

Wordsworth a Poet of Nature
By
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In the "Prelude" Wordsworth gives the story of his life, or growth of the poet's mind. It is an autobiographical poem written by himself. It was begun in the year 1799 and finished in 1805.

The reason that we study the Prelude is because no other production gives us so deep, and sustained a view of his feelings about nature, and of the relation which he believed to exist between nature and the soul of man.

In his mental history two periods are especially prominent - first - his school time at Hawkshead, Catterall Lake, eight years in all. This was the springtime of his soul, a fair springtime in which all the young impulses and intuitions were first awakened, when the

colors were laid in, and deeply engrained into every fiber of his being.

The time spent by Wordsworth at Esthwaite Lake was blameless, pure, and happy, there it was that Nature first, "Peopled his mind with forms sublime, and fair," yet happy and carefree while in his games, strange feelings of Nature came to him, and at times, when in lonely places, and alone he felt from within "Gleams like the flashing of a shield to earth, and common face of Nature spoke to him."

The "Prelude" contains nothing more instructive or beautiful, than the whole account of Wordsworth's school time, it portrays the wonderful boyhood of a wonderful boy, though not realized at that time by his friends or himself. Gradually even before school time

was passed, Nature had come to have a meaning, and an attraction for him, by herself. Further he says that while for him, at that time, each individual rock, tree, and flower, had an interest of its own, he came, deeply to feel the great-living whole which Nature is; all his thoughts he says were steeped in feeling.

While at school he wrote some task-verses on subjects imposed by the master, and also some voluntaries of his own. "From the Conclusion of a Poem, composed in Anticipation of Leaving School." written in 1786, he speaks of the dear native regions and the setting sun.

"A lingering light he fondly throws,
On the dear hills where first he rose."

and another, a few lines written in very early youth. where Nature is ^{the} chief theme.

"Calm is all nature as a resting wheel," it is a picture of twilight on the farm.

During his last-school years 1789-99 he wrote "An Evening Walk", addressed to a young Lady, in which he gives a general sketch of the lakes, and how the face of Nature appears when the sun declines, he describes a sunset; twilight sounds, western lights, night; moon light; and Nature in general.

Wordsworth it seems made up his mind as early as his fourteenth year, to become a poet; During his later school years, he tells us that he would walk alone under the stars and,

"Feel what-er there is of power in sound,
To breathe an elevated mood, by form
Or image unprofaned, and I would stand,
Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are

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The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
Or make their dim abode in distant ^{woods} ~~land~~;
Thence did I drink the visionary power."

Wordsworth learned through communing with Nature; even in boyhood, a true and natural religion - and had felt his soul come into contact with Him, who is at once author and upholder of man, and of Nature, but in his earlier school days he felt this power of Nature more than he seemed to realize it.

In the year 1787 at the age of eighteen Wordsworth went to Cambridge to College. Here he remained three years from 1787-91, and while here his social Nature was developed. The order of his nature had been this, in early boyhood animal activity and trivial pleasures had engrossed him,

in due time these had retired, and before school time was over, Nature stood out-preeminently, almost-alone in his affections. And now we see him in the glory of his youth.

He gave a moral life to everything, rock, tree, shrub, saw them feel, & linked them to some feeling.

"The great-mass lay bedded in a quenching soul, and that I beheld, inspired with inward meaning."

Woodsworth seemed to forget Nature during the first few years of his college life, was so engrossed with college sports, and "such was the tenor of this second act in this new life." Imagination slept, and yet not utterly.

While here at college he wrote Descriptive Sketches, though they were not

printed until 1793, these sketches were taken during a tour among the Alps in which he describes scenery of the mountains, and it is the only writing we have of him, written at that time.

Later on in his college life he became interested in man, and shepherd life, and the "Prelude" says: "And sure it is,

That this first transit from the
Smooth delights, and wild
Outlandish walks of single youth
To something that resembles an
approach towards human business,
To a privileged world within a world,"

It seems that the Shepherd strains illustrated Nature's book of rudiments.

That book upheld as with maternal care when she would enter on her tender scheme of teaching comprehension with delight, and mingling playful

with pathetic thoughts". Though Wordsworth wrote several "Pastorals", they were not written, until long after his college days were over.

In 1791 Wordsworth took his degree of B.A. and left Cambridge, during the summer of that year Wordsworth went to France. He was then about twenty two years of age, and up to this time man had been a quite subordinate object. What Cambridge began residence in France had perfected.

In France he heard the speeches that were made in the Hall of the National Assembly, he wandered about the City viewing the ruins of war.

Here his interest in man for his own sake, and in all the great problems, practical, and speculative, connected with man, the problems of

life had been quickened into feverish intensity by the Revolution. The hopes which that event awoke in him, as in many another enthusiast, the dreams that a new era was about to dawn on downtrodden man, these things are an oft-told tale. Fortunately for Wordsworth and the world he was recalled from France in 1792.

In 1793 he published an "Apology for the French Revolution", in which he rails against all the most cherished institutions of England. Wordsworth was smitten to the core with the contagion of the time, and he began to meditate feelingly on man, his sufferings, his aspirations, his artificial restraints, and his destiny. He became so engrossed in political matters, and was so disappointed at the final ending of

matters that he fell into distrust; not only of Nations, but of himself, and wearied out with endless perplexities, he doubted all moral birth, and gave it up in despair.

With his hopes for man, and his faith in man's destiny, the poetic vision of Nature which had hitherto been with him, disappeared and his immediate converse with Him, who through Nature spoke to him was for a time eclipsed.

This was the lowest depths to which he ever sank, the climax of what he himself calls "his degradations".

But as his faith in man, and his love of Nature, had suffered shipwreck together it was by the same influence they were restored, and the first thing to arouse him was the influence of

human affection, which came to him through the presence of his sister, she saw that his true vocation was to be a poet, he was not only restored but his heart was opened to influences heretofore disregarded.

He opened his eyes to perceive in nature a minute loveliness formerly unnoticed, his heart to feel sympathies for human things hitherto unshared for.

The "Prelude" shows that all Wordsworth's impassioned feelings towards Nature, was no mere fantastic dream, but based on sanity, on a most assured and reasonable philosophy.

Wordsworth held that it was only through the soul that the outer world is rightly apprehended - only when it is contemplated through the human emotions of admiration,

awe, and love. - ~~he~~ held ~~this~~ doctrine
through life.