human nature, "frail humanity", so that a more demanding discipline is now called for.

At the same time, Wordsworth cannot repudiate the conviction that some at least do not require Duty as a taskmaster:

There are who ask not if thine eye
Be on them; who in love and truth,
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth.
Glad hearts, without reproach or blot;
Who do thy work, and know it not -

²Lacey: Wordsworth's View of Nature, p.96.

Was he thinking of Dorothy when he wrote these lines? With her in mind, he never could deny the possibility of the anima naturaliter Christiana - the life that of itself loved and followed the right course. She was to him the perfect example of joy in nature:

Her the birds
And every flower she met with, could they but
Have known her, would have loved. Methought such
charm
Of sweetness did her presence breathe around
That all the trees, and all the silent hills
And everything she look'd on, should have had
An intimation how she bore herself
Towards them and to all creatures. God delights
In such a being; for her common thoughts ~~are~~
Are piety, her life is blessedness. ³

He seemed to feel that hers was the perfect response to nature, and since she meant so much to him, he mistakenly tried to experience nature as she did. In the Ode to Duty, Wordsworth still looks to the time when this will be the pattern of life for all:

Serene will be our days, and bright,
And happy will our nature be,
When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security.

But it was still not so with him. Inclination and desire had failed to provide direction; freedom alone had not sufficed: "Me this unchartered freedom tires, I feel the weight of chance desires." So with something of relief he commends himself to the guidance of Duty from this hour.

In February 1905, Wordsworth was saddened by the loss of his beloved brother John, who was drowned in a storm at sea. This event is reflected in Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle. It is based upon the contrast between

³Prelude, 1805, XI, 214-223,
quoted by Lacey. Wordsworth's View of Nature. p.70

Peele Castle as Wordsworth knew it through weeks of calm sunny weather, and the Peele Castle of Sir George Beaumont's picture, lashed by storm. Here was an allegory of Wordsworth's experience. It was a critical year in his life, and its decisive nature is borne out in this poem. For him at least, the period of serene happiness was shattered by the storm of sorrow that came into his life. Speaking of this contrast, Wordsworth says:

Such, in the fond illusion of my heart,
Such picture would I at that time have made;
And seen the soul of truth in every part,
A steadfast peace that might not be betrayed.

So once it would have been - 'tis so no more;
I have submitted to a new control.

His break with the easy optimism and unreflecting joy of the past could not be more clearly stated. Though once he could have looked upon human life as an untroubled journey, he now confesses that this was an illusion. "A deep distress hath humanized my soul."

Not for a moment could I now behold
A smiling sea, and be what I have been:
The feeling of my loss will ne'er be ~~the~~ old;
This which I know, I speak with mind serene.

We can only say that Wordsworth has here been grappling with one of the most baffling problems with which we have to do: the problem of finding a philosophy of life which will do justice both to good and to evil, to joy and to sorrow. Both are part of human experience, and, while it may be comparatively simple to make place for one, Wordsworth was deeply aware of both. If the serenity of mind, of which he speaks in the line quoted above was genuine, he has mastered the first lesson: that we must at least accept, without despair or rebellion

the afflictions that life brings. Perhaps he might have been able to learn this from nature also, if he had been able to think of nature in large enough terms, and especially to think of nature in relation to the God of nature.

The Ode: Intimations of Immortality is the best statement of Wordsworth's loss of his original sense of joy in nature which we have in a single poem. In the first four stanzas, the question is asked; in the remainder, an answer is offered. Let us look at the Ode in detail.

We must note that the first four stanzas were composed in 1802; the remainder in 1806. Already at the earlier date, Wordsworth was aware of something passing from his experience of nature. In this magnificent and beautiful poem, he looks back to the time of simple, rapturous joy, the time of visionary, mystical joy in meadow, grove, and stream. He writes feelingly of the joy of May-time, and all the sights and sounds of nature: land and sea giving themselves up to jollity. But there is the insistent note of sadness: something is missing. He asks:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream? (ll.56-7)

H.W.Garrod sums up the matter very well: "Until now he has lived in 'the glory and the freshness' of the senses, an immediate report given by the senses of a 'principle of joy' in the world. But with advancing years this report comes to be fitful and dim. 'The things that I have seen, I now can see no more.'" ⁴

⁴ H. W. Garrod, Wordsworth, Lectures and Essays, p.114.

In answering his own question, Wordsworth attempts an explanation of this fading vision in terms of the doctrine of pre-existence. We need not discuss here the validity of the doctrine, or the sense in which Wordsworth accepted and used it. It does not seem necessary to give the lines referring to pre-existence a literal interpretation in order to make sense of them. Believing in the essential goodness of human nature, Wordsworth knew that the living of our days, the "business, love, or strife," must inevitably carry us further from the east. The tragedy of growing away from the natural piety of childhood is heightened by our own ignorance of what we are losing, and our eagerness to lose it:

Thou little child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife? (121-5)

If we leave aside the doctrine of pre-existence as literally understood, what is Wordsworth talking about? Or can we say what is lost with maturing years? We are all aware of changes which take place in mental attitude as we advance from childhood to maturity. These are changes which are inevitable, as Wordsworth recognized. The child is simple, unaffected, natural, whole-hearted, in his response; the older person is more complex and self-conscious in his. The child may become absorbed in self-forgetful rapture; the older person cannot easily escape the pressure of daily concerns. The self and its affairs will intrude upon moments of reverie

or mystical experience, and mar or destroy them. In the first flush of his renewed faith in nature, Wordsworth was capable of these visionary experiences, and of a renewal of childhood's mystical response to nature. As the first rapture subsided, such experiences became more rare, and he lamented their passing.

The real failure in human development, however, is not the loss of childhood's simplicity and self-forgetfulness, which is in any case inevitable, an accompaniment of normal growing up but is rather the failure to find a new basis for feeling and thought. How did Wordsworth succeed in this latter endeavour? Certainly he sought a new position, and the closing stanzas of the Ode deal with the compensations in a life that has lost the visionary gleam. I think that we may say that Wordsworth's success was only partial. He faced the problem; he pointed the way through; but he seemed not to have followed his own guideposts in any thorough-going manner.

There is mingled resignation, acceptance, and fortitude in the lines (179-186):

We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

As has been said, there are here pointers to a solution to the problem. I think Wordsworth was aware of the direction he must take to find it. The last stanza is a grand expression

of the new attitude to nature:

I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway. (190-1)

Nature will still inspire joy, but it will be a more thoughtful, less mystical joy. Gone are the days when he will be tempted to doubt the senses for the rapture of the feeling within. ~~xx~~ The world has been too much with him for that to be any longer possible. He still loves the brooks; "The innocent brightness of a new-born day is lovely yet"; but it is no longer a world made up only of Wordsworth and nature. He has "kept watch o'er man's mortality" and the tenderness, and joys, and fears of the human heart have crowded in, and these bind him to earth.

The Ode has the ring of joy, at least on the surface, but it also has undertones of regret, of backward looking. There is the suggestion that one can live on the memory of past experiences, and this may well have been the enemy of his complete emancipation from fruitless regret. If Wordsworth could have cherished the past without being so closely bound to it, if he could have reaped the harvest of his earlier experiences of nature, and quitted the field, instead of continuing to glean the corners, is it not possible that he would have gone on to greater things.

The question that is raised by his growing sense of the inadequacy of nature, is the question of his poetic inspiration. It is generally ~~xxx~~ accepted that Wordsworth's greatest work was done in the ten years which began with the writing of Lyrical Ballads, though there is not universal

agreement as to the dating of his great period. Miss Batho prefers a later date, 1815, to mark the close of it. Nevertheless, the fact is not in dispute. The reason for the failure of his inspiration has been endlessly discussed, and many theories have been put forward to account for it. It seems to have coincided with his loss of the mystical sense of the unearthly radiance of nature, of his joy in the harvest of eye and ear.

Yet this did not happen suddenly. Wordsworth wrote much good poetry in his later years. He experienced renewals of the old sense of joy on occasion. He makes specific reference to the fact in one of his later poems, Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty, (1818). In the glory of a dying day, he is reminded of past joy in nature, and asks, "This glimpse of glory, why renewed?" He speaks of "the light Full early lost and fruitlessly deplored"

Which, at this moment, on my waking sight
Appears to shine, by miracle restored;
My soul, though yet confined to earth,
Rejoices in a second birth. (ll.74-8)

But the closing lines again suggest resignation to a condition which cannot be altered:

- 'Tis past, the visionary splendour fades;
And night approaches with her shades.

It is no part of our purpose here to offer any new, or repeat any old, explanations for the decline of Wordsworth's inspiration. The field of battle, over which this issue has been fought, is strewn with the dead and not-so-dead remains of many theories. Our interest is simply in noting the correspondence between this decline, and the decline of, or

change in, the poet's experience of joy in nature. This seems real enough, and indisputable. It also seems to be the fact that the reasons for these things lie deep in the personality of William Wordsworth. He has been called an "enigma".⁵ which is attested amply by the critics' failure to agree about him. What may be offered here are a few suggestions as to factors which ought to be considered in any appraisal of the issue.

Was this joy in nature a substantial enough source of inspiration for any long-continued creative effort? It would seem that so long as it was only a feeling-response, or emotional response, to nature, it was not. It was too narrow and temporary a basis. Our point is that the very nature of his inspiration decreed that it should be of limited duration. Mystical joy in nature could not alone do what Wordsworth required, unless indeed it could be constantly renewed in some way. It is well enough to say that all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. But is that all? Perhaps in his tendency to despise the intellect, Wordsworth cut himself off from the renewal of inspiration. There must be feeling in any worth-while creative effort, but does feeling give rise to thought, or thought to feeling? When Wordsworth spoke of the "philosophic mind", the gift of the years, he realized that rapturous emotion could only be replaced by a thoughtful integration of all life's experiences.

⁵ Lacey, Wordsworth's View of Nature, p.115. He further refers to him as a "baffling personality", and says, "Wordsworth cannot be explained by any theory."

It was not possible to devise such a philosophy on the basis of nature alone, as though nature offered all that man required. Nature alone could not sustain the inner life of man. Francis Thompson, in The Hound of Heaven, turned to nature for an answer to the deep craving of his own heart. Though his mood is far removed from Wordsworth's, and his conclusion much more positive and sweeping, yet in substance they come to the same end when Thompson says: "Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth." Wordsworth's joy in nature was not so much wrong as incomplete. Miss Darbishire says: "Wordsworth's creed may be said in three words: God, man, nature. These three were divine; it might almost be said that they were one divinity." ⁶ It was a vague creed, perhaps too vague ever to be a vital factor in life. In his later years, Wordsworth became more orthodox in his belief, but no closer to a living faith. If the picture that is sometimes drawn of the older Wordsworth is at all correct,⁷ the lack of this faith was a serious impairment.

Herbert Read labels Wordsworth's philosophy as ~~humanistic~~ humanistic, "The highest expression of humanism that the world has yet seen." He adds: "The objection to humanism, and it seems to me to be a final one, is that it necessarily assumes this very infinitude of the human mind which inspired Wordsworth." Read presents the live alternative as "extreme

⁶ Darbishire, Wordsworth, p.133.

⁷ Duffin, in The Way of Happiness, says, "From this time, though his years were but forty-two, he was mentally an old man, shrinkingly afraid of life."

scepticism" or "uncompromising supernaturalism". "Either God is present, and his will is our peace, or man is accountable to his own Conscience and Intelligence, and has no need of God."⁸ These references are made, not as a final word on the subject, but as a contribution to the understanding of the relevance of Wordsworth's philosophy to his poetic inspiration.

What has been said here, however, is in no sense dogmatic. The kind of joy Wordsworth found in nature no doubt coloured his whole life; and for a few years proved the inspiration for great poetic productivity. In these years he left his generation and the world a body of truly great poetry, inspired and inspiring.. He had a message for his and our age. Whatever may have been the limitations, either of his source of inspiration or his philosophy of life, nothing can detract from the greatness of his poetic legacy to mankind.

⁸ Read, Wordsworth, pp. 196-7.

V

JOY IN NATURE - SUMMARY AND RELEVANCE

The attempt has been made in this essay, not to indicate some new interpretation of Wordsworth, but rather to trace the development and meaning of joy in nature as he experienced it and wrote about it. This is no obscure or hidden element in his life and work, but a broad and conspicuous strand in the total pattern. We see it in every section of the tapestry. In speaking of its limitations, the purpose has not been in any way to belittle it as an essential element in a sound philosophy of life. We are all children of nature. When men have attempted to ignore that primal relationship, they have destroyed what is essentially basic to happy and useful living. Wordsworth found the relationship with nature a good one, a source of happiness and inspiration, even a guide to moral living. He has placed all in his debt.

Wordsworth was a deeply religious man. Religion in this sense is not a matter of accepting dogmas, but of the quality of the response which is made to nature, man, and God. A religious response is in part a "feeling-response". Such a response cannot be entirely isolated from the response of the whole mind, and may indeed be a response of the whole being. Such was Wordsworth's response to nature, and through it nature revealed to him her inner meaning, her sense of life and joy. Perhaps his response to man, and to God, ^{was} ~~were~~ not in like manner a response of the whole being.

Thus it is that Wordsworth's greatest poetry is a message of joy derived from nature. Interwoven with this recurring theme are adjuncts to it: delight in the common things of every day; love of simplicity; a sense of the worth and dignity of ordinary folk; fortitude and endurance in the face of threats to joy; a penetrating insight into "the life of things". Wordsworth deplored the degrading thirst for the sensational, and the extraordinary, a thirst which he rightly felt was fostered by industrialism, and the insulation of people from nature by crowded urban living. Such living can induce a mental torpor which demands greater and ever greater stimulation to arouse the mind; it also encourages appeals to the lower instincts, which are the common denominator of the individuals in the mass. Modern advertising with its appeals to cupidity, comfort, and physical pleasure, suggests that these tendencies have in our day been carried to even greater lengths. In the face of such tendencies, Wordsworth called for the life that is in harmony with nature, and can drink of the true joy which nature gives.

It will be clear that much in Wordsworth's attitude and message is not congenial to the modern mind. The values so highly exalted among us: activity and aggressiveness, bigness and loudness, newness and sensationalism - these Wordsworth depreciated. Well has Lionel Trilling said it: "At every point in our culture we find the predilection which makes it impossible for most readers to accept Wordsworth. It is the predilection for the powerful, the fierce, the assertive, the personally heroic".¹

Yet that very predilection of our age makes the message of Wordsworth all the more relevant to us. If we are interested in and concerned for the quality of life that may be lived, we shall welcome a voice that is raised on behalf of the deeper levels of living. As one modern student of Wordsworth has put it: "Wordsworth was pleading for an awakening, a new awareness, (whether by eye or ear or heart) of the things that matter and endure, among them the better nature of man and the joy offered by nature".²

In Memorial Verses to Wordsworth, written in 1850, Matthew Arnold not only paid a high tribute to him, but also expressed what he and his age owed to the poet. Wordsworth, as Arnold saw, has a perennial relevance:

He too upon a wintry clime
 Had fallen - on this iron time
 Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears.
 He found us when the age had bound
 Our souls in its benumbing round;
 He spoke, and loosed our heart in tears.
 He laid us as we lay at birth
 On the cool flowery lap of earth;
 Smiles broke from us and we had ease.
 The hills were round us, and the breeze
 Went o'er the sun-lit fields again:
 Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.
 Our youth return'd: for there was shed
 On spirits that had long been dead,
 Spirits dried up and closely-furl'd,
 The freshness of the early world.

Now, too, is an iron time, when the softening and healing influences of nature, as dispensed by Wordsworth, are a

¹Lionel Trilling, in Wordsworth, Centenary Studies, ed. by Gilbert T. Dunklin, Princeton University Press, 1951, p.144.

²Gilbert Dunklin, Wordsworth, Centenary Studies, Introd.p.vi.

greatly needed counterpoise. Wordsworth taught his age to feel, and he teaches us to feel. If he can help us to respond emotionally to the simple sights and sounds of our common life, to crack the hard shell of blase indifference which so easily sets about us, he will be rendering a service of the first order to this sensation-hardened generation.

Our final word will be a quotation which expresses very well how Wordsworth may speak to the heart of man in this year of grace, 1958. These are the words of Dean Sperry of Harvard Divinity School:

In these days when our horizon is darkened by the menace of incredible desolation which may be spread over the face of our earth, as a final act in the tragedy of man's inhumanity to man, my own mind often harks back to an almost prophetic passage in The Prelude in which Wordsworth's own feeling for exultations, agonies and love and man's unconquerable mind finds confident voice:

A thought is with me sometimes, and I say -
Should the whole frame of earth by inward throes
Be wrenched, or fire come down from far to scorch
Her pleasant habitation, and dry up
Old Ocean, in his bed left singed and bare,
Yet would the living Presence still subsist
Victorious, and composure would ensue,
And kindlings like the morning - presage sure
Of day returning and of life revived. 3

³ Willard L. Sperry, in Wordsworth, Centenary Studies, p.163.

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