The Mind of a Poet

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Wordsworth's first year at Cambridge, October, 1787, to July, 1788, when he was seventeen and a half to eighteen and a quarter years old, is described in III. A general survey of his entire stay at the University is also included together with his ideas on advanced education. It is likely that some phases of thought and feeling, some part of the development here referred to the first year, belong in reality to the two and a half years that followed. Wordsworth's memory, amazingly retentive of details both physical and psychological concerning events that seemed to him spiritually significant, was notoriously inaccurate as to dates; and in the present case he may well have thought that dates did not matter. At any rate the states of mind pictured in 90-196, which are in ill accord with the gaiety and "submissive idleness" emphasized in 35-45, 233-58, 506-11, 619-34, and iv. 153-9, were probably less frequent in the first year at Cambridge than in "the ensuing time" when "the bonds of indolent and vague society Relaxing in their hold" he lived more to himself, "read more, reflected more, Felt more, and settled daily into habits More promising" (vi. A 19-25).

Sydney Smith, who was at Oxford about the time Wordsworth was at Cambridge and who can hardly be accused of undue seriousness, wrote in later life, "the only consequences of a University education are the growth of vice and the waste of money"; and said of a friend who had sent his son to Cambridge:

He has put him there to spend his money, to lose what good qualities he has, and to gain nothing useful in return. If men had made no more progress in the common arts of life than they have in education, we should at this moment be dividing our food with our fingers, and drinking out of the palms of our hands.¹

This unfavorable impression receives dispassionate and authoritative confirmation in D. A. Winstanley's Unreformed Cambridge, a Study of Certain Aspects of the University in the
Eighteenth Century (Cambridge, 1935). A more favorable picture is painted by Professor Harper, who shows that the poet's brother seems to have derived profit as well as pleasure from Cambridge, that St. John's College was one of the best, and that "if Wordsworth had been inclined to purely scholastic pursuits, particularly in theology or mathematics, he need not have complained." But he was by no means so inclined; and fifteen years later, as he looked back upon his idle days at Cambridge, he felt that the blame lay chiefly with the University. For he held with Emerson: "Colleges... have their indispensable office,—to teach elements. But they can only highly serve us when they aim not to drill, but to create; when they... set the hearts of their youth on flame." 

In part the fault was his own; he was indolent, averse to regular, set tasks, and over-fond of liberty. He confessed as much frankly (350-62, vi. 188-9) and later explained: "I had a full twelvemonth's start of the freshmen of my year [in mathematics], and accordingly got into rather an idle way; reading nothing but classic authors according to my fancy, and Italian poetry. My Italian master... As I took to these studies with much interest, ... was proud of the progress I made." 

In middle life he composed three sonnets on King's College Chapel, Cambridge, and a fine one on Oxford beginning "Ye sacred Nurseries." 

Although containing much less great poetry and deep thinking than the two preceding and the three following books, III is in the main pleasant and interesting. Wordsworth lingers over his Cambridge days with a love that he is unwilling to confess, much less to justify. The care-free life, the "budding-time Of health, and hope, and beauty," the spacious dignity of the noble buildings rich in memories of the past were to him "a goodly prospect" (222-9, cf. 47-52 n.) and the "deep vacation" appealed strongly to "that majestic indolence so dear To native man" (viii. 255-6). This grudgingly acknowledged pleasure and the penetration with which he views his university life give the book much of its value and charm. In one way the experience was unique: it was the only period when he was in relatively affluent circumstances and when for
any considerable time he lived something approaching the aristocratic life. This may have had its value. Book III offers less of universal and permanent significance than many parts of *The Prelude* because it deals largely with local and temporary conditions and with matters which contributed little to Wordsworth’s development. Some will wish that III gave consideration to the value for the poet of academic training, but Wordsworth felt that he derived little from such training and throughout *The Prelude* he ignores or minimizes his own conscious intellectual efforts as well as the part that such labors have played in the lives of nearly all poets. The picture he gives of the formal education of a great philosophical poet—for so he regarded himself—is amazingly unintellectual.

Professor de Selincourt, assuming that (aside from IX) the books of *The Prelude* were written in the order in which they now stand, believes that 100-200 lines of III were composed between December, 1801, and January, 1803, and the rest in January and perhaps early February, 1804. But on March 6, 1804, Wordsworth wrote De Quincey concerning the poem, “I . . . have just finished that part in which I speak of my residence at the University”; and in a letter of the same day to Coleridge he said, “I finished five or six days ago another Book of my Poem, amounting to 650 lines” (in A, III has 672 lines). Since in the letter to De Quincey Wordsworth says he has completed four books, it seems not unlikely that one of those that now come later, presumably V, was written before III and in the period to which Professor de Selincourt assigns III; and that III was composed during the latter part of February, 1804. Yet in MS W rough drafts of parts of IV, which describe the first university vacation, precede and hence presumably antedate drafts of passages later incorporated into V. It should be observed that V properly belongs before III since it deals with the reading and the education of a child and since III supplements this by treating the education and, to some extent, the reading of a university student. Surely it is illogical to put the satire on infant prodigies and the plea for Jack the Giant-killer after the account of the first year at the university and of the summer devoted mainly to dancing and the like. Furthermore, two of the most impressive incidents narrated in
v, "There was a Boy"—which extends to 62 lines—and the finding of the drowned man, are of the period dealt with in i and ii and would therefore come more suitably immediately after these books than eleven hundred lines later.

1-17. Verbally these opening lines are close to the beginning of x, "It was a beautiful . . . day . . . When . . .," but in method they are really closer to iv. 1-26 since both iii and iv begin with a picture which introduces us, without explanation, to a new manner of life. The first sixty-nine lines of viii are much the same and xiv starts with an incident not with explanation or comment; but neither of these books pictures the scene of a new development.

19-21. Knight points out (ii, 59-60) that at least three of Wordsworth’s schoolmates at Hawkshead were at Cambridge while he was there, that one of these was Fleming of Rayrigg, the friend "passionately loved" (ii. 332-8), that all three seem to have made good records, and that Wordsworth’s friend Wrangham (not from Hawkshead) did unusually well. Wordsworth was capable of the more intense sort of friendship but it would seem from 237-58 and 506-11 that, except in his close and lasting intimacy with Jones (see vi. 323 n.), he did not experience it at Cambridge. He wrote Basil Montagu, October 1, 1844: "My intimate associates of my own college are all gone long since. Myers my cousin, Terrot, Jones my fellow-traveller, Fleming and his brother, Raincock of Pembroke, Bishop Middleton of the same college,—it has pleased God that I should survive them all."

28. The alliteration may be introduced to bring out the humor of the passage, although in most instances Wordsworth’s use of alliteration was probably unconscious: 32, 516-17, 599, 604; i. 525; ii. 441-2; iv. 326, 348; viii. 232, 245, 248; ix. 57-8; xii. 246-7; xiii. A 333-4, xiii. 336. He could hardly have intended such unpleasant instances as i. 555; X variant of vii. A 734; x. 31-2, 50-1, 124, x. A 55, A 556; xi. A 944-5, xi. 388; xii. A 10-11, A 260; xiii. 330; xiv. A 18, A 49, A 69; yet he seems to have become aware of some of them since he removed a number in revision.

30. So sudden and so great was the change that it seemed unreal, a dream. In viii. A 640 the same word is used in speaking of the change to the life at Cambridge.
37-42. Humor; see i. 509-35 n.

47-52. When Wordsworth showed Miss Fenwick his "abiding-place" at Cambridge she pronounced it "one of the meanest and most dismal apartments in the whole University." "But here," the poet replied, "I was as joyous as a lark" (Harper, II, 409).

A 57. It is amazing that the author of so superb a passage as 58-63 should originally have put into it so pedestrian a line as this. See Chapter I above and vi. 115-67 n., 115-28 n.

A 69-76. Most of this is wisely omitted from the final text—the wordy, monosyllabic, and pedestrian A 69-70, A 72-3, the double negative "not seldom" (A 75), the unnecessary (since it but repeats 78-82) A 76—but the involved, passive construction of A 71 (cf. x. 327) is retained. "Melancholy" (A 75)—on which see vi. 171-8 n., 342-778 n., xiv. 293-6 n., de S. note to x. A 869-70—is replaced by "prudent" (77).


80-2. For Wordsworth's emphasis on the mystery of the human mind and the "mysteries of being" see xii. 85-7 n. and pp. 141-6, 152-3 above.

83-9. These lines correspond roughly to A 91-3: "hither I had come with great endowments (not only intellect and the hope of a Christian such as most boys possess) but with peculiar gifts."

A 82-120. These lines, which are more explicit and frank than the corresponding ones in the final version, seem "rather [to] have been called to life By after-meditation" than to be "the naked recollection of that time" (614-16). It would be strange indeed if a boy of seventeen who had done nothing to distinguish himself and who was to achieve nothing of note for ten years more were to feel the remarkable confidence in his peculiar gifts that is indicated in A 82-93. The introspection suggested by A 96-120 was presumably his; but whether it took on the lofty character, the concern for universals and the consciousness of "the Upholder of the tranquil Soul," described in this passage may be doubted. To be sure we are dealing with a consciousness that was highly abnormal, but the entire account of the first year at the University would probably be more just if it were less serious.
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A 82-92. The "two attempts to recast" are notable for their self-confidence and for their expression of Wordsworth's priest-like conception of his office (cf. i. 52-4 n.)—here, it should be observed, a pagan priest of "primaeval mysteries." Professor Arthur Craver of Miami University reminds me that Wordsworth's interest in Druids appears in ii. 101-2; xiii. 312-49; Evening Walk (1793), 171 and n.; Guilt and Sorrow, xiii-xv; Descriptive Sketches, Dedication; The Excursion, iii. 133, 143-8; ix. 698-709; Ecclesiastical Sonnets, i. 3, 4, 10; iii. 39; Duddon, xvii; "Humanity," 7-8; "Pass of Kirkstone," 13; "To the Clouds," 60-1; Guide through the Lakes (Grosart, ii, 257 and n., 271); "The Dog," 5; Vale of Esthwaite, 31-4. "The Druids haunted his imagination," writes Professor de Selincourt (P. W., Youth, p. 367), "long before his fateful visit to Stonehenge in 1793." Lines 6-7 of (1) would be, in prose, "As nature from the invisible shrine within the breast might urge him or as ancient story taught him to act or suffer." On "nature" (7)—which here means instinct—see 557 n.

A 82, 90. Cf. i. A 364 and n.

83-7, 101-7, 111-15, 121-3 are undesirable late additions. A 85-93 (good), A 100-1 (poor), A 104, A 117 (good) are not in the final text. There are many lesser changes: "fresh as heretofore" (97, cf. 365; iv. 136, 191) instead of "busier in itself than heretofore" (A 104, which is implied in 96-7, 116), "native instincts" (99) instead of "powers and habits" (A 106, cf. 88-9), and "What independent solaces" (101) in place of "The strength and consolation which" (A 108) are improvements.

89. work refers to the active, creative powers and is explained by A 87-8, "[to] work . . . mind" (cf. ii. A 245-61 and n.); feel, to the passive, receptive faculties and is explained by A 85-7.

90-99 (A 94-106).

The animal's awareness of the peculiarities of its habitat is not developed unless and until it is deprived of that habitat . . . Wordsworth did not become conscious of the intimate link that existed between his character and his surroundings until that link was broken by his departure for Cambridge in 1787. Even then the full realisation of the
significance of his early mode of life did not come to him; what trace of that passionate intensity of feeling for nature do we find in *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, his first published poems? Probably this is true, although it is doubtful if any inexperienced poet would, in 1793, have been able to express "passionate intensity of feeling for nature" in heroic couplets. Yet so far as I recall Wordsworth himself nowhere says this; he does not distinguish between the intensity of his love and his awareness of that intensity. Certainly he does not in these lines imply that separation from the mountains made him realize how much he cared for them. What he says is, first, that he did not droop like a flower removed from the water but seemed as fresh as before (A 96-7 is simpler: he was soon his old self again). Second, he "more distinctly recognized" the "native instincts" of his mind, his tastes and aptitudes ("powers and habits," A 106); A 103-4 add that his mind "seem’d busier in [i.e. with] itself than heretofore" (cf. 116, A 112), instead of being busy with nature as would have been the case had he remained at Hawkshead, and thus came to recognize how it differed from other minds. Third, he discovered as a result of this scrutiny that he had within himself sources of strength, joy, and consolation which enabled him to rise above his environment. Fourth, he was "rous’d" and "look’d for universal things."

A 91. "When I say I was strong I am not thinking of learning ... but of a very different kind of power which was mine."


96. Cf. 116, A 103-4, and "Elegiac Verses ... John Wordsworth," 22, "While each into himself descends."


108-26. The emphasis is strangely different from that in A 109-20, which point not to piety but to the beginnings of a more philosophical kind of meditation; to speculation as to nature, the mysteries of life, the Changeless amid the flux; and to gaining insight into highest truth.


121. That: A 117 and A² "Which,"—not a personal deity. Cf. A 130-1 and contrast A 144.

127-35. A continuation, as 127 implies, of the development that began the previous spring (ii. 387-418 and notes). Lines 128-9 will be clearer if "either" is inserted before "From" and "from" before "consciousnesses": either reasoning by analogy to men and animals or trusting to his own overpowering feelings about the matter (cf. ii. 388-90 and n.), he concluded that rocks and plants must have feeling, must be permeated by spirit. See pp. 170-1 and 195 above. In so far as he felt there is no dead matter he is in accord with the scientific thought of today. It is strange that Wordsworth never tried to simplify the involved, inverted style of 127-9.

132. moral: Supersensuous; he saw them permeated by "a quickening soul." In view of the immediately preceding and following lines "gave" cannot be taken literally but must be equivalent to "felt in."

A 130. Presence: Cf. "Tintern Abbey," 93-102, "I have felt A presence that disturbs me with the joy Of elevated thoughts," and pp. 74-5 above.

136. Terror: See Chapter III.

137-8. Nature's . . . transitory passion: Cf. ii. 288-90. Despite his search for universals, his consciousness of the one changeless life in all things, he was sensitive to all the transitory aspects of nature.


146. The orthodox conception of God is implied in the early as well as the later versions of this line.


153-7. The intuition of prophets, poets, and primitive men is obscured and distorted "in these tutored days." Primitivism appears in viii. 129-35; de S., 558, lines 208-11; Excursion, iii. 918-55; Recluse, i. i. 625-8; and, most of all, in Descriptive
One aspect of the Golden Age myth appears in i. 190-202.

158-69. "The world which I had made (144-5) was not a false, dream world but was derived from keen observation of all natural phenomena, and this acute awareness of the external world steadied me (see viii. 426-32) and strictly controlled my feelings." Continuous close observation saved Wordsworth from the vagueness and unreality into which the visionary, mystic side of his nature might have led him. See Chapter I. The activity of the "bodily eye" is indicated in 136-42; its "tyranny" is described in xii. 127-51; see also xiv. 344-7.

170-3. These puzzling lines sound as if they were intended for the conclusion of The Prelude as it was first conceived in five books. To be sure they may refer to that "mounting" to "community with highest truth" (125-6) which is described in the immediately preceding passages (80-169); but this track was "not untrod before" (127) and it would seem that the terms here employed fitted better the great experiences of his first and last long vacations which lay ahead.

174. divinity itself: The creative power working within him.

180-5. This impressive and characteristic passage recalls lines 28-41 of the Prospectus to The Recluse, which are quoted along with similar utterances on p. 144 above. See also xii. 85-7 n. It was partly because he felt "genius, power, Creation and divinity itself" at work within him that Wordsworth was impressed with the "awful . . . might," the "genuine prowess," "of souls." It should be observed that he is here speaking of the might of the soul of the child not (as in 35-41 of The Recluse, "Prospectus") of the mind of the adult.

182. Wordsworth probably had pre-existence (see i. 551-8 n.) in the back of his mind although this idea is not necessarily implied in his words. The passage is particularly close to v. 506-23 and xii. 272-82; "yoke" is used in the same connection in the Immortality Ode, 128. Like 200, 207, and A 205, 182 is made up of monosyllables as, except for a dissyllable each, are 144-5, 156, 163, 166, 169-70, 175, 183, 187-9, 192-4, 202, 204. See ii. 41-5 n.
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183. While yet the world seems, not something to which they naturally belong, but a wild field where, like seeds, they have been dropped by chance.

186-9. Cf. xii. 279-82—the preceding lines are in each case similar. The incommunicability is due in part to the fact that in some things each soul is unique, for only what is in part shared by others can be communicated. Cf. Recluse, i. i. 686-8:

Possessions have I that are solely mine,
Something within which yet is shared by none,
Not even the nearest to me and most dear.

189-90. make . . . powers: "I utter something which may give hint of that might of souls (180) which cannot be expressed in words."

191-6. "I am not discouraged ('heartless,' 193) by my inability to deal with this heroic argument, to give expression to this genuine prowess (184-5), since each person will know what I want to say if he will but recall his god-like hours and his realization of [or, in which he realized?] the mighty spiritual powers that belong to man as man."

196. "In consequence of our congenital qualities as contrasted with the effects of training or cultivation." There may be something here of the conception of Nature as "the cosmi cal or d er as a whole, or a half-personified power (natura naturans) manifested therein."

197. plain: Cf. 171, "eminence."

203. Suggests an epic invocation.

204-9. A 202-7 is clearer. Usually Wordsworth simplifies his development by omitting minor fluctuations and temporary reversions to former positions such as are described here; see xiii. 369 n. and Part II: Introduction.

206. into: Not "unto" or "to."

A 207. Since "Observance less devout" seems to mean that he paid less heed to what was due his inner nature, may not the "friend" of MS M be this inner self to which he had for a time "returned?"

208-9. Wordsworth is thinking of animals which change the color or the thickness of their hairy "outward coat" from summer to winter.
210-11. See 230-4 and n.

213. forced hopes: Does this mean that his companions or teachers or relatives induced him to hope that he would succeed in fields for which he had no aptitude and in which he had no real interest?

214-16. Vacillation, which was treason to his inner self since it weakened his mind's directness, singleness of purpose.

216-29. See p. 338 above.

230-4. Cf. 91-124, 210-12, 239, A 379, 443; ii. 76-7; and Chapter iv above, also 355 n. Line 232 is a striking expression of the effect of solitude upon Wordsworth and suggests the visions that often came to him when he was alone.

236. social: Cf. ii. 388-90 and n., also Wordsworth's letter to Mathews of November 7, 1794: "I begin to wish much to be in Town. Cataracts and mountains are good occasional society, but they will not do for constant companions." But contrast "Personal Talk." For "idleness" see vi. A 46 n.

237-58. See 19-21 n.

238. pleasures: Cf. "pleased" (231); the lonely pleasures mentioned in 231-2. See 19-21 n.

239. mutter lonesome songs: Repeat lonesome verse or sing lonesome songs ("mutter" implying that Wordsworth was a poor singer).

240-2. "I had never, by expressing them in verse, given myself the pleasure of reading an account of the deeper joys I found in loneliness, or thought of those joys as a subject for poetry." Wordsworth's early verse certainly gives no hint of such pleasures and probably for the reason here mentioned; see 90-99 n.


259. second act: Wordsworth has really distinguished three "acts" (cf. A 202-7): 18-45, 90-169, and 210-58; but the first and third were so much alike that he seems to have thought of them as one.

261-72. Cf. vi. 57-63; viii. 625-8.

278-324. Further illustrations, taken from the poets, of the point made in the preceding paragraph.

286-305. Wordsworth's other references to Milton will be found in R. D. Havens's Influence of Milton on English Poetry,
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A 303. convention: Coming together. The chapel scene that follows is keenly and vividly sketched. Part of A 316 and A 318 were later omitted.


335-53. Lines 335-6 are prosaic; 346 is stiff and awkward; and 350-3 are both. Such awkward distortions of the normal word order, probably derived from Paradise Lost, as are found in 345-6 are the more reprehensible because in many instances the earlier texts of these passages have the words in their natural sequence (iv. 344; v. 460, 469, 493-4; vii. 618; viii. 82, 202; ix. 230; x. 145) and also because Wordsworth himself condemned them as " the worst fault that poetry can have " (de S., xxx, n. 2).

339-44. Youth has often been stirred to rigorous self-discipline by (1) thirst for the praise of contemporaries, (2) the example of the illustrious dead, (3) libraries. In speaking of libraries as burial places Wordsworth was more truthful and less happy than he realized.


355. a spoiled child: De Quincey affirmed, enviously no doubt: " Freedom—unlimited, careless, insolent freedom—unoccupied possession of his own arms—absolute control over his own legs and motions—these have always been . . . essential to his comfort. " 7 Dorothy wrote Jane Pollard, June 26, 1791, " William . . . lost the chance . . . of a fellowship by not combating his inclinations," and on July 10, 1793, spoke of him to her as a " wayward wight. " In a letter to Mrs. Clarkson of March 27, 1821, she remarked, " The will never governs his labours. " Miss Fenwick also noted his lack of " power over his will " and lamented, " he cannot set himself seriously down to compose; he can do but as the spirit moves him. " 8 See i. 135-45; iii. A 89-90, 230, 371-4; vi. 30-5, 326-35; vii. 64; xiv. 248-9; " Ode to Duty," 25-31 (" I, loving freedom . . . being to myself a guide "). See also vi. 32-3 n. (" over-love Of freedom ").

358-62. The semicolon should come, as in A, before " rang-
ing" not after "captivity," since the wild bird is contrasted with the domesticated fowl. A similar figure is used in 430-47.

362-74. "Nature had so absorbed me as to leave little free space within my mind, which mind, instinctively attracted to natural objects, found them freshest (cf. 97, iv. 136, 191) and winning, but study dull. And hitherto I had done chiefly what I liked." As A 372 has "had been mine" in place of "in me ruled" (368) the reference is not to any new feelings which developed in Cambridge.

367. books; See A 524-30 n.

371-81. "He would not work at the studies of his university: he preferred to imagine a university in which he would work"; cf. vi. 184-7. Although somewhat pompous, 371-5 is briefer and better than the pretty A 375-81; of 371-2 (cf. 355 n., vi. 32-3 n.) A has only "magisterially" (380); "loneliness" (A 379, cf. 91-124, 210-11, 230-4, 443, and Chapter iv) is not in the final text.

381-401, 430-44. Wordsworth's admirable conception of what a university should be ignores the indolence, the self-indulgence, and the passion for amusement that characterizes youth; it likewise assumes a greater, a more sustained enthusiasm for the intellectual life than is common among either students or their teachers, greater indeed than he himself possessed. "Strong book-mindedness" (398), an excellent phrase, was not his, nor is it common. One of his keenest suggestions is that use should be made of the social instinct of youth (386-8). Since he approved of "majestic edifices" (384), 398-401 must refer to "plain living and high thinking" ("Written in London," 11); cf. 448-60, 474-81.

382. Inferior to A 388, which may have been suggested by Midsummer Night's Dream, v. i. 14-15, "as imagination bodies forth The forms of things unknown."

390. awed: Cf. 437 and Chapter III.

391. power: A 397 has "joy," a nobler motive, but note viii. 599-600.

392-3. Apparently Wordsworth felt that knowledge was not "prized For its own sake" at Cambridge by either dons (405-7) or industrious students (500-5 and de S. n.).

401-6. "If so lofty a conception of a university as this only
mocks our recreant age, let foolish and hypocritical university officials pass whatever other regulations may flatter their vanity, but . . . ."


421. Science: Learning, scholarship, which were tainted by the hypocrisy of the compulsory chapel exercises. Wordsworth's general criticism of the university is given in 346-50, 371-7, 407-30, 445-81, 496-505.

430-49. Wordsworth's love of nature leads him to picture his ideal of a university and the Cambridge he knew (446-9) by means of figures drawn from nature; cf. 358-62. This passage is really a continuation of 371-401. "Sanctuary" (431) a place set apart, an asylum; cf. "bird-sanctuary."

433-44. On Wordsworth's fondness for books of travel, see de S., 555, lines 98-109; de S., 602-5, lines 60-114; Recluse, i. i. 703-25; Wordsworth's letter to James Tobin of March 6, 1798 (quoted, de S., xxix), and to Wrangham of early spring, 1812 (?) ("The only modern Books that I read are those of travels, or such as relate to matters of fact"); his notes to "To H. C. Six Years Old," to "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman," to "The Blind Highland Boy," to the Preface and to iii. 931 of The Excursion; 10 de S. notes to iii. A 442-54; viii. A 119-45; Lane Cooper, "Wordsworth's Sources" and "A Glance at Wordsworth's Reading"; 11 K. Lienemann, Die Belesenheit von William Wordsworth, Berlin, 1908, pp. 166-72. In the poems he selected for Lady Mary Lowther he included some "Lines" from Thomas James's Strange and Dangerous Voyage in his intended Discovery of the North-west Passage, 1633. It will be recalled that his contribution to "The Ancient Mariner" was derived from Shelvrock's Voyage; that his geometrician came from Newton's Authentic Narrative (vi. 142-54 n.); that his knowledge of the followers of Sertorius (i. 190-202) and of the Grotto of Antiparos (viii. 560-89) was probably derived from books of travel; that he was solicitous for the return of his copies of two of Gilpin's Tours (letter to Mathews of March 21, 1796); and that his library,
though "ill provided with works of modern fiction and poetry, was remarkably rich in books of travel, some of them ancient and rare" (Harper, II, 344). His love of wandering and wanderers (see vi. 32-3 n.) and of romance (see vii. 77-84 n.) as well as his emphasis of fear (see Chapter III) and wonder (see pp. 480-92) show that this fondness for the literature of travel was connected with things that lay deep with him. Undoubtedly it was stimulated by his intimacy with Coleridge.

448-9. impresses . . . region: Externally the university and the life in it seemed too showy and luxurious. The paragraph that follows brings out this by contrast. "Without," cf. "inner" (447).

448. trivial: Wordsworth’s wide tolerance did not extend to triviality; see iv. 278-306 n.

482-96. Cf. i. 344-50; vi. 35-41, 314-16.

483-6. best things . . . promise: Even best things do not offer their best to all alike.


497-506. Much better than the flabby and wordy A 510-18. Both "timid" (497) and 503-5 are excellent late additions.

505. Cf. v. 8 and Immortality Ode, 203, "other palms are won."

506-11. See 19-21 n. Like 251-8 and 545-9, keen, good-humored, and free from Wordsworth’s frequent diffuseness (see ix. 112 n.); "pillowy" is a master-stroke.

A 524-30. Books have already been referred to in 254, 340-44, 367-8, 398 (cf. also 454-7, 473-81) and are touched on again in the account of the later years at the university (vi. 23-5, 95-114)—an illustration of the desultory, casual structure of III and of other parts of the poem. Note also ix. 236-7, 335-7. For Wordsworth’s reading see 433-44 n.; v and notes, passim; vii. 77-84 n.; K. Lienemann, Die Belesenheit von William Wordsworth, Berlin, 1908; Harper, I, 70-1, II, 322, and especially II, 298-9; The Correspondence of H. C. Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle, ed. E. J. Morley, Oxford, 1927, Appendix III, "Wordsworth’s Library"; J. W. Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry, New York, 1936, pp. 569-77 (important). It is clear from Wordsworth’s letters that he read more, cared more about books, and
was more interested in the scholarly study of them than many of his utterances would lead one to suppose. See p. 128 above.

A 526. *my own food*: Contrasted with "prescrib'd" (A 524).

A 531-41. These lines are not concerned with books but with Wordsworth's unawareness of the deeper passions working round him. A 531-9 (see vii. A 71 n.) and 562-8 strengthen the impression that he matured slowly and was still, in some important respects, only a boy—which may help it explain why he gained so little from his first year at Cambridge. Undergraduate vices are touched on again in viii. 510-17, where we are told not, as here, that Wordsworth was in the main unaware of the evil about him, but that he was terrified by it. Possibly the present passage refers to his first year at Cambridge and viii. 510-17 to the later years, after the emotional development which seems to have taken place during the first long vacation.

A 540. *under soul*: See de S., 600.

512-33. Here, as in 568-70, 582-97, and perhaps in 550-61, Wordsworth tries to say what he gained from Cambridge: chiefly some knowledge of social life and of the world—for the university was the great world in miniature. It also eased the transition to "the conflicts of substantial life." Lines 530-3 are unconvincing but ix. 222-32 assert what may possibly be true: the university, "a Republic, where . . . Distinction open lay to all . . . And wealth and titles were in less esteem Than talents, worth, . . . industry," strengthened his democracy.

516-19. "Mr. Oswald Doughty compares Thomson, *The Castle of Indolence*, i. xxx" (de S., Addenda). These lines are epitomized in "my visionary mind" (526). The alliteration in "Like . . . lone . . . lacking . . . looks" ["k" is also repeated in the last two] and in "far forth" is probably accidental (see 28 n.).

534. There is no "serious mood" in A.

534-49. Wordsworth seems to have been unfortunate in that apparently but one of his teachers—William Taylor, Master of the Hawkshead school, who died while he was a student there (see x. 532-52)—made much, if any, impression on him. These lines do not indicate even respect. "But the manners of the Fellows of the eighteenth century were probably more deplorable than their morals. Often of the very
humblest origin, and frequently unacquainted with any other society, they were apt to remain almost as boorish and uncouth as they had been on first coming to Cambridge." 12 "Unsoured" (545), like the figure that follows, is excellent. See i. 509-35 n.

550-61. This obscure paragraph, which might well have been omitted, contrasts the venerable old age of men who live close to external nature with the grotesqueness which comes from life apart from external nature and men. It suggests that Nature holds such cases up before youth because their lesson is clear to all, and further suggests that the humor which is found in "the grave Elders" is used by Nature to temper the pathos of reality and to lure the young to observe men.

A 584. and which: There is no "which" for "and" to connect with the "which" in the text. Cf. ix. 215, A 289; xiv. 142, A 268.

557. Nature's: The general mother and teacher. The following are some of the other instances in which Wordsworth uses "nature" when he does not mean the external world: ii. A 267; line 7 of variant (1) of iii. A 82-93; iii. 196, 330; v. A 106; vi. A 132; vii. 275, 356, 732; viii. A 513, 487; ix. 149, 398, 571, A 602; x. 158, 189, 205, 232, 470; xi. 30-1, 168, 251, 291, 416, A 844, A 879; xiii. 90, 102, 175, 189, 200-1, 225; xiv. A 229; Excursion, iii. 736-7 ("From the depths Of natural passion, seemingly escaped"), 807-9 ("Here Nature was my guide, The Nature of the dissolute; but thee, O fostering Nature! I rejected"); iv. 957-9 ("demand Of mighty Nature, if 'twas ever meant That we should pry far off yet be unraised"); vi. 871 ("nature that is kind in woman's breast"); vii. 317 ("gifts of nature"); ix. 99-105 ("kind Nature . . . may afford Proof of the sacred love she bears for all . . . far as kindly Nature hath free scope And Reason's sway predominates"); Ecclesiastical Sonnets, iii. xx. 4 ("A Growth from sinful Nature's bed of weeds"); Preface to Lyrical Ballads (Oxf. W., p. 938: "there is no necessity to trick out or to elevate nature [reality, especially man] . . . the Poet . . . converses with general nature"); "Essay, supplementary to the Preface" (Oxf. W., p. 948: Pope was "tempted . . . into a belief that Nature [realism] was not to be trusted, at least in
pastoral Poetry”); letter to John Wilson of June, 1802 (“feelings more sane, pure, and permanent, in short, more consonant to nature, that is, to eternal nature”); second letter to H. J. Rose, probably of December, 1828 (“What more sacred law of nature . . . than that the mother should educate her child?”); letter to Dora of early April, 1838 (“engagements so little in accordance with nature and reason”). See also the three essays upon epitaphs (Grosart, ii, 51, 54, 55, 60, 64, 65).

562-76. With 562-8 compare iv. 301-3; 568-70 condenses the eight lines of A 596-603 into three; 572-6 omits A 605-6 and makes much clearer the comparison to a puppet show.

594-7. “All degrees” is the subject and “Retainers” the object of “fed”; “won away,” enticed.

600-11. “An extraordinarily powerful passage,” Viscount Grey.19 In the Preface to Lyrical Ballads Wordsworth attacks personifications of abstract ideas but adds: “They are, indeed, a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them as such” (Oxford ed., p. 936). Note the alliteration (cf. 599 and see 28 n.) and the succession of nouns (see vi. 505 n.) in 604.

612-16. Like iv. 256-73, these lines are important for their bearing on the question as to how far The Prelude represents the Wordsworth of the time of composition rather than of the time described—in the present case some sixteen years earlier. Cf. “Nutting,” 48-9, “unless I now Confound my present feelings with the past.” Perhaps i. 614-16 (and the earlier form of the same lines, E variant of i. A 643-4), lines 6 and 7 of V variant of v. A 472, vii. A 147-8, X variant of vii. A 734, and viii. 292-3 have a similar meaning. See pp. 280-2 above.

619-31. An admirable figure, unduly prolonged in A. The final text omits A 653-7 and adds the effective repetition, “neighbourhood . . . unneighbourly” (624-5).

632-3. “Idleness” and “labouring time” are contrasted.
NOTES

1 Hesketh Pearson, The Smith of Smiths, New York, 1934, p. 27.
3 "The American Scholar."
4 Autobiographical Memoranda, Grosart, III, 222.
5 Herbert Read, Wordsworth, New York, 1931, pp. 59-60.
6 "C" in A. O. Lovejoy's "'Nature' as Aesthetic Norm," Modern Language Notes, XLII (November, 1927), 446.
7 Literary and Lake Reminiscences, iii, Collected Writings, ed. Masson, II, 263.
8 Correspondence of Henry Taylor, 1888, p. 110.
10 Knight, II, 351; Oxf. W., pp. 113, 297, 926, 927.
11 Athenaeum, April 22, 1905; Modern Language Notes, XXII (1907), 83-9, 110-17 (reprinted in Mr. Cooper's Methods and Aims in the Study of Literature, New York, 1915, pp. 96-132). Mr. Cooper insists on the criticism involved in Wordsworth's use of books of travel and the want of criticism by Coleridge in his use of them.
13 "Wordsworth's 'Prelude,'" Fallodon Papers, Boston, 1926, p. 156.