

banner of political slogans. To-day the artist who sincerely strives 'to make matter resplendent with a dominating intelligibility' necessarily stands alone. That is a discouraging position for any one, and to maintain requires a very unusual amount of stamina. And moral stamina is not conspicuously common at the present time, nor for the matter of that has ever been in the world's history. Still, though Post-Impressionism is in decline, it is too early yet to despair that something better will not take its place, and art be given another lease of life.

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WORDSWORTH : A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

I.

WORDSWORTH'S poetry is not only an extensive, it is a difficult country ; and therefore, before attempting to cross it, I have thought it worth while to summarize what I imagine I know about it. Much of this may be legend, and I put it forward without any confidence that it is anything more ; but a summary of legend is useful if, by internal confusion or apparent improbability, it brings home the amount of labour necessary to attain the truth.

II.

And first of the traps or pitfalls with which Wordsworth's poetry abounds. One of these is I think its mere amount, by which we should not allow ourselves to be unduly impressed. This may seem a slight temptation, but I am not sure that it is easy to avoid. Staying-power is a comparatively rare thing, and even the appearance of it moves at times to admiration. With Wordsworth it is an important question, how much of it is mere appearance ; and an answer can be given only after going through a poem line by line, enquiring into the significance of each. It is not sufficient

to listen for the general effect of a passage, which may be a sonorous cadence with a buzzing of meaning in the background. Wordsworth was skilled in sounding cadences, and with him as with any other poet meaning should be either more or less than a buzz.

From the *Prelude* and the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* it is I think at least probable that he looked on poetry as a sort of natural product, like fruit and flowers ; brought into being by nature rather than by man, or by man only as nature works in him. Thus from one point of view he might be said to shift responsibility for composition from his own shoulders on to nature ; from another, to arrogate to himself the privilege of unrestrained fertility. As nature a hundred daisies for a single oak, so he throws up a hundred insignificant verses for one of substance. But towards them all, as towards the daisies and the oak, he feels the sort of reverence due to the manifestations of a higher power. He receives them into his collected works, and arranges them in a cunning order to ensure that all shall be read ; and in that way he at least dissuades, if he does not intimidate his critic from the task of discrimination.

III.

Secondly we must take care not to be dazzled by his rhetorical skill—' rhetorical ' is a word with a number of senses, but I use it, I believe, in the best. It would be difficult to exaggerate this skill in Wordsworth, and the danger which results from it.

Nature, he seems to have thought, produces only the bare essence of poetry, to which man must fit an outer garment of words and metre ; therefore a poet, if he would not be mute, must set himself to acquire the knack of metre, as he would any other accomplishment. Wordsworth laboured early and long for this end. ' I have bestowed great care upon my style,' he said, ' and yield to none in the love of my art.' From his use of the terms elsewhere, it seems probable that by ' art ' and ' style ' he meant the power simultaneously to observe the rules for lucid and grammatical English, and for any verse-form in which he happened to be working. He practised and attained proficiency in a great many : in the sonnet, and in the forms of Spenser, Milton, Pope, Hamilton, Burns and Scott.

The sort of merit which he thus brought within his reach, and which it is important to recognize and name lest, remarkable as it is, it be mistaken for something yet more remarkable, is fairly clearly illustrated by his poem *Yew Trees*. This is familiar, if for no other reason, for being often quoted as an example of the grand style outside Milton. It may be so ; but I do not think we can call it anything more than an exercise in Miltonics.

. . . those fraternal four of Borrowdale,
Joined in one solemn and capacious grove ;
Huge trunks!—and each particular trunk a growth
Of intertwined fibres serpentine
Up-coiling, and inveterately convolved,—
Nor uninformed with Phantasy . . .

A brilliant exercise, but only brilliant. On re-reading I am sometimes halted by the line in which Time the Shadow, Death the Skeleton and the rest are said to ' meet at noontide ' ; there seems promise here of a complication of ideas ; but if there is, it is soon untied. The ghostly company meet only for the unexpected purpose of united worship, or for the incongruous one of listening to the flood on Glaramara. The yew-trees themselves lack depth, and might as well be figures in tapestry. Wordsworth, I should say, is not much interested in his images or his ideas, except as they serve to support certain rhythms ; it is these which claim the greater part of his attention, and which, as with a sterile art, he exploits for their own sake.

Mastery over metre qualifies him to be a conversational poet—the sort of poet, that is, who flourished in a number of countries during the Renaissance, and in England in the early eighteenth century. At these places and periods a firm tradition of poetic performance permitted the treatment of an unusually wide variety of subjects at least as efficiently in verse as in prose, and often with the urgency and vividness of verse. A number of passages in *The Prelude*, like the description of his dame at Hawkshead or of the sights of London, reach a high level of excellence in this way. One of them, on the Terror, suggests that he might have maintained himself fairly consistently at the highest level, if he had been secure of an audience ; for poetry of this kind, to persist, depends on a society whose members continually stimulate and

restrain. But the audience was lacking, and for various reasons he gradually withdrew into a more and more remote exile. In consequence, some of his later verse, which has been praised for its technical perfection, is no more than scholarly ; it is directed, that is, at a distant, almost a disembodied audience. And some of the rest suffers from a lack of focus, as though it were directed at two widely differing audiences at once. This is the fault of the didactic part of *The Prelude*, where Wordsworth seems unable to convince himself that what he has to say is of itself such as to interest the reader. Therefore by means of orotundity and ornament he seeks to provide an elegant diversion, to combine, as it were, the roles of Lucretius and of Dyer in *The Fleece*. The result is a compromise which I find intensely irritating, though it has been praised. But *The Prelude*, because of a multitude of ingredients, deserves more than one paper to itself.

IV.

A third kind of trap can be described in Wordsworth's own words. Readers of 'moral and religious inclinations,' he says, 'attaching so much importance to the truths which interest them . . . are prone to overrate the Authors by whom those truths are expressed and enforced. They come prepared to impart so much passion to the Poet's language that they remain unconscious how little, in fact, they receive from it.' The vocabulary is that of intellectualism ; but what it expresses might serve as the basis for a distinction between more and less valuable responses to poetry.

Wordsworth often wrote, not only about joy in widest commonality spread, but about common joys. His subjects in themselves, and apart from any treatment he may give, are such as to evoke memories or aspirations in which it is pleasant, if not always profitable or proper to indulge. If the opportunity for indulgence were offered alone, it might be immediately rejected ; but its nature is masked—and this is the greatest danger ; perhaps the last two kinds of traps, which I have taken separately, should be considered together—its nature is masked by the accompanying rhetoric. It is easy to be affected by the subject and by the style or metre of one of Wordsworth's poems, as by two separate things: the one appearing to dignify the other, because of their accidental association ; but neither modifying the other—neither the metre

imposing itself upon and ordering the subject, nor the subject filling out the cavities of the metre. And at the same time it is easy to assume that the poem as a whole is effective when the truth may be that as an integrated whole the poem does not exist. The point is a difficult and, I think, an important one, which will justify one or two illustrations.

Arnold's selection contains a number of not very striking poems ; but the one of least merit is possibly that which begins :

Pansies, lilies, kingcups, daisies,
 Let them live upon their praises ;
 Long as there's a sun that sets,
 Primroses will have their glory ;
 Long as there are violets,
 They will have a place in story :
 There's a flower that shall be mine,
 'Tis the little Celandine.

The lilt, the tone, is that of a music-hall ditty ; it is difficult to imagine how anyone with an ear sensitive to rhythm, with a feeling for more than the surfaces of words can have written it. As Wordsworth had both, the explanation may be the abdication of responsibility to which I have already referred. But how has the poem come to be approved? For it figures in other anthologies besides Arnold's—for example, in the *Oxford Book of Regency Verse*. In the first place the language is clear, the metre gives no occasion for stumbling ; it has at least the negative virtues. And secondly the subject, or a large part of the subject, is humility, which is a popular quality ; it inculcates the popular opinion that to be humble is to be happy, even to be merry ; and finally, it harmonizes with the absentee or vacation cult of nature which was a force in English society and in English poetry from the middle of last century onwards. There was nothing that, in his better moments, Wordsworth despised more than he did this cult ; there was nothing about which he wrote more lamely—or rather, when he can be taken to be writing about it, he is always at his lamest. Yet his choice of subjects is such, and his unfailing rhetorical skill, that he has imposed himself upon the cult, and figured as its canonized poet. In a similar way he has been the canonized poet of English and of Anglican institutions ; and as

recently as 1915, with the publication of Professor Dicey's *Statesmanship of Wordsworth*, he was hailed with renewed conviction as the poet of patriotism. His sentiments on that topic are of course unexceptionable ; and he dresses them out in a language which the percipient can take to be that of inner compulsion, of inspiration. Yet some of these patriotic effusions, as Mr. Leavis has said, are no more than claptrap ; the best probably should not rank as high as what I have called his conversational successes. It seems that patriotism, like religion, is not a safe theme for poetry ; and that, for the reason quoted from Wordsworth, it is at least as difficult to read as to compose.

The isolated appeal of the subject in passages like the above is no doubt too obvious for it nowadays to form a trap. But it was on account of their obviousness I chose them ; it seemed to me they might help in a further discussion, of which the conclusion is not obvious at all. To what extent are we justified in acknowledging Wordsworth as a mystical poet, as is often done? Are we being deceived somewhat in the manner described—that is, are we responding to the subject by itself, and to certain tricks of style by themselves, rather than to a poem in which both are in alliance and unison? By ' mystical poet ' I do not mean one who has intense experiences on the occasion of natural phenomena, nor one who is convinced of the importance of spirit in the life of man and in the affairs of this world. This is perhaps not an unusual meaning for the term, but I employ it in a narrower and I hope more helpful sense. I mean by it a poet who has the sort of experience Wordsworth claims in one or two passages of *The Prelude*—that of a communion or a community with something outside and above the world, with a divine soul or with the highest truth.

The possibility that in these passages the subject may make an isolated appeal arises from the flattering nature of the belief that such communion is possible to a fellow-man ; and from certain comfortable consequences which seem to follow. Wordsworth may play upon these rather than convey the experience upon which, if the belief is true, it must ultimately be based.

I take as an example the passage in which he seeks to tell what happened to him when, writing an account of his experiences, he realized that once he had crossed the Alps.

And now recovering, to my soul I say
I recognise thy glory ; in such strength
Of usurpation, in such visitings
Of awful promise, when the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shown to us
The invisible world, doth Greatness make abode,
There harbours whether we be young or old.
Our destiny, our nature and our 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.

Let me first note about this passage the ample warrant it provides for all that has been said about Wordsworth's skill in rhetoric. Like Milton, he knows how to draw out the sense variously from verse to verse ; or, as he put it to Klopstock, to secure ' an apt arrangement of pauses and cadences, and the sweep of whole paragraphs.' Secondly, the occasion seems not unsuitable for the display of such skill: an attempt, it seems, is to be made to communicate something by its nature difficult, if not incapable of communication, upon which therefore only a number of sallies can be made. If each is doomed to be ineffectual, all of them together, and the variety of their points of departure and return, may be not wholly without effect. ' Strength of usurpation ' and ' visitings of awful promise ' corroborate each other ; and if it is not clear exactly how, inevitable lack of clarity is part of what is to be conveyed. The figure of an invisible world made visible by a flash of light which thereby extinguishes itself, as though by a supreme effort, recommends for acceptance a difficulty for which, even when accepted, there can be no hope of solution. And as the passage goes on, a solution begins to appear less and less necessary: the metre becomes more regular, the difficulty is not at all impossible, it is even exhilarating to live with. The line, ' With hope it is, hope that can never die ' encourages to aspiration; ' Effort and expectation and desire ' suggests an unremitting eagerness in the soul. The last line, ' And something evermore about to be ' is the most regular of all.

The trouble is that it is too regular—too regular to be smooth.

There is no peace about it, but a merciless beat ; and with infinitude there surely should be peace. When we have reached this line the suspicion arises, I think, that Wordsworth is not in fact where a mystic should be—with infinitude, outside or above the world ; but rather, well within it. And if so some of the preceding lines need to be reconsidered, and our opinion on them to be revised. Aspiration can be unreservedly welcome only where, as with infinitude, there is certainty that it will be fulfilled ; elsewhere ' hope that can never die ' is but a euphemism for hope that has never lived. And elsewhere than with infinitude effort and expectation and desire are grim companions : that eagerness is unremitting is no guarantee that, in this world, it will not be baffled. If we turn our attention from the sound to the sense of the last line we see it to have the minimum of meaning : there is nothing in the future to which it will not apply. So far as we can talk of a future in eternity it is of a piece with the present and prophecy cannot arouse mistrust ; but to a creature in time the mere idea of futurity cannot bring consolation, and confidence based upon it and nothing more is a poor thing. Loudly to proclaim such a confidence is a still poorer thing.

If we read over the passage with these and similar reflections in mind we discover I think that the rhetoric is not only skilful, it is too obviously skilful : it has no natural movement which, if we admire, we admire as concrete in the substance which moves ; but rather a mechanical, to admire which we must abstract and even oppose it to the substance. ' How subtle the play of the levers ! ' we say, and all the time are thinking of the unexpectedness of such subtlety in dead matter. The poem is not alive, but an extremely cleverly constructed simulacrum ; a robot put together no doubt for high purposes ; but still not a poem.

It is sometimes said that, to judge with any security of a mystical verse, one should be a mystic oneself. That would however reduce the number of judges to such an extent, that it is hardly likely to be true. It may be suggested that the questions whether Wordsworth succeeded in conveying a mystical experience, and whether he had it, are two different questions, the one falling under biography, the other under criticism ; and that the answers to them are not necessarily identical. Not that biography is irrelevant to criticism, to which it can give valuable if extra-

technical aid ; and the biographical question it is true might profitably be raised here. But it would require much time and space : to analyse (among other things) the biographical element in *The Prelude*, to compare it with the similar element in *Tintern* (from which it seems to differ in not unimportant ways ; as though Wordsworth altered his views about his own experiences as he grew older), and finally to compare that biography, according to whatever view prove more acceptable, with the history of a mystic or mystics who are fairly widely acknowledged to be such.

In default of such aid, it is perhaps advisable to consider somewhat closely a second passage. I will choose the lines about the Simplon Pass, as the most difficult ones I know to criticize satisfactorily. If, as is only too likely, I cannot make clear my point about them and their kind, perhaps I can at least make the difficulty clear ; and that is a sufficiently important matter.

The lines are as follows :

. . . the brook and road
 Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy Pass,
 And with them did we journey several hours
 At a slow step. The immeasurable height
 Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
 And everywhere along the hollow rent
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
 The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
 Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
 And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
 The unfettered clouds, and region of the heavens,
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same race, blossoms upon one tree,
 Characters of the great Apocalypse,
 The types and symbols of Eternity,
 Of first and last, and midst, and without end.

I had better say at once, to prevent misunderstanding as far as I am able, that I think the greater part of this passage is very

impressive indeed. I think it so impressive that I am disappointed perhaps more than I should be with the rest ; but this I think distracts and divides the attention, although it is short. It may also influence unfavourably the style of the whole.

In these lines Wordsworth, it seems to me, is trying to do not one thing but two ; or rather, having done one thing and done it well, he goes on to another which perhaps by its nature cannot be so well done. Down to the last three lines he is concerned to express a feeling of surprise, almost vexation : like the thwarting winds he is bewildered and forlorn ; while the woods, the waterfalls and the rocks about him threaten ruin and decay, they seem fixed for ever. They threaten destruction to one another, and even to the spectator—there are sick sights and giddy prospects—nevertheless there is and there will be no annihilation, only persistence. He finds escape from this bewilderment by, so to speak, living into the phenomena by which it is caused : in all of them he finds the working of a ‘ single mind,’ with which he can identify himself, or of which he can become a part. And then he sees that the stresses which they exert upon one another and upon himself, all of which he experiences in himself, serve only for their mutual support. This notion of immobility resulting where action and change might be expected occurs elsewhere in Wordsworth’s best poetry, of some of which it is almost a mark ; but in such work he rests in the notion as the only satisfaction which the circumstances can afford. Here however he takes a step further, and seeks a satisfaction which so far from springing from the circumstances seems only to discount them. The bewilderment yields to or is transformed into a revelation, an apocalypse, and the ground for it is removed by degrading the woods, the waterfalls and the rocks from being themselves eternal into types and symbols of eternity. And this eternity, rather than charged with a greater significance than what are said to be its symbols, seems empty of everything : it is dismissed in flat pentameter, the only content of which is the highest common factor of the many associations hanging about a scrap from the liturgy. In other words Wordsworth (I think) finally adopts an answer which has no particular relevance to, and is therefore an escape from, his immediate problem ; which, as it might answer any problem, answers none, and is provided for him rather by talk about mysticism than by mysticism itself—

by religiosity rather than religion : at least by a deadening, not a vivifying force.

Perhaps I exaggerate : but I think it is a danger that these last few lines, connected with their predecessors by the sweep of the metre, and offering the reader an alternative against which, in the context, he is least on his guard, may hinder him from entering into the full and difficult meaning of that context ; and they may do so, even when the alternative is rejected. How Wordsworth came to write in this mixed and broken way, if, as I think, he did do so, is obviously a serious problem ; it would almost seem that acute perception was something of which he had learnt to be afraid. Elsewhere there are traces of a similar fear ; of which, of course, it would be a gross impertinence to speak in any tone of censure, not of regret. Perhaps also the phenomenon may be not unconnected with what has already been described as an abdication of responsibility in composition.

V.

From a summary account of what may be the traps—the marshy lowlands, the hidden gulfs—in Wordsworth's poetry, I pass to an account which must be yet more summary of what seem to be its highlands. From a distance it is no less possible to be mistaken about these than about the former ; and as they are of wider significance, I speak with greater diffidence.

It is I think a useful question to ask how Wordsworth first came to believe that he was a poet ; a man, that is, in whom nature works so as to produce poetry. As he thought that nature, instead of repeating herself, provides for a development of the spirit or a gradual revelation of truth, it must have been because he felt he had something new within him.

Part of it was a peculiar sensibility to nature, or a novel intimacy with her and her manifestations. When he was fourteen, he says, he became conscious ' of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by poets of any age and country,' and resolved ' to supply in some degree the deficiency.' But he was more than an observer : the other childhood experience must be remembered, that he sometimes felt himself slipping into ' an abyss of idealism.' He was part of what he saw, or what he

saw was part of him. And as early as the *Descriptive Sketches* he speaks of 'abandoning the cold rules of painting' to consult both 'nature and his feelings.' From that date onwards he gives no mere lists of natural appearances, but groupings of them as they served to prompt a dominant emotion.

As long as what he calls the idealism persisted, or whenever it reasserted itself, this emotion was some degree of joy ; for there was nothing other than himself by which he might be thwarted. It marks various well-known passages in *The Prelude* :

The sea was laughing at a distance ; all
The solid mountains were as bright as clouds,
Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light ;
And in the meadows and the lower grounds,
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn,
Dews, vapours and the melody of birds,
And labourers going forth into the fields.

It is at its most exuberant in the spring poems of the *Lyrical Ballads* :

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.

One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason :
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.

But exaggerations of this kind are themselves a criticism of the mood : as by its nature it is fleeting, it can be maintained for any length of time only by self-deception, to which one means is a loud boasting.

Already in his childhood Wordsworth had made such a criticism : 'idealism' he had recognized as an 'abyss,' and to save himself had put out his hand. In doing so he was not repeating the Johnsonian experiment : his intention was not to refute a metaphysic, but to repeat a type of experience, that of being resisted, which for a time he had forgotten. Resistance,

thwarting, comes from things outside himself, other than himself: and the second new thing about his poetry is I think its pre-occupation with *other things as other*. In various ways they threaten his equanimity, disturb his peace.

In his early years there seems to have been a rapid oscillation between the sense of joyous union, and one of divorce from the external world; the latter giving rise to unhappiness, and at times to fear. A mountain pursued him 'with measured motion, like a living thing;' and 'after he had seen that spectacle'—these are his words:

. . . for many days my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
There was a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects . . .
But huge and mighty Forms that do not live
Like living men moved slowly through the mind
By day and were a trouble to my dreams.

From time to time he returns to this notion of opposition, of enmity—not only between himself, but between other people and the external world; and at times, as in the Simplon Pass, between the external occupants of the world. But it does not long remain the centre of his interest. Conceived of as enemies, other things are in a measure like himself, and in that measure reconciliation with them might be possible; it is in the measure in which they are unlike himself, in which they are other, that the fascination they exert is unescapable.

Are they real? he seems compelled to ask. They are so different, that there is no quality however abstract he might split off from himself—not even the bare quality of being—in which they might partake. Either they exist exactly as he does, and are himself—but that is impossible; or they do not exist at all—but they obviously do. And as though to convince himself of the latter fact in a subtler manner than by clutching at a wall, he considers repeatedly in his verse the sort of realities which maintain themselves under apparently impossible conditions.

. . . the lifeless arch of stones in air
 Suspended, the cerulean firmament
 And what it is ; the river that flows on
 Perpetually, whence comes it, whither tends,
 Going and never gone ; the fish that moves
 And lives as in an element of death.

A rainbow he saw near Coniston, ' the substance thin as dreams,'
 nevertheless stood unmoved through the uproar of a storm,

Sustained itself through many minutes' space,
 As if it were pinned down by adamant.

And reflections in water occupy his attention either because of the instability of the element on which they are traced—like that of Peele Castle, which ' trembled, but it never passed away ; ' or because of their apparent identity with the object reflected, from which nevertheless they are other. Mr. de Selincourt quotes an early version of some lines in the *Excursion* :

Once coming to a bridge that overlooked
 A mountain torrent, where it was becalmed
 By a flat meadow, at a glance I saw
 A twofold image ; on the grassy bank
 A snow-white ram, and in the peaceful flood
 Another and the same ; most beautiful
 The breathing creature ; nor less beautiful
 Beneath him, was his shadowy counterpart :
 Each had his glowing mountains, each his sky,
 And each seemed centre of his own fair world.
 A stray temptation seized me to dissolve
 The vision—but I could not.

He had picked up a pebble, but dropped it unthrown. The passage has many defects, but I quote it for one or two phrases—' another and the same,' ' each had his glowing mountains,'—and for the conclusion. This suggests that the habit of contemplating things which exist when and in a way in which existence seems impossible has led to a respect for them which is almost superstitious. When other things are fleeting they are capable of being destroyed ; but that they are fleeting is a vindication of their reality as other, and this forbids destruction like a desecration.

Reflections in water retain form and colour ; and carrying analysis as far as it can go, Wordsworth seeks to know what they have which makes them to be other than their objects. What are the principles, which render possible a multiplicity of things? which separate him from the external world, as objects in the external world are separated from one another? The ultimate answer he gives is time and place, duration and extension: it is because the reflection of the ram is elsewhere than the ram itself that, apparently identical in all other respects, it is yet obviously different from the ram. And it is upon duration and extension which, highly abstract as they are, yet seem the soil and sap of other reality, that the superstitious respect just noted finally bears. However confused his account of the experience when he realized that he had crossed the Alps, the experience was of an impressive kind ; and, stripping the account of its reference to eternal destiny, we see the experience to have consisted merely in the realization that, whereas he had been on one side of the Alps, he was now on the other. Or we might say that, as he does not contrast the two sides in respect of any of their qualities—their orientation, their contour or their covering—he realized there is diversity of place. It is this, and this alone, that ‘wrapt him in a cloud.’ That a mountain barrier rose between two particular places—that they were the *sides* of a mountain—was not his concern, for there rose between them another barrier which, if more ideal, is more impassable. It was erected by the very notion of space, of which the parts are by definition external one to another ; each, for the rest, an *other*. The experience is perhaps more easily discerned behind a second passage from *The Prelude*, which describes an entry into London. At the time Wordsworth was not occupied by any ideas of the capital as a storehouse of tradition or magnificence, and his immediate surroundings did not invite attention—there were ‘vulgar men’ about him, and ‘mean shapes on every side.’ His senses and his memory were unheeded or asleep. But he was awake to the notion of the boundary, the imaginary line which sets up place against place, and by crossing which, from having been without London, he would find himself within.

The very moment that I seem’d to know
The threshold now is overpass’d . . .

A weight of Ages did at once descend
Upon my heart.

By a sort of intellectual vision he saw himself as having been *there* and now being *here*, and this was sufficient to move him deeply.

Duration is marked and made manifest by events ; and there are passages in some of Wordsworth's poems which are perhaps only too well known, in which the sole purpose seems to be to record that something, no matter what, has happened. Throughout a number of stanzas the metre is supported by little more than expletives, repetitions and tautologies ; our attention is claimed, it seems, only that it may be cheated of an object—for the stanzas contain neither narration nor description, and very little reflection. The reader is exacerbated or wearied, though Wordsworth, presumably, is full of excitement : so that when something finally happens, if only the prevarication of a child or an old man's tears, it is hailed with relief.

Passages of this kind are little more than biographical or psychological curiosities : in them, Wordsworth is so fully occupied with abstractions that he forgets the concrete business of living. But when he returns he is the better qualified to face its problems, having a keener eye for their elements. The external world, for example, he sees quite clearly is not to be subdued or placated like an enemy ; in so far as it is external, it is there while we are here, then while we are now : it is irreducibly *other* than ourselves, so that to stand in any relations to it, to affect it, even to be aware of it, seems to imply a contradiction. If we wish to give any account of it, we can employ only adjectives which are the opposites of those which we apply to ourselves : if we are active then it is immobile, if we are alive then it is dead, as points in space are dead. Yet it is in such a world that he finds himself, and with which he must come to terms, on pain of a sense of desertion blanker than that to which he was first summoned by the pursuing mountain.

His solution seems to be something like the following. He imagines—but imagine is a weak word ; he creates and it is part of his own experience—a kind of being in which both the external world and himself can share. It combines the characters of both : internally it is active and striving, as he is, but looked at from

outside it is immobile like the world. While for himself, that is, he renounces the possibility of action upon other things, he need not on that account feel cut off from them. They and he are united by the common possession of a hidden activity, in the knowledge of which he can feel, while among them, at home and at peace. If his spirit is sealed, so is that of the dead Lucy, so are rocks and stones and trees ; and with dead things he has a sort of sympathy. The universe as thus apprehended has no very remote resemblance to the Simplon Pass : if it cannot quite properly be spoken of as a balance of stresses, it yet contains a number of stresses which, though they are active, produce no alteration. At these moments of apprehension Wordsworth describes himself as ' seeing into the life of things,' or elsewhere, as seeing ' the very pulse of the machine.' The word ' machine ' is important, for it gives that sense of change within stability which I am trying to suggest. And the pulse is conveyed in verses, some of which are among the best he wrote, which describe ambiguous creatures like the horse

. . . that stood
Alone upon a little breast of ground
With a clear silver moonlight sky behind.
With one leg from the ground the creature stood
Insensible and still—breath, motion gone,
Hairs, colour, all but shape and substance gone,
Mane, ears and tail, as lifeless as the trunk
That had no stir of breath ; we paused awhile
In pleasure of the sight, and left him there
With all his functions silently sealed up,
Like an amphibious work of Nature's hand,
A Borderer dwelling betwixt life and death.

The horse has one foot off the ground, and that it is clear he might move is one of the reasons for the pleasure which he gives ; the other reason is that he is restrained from moving, or that he restrains himself. Similar to the horse in this way are the solitary beings whom Wordsworth met at night, or in almost permanently lonely places : like the discharged soldier, who remained ' fix'd to his place,' ' at his feet His shadow lay, and moved not.' ' I wish'd to see him move,' exclaims Wordsworth, that he might be assured of the reality of the soldier ; but when at last the soldier did so

. . . I beheld

With ill-suppress'd astonishment his tall
And ghastly figure moving at my side.

Most carefully drawn of them all is the Leech-gatherer, who is compared both to a 'huge stone,' and to a 'sea-beast'—that is, he is capable of locomotion, but will not engage upon it. He is

Motionless as a cloud . . .

That heareth not the loud winds when they call

—he does not hear, not in the sense that he is deaf, but that he will not obey—

And moveth all together, if it move at all.

I do not know whether Wordsworth was acquainted with the doctrine of the school that all motion is by parts; whether or no, something of the kind has a share in the effect which is intended here. 'The cloud must move all together'—that is it cannot be imagined to move, for if it did one part would be seen to take precedence of another; and yet it may move, for otherwise it would not have a share in being, in reality.

VI.

So far as I know Wordsworth was quite new, and has remained unique, in concerning himself in this way with 'being as such': the old phrase is convenient, in spite or because of its habit of bearing now the minimum, now the maximum of meaning. He explored the significance, or examined the experience, of being for other things, and this modified the experience of being for himself. It would be a mistake, I think, to see in this any influence of contemporary German thought: there is a difficulty about the dates. Wordsworth was not sympathetic to German thinkers, and the whole course of his dealing with the problem suggests that it was posed for him by what he lived through, rather than by what he read or what he heard in Coleridgean conversation. And as the achievement in this matter was his own, he used it as the starting-point for a new enterprise.

The problem of suffering, if he awoke to it later than to that of the external world, came in early manhood to occupy him no

less continually. The notion of being at which he arrived seemed to offer promise of a solution. For if suffering arises from thwarted effort, either to affect other things or to avoid being affected by them, it is a consequence of a creature's desire to operate beyond itself. And if this is renounced, as Wordsworth conceived it might and should be, suffering as the occasion of rebellion or complaint will cease. But is it humanly possible to carry renunciation to the point which may be necessary? It is conceivable that other things should close in to such an extent upon a creature that, if he yields to them, any inner activity left is too insignificant to be called human. There are three poems which are perhaps especially important by the answers they return to this question.

They are *The Leech-gatherer*, *The Lesser Celandine*, and *Michael*. It will be possible to notice them only briefly.

When he comes across the leech-gatherer Wordsworth is a man of moods, and he generalizes from himself to the human race :

As high as we have mounted in delight,
In our dejection do we sink as low.

But the leech-gatherer, like the stone to which he is compared, knows no moods ; he has few hopes, and such disappointments as come his way do not disturb him. Though the stock of leeches has dwindled, and they are to be found only by wandering alone about the weary moors,

Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may.

He preserves a courteous and cheerful demeanour, even 'stately in the main.' Wordsworth marvels there should be 'in that decrepit man so firm a mind ;' and contrasting the firmness with his own levity, which is at the mercy of other things, he accepts the implied rebuke.

The Lesser Celandine usually closes its petals against the foul weather :

But lately, one rough day, this Flower I passed
And recognized it, though an altered form,
Now standing forth an offering to the blast,
And buffeted at will by rain and storm.

I stopped, and said with inly-muttered voice,
'It doth not love the shower, nor seek the cold :

This neither is its courage nor its choice,
But its necessity in being old.

The sunshine may not cheer it, nor the dew,
It cannot help itself in its decay.'

Other things have compelled the Celandine to forfeit the last scrap of independence and dignity ; therefore it can administer no rebuke—it cannot be admired, but only deplored.

Nevertheless it has had what might be considered its due of glory : if it falls a victim, it is only to the forces of time and senility about which, as nothing escapes them, there seems something equitable. In *Michael* the shepherd and his family are involved in a similar fate while still in their prime—for the old man is 'strong and hale'—and although they have taken every measure to avoid it. Like the leech-gatherer they make few claims on life :

Our lot is a hard lot ; the sun himself
Has scarcely been more diligent than I ;

they are 'neither gay perhaps, nor cheerful ;' and if they have objects and hopes, it for 'a life of eager industry,' for the continued performance of the tasks which their ancestors performed before them. Their only pleasure is 'the pleasure which there is in life itself,' that which is necessary to the pulse and implied in the spark of consciousness. They are submissive to the natural course of things, of which their tasks are almost a part ; and, had circumstances permitted, it might have been said of them as of their ancestors, that when

At length their time was come, they were not loth
To give their bodies to the family mould.

They seek to preserve a submissiveness even to their abnormal afflictions ; and the hopes and fears which these cannot but provoke, if wild, are immediately curbed. Each watches the other for signs of strain :

. . . the Old Man paused,
And Isabel sat silent . . .
. . . her face brightened. The Old Man was glad.

At night Isabel

Heard him, how he was troubled in his sleep :
And when they rose at morning she could see
That all his hopes were gone.

Here it is the ready confidence of the son which redresses the balance :

She said to Luke, while they two by themselves
Were sitting at the door, ' Thou must not go . . .
For if thou leave thy Father he will die.'
The youth made answer with a jocund voice ;
And Isabel, when she had told her fears,
Recovered heart.

But Luke too has his misgivings ; and when setting on his journey he reaches the public way he finds it necessary to ' put on a bold face.' All is in vain ; Luke is driven into exile, and Michael survives hardly as a man but as an animal—by his brute strength.

His bodily frame had been from youth to age
Of an unusual strength.

is the first thing we are told about him, and almost the last. He is moreover a sick animal, able to perform some but not all of his instinctive tasks. When he visits the site of the projected sheepfold,

He never lifted up a single stone.

The verse of the poem is a delicate thing. It has almost ceased to beat, and seems maintained only by the flutter of tenuous hopes and sickening fears.

. . . the unlooked-for claim
At the first hearing for a moment took
More hope out of his life than he supposed
That any old man ever could have lost.

Wordsworth, who was so often an imitator, here speaks with his own voice ; and the verse is the contribution he makes to prosody. He uses it rarely—elsewhere than in *Michael* only, I think, in *Margaret* and occasionally in *The Brothers* ; but it should be taken as a measure of his work. Against it the verse of the *Simplon Pass*,

though very different in intention, reveals itself as forced and harsh. As I believe I suggested, what is noble in the *Simplon Pass* is in a measure debased by the immediate context.

VII.

From *Michael* it appeared that the extinction of suffering is the extinction of humanity. To be sure of this lesson, it had been necessary for Wordsworth to experience suffering in an exquisite form, unadulterated in any way—as for example with the satisfaction of playing either to himself or to an audience. There is no audience in *Michael*, except shepherds too close to the hero to do anything but ‘feel pity in their heart.’

I do not know that any other poet has done quite the same thing; I do not think that Wordsworth did it either before or since. It is as though he exposed a nerve which, as it was too sensitive for the impressions it could not but receive, must immediately be deadened.

The conclusions of both *The Leech-gatherer* and *The Lesser Celandine* suggest that something like this happened. Though both are less intense than *Michael*, neither maintains such intensity as it possesses to the end: suddenly both run down with a sickening whirl—or, to change the metaphor, the music in both poems is broken by a discord. After the discovery of firmness in the leech-gatherer, Wordsworth does not prepare himself for any rigorous self-discipline: he ‘laughs himself to scorn’:

‘God,’ said I, ‘be my help and stay secure;
I’ll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!’

In this jauntiness there is no relevance to his circumstances. It is as though he had become oblivious of these; as though they were now presented to the deadened nerve: and the jauntiness had opportunity to supervene from a disconnected part of his consciousness. In *The Lesser Celandine* the break is even more noticeable. It happens in the last line of a stanza:

The sunshine may not cheer it, nor the dew;
It cannot help itself in its decay;
Stiff in its members, withered, changed of hue.
And in my spleen, I smiled that it was gray.

To be a Prodigal's Favourite—then, worse truth,
 A Miser's Pensioner—behold our lot!
 O Man, that from thy fair and shining youth
 Age might but take the things Youth needed not!

The word 'spleen' has a multitude of meanings, one of which might be suitable to the poem ; but there is no reason, other than a complete abandonment of seriousness, why Wordsworth should smile. And this would explain the final stanza, which is the sort of platitude with which we dismiss an argument when we have not solved it, and when it has come to weary us ; or the copy-book maxim with which we hand over a vexing problem of conduct to chance for its decision. Wordsworth's maxim is not so much irrelevant to his problem as a denial of the conditions which it presupposes. The Celandine 'cannot help itself in its decay'—'if only it could!' observes the final stanza.

But, as though foreseeing the outcome of the solution attempted in *Michael*, already in *Margaret* Wordsworth had prepared for another way of dealing with suffering. Unlike *Michael*, *Margaret* plays to an audience, who are the author and the Wanderer ; and like all spectators of tragedy, in so far as mere spectators, they are in the role of *tertius gaudens*. Evil to the actor is good to them. Some of the better poems of the middle years—up to *Peele Castle* and beyond—are devoted in part at least to affirming the belief that evil is in addition and in some way good. The belief may be true, or may be necessary ; but as, without revelation or an augmentation of the faculties, it cannot be comprehended without at least partly neglecting evil, the poems, if they can be looked down on from no mean height, can certainly be looked down on from *Michael*. Others of Wordsworth's occupations were, with the help of the optimistic Hartley, refashioning his memories of the past so that they might support the belief (and hence *The Prelude*, in passages like the two we have examined, is of the nature of a palimpsest) ; or indicting scholarly poems and less disinterested ones on behalf of patriotism, Anglicanism and the like. Some of these have already received summary notice.

But an exploratory paper is no occasion to draw the lower contours of Wordsworth's poetry. It is enough to indicate the high peaks ; for even about these—I hope I may be forgiven this last repetition—a distant observer is likely to be mistaken.

JAMES SMITH.

WILLIAM DUNBAR¹

TO Dunbar Chaucer has become the 'rose of rethoris all'; the phrase is sufficient to awaken doubt as to the substantiality of Dunbar's appreciation of Chaucer. An examination of his poetry reveals that as a poet he is in fact as different from Chaucer as it was possible for another mediæval poet to be. Plainly, to begin an account of Dunbar from a comparison between his work and that of Chaucer would not be to the point, unless to bring home the inaccuracy of styling Dunbar a Scottish Chaucerian. He is at a still further remove from Chaucer than Henryson, and, being nearer the European centre in his time than the latter, he belongs to the very latest mediæval phase.

But to find the explanation of Dunbar's power in the influence, already, of the Renaissance would, again, be a misrepresentation. What gives him (in spite of, and because of, his 'lateness') his extraordinary power, whereby he is perhaps the greatest Scottish poet, in his skilled command of the rich and varied resources of language open to him, and, related to this, his command of varied metres adapted from what were by his time the rich accumulation of mediæval French and mediæval Latin verse, as well as, and often united together with, indigenous alliteration and assonance used as Hopkins rather than as Swinburne uses it. This variety of language and of metres has its counterpart in a variety of modes so bewildering that our first difficulty must be to determine where the centre of Dunbar's work as a whole is. It is my object in this paper to suggest that the core of his living achievement, that part of his achievement which we read as if it were contemporary, consists, not of the ceremonial poems, *The Goldyn Targe*, *The Thrissil and the Rois*, but of the comic and satiric poems, *The Twa Mariit Weman and the Wedo*, *The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis*, the goliardic blasphemies, *The Flyting*, *The Satire on Edinburgh*, and the more acrid and radical satires that

¹*Scottish Poetry from Barbour to James VI*, edited by M. M. Gray (Dent & Sons).

The Poems of William Dunbar, edited (with a good introduction) by W. Mackay Mackenzie (Porpoise Press).