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Wordsworth's Interpretation of Nature.¹

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WORDSWORTH'S childhood and youth were spent with unusual freedom amid the sights and sounds of Nature, among hills and dales where inexhaustible variety of object and incident, grim as well as beautiful, is combined with an orderly repetition of conspicuous changes against a background of hard immutability. He revelled unchecked amid them all, "fostered alike by beauty and by fear."

His delight in Nature was closely akin to that which has inspired many famous naturalists, and his early sympathy with science was so clearly indicated that a slight turn of Fortune's wheel at the critical period of his life might well have made a naturalist of him instead of a poet. In 1785, when a happy schoolboy of fifteen, he eulogised from his Lakeland home

those Elysian plains

Where, throned in gold, immortal Science reigns,
and where Truth teaches

the curious soul

To search the mystic cause of things
And follow Nature to her secret springs ;

and he records that two years later, when an undergraduate at Cambridge, with rooms over the College kitchens at St. John's, nightly from his pillow he could see beneath the stars

The antechapel where the statue stood
Of Newton with his prism and silent face,—
The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone.
(The Prelude, III.)

His activities at Cambridge, however, remind one of Darwin's:

We sauntered, played or rioted ; we talked
Unprofitable talk at morning hours ;
Drifted about along the streets and walks,
Read lazily in trivial books, went forth
To gallop through the country in blind zeal
Of senseless horsemanship, or on the breast
Of Cam sailed boisterously, and let the stars
Come forth, perhaps without one quiet thought.

The academic fare, indeed, seems to have been of even less interest to him than to Darwin :

I did not love,
Judging not ill perhaps, the timid course
Of our scholastic studies ; could have wished
To see the river flow with ampler range
And freer pace.

A question here presents itself. Had there been a Henslow in those days to take this sensitive, sociable, aimless youth in hand, would Wordsworth and the world have gained or lost ? It cannot be doubted that he was in a state of mind in which a very slight change in the course of events might have guided his contemplation of Nature into scientific rather than poetic channels.

It is undoubtedly a fact that geometry gave him great pleasure at this time as it did later :

Specially delightful unto me
Was that clear synthesis built up aloft
So gracefully ;
(Prel. VI.)

and the tribute of the Sage in "The Excursion" to the happiness of the naturalist may safely be taken to represent the poet's own feelings :

Happy is he who lives to understand
Not human nature only, but explores
All natures,—to the end that he may find
The law that governs each, . . .
Through all the mighty commonwealth of things
Up from the creeping plant to sovereign man.
(Exc. IV.)

This is exactly the spirit that animated Darwin, the curiosity that has animated the master-minds of every science. But it is as true of science as of literature, that "for the creation of a master-work . . . two powers must concur, the power of the man and the power of the moment, and the man is not enough without the moment." The conditions, themselves a chapter of accidents, which determined the play of Darwin's spirit, never fell to Wordsworth. None had realised more vividly than he the ordered character of the living as of the inanimate universe, and of the interrelations between them ; but there was as yet no beginning even of a biological "synthesis" to attract his imagination. Observation of detail, which to a later age acquired

¹ Presidential address to the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, October 20, 1925 (slightly abbreviated by the author).

intellectual value, in Wordsworth's case simply enriched his emotions :

Contented if he might enjoy
The things which others understand.
(The Poet's Epitaph, 1799.)

So no special science was to tie him down. This nursling of the "mountains, lakes and sounding cataracts" was "ill-tutored for captivity." But, haunted by dear memories, he did not altogether forget his old nurse; and Nature, if intermittently, continued to be his teacher. Of his Cambridge days, Wordsworth writes :

Oft when the dazzling show no longer new
Had ceased to dazzle, oftentimes did I quit
My comrades, leave the crowd, buildings and groves,
And as I paced alone the level fields
Far from those lovely sights and sounds sublime
With which I had been conversant, the mind
Drooped not. . . .
I looked for universal things ; perused
The common countenance of earth and sky.

I called on both to teach me what they might ;
Or, turning the mind in upon herself,
Pored, watched, expected, listened, spread my thoughts
And spread them with a wider creeping ; felt
Incumbencies more awful, visitings
Of the Upholder of the tranquil soul
That tolerates the indignities of Time,
And, from the centre of Eternity
All finite motions overruling, lives
In glory immutable . . . the great mass
Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
That I beheld respired with inward meaning.

(Prel. III.)

This vision, a development of the more generalised emotions of earlier years,—this ecstatic realisation of the "One in all," was, if I mistake not, the spring and source of Wordsworth's interpretation of Nature. The slight fence between science and poetry had been crossed, and in the Parnassian direction :

I had a world about me—'twas my own :
I made it, for it only lived to me,
And to the God who sees into the heart.

From his Cambridge time onwards, humanity began to encroach upon Nature as his principal object of interest, a period of residence in London, followed by a still more important one in France during the throes of the Revolution, contributing powerfully to this result. Though indifferent at first, he was drawn into the ferment, took sides with the "patriots," and threw himself whole-heartedly into the revolutionary cause, to be dismayed in due course when he realised

The indecision on their part whose aim
Seemed best, and the straightforward path of those
Who in attack or in defence were strong
Through their impiety.

(Prel. X.)

Robespierre was still in power when Wordsworth was recalled to London ("dragged by a chain of harsh necessity") to undergo the mortification of hearing England's declaration of war on the Republic, the first of many moral shocks he was now to undergo. He had witnessed the ushering in, through garlanded streets and rainbow arches, of a Utopia of Reason, Liberty and Light, and, while for some years cherishing his faith in the cause, saw the issue in a long-drawn welter of conflicting passions that knew no test of good and bad, of what to hope for, or of what to shun, in which every one was doomed to become "the dupe of folly or the slave of crime." With instincts and knowledge adequate enough for his guidance along the beaten tracks, now that all these were obliterated the cheerful faith with which he set out faltered ; he began to mistrust the very elevation of spirit which had linked him with

Sage, warrior, patriot, hero ; for it seemed
That their best virtues were not free from taint
Of something false and weak, that could not stand
The open eye of Reason.

(Prel. XII.)

He sought deliberately to separate his past by a complete "gulph" from the nebulous future before him, and in the check which his emotional life had sustained, threw poetic dreams and prospects overboard :

In such strange passion I warred against myself—

Zealously laboured to cut off my heart
From all the sources of her former strength.

He turned to philosophy and found himself able, as he says, "by syllogistic words"

to unsoul
Those mysteries of Being which have made,
And shall continue evermore to make,
Of the whole human race one brotherhood ;

and with remorseless logic scanned "even the visible Universe" with "microscopic view."

Simultaneously with this casting out of emotion, being "somewhat stern in temperament" and "bold to look on painful things," he made a renewed study of the whole framework of social life :

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

The crisis was complete, and the upheaval of his life might well seem incapable of simple solution ; yet it settled itself as quietly and insensibly as a wave of a summer sea. When Wordsworth returned to England after his two years in France, he was too deeply stirred to contemplate retirement to the country, and chose " the great City," where the general air was still agitated over the first unsuccessful attack on the slave trade. Here, as we have seen, he toiled through books and thoughts to find the solution of the problems of society which harassed him (1792-94). Finally, when he had brought himself to emptiness, hopelessness and scepticism, he turned to " abstract science " for relief and rejoined his sister Dorothy in Cumberland :

She whispered still that brightness would return ;
She, in the midst of all, preserved me still
A Poet, made me seek beneath that name,
And that alone, my office upon earth ;
And, lastly, . . . Nature's self,
By all varieties of human love
Assisted, led me back through opening day
To those sweet counsels between head and heart
Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught with
peace,
Which, through the later sinkings of this cause,
Hath still upheld me, and upholds me now.

(Prel. XI.)

And this is how Nature worked :

Long time in search of knowledge did I range
The field of human life, in heart and mind
Benighted ; but, the dawn beginning now
To reappear, 'twas proved that not in vain
I had been taught to reverence a Power
That is the visible quality and shape
And image of right reason ; that matures
Her processes by steadfast laws ; 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.

Thus moderated, thus composed, I found
Once more in Man an object of delight,
Of pure imagination, and of love ;
And, as the horizon of my mind enlarged,
Again I took the intellectual eye
For my instructor, studious more to see
Great truths, than touch and handle little ones.
Knowledge was given accordingly ; my trust
Became more firm in feelings that had stood
The test of such a trial ; clearer far

My sense of excellence—of right and wrong ;
The promise of the present time retired
Into its true proportion ; sanguine schemes,
Ambitious projects, pleased me less ; I sought
For present good in life's familiar face,
And built thereon my hopes of good to come.

(Prel. XIII.)

Prof. Arthur Beatty, of Wisconsin, has recently published an elaborate study of Wordsworth's " Doctrine and Art in their Historical Relations," and makes one or two points which bear upon my topic. The poetic and doctrinal aspects of Wordsworth have frequently been regarded as hostile. Matthew Arnold, for example, " sought to establish the fame of the poet by ignoring his philosophy " ; but the quotations I have given from " The Prelude " make it clear that with Wordsworth the attainment of a philosophy was essential to his poetry. In early youth he had caught the vision of the all-embracing unity of things, which was lost in France, and had to be regained before he could accomplish anything. He sought to get a true view of life as a whole, of man in relation to Nature, even as a part of Nature ; and when he had acquired it, poetry was the expression of his attainment.

Philosophically, as Prof. Beatty claims, he revolted from the sentimental Rousseauist world into which he was born, or rather, into which he had strayed ; and, poetically, he rebelled against the inflated language of his poetic predecessors. He was thus, in a twofold sense, a " poet of reaction," and the springs of both revolts were intimately related. His passion for reality and simplicity outside him had the same source as his love of truth and sincerity of thought within. These he himself attributed to his " education by Nature," which, as he says, from his " first dawn of childhood " did

interweave for me
The passions that build up our human soul
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things—
With life and nature—purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought.

(Prel. I.)

For, having scanned,
Not heedlessly, the laws, and watched the forms
Of Nature, in that knowledge I possessed
A standard, often usefully applied,
Even when unconsciously, to things removed
From a familiar sympathy.

(Prel. V.)

But Prof. Beatty goes into detail, and is not content to see in the poet's attitude the simple flowering of the vigorous germs implanted in his fervent youth. " In the sphere of Art," says Beatty, " he revolts against poetic diction and harks back to Milton and Shakespeare and Chaucer ; in Doctrine he revolts

against Rousseau and Godwin and appeals to Hartley, Locke, and the general tradition of English philosophy."

That Wordsworth followed Hartley and Locke in rejecting the doctrine of "innate ideas," and in recognising that early sensations and sense-impressions constitute the basis upon which the mind is built up by "association of ideas," Prof. Beatty has no difficulty in showing; but merely upon the evidences of this agreement, and of his frequent use of "associationist" language, to sum Wordsworth up as "the interpreter and poet of associationism" surely betrays a lack of perspective. So far as I can see, "associationism" was simply the ladder by which Wordsworth climbed out of the morass of sentimental idealism back to the point of view of his early vision:

Ye motions of delight, that haunt the sides
Of the green hills; ye breezes and soft airs,
Whose subtle intercourse with breathing flowers,
Feelingly watched, might teach Man's haughty race
How without injury to take, to give
Without offence; . . . Ye brooks
Muttering along the stones, a busy noise
By day, a quiet sound in silent night;
Ye waves . . .
And you, ye groves, . . .
Oh, that I had a music and a voice
Harmonious as your own, that I might tell
What ye have done for me. The morning shines,
Nor heedeth Man's perverseness; Spring returns,—
I saw the Spring return.

(Prel. XII.)

This surely is the poet of Nature that speaks, not the poet of "associationism" or any other philosophical nostrum.

Put briefly, the argument and illustrations detailed at great length in "The Prelude" amount to this, that man is not outside Nature—the universe of law and order—but by his subtlest fabric intimately bound up with it. Divorce him in youth from free contact with external Nature and you rob him of Nature's pre-determined means of conferring upon him his share of her own grandeur, modesty and tranquillity. (See "The Three Ages" below.)

In the laws of association Wordsworth thus found not only his intellectual means of escape from sentimentalism and "innate ideas," but also confirmation of his original vision. We are all members of the all-uniting whole, and the very machinery of the mind's processes is a proof of it.

Nature, indeed, was to Wordsworth a universal symphony, a harmony of infinitely varied elements, appealing to man through every sense and gateway to the heart. Some of his smaller poems, and innumerable passages in his longer works, are just so many phrases and passages isolated from the general symphony for special purposes. The musical analogy crops up incessantly:

No sound is uttered,—but a deep
And solemn harmony pervades
The hollow vale from steep to steep
And penetrates the glades.

A soft eye-music of slow-waving boughs.

There are dominating themes and *motifs*; alternations, contrasts and developments of grandeur, tumult and tranquillity; but the meanest instrument has its part to play:

To every Form of Being is assigned
An active Principle. (Exc. IX.)

But the activity or influence of a particular thing is not regarded as something rigorously fixed and definable, as the function of an organ or a species may be defined by science. In his most exalted moods, Wordsworth has his mind concentrated on the whole, and, when he considers the parts, it is their interrelations and interactions that he is conscious of, not their boundaries or limitations.

Herein lies the essential difference between the scientific and the Wordsworthian outlook. Wordsworth is listening to the symphony, contemplating the pageant; science, closing eyes and ears to both, is engrossed in the operations of the separate instruments, in the make-up and doings of the individual agents. The reward to science is an increasing command over instruments and materials for practical purposes, as well as a growing understanding of the processes by which the symphony is rendered. But any message which the symphony, in its entirety, has to convey, is lost to the merely analytic intellect, for it appeals to emotion, and is only apprehended by emotion. Wordsworth, following the symphony "in a wise passiveness," drinks in its "thousand blended notes," is caught up, as it were, into its atmosphere of grandeur, order and beauty, experiences an exaltation of joy that defies expression, and knows that he has entered a gateway to the loftiest aspects of reality open to man:

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.)

The mere analyst shrugs his shoulders before a self-revelation of this order, and suggests an abnormal activity of endocrine glands. The utmost that he is entitled to say is that the emotions, like thought itself, are conditioned, and that to wise men, in intellectual and practical matters, they have proved more useful as incentives than as guides—a truth which barely touches Wordsworth's claim, namely, the value for human life of high emotion ("admiration, hope, and love") when disciplined by communion with Nature in her varied moods, and balanced, not suppressed, by knowledge and reflection:

This is the freedom of the Universe
Unfolded, still the more, more visible,
The more we know.

On the lower plane of cause and effect there is no antagonism between the two points of view, for Wordsworth's belief embraces in advance everything that science has established or may establish as to the orderly and interdependent character of the universe, whether viewed from without or from within. But on the higher plane, in the life of the emotions or spirit, the necessitarian chain simply drops away, and is seen as a mere substratum, conditioning results but not causing them. So long as imagination, or "faith," maintains itself as "feeling" in that upper level, science, at any rate, can interpose no obstacles to its flight.

Talie, as a test, this slight vignette :

A humming bee, a little trickling rill,
A pair of falcons wheeling on the wing.

The matter-of-fact man will see in these two lines a mere catalogue of three disconnected and trivial things of no significance ; but to the Nature-lover they call up, with superb artistry, a fragment of the great world-symphony—summer peace with its muted sounds and leisured motions. To appreciate that fragment, or, better still, its original, is to enter, through the gateway of emotion, a realm in which the proudest generalisations of science are simply irrelevant.

It may be urged, and has been urged, that our so-called peace is a delusion, and that Wordsworth cannot expect us to ignore that underneath the apparent Nature, with which he deals, is a real Nature "red in tooth and claw." This pointed phrase, as every good naturalist knows, is based on a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the "struggle for existence," and suggests that animal life is maintained at the cost of great cruelty and suffering, which is simply not true. In reality, as in appearance, animal life is essentially a world of bustling activity and wide-spread enjoyment. Sooner or later death comes to one and all, but in most cases quickly and unconsciously, as Alfred Russel Wallace pointed out long ago. Only in man, because he "looks before and after," does death necessarily entail an undercurrent of sadness and tragedy.

How death came to be a condition of life is a biological question, to which a fairly clear answer, from the point of view of cause and effect, can already be provided. That it should ever be so has troubled sensitive souls for ages, but Wordsworth's identification of divine and natural laws enabled him to face the problem with the equanimity of a modern biologist :

Such ebb and flow must ever be,
Then wherefore should we mourn ?
(Epitaphs, X., 1806.)

Our delight in the summer symphony may proceed, therefore, unchecked by any intellectual doubts as to the reality of the harmony presented to "eye and ear." That granted, no comment is needed on the supreme expression of Wordsworth's interpretation of the whole, except to notice how trouble and a richer human experience have softened the exuberance that glowed in the visionary moods of his youth :

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,
Not harsh, nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. 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.

(Tintern Abbey.)

At this point it is natural and relevant to refer to an element in Wordsworth's doctrine which first finds expression in this beautiful poem, and plays a large and integral part in his conception of the relations between man and Nature—his emphasis on the distinctive qualities of the "Three Ages of Man." By tracing out, and correlating, the many passages, both of prose and verse, in which Wordsworth's ideas on this point are expressed, Prof. Beatty has discharged a critical task of great service to serious students of the poet. Stated briefly, and with special reference to my own theme, the point is this, that in the individual development of mind and character three stages are passed through: animal childhood (receptive and experimental); emotional (or "sentient") youth, and reflective (or "intellectual") maturity; and that, while each stage exhibits its own distinctive features, the mind only attains its complete fullness and efficiency if the earlier stages have been allowed free scope under conditions suited to make the most of their respective qualities—"The higher mode of being does not exclude, but necessarily includes, the lower: the intellectual does not exclude, but necessarily includes, the sentient; the sentient, the animal. . . ." (Wordsworth, "Convention of Cintra," 1809.)

The recognition of this principle doubtless came to Wordsworth during the period when he was clearing his mind after its unsettlement by his revolutionary experiences, and is bound up with his adoption of Hartley's "associationism." Its discovery, with all its implications, seems to have co-ordinated and stimulated the poet's thoughts and animated his

poetry, as profoundly as the theory of recapitulation affected the zoological world of a later generation. It was the idea of a necessary developmental sequence; and it not only resolved for him a number of hitherto perplexing problems, as set forth at length in "The Prelude," but also became the sheet-anchor of his perennial optimism, as exemplified in the fourth book of "The Excursion."

To it we owe not only its quintessential expression in "The Rainbow" (1802: "The Child is father of the Man"), and the sustained splendour of the famous Ode on "Intimations of Immortality" (1802-6), but also many other of the poet's most characteristic and sonorous lines:

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

(Prel. I.)

It is because the impressions incidentally received in childhood (*e.g.* during bathing, skating, trapping, nutting, etc.) may give so powerful a turn to the emotions of youth as to affect, for better or worse, the mind of manhood, that Wordsworth attaches so much importance to early association with Nature. The child is thus, under natural conditions, Nature's link between herself and man.

If the immortal "Ode" be re-read in the light of these remarks, it will be observed that the first four stanzas, which, according to Wordsworth himself, were written "two years at least" before the remainder, convey no sentiment at variance with this general idea. Indeed, this is just the idea which these four stanzas do so glowingly express—the identification of childhood with the glory and joy of Nature, and the more distant sympathy between Nature and manhood:

The first diviner influence of this world,
As it appears to unaccustomed eyes.

(Prel. XII.)

The association of the idea of pre-existence with the "visionary gleam" of childhood was a "poetic" afterthought; and was intended, as Wordsworth himself has assured us, rather to emphasise than to explain the "dream-like" qualities of sight and feeling with which a child's mind explores the realities of the "not-self." In that case the poet very greatly over-shot the mark, both by the extent to which he carried his apotheosis of the child, and by incorporating the idea in later versions of the title. Not all the poet's skill and sustained beauty of language have been able to blend the two voices speaking in this famous "Ode." In particular, as various critics have pointed out, the second group of four stanzas (v.-viii.) is, in effect, an interpolation, alien to the poet's whole philosophy of life, and inconsistent with both the opening and closing sections of the poem. By exaggerating the

divinity of the child, he is compelled in those stanzas to treat the attainment of manhood in terms of loss instead of gain, whereas in the noble peroration of the "Ode," as well as everywhere else, the "years that bring the philosophic mind" are regarded as bringing with them an access of serenity and power and human sympathy which more than compensates for the loss of the "dizzy raptures" of youth.

It is remarkable that the zoological theory of "recapitulation" has undergone, and is still undergoing, the same criticism as that which has been applied to Wordsworth's "Ode," and is being steadily pruned of elements which exaggerate the ancestral significance of developmental features. In a brief criticism of the "Ode," the general result of which is not at variance with that expressed in my last paragraph, Dean Inge implies that the qualities of childhood, which Wordsworth exalts as reminiscences of its "ancestral home," may include racial instincts "which do not arise from his own (*i.e.* the child's) experience in his present life." So far as the "interpolated" stanzas are concerned, however, the reference is not just to "animal spirits," but to

those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds unrealised;

and these, as is clear from the special incidents which Wordsworth recalls in his prefatory note, are not "ancestral" traits at all, but the inevitable reactions of any mind, in its first intense subjectivity, when groping its way to the perception of external reality. The more sensitive mind naturally reacts more strikingly.

From some of his more familiar poems it might be inferred that Wordsworth's attitude towards science was one of indifference, if not of contempt, *e.g.*

Enough of Science and of Art;
Close up those barren leaves.

(Lyrical Ballads, 1798.)

This inference would not lack support from certain passages in "The Excursion" (Books III. and IV.).

It is equally true, however, that Wordsworth took a lofty view of the functions both of poetry and of science, and his tributes to the actual geometry and the potential biology of his time have already been quoted. In the famous preface to the second edition of "Lyrical Ballads" (1800), he tells us that the poet is as much concerned in the spread of truth as the man of science, but truth of a different and more general order, "not standing upon external testimony, but carried into the heart by passion, truth which is its own testimony, appealing to the knowledge which all men carry about with them, and to those sympathies in

which, without any other discipline than that of our daily life, we are fitted to take delight."

"The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated . . . shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings."

These quotations (nearly, but not quite, *verbatim*) are enough to show that, whether Wordsworth's point of view be accepted or not, he had a vision in his mind which was not unfriendly to the development of science, even though, as he said, he would be unable to make use of science until, in its various branches, it had made some degree of progress intelligible and familiar to the common man.

Passages like that already quoted from "Lyrical Ballads," or the half-sarcastic description in "The Excursion" (Bk. III.) of the botanist and the geologist of his time, are robbed of their sting when it is remembered that Wordsworth began to write in the eighteenth century, when few of the natural sciences had given any signal proof of their value to men "as enjoying and suffering beings." It was the age of Linneus, who was still alive in Wordsworth's youth. All the sciences were still at work upon their foundations, engrossed in distinguishing gases, analysing substances into their elements, describing and classifying species generally. They wore the aspect, to all but the initiated, of elegant pastimes or harmless hobbies.

It could scarcely be expected that the poet Wordsworth, appealing to emotion with a gospel of Nature that was the refined expression of vivid experience, should find an atmosphere "in which to move his wings" in analytic researches—

Where soul is dead, and feeling hath no place ;
Where knowledge, ill begun in cold remark
On outward things, with formal inference ends.
(Exc. IV.)

Nevertheless, it was less the act of analysis than contentment with analysis that Wordsworth decried, and there are many passages in his later writings which suggest that his early appreciation of science grew stronger as time passed :

To reinstate wild Fancy, would we hide
Truths whose thick veil Science has drawn aside ?
(1833.)

Explicit references to scientific discoveries are not numerous, but the following are interesting examples of Wordsworth's poetic use of them. We have already noted his admiration of Newton. In his account of the babe in his mother's arms, he characteristically

refers to "gravitation" as one of the bonds "that connect him [*i.e.* the babe] with the world" (Prel. II.).

In his poem "To the Small Celandine" (1803) there is a playful comparison between the poet's "discovery" of this flower and the stir made on the "sage astronomer's" finding of a new star. The allusion is obviously to Herschel's discovery of Uranus (1781).

Similarly, as was first pointed out to me by my blind botanical friend, Mr. J. G. Wilkinson, the poet's many references to the "breathing" of flowers—one of which has been quoted already (p. 4)—are probably based on the results of Joseph Priestley's experiments (1775)—"the philosophic Priestley" of Wordsworth's "Apology for the French Revolution" (1793). One of the poems which contains an allusion to "breathing flowers" is "This Lawn, a carpet all alive" (1829), and in the Fenwick note to this (1843) the poet remarks: "The beauty in form of a plant or an animal is not made less but more apparent as a whole by more accurate insight into its constituent properties and powers."

So far it has been possible to discuss Wordsworth's interpretation of Nature without considering the special use which the poet makes of particular details. We have seen, however, that while his general idea of Nature can be appropriately likened to that of a symphony, or, rather, an interacting harmony of sense-impressions generally, he also regarded each part of Nature, each "Form of Being," animate and inanimate, as discharging an "active" function. His clear, imaginative vision, and mastery of word and phrase, are never more telling than in those descriptions of Nature, scattered through all his larger works, in which the influences of natural objects are made manifest without the need of a single didactic word. As Matthew Arnold so aptly said: "Nature herself seems to take the pen out of his hand, and to write for him with her own bare, sheer, penetrating power."

When in his smaller poems Wordsworth singles out particular "Forms of Being" for special eulogy, a change of tone is at once apparent; the poet ceases to be the perfect mouthpiece of Nature, and, allowing freer play to fancy, tends to become the conscious teacher and moralist. It is not his special interest in "life's familiar face" that betrays him. On the contrary, to reveal new charms in the common-place strengthens his claims to be Nature's own interpreter. But Nature endows all her children with distinctive charms, each admirable in its sphere; and the false note creeps in when the moralist, with his single scale of human values, seeks to compare one flower with another, one bird with another, not from the relative efficiency with which they play their parts, but from their fancied approximation to points in the human code.

The Lesser Celandine, pleasing him at first, and naturally, as a bright harbinger of spring, becomes a type of meekness and humility in contrast to the self-advertising buttercup "of the flaring hours" (the "little children's flower" of Browning!). On the other hand the "cheerful" Daisy is praised for its very ubiquity at every season, while Violets "in their secret mews" ("modest" for every other poet!) are dismissed with a suggestion of encouraging the "wanton zephyrs." Similarly the fiery eloquence of the nightingale is rejected on one occasion for the "pensive" cooing of the stockdove, and on another for the "pilgrim" strains of the skylark, "true to the kindred points of heaven and home."

Treatment of this kind is obviously not interpretation of Nature, but self-expression, with natural objects employed as symbols. It differs little in essence from the "emblematic" treatment of Nature by the poet's predecessors, and carries with it an artificial flavour of the domestic garden, instead of the atmosphere of Nature herself. Even in these flights of fancy and imagination, however, Wordsworth always goes directly to Nature for his emblems and types, and not to the traditional stock, and his observant eye picks out real and distinctive features on which his reflections are based or his fancy plays.

As a typical example of this latter point may be cited his poem on the familiar "Herb Robert," with its shining red stems, which enable "Poor Robin," as he calls it,

his part to fill;
Cheerful alike if bare of flowers as now,
Or when his tiny gems shall deck his brow.

But best of all his smaller Nature-poems, because simply lyrical, is, to my mind, his poem on the greenfinch ("Green Linnet"), in which he makes delightful play with the bird's liveliness, protective colouring, and characteristic discontinuity of song:

My dazzled sight he oft deceives,
A brother of the dancing leaves;
Then flits, and from the cottage eaves
Pours forth his song in gushes.

In fact, as the late Sir Walter Raleigh said, "the spirit of science has found no loftier or loyaller prophet than Wordsworth," and I venture to hope that this examination of Wordsworth's message and methods by one of themselves may not be altogether indifferent to the votaries of science. With zeal as undivided as theirs he pursued the same goal, truth; in accuracy and range of observation, no less than in fidelity of description, he was as scrupulous as the best, and equally critical (but not neglectful) of speculation and romance. Indeed, though poetic to the core, he risked reputation and fame by insisting that poetic creations must be

based on the facts and realities of the world "as they are," and not as unchecked fancy may depict them—an axiom of his to which NATURE pays weekly tribute:

To the solid ground
Of Nature trusts the Mind that builds for aye;
Convinced that there, there only, she can lay
Secure foundations.

(Misc. Sonnets, XXXIV.)

Wordsworth's whole gospel, indeed, might be summed up in some such terms as these: Learn the order of Nature; recognise the fixity of her laws, and then conform. Do these things, however, not with a cold and formal spirit, kicking against the pricks of stern necessity, but with a "feeling intellect" that first learns to admire the grandeur and harmony of Nature's order, and then aspires to achieve them in the distracted fields of human life:

This prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greeting where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings.

(Tintern Abbey, 1798.)

The facts confronting the poet and the man of science are the same, Nature and man,—man the inhabitant of Nature, and Nature the environment and nurse of man,—but each acting and reacting on the other, and together building up "this transcendent universe." To understand this unity is the task of poetry and science alike. But while science sets no term to its efforts, and the life-work of a single investigator is spent upon a mere fragment or two of the ultimate edifice, the poet, when he claims his ancient rôle, feels bidden to present to his age and generation a synthesis, of which the corners have been rounded by insight and feeling, where the inductions of science are still, and may be for ever, wanting. This aim may be incapable of complete attainment, but it is neither futile nor unwelcome in the attempt, provided the poet be equipped for his task by long, close and sympathetic converse with Nature and man, and that he be one

who looks
In steadiness, who hath among least things
An undersense of greatest; sees the parts
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole.

It is precisely because he fulfilled these requirements that Wordsworth still claims our attention.