

## Book Third

### *Residence at Cambridge*

- It was a dreary morning when the chaise  
Rolled over the flat plains of Huntingdon  
And through the open windows first I saw  
The long-backed chapel of King's College rear  
[5] His pinnacles above the dusky groves.<sup>1</sup> 5  
Soon afterwards we espied upon the road  
A student clothed in gown and tasselled cap;  
[11] He passed—nor was I master of my eyes 10  
Till he was left a hundred yards behind.  
The place as we approached seemed more and more  
To have an eddy's force, and sucked us in  
More eagerly at every step we took.<sup>2</sup>  
[15] Onward we drove beneath the castle, down 15  
By Magdalene Bridge we went and crossed the Cam,  
And at the Hoop we landed, famous inn.
- My spirit was up, my thoughts were full of hope;  
Some friends I had—acquaintances who there  
[20] Seemed friends—poor simple schoolboys now hung round 20  
With honour and importance. In a world  
Of welcome faces up and down I roved—  
Questions, directions, counsel and advice  
Flowed in upon me from all sides. Fresh day  
[25] Of pride and pleasure: to-myself I seemed 25  
A man of business and expense, and went  
From shop to shop about my own affairs,  
To tutors or to tailors as befel,  
From street to street with loose and careless heart.  
[30] I was the dreamer, they the dream; I roamed 30  
Delighted through the motley spectacle:  
Gowns grave or gaudy, doctors, students, streets,  
Lamps, gateways, flocks of churches, courts and towers—  
Strange transformation for a mountain youth,  
[35] A northern villager. As if by word

1. Wordsworth reached Cambridge on October 30, 1787, and took his B.A. on January 21, 1791.

2. Cambridge is an eddy in the river of

Wordsworth's development. The image originates in 1799, II, 247-49, and is applied specifically to university life at 1805, IV, 39-55.

## Book Third

### *Residence at Cambridge*

It was a dreary morning when the wheels  
Rolled over a wide plain o'erhung with clouds,  
And nothing cheered our way till first we saw  
The long-roofed chapel of King's College lift  
Turrets and pinnacles in answering files, 5  
Extended high above a dusky grove.<sup>1</sup>

Advancing, we espied upon the road  
A student clothed in gown and tasselled cap,  
Striding along as if o'ertasked by Time,  
Or covetous of exercise and air; 10  
He passed—nor was I master of my eyes  
Till he was left an arrow's flight behind.  
As near and nearer to the spot we drew,  
It seemed to suck us in with an eddy's force.<sup>2</sup>  
Onward we drove beneath the Castle; caught, 15  
While crossing Magdalene Bridge, a glimpse of Cam;  
And at the *Hoop* alighted, famous Inn.<sup>3</sup>

My spirit was up, my thoughts were full of hope;  
Some friends I had, acquaintances who there  
Seemed friends, poor simple school-boys, now hung round 20  
With honour and importance: in a world  
Of welcome faces up and down I roved;  
Questions, directions, warnings and advice,  
Flowed in upon me, from all sides; fresh day  
Of pride and pleasure! to myself I seemed 25  
A man of business and expense, and went  
From shop to shop about my own affairs,  
To Tutor or to Tailor, as befel,  
From street to street with loose and careless mind.

I was the Dreamer, they the Dream; I roamed 30  
Delighted through the motley spectacle;  
Gowns grave, or gaudy, doctors, students, streets,  
Courts, cloisters, flocks of churches, gateways, towers:  
Migration strange for a stripling of the hills,  
A northern villager. 35

3. Singled out by Matthew Arnold (*On Translating Homer*, 1861) because it "shows excellently how a poet may sink with his subject by resolving not to sink with it" (*Complete Prose Works*, I, p.

187); but de Selincourt is surely right that Wordsworth is being playful, not pompous, and treats his early Cambridge days "in something of the mock-heroic manner."

Of magic or some fairy's power, at once  
Behold me rich in monies and attired 35  
In splendid clothes, with hose of silk, and hair  
Glittering like rimy trees when frost is keen<sup>4</sup>—

- [40] My lordly dressing-gown, I pass it by,  
With other signs of manhood which supplied  
The lack of beard. The weeks went roundly on, 40  
With invitations, suppers, wine, and fruit,  
Smooth housekeeping within, and all without  
[45] Liberal and suiting gentleman's array.

- The Evangelist St John my patron was;  
Three gloomy courts are his, and in the first 45  
Was my abiding-place, a nook obscure.  
Right underneath, the college kitchens made  
[50] A humming sound, less tuneable than bees  
But hardly less industrious; with shrill notes  
Of sharp command and scolding intermixed. 50  
Near me was Trinity's loquacious clock  
Who never let the quarters, night or day,  
[55] Slip by him unproclaimed, and told the hours  
Twice over with a male and female voice.  
Her pealing organ was my neighbour too; 55  
And from my bedroom I in moonlight nights  
Could see right opposite, a few yards off,  
[60] The antechapel, where the statue stood  
Of Newton with his prism and silent face.

- Of college labours, of the lecturer's room 60  
[65] All studded round, as thick as chairs could stand,  
With loyal students faithful to their books,  
Half-and-half idlers, hardy recusants,<sup>6</sup>  
And honest dunces; of important days,  
Examinations, when the man was weighed 65  
[70] As in the balance;<sup>7</sup> of excessive hopes,  
Tremblings withal and commendable fears,  
Small jealousies and triumphs good or bad—  
I make short mention. Things they were which then  
I did not love, nor do I love them now: 70  
Such glory was but little sought by me,  
[75] And little won. But it is right to say  
That even so early, from the first crude days  
Of settling-time in this my new abode,

4. Wordsworth at this stage wore his hair powdered, in the fashion of the time. "Rimey": covered with rime, hoar-frost.  
6. Originally, those who refused to attend

Church of England services; here, those who refused to do academic work.  
7. A pun, as Maxwell points out, on Latin *examen*, "a balance."

As if the change

Had waited on some Fairy's wand, at once  
Behold me rich in monies, and attired  
In splendid garb, with hose of silk, and hair  
Powdered like rimy trees, when frost is keen.<sup>4</sup>  
My lordly dressing-gown, I pass it by, 40  
With other signs of manhood that supplied  
The lack of beard.—The weeks went roundly on,  
With invitations, suppers, wine and fruit,  
Smooth housekeeping within, and all without  
Liberal, and suiting gentleman's array. 45

The Evangelist St. John my patron was:  
Three Gothic courts are his, and in the first  
Was my abiding-place, a nook obscure;  
Right underneath, the College kitchens made  
A humming sound, less tuneable than bees, 50  
But hardly less industrious; with shrill notes  
Of sharp command and scolding intermixed.  
Near me hung Trinity's loquacious clock,  
Who never let the quarters, night or day,  
Slip by him unproclaimed, and told the hours 55  
Twice over with a male and female voice.  
Her pealing organ was my neighbour too;  
And from my pillow, looking forth by light  
Of moon or favouring stars, I could behold  
The antechapel where the statue stood 60  
Of Newton with his prism and silent face,  
The marble index of a mind for ever  
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone.<sup>5</sup>

Of College labours, of the Lecturer's room  
All studded round, as thick as chairs could stand, 65  
With loyal students faithful to their books  
Half-and-half idlers, hardy recusants,<sup>6</sup>  
And honest dunces—of important days,  
Examinations, when the man was weighed  
As in a balance!<sup>7</sup> of excessive hopes, 70  
Tremblings withal and commendable fears,  
Small jealousies, and triumphs good or bad,  
Let others that know more speak as they know.  
Such glory was but little sought by me,  
And little won. Yet from the first crude days 75  
Of settling time in this untried abode,

5. These famous lines were introduced in 1838/39, and drawn on lines 125–28 of Thomson's elegy on Newton: "The noiseless tide of time, all bearing down / To

vast eternity's unbounded sea, / Where the green islands of the happy shine, / He stemmed alone \* \* \*."

- Not seldom I had melancholy thoughts 75  
 From personal and family regards,  
 Wishing to hope without a hope—<sup>8</sup> some fears  
 About my future worldly maintenance,  
 [80] And, more than all, a strangeness in my mind, 80  
 A feeling that I was not for that hour  
 Nor for that place. But wherefore be cast down,  
 Why should I grieve?—I was a chosen son.<sup>9</sup>  
 For hither I had come with holy powers  
 [89] And faculties, whether to work or feel: 85  
 To apprehend all passions and all moods  
 Which time, and place, and season do impress  
 Upon the visible universe, and work  
 Like changes there by force of my own mind.  
 I was a freeman, in the purest sense  
 Was free, and to majestic ends was strong— 90  
 I do not speak of learning, moral truth,  
 Or understanding—'twas enough for me  
 To know that I was otherwise endowed.  
 When the first glitter of the show was passed,  
 And the first dazzle of the taper-light, 95  
 As if with a rebound my mind returned  
 Into its former self. Oft did I leave  
 [92] My comrades, and the crowd, buildings and groves,  
 And walked along the fields, the level fields,  
 With heaven's blue concave reared above my head. 100  
 And now it was that through such change entire,  
 And this first absence from those shapes sublime  
 [95] Wherewith I had been conversant, my mind  
 Seemed busier in itself than heretofore—  
 At least I more directly recognised 105  
 My powers and habits. Let me dare to speak  
 [100] A higher language, say that now I felt  
 The strength and consolation which were mine.  
 As if awakened, summoned, roused, constrained,  
 I looked for universal things, perused 110  
 [110] The common countenance of earth and heaven,  
 And, turning the mind in upon itself,  
 Pored, watched, expected, listened, spread my thoughts,  
 And spread them with a wider creeping, felt  
 Incumbences more awful,<sup>1</sup> visitings 115  
 [120] Of the upholder, of the tranquil soul,  
 Which underneath all passion lives secure

8. Wordsworth was burdened by the assumption of his family that he would obtain a Fellowship at St. John's (see Schneider, pp. 7–9).

9. Wordsworth's unequivocal claim to be chosen son of Nature was allowed to

stand until the revisions of 1838/39. Compare the pious alteration in 1850, lines 83–88.

1. "Incumbences": spiritual brooding or overshadowing (*NED*). "Awful": awe-inspiring.

I was disturbed at times by prudent thoughts,  
 Wishing to hope without a hope,<sup>8</sup> some fears  
 About my future worldly maintenance,  
 And, more than all, a strangeness in the mind, 80  
 A feeling that I was not for that hour,  
 Nor for that place. But wherefore be cast down?  
 For (not to speak of Reason and her pure  
 Reflective acts to fix the moral law  
 Deep in the conscience nor of Christian Hope, 85  
 Bowing her head before her sister Faith  
 As one far mightier), hither I had come,  
 Bear witness Truth, endowed with holy powers  
 And faculties, whether to work or feel.  
 Oft when the dazzling show no longer new 90  
 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 95  
 Drooped not; but there into herself returning,  
 With prompt rebound seemed fresh as heretofore.  
 At least I more distinctly recognized  
 Her native instincts: let me dare to speak  
 A higher language, say that now I felt 100  
 What independent solaces were mine,  
 To mitigate the injurious sway of place  
 Or circumstance, how far soever changed  
 In youth, or to be changed in manhood's prime;  
 Or for the few who shall be called to look 105  
 On the long shadows in our evening years,  
 Ordained precursors to the night of death.  
 As if awakened, summoned, roused, constrained,  
 I looked for universal things; perused  
 The common countenance of earth and sky: 110  
 Earth, nowhere unembellished by some trace  
 Of that first Paradise whence man was driven;  
 And sky, whose beauty and bounty are expressed  
 By the proud name she bears—the name of Heaven.  
 I called on both to teach me what they might; 115  
 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,<sup>1</sup> visitings  
 Of the Upholder, of the tranquil soul, 120  
 That tolerates the indignities of Time,  
 And, from the centre of Eternity  
 All finite motions overruling, lives

A steadfast life. But peace, it is enough

[125] To notice that I was ascending now  
To such community with highest truth. 120

A track pursuing not untrod before,  
From deep analogies by thought supplied,  
Or consciousnesses not to be subdued,

[130] To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,  
Even the loose stones that cover the highway, 125  
I gave a moral life—I saw them feel,  
Or linked them to some feeling. The great mass  
Lay bedded in a quickening soul,<sup>2</sup> and all

[135] That I beheld respired with inward meaning.  
Thus much for the one presence, and the life 130  
Of the great whole; suffice it here to add  
That whatso'er of terror, or of love,  
Or beauty, Nature's daily face put on  
From transitory passion, unto this  
I was as wakeful even as waters are 135

[140] To the sky's motion, in a kindred sense  
Of passion was obedient as a lute  
That waits upon the touches of the wind.  
So was it with me in my solitude: 140  
So often among multitudes of men.  
Unknown, unthought of, yet I was most rich,  
I had a world about me—'twas my own,

[145] I made it; for it only lived to me,  
And to the God who looked into my mind.  
Such sympathies would sometimes shew themselves 145  
By outward gestures and by visible looks—  
Some called it madness; such indeed it was,

[150] If childlike fruitfulness in passing joy,  
If steady moods of thoughtfulness matured  
To inspiration, sort with such a name; 150  
If prophesy be madness; if things viewed  
By poets of old time, and higher up

[155] By the first men, earth's first inhabitants,  
May in these tutored days no more be seen  
With undisordered sight. But leaving this, 155  
It was no madness; for I had an eye  
Which in my strongest workings evermore

[160] Was looking for the shades of difference  
As they lie hid in all exterior forms,  
Near or remote, minute or vast—an eye 160  
Which from a stone, a tree, a withered leaf,  
To the broad ocean and the azure heavens

2. I.e., the material world draws its life and nourishment like a plant from an underlying spirit. "Quickening": life-giving.

In glory immutable. But peace! enough  
 Here to record I had ascended now 125  
 To such community with highest truth.

A track pursuing, not untrod before,  
 From strict analogies by thought supplied  
 Or consciousnesses not to be subdued,  
 To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower, 130  
 Even the loose stones that cover the high-way,  
 I gave a moral life: I saw them feel,  
 Or linked them to some feeling: the great mass  
 Lay bedded in a quickening soul,<sup>2</sup> and all  
 That I beheld respired with inward meaning. 135  
 Add that whate'er of Terror or of Love  
 Or Beauty, Nature's daily face put on  
 From transitory passion, unto this  
 I was as sensitive as waters are  
 To the sky's influence: in a kindred mood 140  
 Of passion, was obedient as a lute  
 That waits upon the touches of the wind  
 Unknown, unthought of, yet I was most rich—  
 I had a world about me—'twas my own;  
 I made it, for it only lived to me, 145  
 And to the God who sees into the heart.  
 Such sympathies; though rarely, were betrayed  
 By outward gestures and by visible looks:  
 Some called it madness—so indeed it was,  
 If child-like fruitfulness in passing joy, 150  
 If steady moods of thoughtfulness matured  
 To inspiration, sort with such a name;  
 If prophecy be madness; if things viewed  
 By poets in old time, and higher up  
 By the first men, earth's first inhabitants, 155  
 May in these tutored days no more be seen  
 With undisordered sight. But leaving this,  
 It was no madness, for the bodily eye  
 Amid my strongest workings evermore  
 Was searching out the lines of difference 160  
 As they lie hid in all external forms,  
 Near or remote, minute or vast, an eye  
 Which from a tree, a stone, a withered leaf,  
 To the broad ocean and the azure heavens



- [165] Spangled with kindred multitudes of stars,  
 Could find no surface where its power might sleep,  
 Which spake perpetual logic to my soul,  
 And by an unrelenting agency  
 Did bind my feelings even as in a chain.<sup>3</sup> 165
- [170] And here, O friend, have I retraced my life  
 Up to an eminence, and told a tale  
 Of matters which not falsely I may call  
 The glory of my youth. Of genius, power,  
 Creation, and divinity itself, 170
- [175] I have been speaking, for my theme has been  
 What passed within me. Not of outward things  
 Done visibly for other minds—words, signs,  
 Symbols or actions—but of my own heart  
 Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind. 175
- [180] O heavens, how awful is the might of souls,  
 And what they do within themselves while yet  
 The yoke of earth is new to them, the world  
 Nothing but a wild field where they were sown.  
 This is in truth heroic argument, 180
- [185] And genuine prowess<sup>4</sup>—which I wished to touch,  
 With hand however weak—but in the main  
 It lies far hidden from the reach of words.  
 Points have we all of us within our souls  
 Where all stand single; this I feel, and make 185
- [190] Breathings for incommunicable powers.<sup>5</sup>  
 Yet each man is a memory to himself,  
 And, therefore, now that I must quit this theme,  
 I am not heartless;<sup>6</sup> for there's not a man  
 That lives who hath not had his god-like hours, 190
- [195] And knows not what majestic sway we have  
 As natural beings in the strength of Nature. 195

Enough, for now into a populous plain  
 We must descend. A traveller I am,  
 And all my tale is of myself—even so— 195

[200] So be it, if the pure in heart delight  
 To follow me, and thou, O honored friend,  
 Who in my thoughts art ever at my side,  
 Uphold as heretofore my fainting steps. 200

3. 1805, 82, 122–27, 141–47 and 156–67 were originally written as third-person narrative for *The Ruined Cottage* in February–March 1798.

4. 1805, 171–83 (1850, 173–85) define a new theme (“argument”) for epic poetry; in justifying his treatment of the Fall, Milton had claimed to be replacing the battle poetry of Homer and Virgil—“Wars, hitherto the only argument / He-

roic deemed \* \* \* ” (*Paradise Lost*, IX, 28–29). Now Wordsworth takes the further step and asserts that Christian epic too is out of date, dealing merely with “outward things / Done visibly.”

5. A baffling statement that persists through 1850. “Breathings” are perhaps the poet’s own inadequate attempts to communicate the incommunicable.

6. Discouraged.

Spangled with kindred multitudes of stars, 165  
 Could find no surface where its power might sleep;  
 Which spake perpetual logic to my soul,  
 And by an unrelenting agency  
 Did bind my feelings even as in a chain.

And here, O Friend! have I retraced my life 170  
 Up to an eminence, and told a tale  
 Of matters which not falsely may be called  
 The glory of my youth. Of genius, power,  
 Creation and divinity itself

I have been speaking, for my theme has been 175  
 What passed within me. Not of outward things  
 Done visibly for other minds, words, signs,  
 Symbols or actions, but of my own heart  
 Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind.

O Heavens! how awful is the might of souls, 180  
 And what they do within themselves while yet  
 The yoke of earth is new to them, the world  
 Nothing but a wild field where they were sown.

This is, in truth, heroic argument,  
 This genuine prowess,<sup>4</sup> which I wished to touch 185  
 With hand however weak, but in the main  
 It lies far hidden from the reach of words.

Points have we all of us within our souls  
 Where all stand single; this I feel, and make  
 Breathings for incommunicable powers;<sup>5</sup> 190  
 But is not each a memory to himself?

And, therefore, now that we must quit this theme,  
 I am not heartless,<sup>6</sup> for there's not a man  
 That lives who hath not known his godlike hours,  
 And feels not what an empire we inherit 195  
 As natural beings in the strength of Nature.

No more: for now into a populous plain  
 We must descend. A Traveller I am,  
 Whose tale is only of himself; even so, 200  
 So be it, if the pure of heart be prompt  
 To follow, and if thou, my honoured Friend!  
 Who in these thoughts art ever at my side,  
 Support, as heretofore, my fainting steps.

- It hath been told already how my sight  
 [205] Was dazzled by the novel show, and how  
 Ere long I did into myself return.  
 So did it seem, and so in truth it was— 205  
 Yet this was but short-lived. Thereafter came  
 Observance less devout: I had made a change  
 In climate, and my nature's outward coat  
 Changed also, slowly and insensibly.
- [210] To the deep quiet and majestic thoughts 210  
 Of loneliness succeeded empty noise  
 And superficial pastimes, now and then  
 Forced labour, and more frequently forced hopes,  
 And, worse than all, a treasonable growth
- [215] Of indecisive judgements that impaired 215  
 And shook the mind's simplicity. And yet  
 This was a gladsome time. Could I behold—  
 Who less insensible than sodden clay  
 On a sea-river's bed at ebb of tide
- [220] Could have beheld—with undelighted heart 220  
 So many happy youths, so wide and fair  
 A congregation in its budding-time  
 Of health, and hope, and beauty, all at once  
 So many divers samples of the growth
- [225] Of life's sweet season, could have seen unmoved 225  
 That miscellaneous garland of wild flowers  
 Upon the matron temples of a place  
 So famous through the world?<sup>7</sup> To me at least  
 It was a goodly prospect; for, through youth,
- [230] Though I had been trained up to stand unpropped, 230  
 And independent musings pleased me so  
 That spells seemed on me when I was alone,  
 Yet could I only cleave to solitude  
 In lonesome places—if a throng was near
- [235] That way I leaned by nature, for my heart 235  
 Was social and loved idleness and joy.<sup>8</sup>

- Not seeking those who might participate  
 My deeper pleasures—nay, I had not once,  
 Though not unused to mutter lonesome songs,  
 [240] Even with myself divided such delight, 240  
 Or looked that way for aught that might be clothed  
 In human language—easily I passed  
 From the remembrances of better things,

7. Undergraduates are seen as flowers that Cambridge, Wordsworth's *alma mater*, wears on her brow.

8. Not the usual view of Wordsworth, but supported by a letter of November

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" (*EY*, p. 136).

It hath been told, that when the first delight  
 That flashed upon me from this novel show 205  
 Had failed, the mind returned into herself;  
 Yet true it is, that I had made a change  
 In climate, and my nature's outward coat  
 Changed also slowly and insensibly.  
 Full oft the quiet and exalted thoughts 210  
 Of loneliness gave way to empty noise  
 And superficial pastimes; now and then  
 Forced labour, and more frequently forced hopes;  
 And, worst of all, a treasonable growth  
 Of indecisive judgments, that impaired 215  
 And shook the mind's simplicity.—And yet  
 This was a gladsome time. Could I behold—  
 Who, less insensible than sodden clay  
 In a sea-river's bed at ebb of tide,  
 Could have beheld,—with undelighted heart, 220  
 So many happy youths, so wide and fair  
 A congregation in its budding-time  
 Of health, and hope, and beauty, all at once  
 So many divers samples from the growth  
 Of life's sweet season—could have seen unmoved 225  
 That miscellaneous garland of wild flowers  
 Decking the matron temples of a place  
 So famous through the world?<sup>7</sup> To me, at least,  
 It was a goodly prospect: for, in sooth,  
 Though I had learnt betimes to stand unpropped, 230  
 And independent musings pleased me so  
 That spells seemed on me when I was alone,  
 Yet could I only cleave to solitude  
 In lonely places; if a throng was near  
 That way I leaned by nature; for my heart 235  
 Was social, and loved idleness and joy.<sup>8</sup>

Not seeking those who might participate  
 My deeper pleasures (nay, I had not once,  
 Though not unused to mutter lonesome songs,  
 Even with myself divided such delight, 240  
 Or looked that way for aught that might be clothed  
 In human language), easily I passed  
 From the remembrances of better things,

- And slipped into the weekday works of youth,  
 [245] Unburthened, unalarmed, and unprofaned.<sup>9</sup> 245  
 Caverns there were within my mind which sun  
 Could never penetrate, yet did there not  
 Want store of leafy arbours where the light  
 Might enter in at will. Companionships,  
 [250] Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all; 250  
 We sauntered, played, we rioted, we talked  
 Unprofitable talk at morning hours,  
 Drifted about along the streets and walks,  
 Read lazily in lazy books, went forth  
 [255] To gallop through the country in blind zeal 255  
 Of senseless horsemanship, or on the breast  
 Of Cam sailed boisterously, and let the stars  
 Come out, perhaps without one quiet thought.

- Such was the tenor of the opening act  
 [260] In this new life. Imagination slept, 260  
 And yet not utterly: I could not print  
 Ground where the grass had yielded to the steps  
 Of generations of illustrious men,  
 Unmoved; I could not always lightly pass  
 [265] Through the same gateways, sleep where they had slept, 265  
 Wake where they waked, range that enclosure old,  
 That garden of great intellects, undisturbed.  
 Place also by the side of this dark sense  
 Of nobler feeling, that those spiritual men,  
 [270] Even the great Newton's own etherial self, 270  
 Seemed humbled in these precincts, thence to be  
 The more beloved, invested here with tasks  
 Of life's plain business, as a daily garb—  
 Dictators at the plough<sup>3</sup>—a change that left  
 [277] All genuine admiration unimpaired. 275

- Beside the pleasant mills of Trompington  
 I laughed with Chaucer; in the hawthorn shade  
 [280] Heard him, while birds were warbling, tell his tales 280  
 Of amorous passion.<sup>4</sup> And that gentle bard  
 Chosen by the Muses for their Page of State,  
 Sweet Spencer, moving through his clouded heaven  
 With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace—

9. Compare "Unbodied, unsoul'd, un-  
 heard, unseene" (*Faerie Queene*, VII, vii,  
 46) and "Unshaken, unseduced, unterri-  
 fied" (*Paradise Lost*, VI, 899).

3. A reference to Cincinnatus, tradition-  
 ally said to have been ploughing when

summoned to be dictator of Rome in  
 458 B.C.

4. Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale* is set at  
 Trompington, and concerns the wenching  
 of two students from Cambridge.

And slipped into the ordinary works  
 Of careless youth, unburthened, unalarmed. 245  
*Caverns* there were within my mind which sun  
 Could never penetrate, yet did there not  
 Want store of leafy *arbours* where the light  
 Might enter in at will. Companionships,  
 Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all. 250  
 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 255  
 Of senseless horsemanship, or on the breast  
 Of Cam sailed boisterously, and let the stars  
 Come forth, perhaps without one quiet thought.

Such was the tenor of the second act<sup>1</sup>  
 In this new life. Imagination slept, 260  
 And yet not utterly. I could not print  
 Ground where the grass had yielded to your steps  
 Ye generations of illustrious men,  
 Unmoved. I could not always lightly pass  
 Through the same gateways, sleep where ye had slept, 265  
 Wake where ye waked, range that inclosure old,  
 That garden of great intellects, undisturbed.  
 Place also by the side of this dark sense  
 Of nobler feeling, that those spiritual men,  
 Even the great Newton's own ethereal self, 270  
 Seemed humbled in these precincts, thence to be  
 The more endeared. Their several memories here  
 (Even like their persons in their portraits clothed  
 With the accustomed garb of daily life)<sup>2</sup>  
 Put on a lowly and a touching grace 275  
 Of more distinct humanity, that left  
 All genuine admiration unimpaired.

Beside the pleasant Mill of Trompington  
 I laughed with Chaucer; in the hawthorn shade  
 Heard him, while birds were warbling, tell his tales 280  
 Of amorous passion. And that gentle Bard,  
 Chosen by the Muses for their Page of State—  
 Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven  
 With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace,

1. Wordsworth's correction of 1805  
 "opening act" to 1850 "second act" is a  
 reminder that "the ordinary works / Of  
 careless youth" (lines 244-45) had fol-  
 lowed an earlier phase of his life in which  
 the effect of Cambridge had been to turn

the poet's mind in upon itself.

2. Academic dress had changed very lit-  
 tle, so that in their portraits great Cam-  
 bridge men of the past wore the same  
 clothes as undergraduates of Words-  
 worth's own time.

- [285] I called him brother, Englishman, and friend.  
 Yea, our blind poet, who, in his later day  
 Stood almost single, uttering odious truth, 285  
 Darkness before, and danger's voice behind<sup>5</sup>—  
 Soul awful, if the earth hath ever lodged
- [290] An awful soul—I seemed to see him here  
 Familiarly, and in his scholar's dress  
 Bounding before me, yet a stripling youth, 290  
 A boy, no better, with his rosy cheeks  
 Angelical, keen eye, courageous look,
- [295] And conscious step of purity and pride. 295
- Among the band of my compeers was one,  
 My class-fellow at school, whose chance it was  
 To lodge in the apartments which had been  
 Time out of mind honored by Milton's name—  
 The very shell reputed of the abode  
 Which he had tenanted. O temperate bard!  
 One afternoon, the first time I set foot 300
- [300] In this thy innocent nest and oratory,  
 Seated with others in a festive ring  
 Of commonplace convention,<sup>6</sup> I to thee  
 Poured out libations, to thy memory drank  
 Within my private thoughts, till my brain reeled, 305  
 Never so clouded by the fumes of wine
- [305] Before that hour, or since. Thence, forth I ran  
 From that assembly, through a length of streets  
 Ran ostrich-like to reach our chapel door  
 In not a desperate or opprobrious time, 310  
 Albeit long after the importunate bell
- [310] Had stopped, with wearisome Cassandra voice  
 No longer haunting the dark winter night.<sup>7</sup>  
 Call back, O friend, a moment to thy mind  
 The place itself and fashion of the rites. 315  
 Upshouldering in a dislocated lump  
 With shallow ostentatious carelessness  
 My surplice, gloried in and yet despised,
- [315] I clove in pride through the inferior throng  
 Of the plain burghers, who in audience stood 320

5. Abdiel in *Paradise Lost* traditionally represents Milton's own position, and is twice referred to as "single" in his loyalty (V, 903; VI, 30). Henry Crabb Robinson records that "Wordsworth, when he resolved to be a poet, feared competition only with Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton" (*Books and Their Writers*, ed. E. J. Morley, II, p. 776). Spenser and Milton had both been at Cambridge—Spenser at Pembroke Hall, Milton at Christ's.

6. Meeting, gathering.

7. Attendance at chapel was compulsory; see 1805, 415–27, below. Wordsworth runs "ostrich-like" (1805, 309; 1850, 307) because his academic gown has been hitched up for greater speed. "Opprobrious" (1805, 310; 1850, 308): disgraceful (*Johnson's Dictionary*). "Cassandra voice" (1805, 312; 1850, 310): Priam's daughter Cassandra foretold the fall of Troy.

I called him Brother, Englishman, and Friend! 285  
 Yea, our blind Poet, who in his later day,  
 Stood almost single; uttering odious truth—  
 Darkness before, and danger's voice behind,<sup>5</sup>  
 Soul awful—if the earth hath ever lodged  
 An awful soul—I seemed to see him here 290  
 Familiarly, and in his scholar's dress  
 Bounding before me, yet a stripling youth—  
 A boy, no better, with his rosy cheeks  
 Angelical, keen eye, courageous look,  
 And conscious step of purity and pride. 295  
 Among the band of my compeers was one  
 Whom chance had stationed in the very room—  
 Honoured by Milton's name. O temperate Bard!  
 Be it confest that, for the first time, seated  
 Within thy innocent lodge and oratory, 300  
 One of a festive circle, I poured out  
 Libations, to thy memory drank, till pride  
 And gratitude grew dizzy in a brain  
 Never excited by the fumes of wine  
 Before that hour, or since. Forth I ran 305  
 From the assembly; through a length of streets,  
 Ran, ostrich-like, to reach our chapel door  
 In not a desperate or opprobrious time,  
 Albeit long after the importunate bell  
 Had stopped, with wearisome Cassandra voice 310  
 No longer haunting the dark winter night.<sup>7</sup>  
 Call back, O Friend! a moment to thy mind  
 The place itself, and fashion of the rites.  
 With careless ostentation shouldering up  
 My surplice, through the inferior throng I clove 315  
 Of the plain Burghers, who in audience stood



On the last skirts of their permitted ground,  
 Beneath the pealing organ.<sup>8</sup> Empty thoughts,  
 I am ashamed of them; and that great bard,  
 [320] And thou, O friend, who in thy ample mind  
 Hast stationed me for reverence and love, 325  
 Ye will forgive the weakness of that hour,  
 In some of its unworthy vanities  
 Brother of many more.

In this mixed sort

[325] The months passed on, remissly, not giving up  
 To wilful alienation from the right, 330  
 Or walks of open scandal, but in vague  
 And loose indifference, easy likings, aims  
 Of a low pitch—duty and zeal dismissed,  
 [330] Yet Nature, or a happy course of things,  
 Not doing in their stead the needful work. 335  
 The memory languidly revolved, the heart  
 Reposed in noontide rest, the inner pulse  
 [334] Of contemplation almost failed to beat.  
 Rotted as by a charm, my life became  
 A floating island, an amphibious thing, 340  
 Unsound, of spungy texture, yet withal  
 Not wanting a fair face of water-weeds  
 And pleasant flowers.<sup>9</sup> The thirst of living praise,  
 [340] A reverence for the glorious dead, the sight  
 Of those long vistas,<sup>10</sup> catacombs in which 345  
 Perennial minds lie visibly entombed,  
 Have often stirred the heart of youth, and bred  
 A fervent love of rigorous discipline.  
 [345] Alas, such high commotion touched not me;  
 No look was in these walls to put to shame 350  
 My easy-spirits, and discountenance  
 Their light composure—far less to instil  
 A calm resolve of mind, firmly addressed  
 [350] To puissant<sup>1</sup> efforts. Nor was this the blame  
 Of others, but my own; I should in truth, 355  
 As far as doth concern my single self,

8. Townspeople would be confined to limited areas in the College Chapel. "Surplice" (1805, 318; 1850, 315): a white linen robe that members of the College were required to wear during services, although Wordsworth seems to have entered the chapel with his bunched over his shoulder.

9. An image that was vivid for Wordsworth himself because he had a specific picture in mind: "there occasionally ap-

pears above the surface of Derwent-water, and always in the same place, a considerable tract of spongy ground covered with aquatic plants, which is called the Floating \* \* \* Island" (Wordsworth, *Guide to the Lakes; Prose Works*, II, p. 184).

10. Common eighteenth-century spelling of "vistas."

1. Powerful.

On the last skirts of their permitted ground,<sup>8</sup>  
 Under the pealing organ. Empty thoughts!  
 I am ashamed of them: and that great Bard,  
 And thou, O Friend! who in thy ample mind 320  
 Hast placed me high above my best deserts,  
 Ye will forgive the weakness of that hour,  
 In some of its unworthy vanities,  
 Brother to many more.

In this mixed sort

The months passed on, remissly, not given up 325  
 To wilful alienation from the right,  
 Or walks of open scandal, but in vague  
 And loose indifference, easy likings, aims  
 Of a low pitch—duty and zeal dismissed,  
 Yet Nature, or a happy course of things, 330  
 Not doing in their stead the needful work,  
 The memory languidly revolved, the heart  
 Reposed in noontide rest, the inner pulse  
 Of contemplation almost failed to beat.  
 Such life might not inaptly be compared 335  
 To a floating island, an amphibious spot  
 Unsound, of spongy texture, yet withal  
 Not wanting a fair face of water weeds  
 And pleasant flowers.<sup>9</sup> The thirst of living praise,  
 Fit reverence for the glorious Dead, the sight 340  
 Of those long vistas, sacred catacombs,  
 Where mighty *minds* lie visibly entombed,  
 Have often stirred the heart of youth, and bred  
 A fervent love of rigorous discipline.—  
 Alas! such high emotion touched not me. 345  
 Look was there none within these walls to shame  
 My easy spirits, and discountenance  
 Their light composure, far less to instil  
 A calm resolve of mind, firmly addressed  
 To puissant<sup>1</sup> efforts. Nor was this the blame 350  
 Of others, but my own; I should, in truth,  
 As far as doth concern my single self,

- Misdeem most widely, lodging it elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>  
 For I, bred up in Nature's lap, was even  
 [355] As a spoiled child; and, rambling like the wind  
 As I had done in daily intercourse 360  
 With those delicious rivers, solemn heights,  
 And mountains, ranging like a fowl of the air,  
 I was ill-tutored for captivity—
- [360] To quit my pleasure, and from month to month  
 Take up a station calmly on the perch 365  
 Of sedentary peace. Those lovely forms  
 Had also left less space within my mind,  
 Which, wrought upon instinctively, had found
- [365] A freshness in those objects of its love,  
 A winning power beyond all other power. 370  
 Not that I slighted books—that were to lack  
 All sense—but other passions had been mine,  
 More fervent, making me less prompt perhaps
- [370] To indoor study than was wise or well,  
 Or suited to my years. Yet I could shape 375  
 The image of a place which—soothed and lulled  
 As I had been, trained up in paradise  
 Among sweet garlands and delightful sounds,  
 Accustomed in my loneliness to walk  
 With Nature magisterially<sup>3</sup>—yet I 380  
 Methinks could shape the image of a place
- [376] Which with its aspect should have bent me down  
 To instantaneous service, should at once  
 Have made me pay to science and to arts  
 And written lore, acknowledged my liege lord, 385
- [380] A homage frankly offered up like that  
 Which I had paid to Nature. Toil and pains  
 In this recess which I have bodied forth<sup>5</sup>  
 Should spread from heart to heart; and stately groves,  
 Majestic edifices, should not want 390
- [385] A corresponding dignity within.  
 The congregating temper<sup>6</sup> which pervades  
 Our unripe years, not wasted, should be made  
 To minister to works of high attempt,  
 Which the enthusiast would perform with love. 395
- [390] Youth should be awed, possessed, as with a sense

2. Dorothy ascribed her brother's failure to achieve a fellowship to his dislike of mathematics, the dominant subject at Cambridge, and at this period the only one in which academic distinction could be achieved: "William you may have heard lost the chance, indeed the certainty, of a fellowship by not combatting his inclinations \* \* \* He reads Italian, Spanish, French, Greek and Latin,

and English, but never opens a mathematical book" (*EY*, p. 52).

3. I.e., as if I had been Nature's master.

5. I.e., academic work, carried out in this secluded place to which my thoughts have given substance. Wordsworth is describing what he might have done in an ideal academic environment.

6. Gregariousness.

Misdemeanor most widely, lodging it elsewhere:<sup>2</sup>  
 For I, bred up 'mid Nature's luxuries,  
 Was a spoiled child, and rambling like the wind, 355  
 As I had done in daily intercourse  
 With those crystalline rivers, solemn heights,  
 And mountains; ranging like a fowl of the air,  
 I was ill-tutored for captivity,  
 To quit my pleasure, and, from month to month, 360  
 Take up a station calmly on the perch  
 Of sedentary peace. Those lovely forms  
 Had also left less space within my mind,  
 Which, wrought upon instinctively, had found  
 A freshness in those objects of her love, 365  
 A winning power, beyond all other power.  
 Not that I slighted books,—that were to lack  
 All sense,—but other passions in me ruled,  
 Passions more fervent, making me less prompt  
 To in-door study than was wise or well, 370  
 Or suited to those years. Yet I, though used  
 In magisterial<sup>4</sup> liberty to rove,  
 Culling such flowers of learning as might tempt  
 A random choice, could shadow forth a place  
 (If now I yield not to a flattering dream) 375  
 Whose studious aspect should have bent me down  
 To instantaneous service; should at once  
 Have made me pay to science and to arts  
 And written lore, acknowledged my liege lord,  
 A homage frankly offered up, like that 380  
 Which I had paid to Nature. Toil and pains  
 In this recess, by thoughtful Fancy built,  
 Should spread from heart to heart; and stately groves,  
 Majestic edifices, should not want  
 A corresponding dignity within. 385  
 The congregating temper<sup>6</sup> that pervades  
 Our unripe years, not wasted, should be taught  
 To minister to works of high attempt—  
 Works which the enthusiast would perform with love.  
 Youth should be awed, religiously possessed 390

4. Masterful.

Religious, of what holy joy there is  
 In knowledge if it be sincerely sought  
 For its own sake—in glory, and in praise,  
 If but by labour won, and to endure.

400

- [395] The passing day should learn to put aside  
 Her trappings here, should strip them off abashed  
 Before antiquity and stedfast truth,  
 And strong book-mindedness; and over all  
 Should be a healthy sound simplicity,  
 [400] A seemly plainness—name it as you will,  
 Republican or pious.<sup>7</sup>

405

If these thoughts

Be a gratuitous emblazonry  
 That does but mock this recreant age, at least  
 Let Folly and False-seeming (we might say)

410

- [405] Be free to affect whatever formal gait  
 Of moral or scholastic discipline  
 Shall raise them highest in their own esteem;  
 Let them parade among the schools at will,  
 But spare the house of God. Was ever known

415

- [409] The witless shepherd who would drive his flock  
 With serious repetition to a pool  
 Of which 'tis plain to sight they never taste?  
 A weight must surely hang on days begun  
 And ended with worst mockery. Be wise,  
 Ye Presidents and Deans, and to your bells

420

- [416] Give seasonable rest, for 'tis a sound  
 Hollow as ever vexed the tranquil air,  
 And your officious doings bring disgrace  
 On the plain steeples of our English Church,

425

- [420] Whose worship, 'mid remotest village trees,  
 Suffers for this. Even science<sup>9</sup> too, at hand  
 In daily sight of such irreverence,  
 Is smitten thence with an unnatural taint,  
 Loses her just authority, falls beneath

430

- [425] Collateral suspicion, else unknown.  
 This obvious truth did not escape me then,  
 Unthinking as I was, and I confess  
 That—having in my native hills given loose  
 To a schoolboy's dreaming—I had raised a pile

435

- [429] Upon the basis of the coming time  
 Which now before me melted fast away,  
 Which could not live, scarcely had life enough

7. The plainness described is that of the early Roman Republic, but Wordsworth leaves it open to those who dislike the current associations of republicanism with the French Revolution to think of it

in terms of primitive Christianity.

9. Knowledge, learning in general (though at line 384 above "science" seems to have its modern sense).

With a conviction of the power that waits  
 On knowledge, when sincerely sought and prized  
 For its own sake, on glory and on praise  
 If but by labour won, and fit to endure.  
 The passing day should learn to put aside 395  
 Her trappings here, should strip them off abashed  
 Before antiquity and stedfast truth  
 And strong book-mindedness; and over all  
 A healthy sound simplicity should reign,  
 A seemly plainness, name it what you will, 400  
 Republican or pious.<sup>7</sup>

If these thoughts  
 Are a gratuitous emblazonry  
 That mocks the recreant age *we* live in, then  
 Be Folly and False-seeming free to affect  
 Whatever formal gait of discipline 405  
 Shall raise them highest in their own esteem—  
 Let them parade among the Schools at will,  
 But spare the House of God. Was ever known  
 The witless shepherd who persists to drive  
 A flock that thirsts not to a pool disliked? 410  
 A weight must surely hang on days begun  
 And ended with such mockery. Be wise,  
 Ye Presidents and Deans, and, till the spirit  
 Of ancient times revive, and youth be trained  
 At home in pious service,<sup>8</sup> to your bells 415  
 Give seasonable rest, for 'tis a sound  
 Hollow as ever vexed the tranquil air;  
 And your officious doings bring disgrace  
 On the plain steeples of our English Church,  
 Whose worship, 'mid remotest village trees, 420  
 Suffers for this. Even Science,<sup>9</sup> too, at hand  
 In daily sight of this irreverence,  
 Is smitten thence with an unnatural taint,  
 Loses her just authority, falls beneath  
 Collateral suspicion, else unknown. 425  
 This truth escaped me not, and I confess,  
 That having 'mid my native hills given loose  
 To a schoolboy's vision, I had raised a pile

8. Wordsworth, whose brother Christopher was Master of Trinity, Cambridge, and unpopular for enforcement of chapel

attendance, shows his continuing independence of mind in not toning down substantially the advice given in 1805.

- To mock the builder. Oh, what joy it were  
 [431] To see a sanctuary for our country's youth 440  
 With such a spirit in it as might be  
 Protection for itself, a virgin grove,  
 Primaeval in its purity and depth—  
 Where, though the shades were filled with cheerfulness,  
 [435] Nor indigent of songs warbled from crowds 445  
 In under-coverts, yet the countenance  
 Of the whole place should wear a stamp of awe—  
 A habitation sober and demure  
 For ruminating creatures,<sup>1</sup> a domain  
 [440] For quiet things to wander in, a haunt 450  
 In which the heron might delight to feed  
 By the shy rivers, and the pelican  
 Upon the cypress-spire in lonely thought  
 Might sit and sun himself.<sup>2</sup> Alas, alas,  
 [445] In vain for such solemnity we look; 455  
 Our eyes are crossed by butterflies, our ears  
 Hear chattering popinjays—the inner heart  
 Is trivial, and the impresses without  
 Are of a gaudy region.<sup>3</sup>
- Different sight
- [450] Those venerable doctors saw of old 460  
 When all who dwelt within these famous walls  
 Led in abstemiousness a studious life,  
 When, in forlorn and naked chambers cooped  
 And crowded, o'er their ponderous books they sate  
 [455] Like caterpillars eating out their way 465  
 In silence, or with keen devouring noise  
 Not to be tracked or fathered.<sup>4</sup> Princes then  
 At matins froze, and couched at curfew-time,<sup>5</sup>  
 Trained up through piety and zeal to prize  
 [460] Spare diet, patient labour, and plain weeds.<sup>6</sup> 470  
 O seat of Arts, renowned throughout the world,  
 Far different service in those homely days  
 The nurslings of the Muses underwent  
 From their first childhood. In that glorious time  
 [465] When Learning, like a stranger come from far, 475  
 Sounding through Christian lands her trumpet, roused  
 The peasant and the king; when boys and youths,

1. Literally, animals that chew the cud.

2. Wordsworth draws the image of the pelican from William Bartram's *Travels Through North and South Carolina* (1791), more famous as a source for the "deep, romantic chasm" of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*.

3. I.e., the impressions made by the ex-

ternal world are of gaudiness.

4. Attributed to a source; compare imagination as the "unfathered vapour," at VI, 527, below.

5. "Matins": Morning prayer. "Curfew-time": time of the evening bell.

6. Garments.

Upon the basis of the coming time,  
 That fell in ruins round me. Oh, what joy  
 To see a sanctuary for our country's youth  
 Informed with such a spirit as might be  
 Its own protection; a primeval grove,  
 Where, though the shades with cheerfulness were filled,  
 Nor indigent of songs warbled from crowds  
 In under-coverts, yet the countenance  
 Of the whole place should bear a stamp of awe;  
 A habitation sober and demure  
 For ruminating creatures;<sup>1</sup> a domain  
 For quiet things to wander in; a haunt  
 In which the heron should delight to feed  
 By the shy rivers, and the pelican  
 Upon the cypress spire in lonely thought  
 Might sit and sun himself.<sup>2</sup>—Alas! Alas!  
 In vain for such solemnity I looked;  
 Mine eyes were crossed by butterflies, ears vexed  
 By chattering popinjays; the inner heart  
 Seemed trivial, and the impresses without  
 Of a too gaudy region.<sup>3</sup>

Different sight

Those venerable Doctors saw of old,  
 When all who dwelt within these famous walls  
 Led in abstemiousness a studious life;  
 When, in forlorn and naked chambers cooped  
 And crowded, o'er the ponderous books they hung  
 Like caterpillars eating out their way  
 In silence, or with keen devouring noise  
 Not to be tracked or fathered.<sup>4</sup> Princes then  
 At matins froze, and couched at curfew-time,<sup>5</sup>  
 Trained up through piety and zeal to prize  
 Spare diet, patient labour, and plain weeds.<sup>6</sup>  
 O seat of Arts! renowned throughout the world!  
 Far different service in those homely days  
 The Muses' modest nurslings underwent  
 From their first childhood: in that glorious time  
 When Learning, like a stranger come from far,  
 Sounding through Christian lands her trumpet, roused  
 Peasant and king; when boys and youths, the growth



The growth of ragged villages and huts,  
 Forsook their homes and—errant in the quest  
 [470] Of patron, famous school or friendly nook, 480  
 Where, pensioned, they in shelter might sit down—  
 From town to town and through wide scattered realms  
 Journeyed with their huge folios in their hands,  
 And often, starting from some covert place,  
 [475] Saluted the chance comer on the road, 485  
 Crying, 'An obolus, a penny give  
 To a poor scholar'; when illustrious men,  
 Lovers of truth, by penury constrained,  
 Bucer, Erasmus, or Melancthon, read  
 [480] Before the doors or windows of their cells  
 By moonshine through mere lack of taper light.<sup>7</sup> 490

But peace to vain regrets. We see but darkly  
 Even when we look behind us; and best things  
 Are not so pure by nature that they needs  
 [485] Must keep to all—as fondly all believe— 495  
 Their highest promise. If the mariner,  
 When at reluctant distance he hath passed  
 Some fair enticing island, did but know  
 What fate might have been his, could he have brought  
 [490] His bark to land upon the wished-for spot, 500  
 Good cause full often would he have to bless  
 The belt of churlish surf that scared him thence,  
 Or haste of the inexorable wind.  
 For me, I grieve not; happy is the man  
 [495] Who only misses what I missed, who falls 505  
 No lower than I fell. I did not love,  
 As hath been noticed heretofore, the guise  
 Of our scholastic studies—could have wished  
 The river to have had an ampler range  
 [500] And freer pace. But this I tax<sup>8</sup> not; far, 510  
 Far more I grieved to see among the band  
 Of those who in the field of contest stood  
 As combatants, passions that did to me  
 Seem low and mean—from ignorance of mine,  
 In part, and want of just forbearance; yet  
 My wiser mind grieves now for what I saw. 515  
 Willingly did I part from these, and turn  
 Out of their track to travel with the shoal  
 [507] Of more unthinking natures, easy minds

7. 1805, 484–87 (1850, 474–77) allude to the disgraced Byzantine general, Belisarius, traditionally said to have been blinded, and to have begged in Constantinople with the words, "*Date obolum Belisario*" ("Give a penny to Belisarius").

Bucer, Erasmus and Melancthon (1805, 489; 1850, 479) were three of the most distinguished early sixteenth-century scholars, the first two working at Cambridge and Oxford respectively.

8. Blame.

Of ragged villages and crazy huts,  
 Forsook their homes, and, errant in the quest  
 Of Patron, famous school or friendly nook, 470  
 Where, pensioned, they in shelter might sit down,  
 From town to town and through wide scattered realms  
 Journeyed with ponderous folios in their hands;  
 And often, starting from some covert place,  
 Saluted the chance comer on the road, 475  
 Crying 'An obolus, a penny give  
 To a poor scholar!'—when illustrious men,  
 Lovers of truth, by penury constrained,  
 Bucer, Erasmus, or Melancthon, read  
 Before the doors or windows of their cells 480  
 By moonshine through mere lack of taper light.<sup>7</sup>

But peace to vain regrets! We see but darkly  
 Even when we look behind us, and best things  
 Are not so pure by nature that they needs  
 Must keep to all, as fondly all believe, 485  
 Their highest promise. If the mariner  
 When at reluctant distance he hath passed  
 Some tempting island, could but know the ills  
 That must have fallen upon him had he brought  
 His bark to land upon the wished-for shore, 490  
 Good cause would oft be his to thank the surf  
 Whose white belt scared him thence, or wind that blew  
 Inexorably adverse: for myself  
 I grieve not; happy is the gownèd youth,  
 Who only misses what I missed, who falls 495  
 No lower than I fell.

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; but more, far more, I grieved 500  
 To see displayed among an eager few,  
 Who in the field of contest persevered,  
 Passions unworthy of youth's generous heart  
 And mounting spirit, pitiably repaid,  
 When so disturbed, whatever palms are won. 505  
 From these I turned to travel with the shoal  
 Of more unthinking natures, easy minds

And pillowy, and not wanting love that makes  
 The day pass lightly on,<sup>9</sup> when foresight sleeps, 520  
 [510] And wisdom and the pledges interchanged  
 With our own inner being, are forgot.

To books, our daily fare prescribed, I turned  
 With sickly appetite; and when I went, 525  
 At other times, in quest of my own food,  
 I chaced not steadily the manly deer,  
 But laid me down to any casual feast  
 Of wild wood-honey; or, with truant eyes  
 Unruly, peeped about for vagrant fruit. 530  
 And as for what pertains to human life,  
 The deeper passions working round me here—  
 Whether of envy, jealousy, pride, shame,  
 Ambition, emulation, fear, or hope,  
 Or those of dissolute pleasure—were by me 535  
 Unshared, and only now and then observed,  
 So little was their hold upon my being,  
 As outward things that might administer  
 To knowledge or instruction. Hushed meanwhile  
 Was the under-soul, locked up in such a calm, 540  
 That not a leaf of the great nature stirred.<sup>1</sup>  
 Yet was this deep vacation not given up  
 To utter waste.<sup>2</sup> Hitherto I had stood  
 In my own mind remote from human life,  
 [515] At least from what we commonly so name, 545  
 Even as a shepherd on a promontory,  
 Who, lacking occupation, looks far forth  
 Into the endless sea, and rather makes  
 Than finds what he beholds.<sup>3</sup> And sure it is,  
 [520] That this first transit from the smooth delights 550  
 And wild outlandish walks of simple youth  
 To something that resembled an approach  
 Towards mortal business, to a privileged world  
 Within a world, a midway residence  
 [525] With all its intervenient imagery, 555  
 Did better suit my visionary mind—  
 Far better, than to have been bolted forth,<sup>4</sup>

9. The love which these unthinking men do not lack (are "not wanting") is a superficial kind, and merely serves to pass the time agreeably. "Shoal" (1805, 518; 1850, 506): crowd, throng (Johnson's *Dictionary*).

1. Lines 524-41 were cut in 1816/19. The impression given both of Cambridge, and of Wordsworth's own behavior, can be filled out by comparison with a letter of March 6, 1804, to De Quincey, who had just gone up to Oxford (*EY*, p. 454).

2. It is the supposedly active part of the university year that Wordsworth refers to as vacation.

3. Wordsworth has in mind the literary "shepherd of the Hebrid Isles" who in Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* (1748), Book I, stanza xxx, sees, or thinks he sees, "A vast assembly" as Phoebus dips his wain into the ocean.

4. Forced out of the protected world of childhood as an animal is forced to bolt from cover.

And pillow; yet not wanting love that makes  
 The day pass lightly on,<sup>9</sup> when foresight sleeps,  
 And wisdom and the pledges interchanged 510  
 With our own inner-being are forgot.

Yet was this deep vacation not given up  
 To utter waste.<sup>2</sup> Hitherto I had stood  
 In my own mind remote from social life  
 (At least from what we commonly so name), 515  
 Like a lone shepherd on a promontory  
 Who lacking occupation looks far forth  
 Into the boundless sea, and rather makes  
 Than finds what he beholds.<sup>3</sup> And sure it is,  
 That this first transit from the smooth delights 520  
 And wild outlandish walks of simple youth  
 To something that resembled an approach  
 Towards human business, to a privileged world  
 Within a world, a midway residence  
 With all its intervenient imagery, 525  
 Did better suit my visionary mind,  
 Far better, than to have been bolted forth,<sup>4</sup>

- Thrust out abruptly into fortune's way  
 Among the conflicts of substantial life—
- [530] By a more just gradation did lead on 560  
 To higher things, more naturally matured  
 For permanent possession, better fruits,  
 Whether of truth or virtue, to ensue.<sup>5</sup>
- [535] In playful zest of fancy did we note— 565  
 How could we less?—the manners and the ways  
 Of those who in the livery were arrayed  
 Of good or evil fame, of those with whom  
 By frame of academic discipline
- [540] Perforce we were connected, men whose sway, 570  
 And whose authority of office, served  
 To set our minds on edge,<sup>6</sup> and did no more.  
 Nor wanted we rich pastime of this kind—  
 Found everywhere, but chiefly in the ring
- [545] Of the grave elders, men unscoured, grotesque 575  
 In character, tricked out like aged trees  
 Which through the lapse of their infirmity  
 Give ready place to any random seed  
 That chuses to be reared upon their trunks.
- [550] Here on my view, confronting as it were 580  
 Those shepherd swains whom I had lately left,  
 Did flash a different image of old age—  
 How different—yet both withal alike  
 A book of rudiments for the unpractised sight,
- [554] Objects embossed, and which with sedulous<sup>7</sup> care 585  
 Nature holds up before the eye of youth  
 In her great school—with further view, perhaps,  
 To enter early on her tender scheme
- [560] Of teaching comprehension with delight  
 And mingling playful with pathetic thoughts.
- The surfaces of artificial life 590  
 And manners finely spun, the delicate race  
 Of colours, lurking, gleaming up and down
- [565] Through that state arras woven with silk and gold—  
 This wily interchange of snaky hues,  
 Willingly and unwillingly revealed,<sup>8</sup> 595

5. Wordsworth's syntax in *1805*, 560–63 (*1850*, 530–33) is uncommonly cryptic. The halfway stage ("just gradation") of university life leads on to "higher things, more naturally matured," with the result that better fruits may follow.

6. In the context, presumably "to irritate"—by analogy with setting teeth on edge—rather than to stimulate, or sharpen.

7. Diligent, as at I, 571, above.

8. In evoking the artificial surface of life Wordsworth draws on Spenser, the "gentle bard" of *1805*, 279–83; see especially *Faerie Queene*, III, stanza 28, which describes an "arras," or tapestry, "Woven with gold and silk," in which the "rich metal lurked privily," yet here and there "shewd itself and shone unwillingly."

Thrust out abruptly into Fortune's way  
 Among the conflicts of substantial life;  
 By a more just gradation did lead on 530  
 To higher things; more naturally matured,  
 For permanent possession, better fruits,  
 Whether of truth or virtue, to ensue.<sup>5</sup>  
 In serious mood, but oftener, I confess,  
 With playful zest of fancy did we note 535  
 (How could we less?) the manners and the ways  
 Of those who lived distinguished by the badge  
 Of good or ill report; or those with whom  
 By frame of Academic discipline  
 We were perforce connected, men whose sway 540  
 And known authority of office served  
 To set our minds on edge,<sup>6</sup> and did no more.  
 Nor wanted we rich pastime of this kind,  
 Found everywhere, but chiefly in the ring  
 Of the grave Elders, men unscoured, grotesque 545  
 In character, tricked out like aged trees  
 Which through the lapse of their infirmity  
 Give ready place to any random seed  
 That chooses to be reared upon their trunks.

Here on my view, confronting vividly 550  
 Those shepherd swains whom I had lately left,  
 Appeared a different aspect of old age;  
 How different! yet both distinctly marked,  
 Objects embossed to catch the general eye,  
 Or portraitures for special use designed, 555  
 As some might seem, so aptly do they serve  
 To illustrate Nature's book of rudiments—  
 That book upheld as with maternal care  
 When she would enter on her tender scheme  
 Of teaching comprehension with delight, 560  
 And mingling playful with pathetic thoughts.

The surfaces of artificial life  
 And manners finely wrought, the delicate race  
 Of colours, lurking, gleaming up and down  
 Through that state arras woven with silk and gold: 565  
 This wily interchange of snaky hues,  
 Willingly or unwillingly revealed,<sup>8</sup>

I had not learned to watch, and at this time  
 Perhaps, had such been in my daily sight,  
 I might have been indifferent thereto  
 As hermits are to tales of distant things.  
 Hence, for these rarities elaborate 600  
 Having no relish yet, I was content  
 With the more homely produce rudely piled  
 [570] In this our coarser warehouse. At this day  
 I smile in many a mountain solitude  
 At passages and fragments that remain 605  
 Of that inferior exhibition, played  
 By wooden images, a theatre  
 [576] For wake or fair. And oftentimes do flit  
 Remembrances before me of old men,  
 Old humourists,<sup>9</sup> who have been long in their graves, 610  
 And, having almost in my mind put off  
 [580] Their human names, have into phantoms passed  
 Of texture midway betwixt life and books.

I play the loiterer, 'tis enough to note 615  
 That here in dwarf proportions were expressed  
 The limbs of the great world—its goings-on  
 [585] Collaterally pourtrayed as in mock fight,  
 A tournament of blows, some hardly<sup>1</sup> dealt  
 Though short of mortal combat—and whate'er  
 Might of this pageant be supposed to hit 620  
 A simple rustic's notice, this way less,  
 [590] More that way, was not wasted upon me.  
 And yet this spectacle may well demand  
 A more substantial name, no mimic show,  
 Itself a living part of a live whole, 625  
 A creek of the vast sea. For, all degrees  
 [595] And shapes of spurious fame and short-lived praise  
 Here sate in state, and, fed with daily alms,  
 Retainers won away from solid good.  
 And here was Labour, his own Bond-slave; Hope 630  
 That never set the pains against the prize;  
 [600] Idleness, halting with his weary clog;  
 And poor misguided Shame, and witless Fear,  
 And simple Pleasure, foraging for Death;  
 Honour misplaced, and Dignity astray; 635  
 Feuds, factions, flatteries, Enmity and Guile,  
 [605] Murmuring Submission and bald Government  
 (The idol weak as the idolator)  
 And Decency and Custom starving Truth,  
 And blind Authority beating with his staff 640

9. In the old sense: eccentric or fantastic men. 1. Hard, severely.

I neither knew nor cared for; and as such  
 Were wanting here, I took what might be found  
 Of less elaborate fabric. At this day 570  
 I smile, in many a mountain solitude  
 Conjuring up scenes as obsolete in freaks  
 Of character, in points of wit as broad,  
 As aught by wooden images performed  
 For entertainment of the gaping crowd 575  
 At wake or fair. And oftentimes do flit  
 Remembrances before me of old men—  
 Old humourists,<sup>9</sup> who have been long in their graves,  
 And having almost in my mind put off  
 Their human names, have into phantoms passed 580  
 Of texture midway between life and books.

I play the loiterer: 'tis enough to note  
 That here in dwarf proportions were expressed  
 The limbs of the great world; its eager strifes  
 Collaterally pourtrayed, as in mock fight, 585  
 A tournament of blows, some hardly<sup>1</sup> dealt  
 Though short of mortal combat; and whate'er  
 Might in this pageant be supposed to hit  
 An artless rustic's notice, this way less,  
 More that way, was not wasted upon me— 590  
 And yet the spectacle may well demand  
 A more substantial name, no mimic show,  
 Itself a living part of a live whole,  
 A creek in the vast sea; for, all degrees  
 And shapes of spurious fame and short-lived praise 595  
 Here sate in state, and fed with daily alms  
 Retainers won away from solid good;  
 And here was Labour, his own bond-slave; Hope,  
 That never set the pains against the prize;  
 Idleness halting with his weary clog, 600  
 And poor misguided Shame, and witless Fear,  
 And simple Pleasure foraging for Death;  
 Honour misplaced, and Dignity astray;  
 Feuds, factions, flatteries, enmity, and guile;  
 Murmuring submission, and bald government, 605  
 (The idol weak as the idolator),  
 And Decency and Custom starving Truth,  
 And blind Authority beating with his staff



The child that might have led him; Emptiness

[610] Followed as of good omen, and meek Worth  
Left to itself unheard of and unknown.<sup>2</sup>

Of these and other kindred notices  
I cannot say what portion is in truth

645

The naked recollection of that time,

[615] And what may rather have been called to life

By after-meditation. But delight,

That, in an easy temper lulled asleep,

Is still with innocence its own reward,

650

This surely was not wanting. Carelessly

I gazed, roving as through a cabinet<sup>3</sup>

[620] Or wide museum, thronged with fishes, gems,

Birds, crocodiles, shells, where little can be seen,

Well understood, or naturally endeared,

655

Yet still does every step bring something forth

That quickens, pleases, stings—and here and there

A casual rarity is singled out

And has its brief perusal, then gives way

To others, all supplanted in their turn.

660

Meanwhile, amid this gaudy congress framed

[625] Of things by nature most unneighbourly,

The head turns round, and cannot right itself;

And, though an aching and a barren sense

Of gay confusion still be uppermost,

665

With few wise longings and but little love,

[630] Yet something to the memory sticks at last

Whence profit may be drawn in times to come.

Thus in submissive idleness, my friend,

The labouring time of autumn, winter, spring—

670

Nine months—rolled pleasingly away, the tenth

[635] Returned me to my native hills again.

2. A passage which shows how well Wordsworth could, when he chose, manage the personifications that he had re-

jected in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.  
3. Display case.

The child that might have led him; Emptiness  
 Followed as of good omen, and meek Worth 610  
 Left to herself unheard of and unknown.<sup>2</sup>

Of these and other kindred notices  
 I cannot say what portion is in truth  
 The naked recollection of that time,  
 And what may rather have been called to life 615  
 By after-meditation. But delight  
 That, in an easy temper lulled asleep,  
 Is still with innocence its own reward,  
 This was not wanting. Carelessly I roamed 620  
 As through a wide museum from whose stores  
 A casual rarity is singled out  
 And has its brief perusal, then gives way  
 To others, all supplanted in their turn;  
 Till 'mid this crowded neighbourhood of things 625  
 That are by nature most unneighbourly,  
 The head turns round and cannot right itself;  
 And though an aching and a barren sense  
 Of gay confusion still be uppermost,  
 With few wise longings and but little love, 630  
 Yet to the memory something cleaves at last,  
 Whence profit may be drawn in times to come.

Thus in submissive idleness, my Friend!  
 The labouring time of autumn, winter, spring,  
 Eight months! rolled pleasingly away; the ninth  
 Came and returned me to my native hills. 635

## Book Fourth

### *Summer Vacation*

- A pleasant sight it was when, having clomb  
The Heights of Kendal, and that dreary moor  
Was crossed, at length as from a rampart's edge
- [15] I overlooked the bed of Windermere.<sup>1</sup> 5  
I bounded down the hill, shouting amain  
A lusty summons to the farther shore  
For the old ferryman; and when he came
- [16] I did not step into the well-known boat 10  
Without a cordial welcome. Thence right forth  
I took my way, now drawing towards home,  
To that sweet valley where I had been reared;
- [20] 'Twas but a short hour's walk ere, veering round,  
I saw the snow-white church upon its hill  
Sit like a thronèd lady, sending out 15  
A gracious look all over its domain.<sup>3</sup>
- [27] Glad greetings had I, and some tears perhaps,  
From my old dame, so motherly and good,  
While she perused me with a parent's pride.
- [30] The thoughts of gratitude shall fall like dew 20  
Upon thy grave, good creature:<sup>4</sup> while my heart  
Can beat I never will forget thy name.  
Heaven's blessing be upon thee where thou liest  
After thy innocent and busy stir
- [35] In narrow cares, thy little daily growth 25  
Of calm enjoyments, after eighty years,  
And more than eighty, of untroubled life—  
Childless, yet by the strangers to thy blood  
Honoured with little less than filial love.
- [40] Great joy was mine to see thee once again, 30  
Thee and thy dwelling, and a throng of things

1. Wordsworth was standing on the ridge by Cleabarrow, five or six hundred feet above the lake. "Clomb" (line 1): climbed.

3. Hawkshead, where the poet had been at school. As one approaches it—like

Wordsworth—along Esthwaite Water, the church does seem to sit above the roofs of the village.

4. Ann Tyson, Wordsworth's landlady, died in 1796, aged eighty-three.

## Book Fourth

### *Summer Vacation*

BRIGHT was the summer's noon when quickening steps  
Followed each other till a dreary moor  
Was crossed, and a bare ridge clomb, upon whose top  
Standing alone, as from a rampart's edge,  
I overlooked the bed of Windermere,<sup>1</sup> 5  
Like a vast river, stretching in the sun.  
With exultation, at my feet I saw  
Lake, islands, promontories, gleaming bays,  
A universe of Nature's fairest forms  
Proudly revealed with instantaneous burst, 10  
Magnificent, and beautiful, and gay.  
I bounded down the hill shouting amain  
For the old Ferryman; to the shout the rocks  
Replied, and when the Charon of the flood  
Had staid his oars, and touched the jutting pier, 15  
I did not step into the well-known boat  
Without a cordial greeting.<sup>2</sup> Thence with speed  
Up the familiar hill I took my way  
Towards that sweet Valley where I had been reared;  
'Twas but a short hour's walk, ere veering round 20  
I saw the snow-white church upon her hill  
Sit like a thronèd Lady, sending out  
A gracious look all over her domain.<sup>3</sup>  
Yon azure smoke betrays the lurking town;  
With eager footsteps I advance and reach 25  
The cottage threshold where my journey closed.  
Glad welcome had I, with some tears, perhaps,  
From my old Dame, so kind and motherly,  
While she perused me with a parent's pride.  
The thoughts of gratitude shall fall like dew 30  
Upon thy grave, good creature!<sup>4</sup> While my heart  
Can beat never will I forget thy name.  
Heaven's blessing be upon thee where thou liest  
After thy innocent and busy stir  
In narrow cares, thy little daily growth 35  
Of calm enjoyments, after eighty years,  
And more than eighty, of untroubled life,  
Childless, yet by the strangers to thy blood  
Honoured with little less than filial love.  
What joy was mine to see thee once again, 40  
Thee and thy dwelling, and a crowd of things

2. As de Selincourt comments, an "in-apt allusion"; Charon ferried the souls of the dead across the rivers Styx and

Acheron of the Greek underworld, and exchanged no cordial greetings with his passengers.

About its narrow precincts, all beloved  
And many of them seeming yet my own.

- Why should I speak of what a thousand hearts  
[45] Have felt, and every man alive can guess? 35  
The rooms, the court, the garden were not left  
Long unsaluted, and the spreading pine  
And broad stone table underneath its boughs—  
Our summer seat in many a festive hour—  
[50] And that unruly child of mountain birth, 40  
The froward brook, which, soon as he was boxed  
Within our garden, found himself at once  
As if by trick insidious and unkind,  
Stripped of his voice, and left to dimple down  
[55] Without an effort and without a will 45  
A channel paved by the hand of man.  
I looked at him and smiled, and smiled again,  
And in the press of twenty thousand thoughts,  
[59] 'Ha', quoth I, 'pretty prisoner, are you there!'  
—And now, reviewing soberly that hour, 50  
I marvel that a fancy did not flash  
Upon me, and a strong desire, straitway,  
At sight of such an emblem that shewed forth  
So aptly my late course of even days  
And all their smooth enthrallment, to pen down  
A satire on myself. My aged dame 55  
[65] Was with me, at my side; she guided me,  
I willing, nay—nay, wishing to be led.  
The face of every neighbour whom I met  
Was as a volume to me; some I hailed  
Far off, upon the road, or at their work— 60  
[70] Unceremonious greetings, interchanged  
With half the length of a long field between.  
Among my schoolfellows I scattered round  
A salutation that was more constrained  
Though earnest—doubtless with a little pride, 65  
[75] But with more shame, for my habiliments,  
The transformation and the gay attire.
- Delighted did I take my place again  
At our domestic table; and, dear friend,  
Relating simply as my wish hath been 70  
[80] A poet's history, can I leave untold  
The joy with which I laid me down at night  
In my accustomed bed, more welcome now  
Perhaps than if it had been more desired,  
Or been more often thought of with regret— 75  
[85] That bed whence I had heard the roaring wind  
And clamorous rain, that bed where I so oft

About its narrow precincts all beloved,  
 And many of them seeming yet my own!  
 Why should I speak of what a thousand hearts  
 Have felt, and every man alive can guess? 45  
 The rooms, the court, the garden were not left  
 Long unsaluted, nor the sunny seat  
 Round the stone table under the dark pine,  
 Friendly to studious or to festive hours;  
 Nor that unruly child of mountain birth, 50  
 The froward brook, who, soon as he was boxed  
 Within our garden, found himself at once,  
 As if by trick insidious and unkind,  
 Stripped of his voice and left to dimple down  
 (Without an effort and without a will) 55  
 A channel paved by man's officious care.  
 I looked at him and smiled, and smiled again,  
 And in the press of twenty thousand thoughts,  
 'Ha', quoth I, 'pretty prisoner, are you there!'  
 Well might sarcastic Fancy then have whispered, 60  
 'An emblem here behold of thy own life;  
 In its late course of even days with all  
 Their smooth enthrallment'; but the heart was full,  
 Too full for that reproach. My aged Dame  
 Walked proudly at my side: she guided me; 65  
 I willing, nay—nay, wishing to be led.  
 —The face of every neighbour whom I met  
 Was like a volume to me: some were hailed  
 Upon the road, some busy at their work,  
 Unceremonious greetings interchanged 70  
 With half the length of a long field between.  
 Among my schoolfellows I scattered round  
 Like recognitions, but with some constraint  
 Attended, doubtless, with a little pride,  
 But with more shame, for my habiliments, 75  
 The transformation wrought by gay attire.  
 Not less delighted did I take my place  
 At our domestic table: and, dear Friend!  
 In this endeavour simply to relate  
 A Poet's history, may I leave untold 80  
 The thankfulness with which I laid me down  
 In my accustomed bed, more welcome now  
 Perhaps than if it had been more desired  
 Or been more often thought of with regret;  
 That lowly bed whence I had heard the wind 85  
 Roar and the rain beat hard, where I so oft

Had lain awake on breezy nights to watch  
 The moon in splendour couched among the leaves  
 Of a tall ash that near our cottage stood, 80  
 [90] Had watched her with fixed eyes, while to and fro  
 In the dark summit of the moving tree  
 She rocked with every impulse of the wind.

Among the faces which it pleased me well  
 To see again was one by ancient right 85  
 [95] Our inmate, a rough terrier of the hills,  
 By birth and call of nature preordained  
 To hunt the badger and unearth the fox  
 Among the impervious crags. But having been  
 From youth our own adopted, he had passed 90  
 [100] Into a gentler service; and when first  
 The boyish spirit flagged, and day by day  
 Along my veins I kindled with the stir,  
 The fermentation and the vernal heat  
 Of poesy, affecting private shades 95  
 [105] Like a sick lover, then this dog was used  
 To watch me, an attendant and a friend,  
 Obsequious to my steps early and late,  
 Though often of such dilatory walk  
 Tired, and uneasy at the halts I made. 100  
 [110] A hundred times when in these wanderings  
 I have been busy with the toil of verse—  
 Great pains and little progress—and at once  
 Some fair enchanting image in my mind  
 Rose up, full-formed like Venus from the sea, 105  
 [115] Have I sprung forth towards him and let loose  
 My hand upon his back with stormy joy,  
 Caressing him again and yet again.<sup>5</sup>  
 And when in the public roads at eventide  
 I sauntered, like a river murmuring 110  
 [120] And talking to itself, at such a season  
 It was his custom to jog on before;  
 But, duly whensoever he had met  
 A passenger<sup>6</sup> approaching, would he turn  
 To give me timely notice, and straitway, 115  
 [125] Punctual to such admonishment, I hushed  
 My voice, composed my gait, and shaped myself  
 To give and take a greeting that might save  
 My name from piteous rumours, such as wait  
 [130] On men suspected to be crazed in brain. 120

5. Lines 101–8 are a playful rewriting of lines from *The Dog: An Idyllium*, composed by Wordsworth in 1786–87—the period to which the passage refers: “If while I gazed, to Nature blind, / In the calm ocean of my mind / Some new-

created image rose / In full-grown beauty at its birth, / Lovely as Venus from the sea, / Then, while my glad hand sprung to thee, / We were the happiest pair on earth” (*Oxford Wordsworth*, I, p. 264).  
 6. Passerby.

Had lain awake on summer nights to watch  
 The moon in splendour couched among the leaves  
 Of a tall ash, that near our cottage stood;  
 Had watched her with fixed eyes while to and fro 90  
 In the dark summit of the waving tree  
 She rocked with every impulse of the breeze.

Among the favourites whom it pleased me well  
 To see again, was one by ancient right  
 Our inmate, a rough terrier of the hills; 95  
 By birth and call of nature pre-ordained  
 To hunt the badger and unearth the fox  
 Among the impervious crags, but having been  
 From youth our own adopted, he had passed  
 Into a gentler service. And when first 100  
 The boyish spirit flagged, and day by day  
 Among my veins I kindled with the stir,  
 The fermentation, and the vernal heat  
 Of poesy, affecting private shades  
 Like a sick Lover, then this dog was used 105  
 To watch me, an attendant and a friend,  
 Obsequious to my steps early and late,  
 Though often of such dilatory walk  
 Tired, and uneasy at the halts I made.  
 A hundred times when, roving high and low, 110  
 I have been harassed with the toil of verse,  
 Much pains and little progress; and at once  
 Some lovely Image in the song rose up  
 Full-formed, like Venus rising from the sea;  
 Then have I darted forwards to let loose 115  
 My hand upon his back with stormy joy,  
 Caressing him again and yet again.  
 And when at evening on the public way  
 I sauntered, like a river murmuring  
 And talking to itself when all things else 120  
 Are still, the creature trotted on before;  
 Such was his custom; but whene'er he met  
 A passenger<sup>6</sup> approaching, he would turn  
 To give me timely notice, and straightway,  
 Grateful for that admonishment, I hushed 125  
 My voice, composed my gait, and, with the air  
 And mien of one whose thoughts are free, advanced  
 To give and take a greeting that might save  
 My name from piteous rumours; such as wait  
 On men suspected to be crazed in brain. 130



- Those walks, well worthy to be prized and loved—  
 Regretted, that word too was on my tongue,  
 But they were richly laden with all good,  
 And cannot be remembered but with thanks  
 [135] And gratitude and perfect joy of heart— 125  
 Those walks did now like a returning spring  
 Come back on me again. When first I made  
 Once more the circuit of our little lake  
 If ever happiness hath lodged with man  
 [140] That day consummate<sup>7</sup> happiness was mine— 130  
 Wide-spreading, steady, calm, contemplative.  
 The sun was set, or setting, when I left  
 Our cottage door, and evening soon brought on  
 A sober hour, not winning or serene,  
 [145] For cold and raw the air was, and untuned; 135  
 But as a face we love is sweetest then  
 When sorrow damps it, or, whatever look  
 It chance to wear, is sweetest if the heart  
 Have fulness in itself, even so with me  
 [150] It fared that evening. Gently did my soul 140  
 Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood  
 Naked as in the presence of her God.<sup>8</sup>  
 As on I walked, a comfort seemed to touch  
 A heart that had not been disconsolate,  
 [155] Strength came where weakness was not known to be, 145  
 At least not felt; and restoration came  
 Like an intruder knocking at the door  
 Of unacknowledged weariness. I took  
 The balance in my hand and weighed myself:  
 [161] I saw but little, and thereat was pleased; 150  
 Little did I remember, and even this  
 Still pleased me more—but I had hopes and peace  
 And swellings of the spirits, was rapt and soothed,  
 Conversed with promises, had glimmering views  
 [165] How life pervades the undecaying mind, 155  
 How the immortal soul with godlike power  
 Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep  
 That time can lay upon her, how on earth  
 Man if he do but live within the light  
 [170] Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad 160  
 His being with a strength that cannot fail.  
 Nor was there want of milder thoughts, of love,  
 Of innocence, and holiday repose,  
 And more than pastoral quiet in the heart  
 [175] Of amplest projects, and a peaceful end 165

7. Complete; pronounced "consummit."

8. When Moses in Exodus 34:33–34, came down from Mount Sinai, his face

shone so brightly that he covered it with a veil, but he took the veil off when talking to God.

Those walks well worthy to be prized and loved—  
 Regretted!—that word, too, was on my tongue,  
 But they were richly laden with all good,  
 And cannot be remembered but with thanks  
 And gratitude, and perfect joy of heart— 135  
 Those walks in all their freshness now came back  
 Like a returning Spring. When first I made  
 Once more the circuit of our little lake,  
 If ever happiness hath lodged with man,  
 That day consummate<sup>7</sup> happiness was mine, 140  
 Wide-spreading, steady, calm, contemplative.  
 The sun was set, or setting, when I left  
 Our cottage door, and evening soon brought on  
 A sober hour, not winning or serene,  
 For cold and raw the air was, and untuned; 145  
 But as a face we love is sweetest then  
 When sorrow damps it, or, whatever look  
 It chance to wear is sweetest if the heart  
 Have fulness in herself; even so with me  
 It fared that evening. Gently did my soul 150  
 Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood  
 Naked, as in the presence of her God.<sup>8</sup>  
 While on I walked, a comfort seemed to touch  
 A heart that had not been disconsolate:  
 Strength came where weakness was not known to be, 155  
 At least not felt; and restoration came  
 Like an intruder knocking at the door  
 Of unacknowledged weariness. I took  
 The balance, and with firm hand weighed myself.  
 —Of that external scene which round me lay, 160  
 Little, in this abstraction, did I see;  
 Remembered less; but I had inward hopes  
 And swellings of the spirit, was rapt and soothed,  
 Conversed with promises, had glimmering views  
 How life pervades the undecaying mind; 165  
 How the immortal soul with God-like power  
 Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep  
 That time can lay upon her; how on earth,  
 Man, if he do but live within the light  
 Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad 170  
 His being armed with strength that cannot fail.  
 Nor was there want of milder thoughts, of love,  
 Of innocence, and holiday repose;  
 And more than pastoral quiet, 'mid the stir  
 Of boldest projects, and a peaceful end 175

At last, or glorious, by endurance won.  
 Thus musing, in a wood I sate me down  
 Alone, continuing there to muse. Meanwhile  
 The mountain heights were slowly overspread  
 [180] With darkness, and before a rippling breeze. 170  
 The long lake lengthened out its hoary line,  
 And in the sheltered coppice<sup>9</sup> where I sate,  
 Around me, from among the hazel leaves—  
 Now here, now there, stirred by the straggling wind—  
 [185] Came intermittingly a breath-like sound, 175  
 A respiration short and quick, which oft,  
 Yea, might I say, again and yet again,  
 Mistaking for the panting of my dog,  
 The off-and-on companion of my walk,  
 [189] I turned my head to look if he were there. 180

A freshness also found I at this time.  
 In human life, the life I mean of those  
 Whose occupations really I loved.  
 The prospect often touched me with surprize:  
 Crowded and full, and changed, as seemed to me, 185  
 [195] Even as a garden in the heat of spring.  
 After an eight-days' absence. For—to omit  
 The things which were the same and yet appeared  
 So different—amid this solitude, 190  
 The little vale where was my chief abode,  
 [200] 'Twas not indifferent to a youthful mind  
 To note, perhaps, some sheltered seat in which  
 An old man had been used to sun himself,  
 Now empty; pale-faced babes whom I had left  
 In arms, known children of the neighbourhood, 195  
 [205] Now rosy prattlers, tottering up and down;  
 And growing girls whose beauty, filched away  
 With all its pleasant promises, was gone  
 To deck some slighted playmate's homely cheek.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, I had something of another eye, 200  
 [210] And often looking round was moved to smiles  
 Such as a delicate work of humour breeds.  
 I read, without design, the opinions, thoughts,  
 Of those plain-living people, in a sense.  
 Of love and knowledge: with another eye. 205  
 [215] I saw the quiet woodman in the woods,  
 The shepherd on the hills. With new delight,  
 This chiefly, did I view my grey-haired dame,  
 Saw her go forth to church, or other work

9. Copse: a small wood typically composed of hazel-bushes.

1. An echo of *Lycidas*, 65, "To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade."

At last, or glorious, by endurance won.  
 Thus musing, in a wood I sate me down  
 Alone, continuing there to muse: the slopes  
 And heights meanwhile were slowly overspread  
 With darkness, and before a rippling breeze 180  
 The long lake lengthened out its hoary line,  
 And in the sheltered coppice<sup>9</sup> where I sate,  
 Around me from among the hazel leaves,  
 Now here, now there, moved by the straggling wind,  
 Came ever and anon a breath-like sound, 185  
 Quick as the pantings of the faithful dog,  
 The off and on companion of my walk;  
 And such, at times, believing them to be,  
 I turned my head to look if he were there;  
 Then into solemn thought I passed once more. 190

A freshness also found I at this time  
 In human Life, the daily life of those  
 Whose occupations really I loved;  
 The peaceful scene oft filled me with surprise  
 Changed like a garden in the heat of spring 195  
 After an eight-days' absence. For (to omit  
 The things which were the same and yet appeared  
 Far otherwise) amid this rural solitude,  
 A narrow Vale where each was known to all,  
 'Twas not indifferent to a youthful mind 200  
 To mark some sheltering bower or sunny nook,  
 Where an old man had used to sit alone,  
 Now vacant; pale-faced babes whom I had left  
 In arms, now rosy prattlers at the feet  
 Of a pleased grandame tottering up and down; 205  
 And growing girls whose beauty, filched away  
 With all its pleasant promises, was gone  
 To deck some slighted playmate's homely cheek.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, I had something of a subtler sense,  
 And often looking round was moved to smiles 210  
 Such as a delicate work of humour breeds;  
 I read, without design, the opinions, thoughts,  
 Of those plain-living people now observed  
 With clearer knowledge; with another eye  
 I saw the quiet woodman in the woods, 215  
 The shepherd roam the hills. With new delight,  
 This chiefly, did I note my grey-haired Dame;  
 Saw her go forth to church or other work

- Of state, equipped in monumental trim— 210  
 [220] Short velvet cloak, her bonnet of the like,  
 A mantle such as Spanish cavaliers  
 Wore in old time. Her smooth domestic life—  
 Affectionate without uneasiness—  
 Her talk, her business, pleased me; and no less 215  
 [225] Her clear though shallow stream of piety,  
 That ran on sabbath days a fresher course.  
 With thoughts unfelt till now I saw her read  
 Her bible on the Sunday afternoons,  
 And loved the book when she had dropped asleep 220  
 [230] And made of it a pillow for her head.

- Nor less do I remember to have felt  
 Distinctly manifested at this time,  
 A dawning, even as of another sense,  
 A human-heartedness about my love 225  
 For objects hitherto the gladsome air  
 [235] Of my own private being, and no more<sup>2</sup>—  
 Which I had loved, even as a blessèd spirit  
 Or angel, if he were to dwell on earth,  
 Might love in individual happiness. 230  
 But now there opened on me other thoughts,  
 [240] Of change, congratulation and regret,  
 A new-born feeling. It spread far and wide:  
 The trees, the mountains shared it, and the brooks,  
 The stars of heaven, now seen in their old haunts— 235  
 White Sirius glittering o'er the southern crags,  
 [245] Orion with his belt, and those fair Seven,  
 Acquaintances of every little child,  
 And Jupiter, my own belovèd star.<sup>3</sup>  
 Whatever shadings of mortality 240  
 [250] Had fallen upon these objects heretofore  
 Were different in kind: not tender—strong,  
 Deep, gloomy were they, and severe, the scatterings  
 Of childhood, and moreover, had given way  
 In later youth to beauty and to love 245  
 [255] Enthusiastic, to delight and joy.

As one who hangs down-bending from the side  
 Of a slow-moving boat upon the breast  
 Of a still water, solacing himself

2. Looking back, Wordsworth dates the stages of his development differently at different times. The dawning of "human-heartedness" in his love for Nature is here recorded as occurring in 1788. In *Tintern Abbey* (1798), however, Nature is said to have been "all in all" as late as 1793, and Wordsworth by implication has

come only quite recently to hear "the still, sad music of humanity" (lines 73–76, 89–94).

3. Wordsworth was born on April 7, and thus under the planet Jupiter. "Those fair Seven" are the Seven Sisters, or Pleiades.

Of state, equipped in monumental trim;  
 Short velvet cloak (her bonnet of the like), 220  
 A mantle such as Spanish Cavaliers  
 Wore in old time. Her smooth domestic life,  
 Affectionate without disquietude,  
 Her talk, her business, pleased me; and no less  
 Her clear though shallow stream of piety 225  
 That ran on Sabbath days a fresher course;  
 With thoughts unfelt till now I saw her read  
 Her Bible on hot Sunday afternoons,  
 And loved the book, when she had dropped asleep  
 And made of it a pillow for her head. 230

Nor less do I remember to have felt,  
 Distinctly manifested at this time,  
 A human-heartedness about my love  
 For objects hitherto the absolute wealth  
 Of my own private being and no more:<sup>2</sup> 235  
 Which I had loved, even as a blessed spirit  
 Or Angel, if he were to dwell on earth,  
 Might love in individual happiness.  
 But now there opened on me other thoughts  
 Of change, congratulation or regret, 240  
 A pensive feeling! It spread far and wide;  
 The trees, the mountains shared it, and the brooks,  
 The stars of Heaven, now seen in their old haunts—  
 White Sirius glittering o'er the southern crags,  
 Orion with his belt, and those fair Seven, 245  
 Acquaintances of every little child,  
 And Jupiter, my own beloved star!<sup>3</sup>  
 Whatever shadings of mortality,  
 Whatever imports from the world of death  
 Had come among these objects heretofore, 250  
 Were, in the main, of mood less tender: strong,  
 Deep, gloomy were they, and severe; the scatterings  
 Of awe or tremulous dread, that had given way  
 In later youth to yearnings of a love  
 Enthusiastic, to delight and hope. 255

As one who hangs down-bending from the side  
 Of a slow-moving boat, upon the breast  
 Of a still water, solacing himself

- With such discoveries as his eye can make 250
- [260] Beneath him in the bottom of the deeps,  
Sees many beauteous sights—weeds, fishes, flowers,  
Grots, pebbles, roots of trees—and fancies more,  
Yet often is perplexed, and cannot part  
The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky, 255
- [265] Mountains and clouds, from that which is indeed  
The region, and the things which there abide  
In their true dwelling; now is crossed by gleam  
Of his own image, by a sunbeam now,  
And motions that are sent he knows not whence, 260
- [270] Impediments that make his task more sweet;  
Such pleasant office have we long pursued  
Incumbent o'er the surface of past time—  
With like success. Nor have we often looked  
On more alluring shows—to me at least— 265
- [275] More soft, or less ambiguously descried,  
Than those which now we have been passing by,  
And where we still are lingering. Yet in spite  
Of all these new employments of the mind  
There was an inner falling off. I loved,<sup>4</sup> 270
- [280] Loved deeply, all that I had loved before,  
More deeply even than ever; but a swarm  
Of heady thoughts jostling each other, gawds  
And feast and dance and public revelry  
And sports and games—less pleasing in themselves 275
- [285] Than as they were a badge, glossy and fresh,  
Of manliness and freedom—these did now  
Seduce me from the firm habitual quest  
Of feeding pleasures,<sup>5</sup> from that eager zeal,  
Those yearnings which had every day been mine, 280
- [290] A wild, unworldly-minded youth, given up  
To Nature and to books, or, at the most,  
From time to time by inclination shipped  
One among many, in societies  
That were, or seemed, as simple as myself. 285
- But now was come a change—it would demand  
Some skill, and longer time than may be spared,  
To paint even to myself these vanities,  
And how they wrought—but sure it is that now  
Contagious air did oft environ me, 290

4. The mutilated faircopy of Book IV of the five-Book *Prelude* that is preserved in *MS. W* opens at this point with five important lines not present in 1805: "Auspicious was this outset, and the days / That followed marched in flattering symphony / With such a fair presage; but 'twas not long / Ere fallings-off and in-

direct desires / Told of an inner weakness. Much I loved \* \* \*" Book IV in this original version seems to have been a shorter form of 1805, IV and V, into which it was very quickly expanded.

5. I.e., pleasures that supplied nutrition to the mind. "Gawds" (1805, 273; 1850, 281): gaieties (*NED*).

With such discoveries as his eye can make  
 Beneath him in the bottom of the deep, 260  
 Sees many beauteous sights—weeds, fishes, flowers,  
 Grots, pebbles, roots of trees, and fancies more,  
 Yet often is perplexed and cannot part  
 The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky,  
 Mountains and clouds, reflected in the depth 265  
 Of the clear flood, from things which there abide  
 In their true dwelling; now is crossed by gleam  
 Of his own image, by a sun-beam now,  
 And wavering motions sent he knows not whence,  
 Impediments that make his task more sweet; 270  
 Such pleasant office have we long pursued  
 Incumbent o'er the surface of past time  
 With like success, nor often have appeared  
 Shapes fairer or less doubtfully discerned  
 Than these to which the Tale, indulgent Friend! 275  
 Would now direct thy notice. Yet in spite  
 Of pleasure won, and knowledge not withheld,  
 There was an inner falling off—I loved,  
 Loved deeply all that had been loved before,  
 More deeply even than ever: but a swarm 280  
 Of heady schemes jostling each other, gawds,  
 And feast and dance, and public revelry,  
 And sports and games (too grateful in themselves,  
 Yet in themselves less grateful, I believe,  
 Than as they were a badge glossy and fresh 285  
 Of manliness and freedom) all conspired  
 To lure my mind from firm habitual quest  
 Of feeding pleasures,<sup>5</sup> to depress the zeal  
 And damp those daily yearnings which had once been mine—  
 A wild, unworldly-minded youth, given up 290  
 To his own eager thoughts. It would demand  
 Some skill, and longer time than may be spared,  
 To paint these vanities, and how they wrought



Unknown among these haunts in former days.

- [295] The very garments that I wore appeared  
 To prey upon my strength, and stopped the course  
 And quiet stream of self-forgetfulness.  
 Something there was about me that perplexed 295  
 Th' authentic sight of reason,<sup>6</sup> pressed too closely  
 On that religious dignity of mind  
 That is the very faculty of truth,  
 Which wanting—either, from the very first  
 A function never lighted up, or else 300  
 Extinguished—man, a creature great and good,  
 Seems but a pageant plaything with vile claws,<sup>7</sup>  
 And this great frame of breathing elements  
 A senseless idol.

This vague heartless<sup>8</sup> chace

- Of trivial pleasures was a poor exchange 305  
 For books and Nature at that early age.  
 [300] 'Tis true, some casual knowledge might be gained  
 Of character or life; but at that time,  
 Of manners put to school<sup>9</sup> I took small note,  
 And all my deeper passions lay elsewhere— 310  
 Far better had it been to exalt the mind  
 [305] By solitary study, to uphold  
 Intense desire by thought and quietness.  
 And yet, in chastisement of these regrets,  
 The memory of one particular hour 315  
 Doth here rise up against me. In a throng,  
 [310] A festal company of maids and youths,  
 Old men and matrons, staid, promiscuous rout,<sup>2</sup>  
 A medley of all tempers,<sup>3</sup> I had passed 320  
 The night in dancing, gaiety and mirth—  
 With din of instruments, and shuffling feet,  
 And glancing forms, and tapers glittering,  
 [315] And unaimed prattle flying up and down,  
 Spirits upon the stretch, and here and there  
 Slight shocks of young love-liking interspersed 325  
 That mounted up like joy into the head,  
 And tingled through the veins. Ere we retired  
 [320] The cock had crowed, the sky was bright with day;

6. De Selincourt draws attention to Coleridge's later definition of reason as "the mind's eye," "an organ bearing the same relation to spiritual objects \* \* \* as the eye bears to material and contingent phenomena" (*CC*, IV, i, pp. 155-57).

7. As with the floating island of III, 339-43, Wordsworth's image contains a specific reference. Owen points out ("Tipu's Tiger," *NQ*, CCXV [1970], pp. 379-80) that he had in mind a near life-sized

model of a tiger savaging a white man, captured at the fall of Seringapatam, India, in 1799, and on show at the East India Company in London. The tiger is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

8. Discouraging, depressing.

9. I.e., the study of human behavior.

2. "Promiscuous rout": varied company; both words are used in a Miltonic sense.

3. Temperaments.

In haunts where they, till now, had been unknown.  
 It seemed the very garments that I wore 295  
 Preyed on my strength, and stopped the quiet stream  
 Of self-forgetfulness.

Yes, that heartless<sup>8</sup> chase

Of trivial pleasures was a poor exchange  
 For books and nature at that early age.  
 'Tis true, some casual knowledge might be gained 300  
 Of character or life; but at that time,  
 Of manners put to school<sup>9</sup> I took small note,  
 And all my deeper passions lay elsewhere.  
 Far better had it been to exalt the mind  
 By solitary study, to uphold 305  
 Intense desire through meditative peace;  
 And yet, for chastisement of these regrets,  
 The memory of one particular hour  
 Doth here rise up against me.<sup>1</sup> 'Mid a throng  
 Of maids and youths, old men, and matrons staid 310  
 A medley of all tempers,<sup>3</sup> I had passed  
 The night in dancing, gaiety, and mirth,  
 With din of instruments and shuffling feet,  
 And glancing forms, and tapers glittering,  
 And unaimed prattle flying up and down; 315  
 Spirits upon the stretch, and here and there  
 Slight shocks of young love-liking interspersed,  
 Whose transient pleasure mounted to the head,  
 And tingled through the veins. Ere we retired,  
 The cock had crowed, and now the eastern sky 320

1. The omission of 1805, lines 282–86, 289–90, 295–304, makes for an easier lead into the consecration scene that follows.

Two miles I had to walk along the fields  
 Before I reached my home. Magnificent 330  
 The morning was, a memorable pomp,  
 [325] More glorious than I ever had beheld.  
 The sea was laughing at a distance; all  
 The solid mountains were as bright as clouds,  
 Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light;<sup>4</sup> 335  
 And in the meadows and the lower grounds  
 [330] Was all the sweetness of a common dawn—  
 Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,<sup>5</sup>  
 And labourers going forth into the fields.  
 Ah, need I say, dear friend, that to the brim 340  
 My heart was full? I made no vows, but vows  
 [335] Were then made for me: bond unknown to me  
 Was given, that I should be—else sinning greatly—  
 A dedicated spirit.<sup>6</sup> On I walked  
 In blessedness, which even yet remains. 345

Strange rendezvous my mind was at that time,  
 [340] A party-coloured shew of grave and gay,  
 Solid and light, short-sighted and profound,  
 Of inconsiderate habits and sedate,  
 Consorting in one mansion unreprieved. 350  
 I knew the worth of that which I possessed,  
 [345] Though slighted and misused. Besides in truth  
 That summer, swarming as it did with thoughts  
 Transient and loose, yet wanted not a store  
 Of primitive hours,<sup>8</sup> when—by these hindrances 355  
 Unthwarted—I experienced in myself  
 [350] Conformity as just as that of old  
 To the end and written spirit of God's works,  
 Whether held forth in Nature or in man. 360

From many wanderings that have left behind  
 Remembrances not lifeless, I will here  
 Single out one, then pass to other themes.  
 A<sup>9</sup> favorite pleasure hath it been with me  
 From time of earliest youth to walk alone 365  
 Along the public way, when, for the night

4. Wordsworth, in this deliberately Miltonic line, has in mind the description of Raphael's wings as "Sky-tinctured grain" (*Paradise Lost*, V, 285); "grain" literally means "fast-dyed," but was associated in poetic usage with crimson. The "empyrean" is the highest heaven, the sphere of the pure element of fire.

5. Another Miltonic echo: "fruits and flowers, / Walks, and the melody of birds" (*Paradise Lost*, VIII, 527-28).

6. Wordsworth does not say that his

dedication was to a life of poetry, but it is a very strong implication.

8. I.e., times at which Wordsworth responded with his original immediacy.

9. The incident of the Discharged Soldier (lines 363-504) was written as an independent poem, a companion piece to *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, in January-February 1798. See Beth Darlington's text in *Bicentenary Studies*, pp. 433-37. In place of lines 363-64 was the half-line "I love to walk."

Was kindling, not unseen, from humble copse  
 And open field, through which the pathway wound,  
 And homeward led my steps. Magnificent  
 The morning rose, in memorable pomp,  
 Glorious as e'er I had beheld—in front, 325  
 The sea lay laughing at a distance; near  
 The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds,  
 Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light;<sup>4</sup>  
 And in the meadows and the lower grounds  
 Was all the sweetness of a common dawn— 330  
 Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,<sup>5</sup>  
 And labourers going forth to till the fields.

Ah! need I say, dear Friend! that to the brim  
 My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows  
 Were then made for me; bond unknown to me 335  
 Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,  
 A dedicated Spirit.<sup>6</sup> On I walked  
 In thankful blessedness, which yet survives.

Strange rendezvous my mind was at that time,<sup>7</sup>  
 A parti-coloured show of grave and gay, 340  
 Solid and light, short-sighted and profound;  
 Of inconsiderate habits and sedate,  
 Consorting in one mansion unreprieved.  
 The worth I knew of powers that I possessed,  
 Though slighted and too oft misused. Besides, 345  
 That summer, swarming as it did with thoughts  
 Transient and idle, lacked not intervals  
 When Folly from the frown of fleeting Time  
 Shrunk, and the mind experienced in herself  
 Conformity as just as that of old 350  
 To the end and written spirit of God's works,  
 Whether held forth in Nature or in Man.

When from our better selves we have too long  
 Been parted by the hurrying world, and droop,  
 Sick of its business, of its pleasures tired, 355  
 How gracious, how benign, is Solitude;  
 How potent a mere image of her sway;  
 Most potent when impressed upon the mind  
 With an appropriate human centre—hermit,  
 Deep in the bosom of the wilderness; 360  
 Votary (in vast cathedral, where no foot  
 Is treading, where no other face is seen)

7. With no support from the manuscripts the first edition reads, "Strange rendezvous!  
 My mind was at that time \* \* \*."

- Deserted, in its silence it assumes  
 [368] A character of deeper quietness  
 Than pathless solitudes. At such an hour  
 Once, ere these summer months were passed away,  
 I slowly mounted up a steep ascent 370  
 Where the road's wat'ry surface, to the ridge  
 [380] Of that sharp rising, glittered in the moon  
 And seemed before my eyes another stream  
 Creeping with silent lapse to join the brook  
 [384] That murmured in the valley.<sup>2</sup> On I went 375  
 Tranquil, receiving in my own despite  
 Amusement, as I slowly passed along,  
 From such near objects as from time to time  
 Perforce intruded on the listless sense,  
 Quiescent and disposed to sympathy, 380  
 With an exhausted mind worn out by toil  
 And all unworthy of the deeper joy  
 Which waits on distant prospect—cliff or sea,  
 The dark blue vault and universe of stars.  
 Thus did I steal along that silent road, 385  
 My body from the stillness drinking in  
 A restoration like the calm of sleep,  
 But sweeter far. Above, before, behind,  
 Around me, all was peace and solitude;  
 I looked not round, nor did the solitude 390  
 Speak to my eye, but it was heard and felt,  
 O happy state! what beauteous pictures now  
 Rose in harmonious imagery; they rose  
 As from some distant region of my soul  
 And came along like dreams—yet such as left 395  
 Obscurely mingled with their passing forms  
 A consciousness of animal delight,  
 A self-possession felt in every pause  
 And every gentle movement of my frame.
- While thus I wandered, step by step led on, 400  
 It chanced a sudden turning of the road  
 Presented to my view an uncouth shape,  
 [388] So near that, slipping back into the shade  
 Of a thick hawthorn, I could mark him well,  
 [390] Myself unseen. He was of stature tall, 405

2. Wordsworth has a specific landscape in mind—the “ascent” is Briers Brow, above the Windermere Ferry, and the corner round which the soldier is discovered is just past Far Sawrey, three miles from Hawkshead (see Thompson, pp. 139–41). He is, however, prepared to include a detail noticed by Dorothy at

Alfoxden on January 31, 1798, a day or two before he was writing: “The road to the village of Holford glittered like another stream.” “Lapse” (1805, 374; 1850, 382): gentle flow; see *Paradise Lost*, VIII, 263, “And liquid lapse of murmuring streams.”

Kneeling at prayers; or watchman on the top  
 Of lighthouse, beaten by Atlantic waves;  
 Or as the soul of that great Power is met 365  
 Sometimes embodied on a public road,  
 When, for the night deserted, it assumes  
 A character of quiet more profound  
 Than pathless wastes.

Once, when those summer months  
 Were flown, and autumn brought its annual show 370  
 Of oars with oars contending, sails with sails,  
 Upon Winander's spacious breast, it chanced  
 That—after I had left a flower-decked room  
 (Whose in-door pastime, lighted up, survived  
 To a late hour), and spirits overwrought 375  
 Were making night do penance for a day  
 Spent in a round of strenuous idleness<sup>1</sup>—  
 My homeward course led up a long ascent,  
 Where the road's watery surface, to the top  
 Of that sharp rising, glittered to the moon 380  
 And bore the semblance of another stream  
 Stealing with silent lapse to join the brook  
 That murmured in the vale.<sup>2</sup> All else was still;  
 No living thing appeared in earth or air,  
 And, save the flowing water's peaceful voice, 385  
 Sound there was none—but, lo! an uncouth shape,  
 Shown by a sudden turning of the road,  
 So near that, slipping back into the shade  
 Of a thick hawthorn, I could mark him well,  
 Myself unseen. He was of stature tall, 390

1. As de Selincourt remarks, the addition of this passage "was unnecessary and the rather elaborate style in which it is written contrasts awkwardly with the bare, telling simplicity of the narration that follows." "Strenuous idleness" (line 378):

a translation of Horace "*strenua \* \* \* inertia*" (*Epistles*, I, xi, 28); Wordsworth uses the Horatian phrase again in "This lawn, a carpet all alive," written in 1829.

- A foot above man's common measure tall,  
 Stiff in his form, and upright, lank and lean—  
 A man more meagre, as it seemed to me,  
 Was never seen abroad by night or day.<sup>3</sup>
- [395] His arms were long, and bare his hands; his mouth 410  
 Shewed ghastly<sup>4</sup> in the moonlight; from behind,  
 A milestone propped him, and his figure seemed  
 Half sitting, and half standing. I could mark  
 That he was clad in military garb,  
 Though faded yet entire.<sup>5</sup> He was alone, 415  
 Had no attendant, neither dog, nor staff,  
 [400] Nor knapsack; in his very dress appeared  
 A desolation, a simplicity  
 That seemed akin to solitude. Long time  
 Did I peruse him with a mingled sense 420  
 Of fear and sorrow. From his lips meanwhile  
 There issued murmuring sounds, as if of pain  
 [405] Or of uneasy thought; yet still his form  
 Kept the same steadiness, and at his feet  
 His shadow lay, and moved not. In a glen 425  
 Hard by, a village stood, whose roofs and doors  
 Were visible among the scattered trees,  
 Scarce distant from the spot an arrow's flight.  
 I wished to see him move, but he remained  
 Fixed to his place, and still from time to time 430  
 Sent forth a murmuring voice of dead complaint,  
 Groans scarcely audible. Without self-blame  
 I had not thus prolonged my watch; and now,  
 Subduing my heart's specious cowardise,<sup>7</sup> 435  
 [410] I left the shady nook where I had stood  
 And hailed him. Slowly from his resting-place  
 He rose, and with a lean and wasted arm  
 In measured gesture lifted to his head  
 Returned my salutation, then resumed  
 [415] His station as before. And when erelong 440  
 I asked his history, he in reply  
 Was neither slow nor eager, but, unmoved,  
 And with a quiet uncomplaining voice,  
 A stately air of mild indifference,

3. Lines 405–9 are a shortened, and much less impressive, form of *Discharged Soldier*, 41–47: “He was in stature tall, / A foot above man's common measure tall, / And lank, and upright. There was in his form / A meagre stiffness. You might almost think / That his bones wounded him. His legs were long, / So long and shapeless that I looked at them / Forgetful of the body they sustained.”

4. Ghostly (*Johnson's Dictionary*).

5. Two sentences of the earlier poem

have been omitted at this point, describing the soldier's detachment: “His face was turned / Towards the road, yet not as if he sought / For any living thing. He appeared / Forlorn and desolate, a man cut off / From all his kind, and more than half detached / From his own nature” (*Discharged Soldier*, 55–60).

7. I.e., “the cowardise of my specious heart”; Wordsworth had been pretending to himself to have better motives than he really had.

A span above man's common measure tall,  
 Stiff, lank, and upright; a more meagre man  
 Was never seen before by night or day.  
 Long were his arms, pallid his hands; his mouth  
 Looked ghastly<sup>4</sup> in the moonlight: from behind, 395  
 A mile-stone propped him; I could also ken  
 That he was clothed in military garb,  
 Though faded, yet entire. Companionless,  
 No dog attending, by no staff sustained,  
 He stood, and in his very dress appeared 400  
 A desolation, a simplicity,  
 To which the trappings of a gaudy world  
 Make a strange back-ground.<sup>6</sup> From his lips, ere long,  
 Issued low muttered sounds, as if of pain  
 Or some uneasy thought; yet still his form 405  
 Kept the same awful steadiness—at his feet  
 His shadow lay, and moved not. From self-blame  
 Not wholly free, I watched him thus; at length  
 Subduing my heart's specious cowardice,<sup>7</sup>  
 I left the shady nook where I had stood 410  
 And hailed him. Slowly from his resting-place  
 He rose, and with a lean and wasted arm  
 In measured gesture lifted to his head  
 Returned my salutation; then resumed  
 His station as before; and when I asked 415  
 His history, the veteran, in reply,  
 Was neither slow nor eager; but, unmoved,  
 And with a quiet uncomplaining voice,  
 A stately air of mild indifference,

6. It is odd that Wordsworth could ever have preferred these two empty lines to the beautiful reading of 1805, "That seemed akin to solitude." On the whole

he tended to cut the episode in successive versions; of the 142 lines of 1805, less than a hundred stand in 1850, the major cuts taking place in 1832 or 1838/39.



- [420] He told in simple words a soldier's tale: 445  
 That in the tropic islands he had served,  
 Whence he had landed scarcely ten days past—  
 That on his landing he had been dismissed,  
 [424] And now was travelling to his native home.<sup>8</sup>  
 At this I turned and looked towards the village, 450  
 But all were gone to rest, the fires all out,  
 And every silent window to the moon  
 Shone with a yellow glitter. 'No one there',  
 Said I, 'is waking; we must measure back  
 The way which we have come. Behind yon wood 455  
 A labourer dwells, and, take it on my word,  
 He will not murmur should we break his rest,  
 And with a ready heart will give you food  
 And lodging for the night.' At this he stooped,  
 And from the ground took up an oaken staff 460  
 By me yet unobserved, a traveller's staff—  
 [428] Which I suppose from his slack hand had dropped,  
 And lain till now neglected in the grass.

- Towards the cottage without more delay  
 We shaped our course. As it appeared to me 465  
 [431] He travelled without pain, and I beheld  
 With ill-suppressed astonishment his tall  
 And ghastly figure moving at my side;  
 Nor while we journeyed thus could I forbear  
 To question him of what he had endured 470  
 [436] From hardship, battle, or the pestilence.  
 He all the while was in demeanor calm,  
 [440] Concise in answer. Solemn and sublime  
 He might have seemed, but that in all he said  
 There was a strange half-absence, and a tone 475  
 Of weakness and indifference, as of one  
 Remembering the importance of his theme  
 But feeling it no longer. We advanced  
 Slowly, and ere we to the wood were come  
 [445] Discourse had ceased. Together on we passed 480  
 In silence through the shades, gloomy and dark;  
 Then, turning up along an open field,  
 We gained the cottage. At the door I knocked,  
 Calling aloud, 'My friend, here is a man  
 By sickness overcome. Beneath your roof 485  
 This night let him find rest, and give him food  
 If food he need, for he is faint and tired.'

8. *Discharged Soldier*, 103–4, reads "And with the little strength he yet had left / Was travelling to regain \* \* \*" The soldier had been in the West Indies, which accounts for his wasted condition. It is

reckoned that by 1796 the British forces there had lost 40,000 men through yellow fever, and that as many again had been rendered unfit for further service—being no doubt dismissed on their return.

He told in few plain words a soldier's tale— 420  
 That in the Tropic Islands he had served,  
 Whence he had landed scarcely three weeks past;  
 That on his landing he had been dismissed,  
 And now was travelling towards his native home.<sup>8</sup>  
 This heard, I said, in pity, 'Come with me.' 425  
 He stooped, and straightway from the ground took up  
 An oaken staff by me yet unobserved—  
 A staff which must have dropt from his slack hand  
 And lay till now neglected in the grass.  
 Though weak his step and cautious, he appeared 430  
 To travel without pain, and I beheld,  
 With an astonishment but ill suppressed,  
 His ghostly<sup>9</sup> figure moving at my side;  
 Nor could I, while we journeyed thus, forbear  
 To turn from present hardships to the past, 435  
 And speak of war, battle, and pestilence,  
 Sprinkling this talk with questions, better spared,  
 On what he might himself have seen or felt.  
 He all the while was in demeanour calm,  
 Concise in answer; solemn and sublime 440  
 He might have seemed, but that in all he said  
 There was a strange half-absence, as of one  
 Knowing too well the importance of his theme,  
 But feeling it no longer. Our discourse  
 Soon ended, and together on we passed 445  
 In silence through a wood gloomy and still.  
 Up-turning, then, along an open field,  
 We reached a cottage. At the door I knocked,  
 And earnestly to charitable care  
 Commended him as a poor friendless man, 450  
 Belated and by sickness overcome.

9. Assumed by de Selincourt to be a copyist's error for 1805 "ghastly," but the change is made in the base text of *MS. D* (1832), and not corrected in sub-

sequent revisions. The two words still meant the same, and Wordsworth very probably decided to avoid repetition of "ghastly" in line 395.

Assured that now my comrade would repose  
 In comfort, I entreated that henceforth  
 He would not linger in the public ways, 490  
 [455] But ask for timely furtherance, and help  
 Such as his state required. At this reproof,<sup>1</sup>  
 With the same ghastly mildness in his look,  
 He said, 'My trust is in the God of Heaven,  
 And in the eye of him that passes me.' 495  
 [460] The cottage door was speedily unlocked,  
 And now the soldier touched his hat again  
 With his lean hand, and in a voice that seemed  
 To speak with a reviving interest,  
 Till then unfelt, he thanked me; I returned 500  
 [465] The blessing of the poor unhappy man,  
 And so we parted. Back I cast a look,  
 And lingered near the door a little space,  
 Then sought with quiet heart my distant home.<sup>3</sup>

1. In the early version the poet's reproof had been sharper, more intrusive: "And told him, feeble as he was, 'twere fit / He asked relief or alms" (*Discharged*

*Soldier*, 161-62).

3. The final sentence is not present in *The Discharged Soldier*.

Assured that now the traveller would repose  
 In comfort, I entreated that henceforth  
 He would not linger in the public ways,  
 But ask for timely furtherance and help 455  
 Such as his state required. At this reproof,  
 With the same ghastly mildness in his look,  
 He said, 'My trust is in the God of Heaven,  
 And in the eye of him who passes me!'

The cottage door was speedily unbarred, 460  
 And now the soldier touched his hat once more  
 With his lean hand, and in a faltering voice,  
 Whose tone bespake reviving interests  
 Till then unfelt, he thanked me; I returned  
 The farewell blessing of the patient man,<sup>2</sup> 465  
 And so we parted. Back I cast a look,  
 And lingered near the door a little space,  
 Then sought with quiet heart my distant home.

This passed, and he who deigns to mark with care  
 By what rules governed, with what end in view, 470  
 This Work proceeds, *he* will not wish for more.<sup>4</sup>

2. A very different emphasis from Wordsworth's original reading, "the poor unhappy man" (*Discharged Soldier* and 1805).

4. Lines 469-71 were omitted in the first

edition, but stand in *MSS. D* and *E*. In each case the copyist has entered a query as to whether they should be cut, but there is no evidence to suggest that Wordsworth ever decided against them.

## Book Fifth

### Books

- Even in the steadiest mood of reason,<sup>1</sup> when  
All sorrow for thy transitory pains  
Goes out, it grieves me for thy state, O man,  
Thou paramount creature, and thy race, while ye  
Shall sojourn on this planet, not for woes 5
- [6] Which thou endur'st—that weight, albeit huge,  
I charm away<sup>2</sup>—but for those palms atchieved  
[10] Through length of time, by study and hard thought,  
The honours of thy high endowments; there  
My sadness finds its fuel. Hitherto 10  
In progress through this verse my mind hath looked  
Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven  
As her prime teacher, intercourse with man
- [15] Established by the Sovereign Intellect,  
Who through that bodily image hath diffused 15  
A soul divine which we participate,  
A deathless spirit.<sup>3</sup> Thou also, man, hast wrought,  
For commerce of thy nature with itself,<sup>4</sup>
- [20] Things worthy of unconquerable life;  
And yet we feel—we cannot chuse but feel— 20  
That these must perish. Tremblings of the heart  
It gives, to think that the immortal being  
No more shall need such garments;<sup>5</sup> and yet man,
- [25] As long as he shall be the child of earth,  
Might almost 'weep to have' what he may lose— 25  
Nor be himself extinguished, but survive  
Abject, depressed, forlorn, disconsolate.<sup>6</sup>

1. In Book IV of the five-Book *Prelude* there was no break between the Discharged Soldier (1805, IV, 360–504) and 1805, V, 1–48. *MS. W* preserves the transition-piece that carried Wordsworth from the personal sufferings of 'the poor unhappy man', through to more general reflections: "Enough of private sorrow—longest lived / Is transient, severest doth not lack / A mitigation in th'assured trust / Of the grave's quiet comfort and blest home, / Inheritance vouchsafed to man perhaps / Alone of all that suffer on the earth. / Even in the steadiest \* \* \*"

2. I.e., I propose to ignore.

3. I.e., intercourse between man and Nature has been established by "the Sovereign Intellect" (God—called elsewhere "the one great mind"), who has diffused through the physical world a soul, or life force, shared by man. (In line 15, "bodily" means "physical, substantial," and "image" refers back to "the speaking force" of visible Nature, line 12.) This late but unequivocal restatement of the pantheist position of *Tintern Abbey*,

94–103, was modified in the revisions of *MS. D* (1832 or 1838/39) but did not until the poet's final corrections to *MS. E* reach the wording of 1850, where all reference to the "soul divine" has gone, and the perception even of a "deathless spirit" in Nature becomes a whim of transitory man (1850, 17–18).

4. I.e., man (as well as the "Sovereign Intellect") has created works by which to communicate with other men.

5. I.e., to think that man, when he becomes an immortal being, shall no longer need the works described in 1805, 19 (1850, 20).

6. Wordsworth's syntax in 1805, 23–27 (1850, 24–28) is strained, but a key to his meaning is provided by Shakespeare's sonnet 64, to which his quotation marks draw attention: "This thought is as a death, which cannot choose / But weep to have that which it fears to lose." While he is on earth man is in the position almost of grieving to possess those works that may be taken from him while he lives on abject and disconsolate.

## Book Fifth

### *Books*

WHEN Contemplation, like the night-calm felt  
Through earth and sky, spreads widely, and sends deep  
Into the soul its tranquillizing power,  
Even then I sometimes grieve for thee, O Man,  
Earth's paramount Creature! not so much for woes 5  
That thou endurest; heavy though that weight be,  
Cloud-like it mounts, or touched with light divine  
Doth melt away; but for those palms achieved,  
Through length of time, by patient exercise  
Of study and hard thought; there, there, it is 10  
That sadness finds its fuel. Hitherto,  
In progress through this work, my mind hath looked  
Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven  
As her prime teacher, intercourse with man  
Established by the sovereign Intellect, 15  
Who through that bodily image hath diffused,  
As might appear to the eye of fleeting time,  
A deathless spirit. Thou also, man! hast wrought,  
For commerce of thy nature with herself,<sup>4</sup>  
Things that aspire to unconquerable life; 20  
And yet we feel—we cannot choose but feel—  
That they must perish. Tremblings of the heart  
It gives, to think that our immortal being  
No more shall need such garments;<sup>5</sup> and yet man,  
As long as he shall be the child of earth, 25  
Might almost 'weep to have' what he may lose,  
Nor be himself extinguished, but survive,  
Abject, depressed, forlorn, disconsolate.<sup>6</sup>

- A thought is with me sometimes, and I say,  
 [30] 'Should earth by inward throes be wrenched throughout,  
 Or fire be sent from far to wither all 30  
 Her pleasant habitations, and dry up  
 Old Ocean in his bed, left singed and bare,  
 Yet would the living presence still subsist  
 [35] Victorious; and composure would ensue,  
 And kindlings like the morning—presage sure, 35  
 Though slow perhaps, of a returning day.'  
 But all the meditations of mankind,  
 Yea, all the adamantine holds<sup>7</sup> of truth  
 [40] By reason built, or passion (which itself  
 Is highest reason in a soul sublime),<sup>8</sup> 40  
 The consecrated works of bard and sage,  
 Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,  
 Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes—  
 [45] Where would they be? Oh, why hath not the mind  
 Some element to stamp her image on 45  
 In nature somewhat nearer to her own?  
 Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad  
 Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?
- [50] One day, when in the hearing of a friend  
 I had given utterance to thoughts like these, 50  
 He answered with a smile that in plain truth  
 'Twas going far to seek disquietude—  
 But on the front of his reproof confessed  
 [55] That he at sundry seasons had himself  
 Yielded to kindred hauntings, and, forthwith, 55  
 Added that once upon a summer's noon  
 While he was sitting in a rocky cave  
 By the seaside, perusing as it chanced,  
 [60] The famous history of the errant knight  
 Recorded by Cervantes,<sup>9</sup> these same thoughts 60  
 Came to him, and to height unusual rose  
 While listlessly he sate, and, having closed  
 The book, had turned his eyes towards the sea.  
 [65] On poetry and geometric truth  
 (The knowledge that endures) upon these two, 65  
 And their high privilege of lasting life  
 Exempt from all internal injury,  
 He mused—upon these chiefly—and at length,  
 His senses yielding to the sultry air,  
 [70] Sleep seized him and he passed into a dream. 70

7. Indestructible fortresses.

8. Compare *1805*, XIII, 166–70, where imagination comes to be seen as “reason in her most exalted mood.”9. *Don Quixote* (1605), a major influence on eighteenth-century English literature; it had been read by Wordsworth as a child (see *1805*, 179*n*, below).

A thought is with me sometimes, and I say,—  
 Should the whole frame of earth by inward throes 30  
 Be wrenched, or fire come down from far to scorch  
 Her pleasant habitations, and dry up  
 Old Ocean, in his bed left singed and bare,  
 Yet would the living Presence still subsist  
 Victorious, and composure would ensue, 35  
 And kindlings like the morning—presage sure  
 Of day returning and of life revived.  
 But all the meditations of mankind,  
 Yea, all the adamantin<sup>7</sup> holds of truth  
 By reason built, or passion, which itself 40  
 Is highest reason in a soul sublime;<sup>8</sup>  
 The consecrated works of Bard and Sage,  
 Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,  
 Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes;  
 Where would they be? Oh! why hath not the Mind 45  
 Some element to stamp her image on  
 In nature somewhat nearer to her own?  
 Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad  
 Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?

One day, when from my lips a like complaint 50  
 Had fallen in presence of a studious friend,  
 He with a smile made answer, that in truth  
 'Twas going far to seek disquietude;  
 But on the front of his reproof confessed  
 That he himself had oftentimes given way 55  
 To kindred hauntings. Whereupon I told,  
 That once in the stillness of a summer's noon,  
 While I was seated in a rocky cave  
 By the sea-side, perusing, so it chanced,  
 The famous history of the errant knight 60  
 Recorded by Cervantes,<sup>9</sup> these same thoughts  
 Beset me, and to height unusual rose,  
 While listlessly I sate, and, having closed  
 The book, had turned my eyes toward the wide sea.  
 On poetry and geometric truth, 65  
 And their high privilege of lasting life,  
 From all internal injury exempt,  
 I mused, upon these chiefly: and at length,  
 My senses yielding to the sultry air,  
 Sleep seized me, and I passed into a dream. 70



- He saw before him an Arabian waste,  
 A desert, and he fancied that himself  
 Was sitting there in the wide wilderness  
 Alone upon the sands. Distress of mind  
 Was growing in him when, behold, at once 75  
 To his great joy a man was at his side,  
 [76] Upon a dromedary mounted high.  
 He seemed an arab of the Bedouin tribes;  
 A lance he bore, and underneath one arm  
 A stone, and in the opposite hand a shell 80  
 [80] Of a surpassing brightness. Much rejoiced  
 The dreaming man that he should have a guide  
 To lead him through the desert; and he thought,  
 While questioning himself what this strange freight  
 [85] Which the newcomer carried through the waste 85  
 Could mean, the arab told him that the stone—  
 To give it in the language of the dream—  
 Was *Euclid's Elements*.<sup>2</sup> 'And this', said he,  
 'This other', pointing to the shell, 'this book  
 Is something of more worth.' 'And, at the word, 90  
 The stranger', said my friend continuing,  
 [90] 'Stretched forth the shell towards me, with command  
 That I should hold it to my ear. I did so  
 And heard that instant in an unknown tongue,  
 Which yet I understood, articulate sounds, 95  
 [95] A loud prophetic blast of harmony,  
 An ode<sup>3</sup> in passion uttered, which foretold  
 Destruction to the children of the earth  
 By deluge now at hand. No sooner ceased  
 The song, but with calm look the arab said 100  
 [100] That all was true, that it was even so  
 As had been spoken, and that he himself  
 Was going then to bury those two books—  
 The one that held acquaintance with the stars,  
 And wedded man to man by purest bond 105  
 [105] Of nature, undisturbed by space or time;  
 Th' other that was a god, yea many gods,  
 Had voices more than all the winds, and was  
 A joy, a consolation, and a hope.'  
 [110] My friend continued, 'Strange as it may seem 110  
 I wondered not, although I plainly saw  
 The one to be a stone, th' other a shell,  
 Nor doubted once but that they both were books,  
 Having a perfect faith in all that passed.  
 A wish was now engendered in my fear 115

2. Euclid was a Greek mathematician of the third century B.C.; his *Elements* established the mathematical science of

geometry.

3. A poem written to be sung to music (Johnson's *Dictionary*).

I saw before me stretched a boundless plain  
 Of sandy wilderness, all black and void,  
 And as I looked around, distress and fear  
 Came creeping over me, when at my side,  
 Close at my side, an uncouth shape appeared<sup>1</sup> 75  
 Upon a dromedary, mounted high.  
 He seemed an Arab of the Bedouin tribes:  
 A lance he bore, and underneath one arm  
 A stone, and in the opposite hand, a shell  
 Of a surpassing brightness. At the sight 80  
 Much I rejoiced, not doubting but a guide  
 Was present, one who with unerring skill  
 Would through the desert lead me; and while yet  
 I looked and looked, self-questioned what this freight  
 Which the new-comer carried through the waste 85  
 Could mean, the Arab told me that the stone  
 (To give it in the language of the dream)  
 Was 'Euclid's Elements';<sup>2</sup> and 'This', said he,  
 'Is something of more worth'; and at the word  
 Stretched forth the shell, so beautiful in shape, 90  
 In colour so resplendent, with command  
 That I should hold it to my ear. I did so,  
 And heard that instant in an unknown tongue,  
 Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,  
 A loud prophetic blast of harmony; 95  
 An Ode,<sup>3</sup> in passion uttered, which foretold  
 Destruction to the children of the earth  
 By deluge, now at hand. No sooner ceased  
 The song, than the Arab with calm look declared  
 That all would come to pass of which the voice 100  
 Had given forewarning, and that he himself  
 Was going then to bury those two books:  
 The one that held acquaintance with the stars,  
 And wedded soul to soul in purest bond  
 Of reason, undisturbed by space or time; 105  
 The other that was a god, yea many gods,  
 Had voices more than all the winds, with power  
 To exhilarate the spirit, and to soothe,  
 Through every clime, the heart of human kind.  
 While this was uttering, strange as it may seem, 110  
 I wondered not, although I plainly saw  
 The one to be a stone, the other a shell;  
 Nor doubted once but that they both were books,  
 Having a perfect faith in all that passed.  
 Far stronger, now, grew the desire I felt 115

1. Wordsworth's final reading associates the Arab with the Discharged Soldier,

also "an uncouth shape" when first perceived (1805, IV, 402).

- [116] To cleave unto this man, and I begged leave  
 To share his errand with him. On he passed  
 Not heeding me; I followed, and took note  
 That he looked often backward with wild look,
- [120] Grasping his twofold treasure to his side. 120  
 Upon a dromedary, lance in rest,  
 He rode, I keeping pace with him; and now  
 I fancied that he was the very knight  
 Whose tale Cervantes tells, yet not the knight,  
 But was an arab of the desert too, 125
- [125] Of these was neither, and was both at once.  
 His countenance meanwhile grew more disturbed,  
 And looking backwards when he looked I saw  
 A glittering light, and asked him whence it came.
- [130] "It is", said he, "the waters of the deep 130  
 Gathering upon us." Quickening then his pace  
 He left me; I called after him aloud;  
 He heeded not, but with his twofold charge
- [135] Beneath his arm—before me full in view— 135  
 I saw him riding o'er the desert sands  
 With the fleet waters of the drowning world  
 In chace of him; whereat I waked in terror,  
 And saw the sea before me, and the book
- [140] In which I had been reading at my side.<sup>4</sup>

- Full often, taking from the world of sleep 140  
 This arab phantom which my friend beheld,  
 This semi-Quixote, I to him have given  
 A substance, fancied him a living man—
- [145] A gentle dweller in the desert, crazed 145  
 By love, and feeling, and internal thought  
 Protracted among endless solitudes—  
 Have shaped him, in the oppression of his brain,  
 Wandering upon this quest and thus equipped.  
 And I have scarcely pitied him, have felt
- [150] A reverence for a being thus employed, 150  
 And thought that in the blind and awful lair  
 Of such a madness reason did lie couched.  
 Enow<sup>5</sup> there are on earth to take in charge  
 Their wives, their children, and their virgin loves,
- [155] Or whatsoever else the heart holds dear— 155  
 Enow to think of these—yea, will I say,  
 In sober contemplation of the approach

4. The dream of the Arab and his two "books," ascribed to a friend in 1805 and to Wordsworth himself in 1850, is in fact a brilliantly imaginative transformation of a dream experienced by the philosopher Descartes in 1619. It had pre-

sumably been related to Wordsworth by Coleridge; see Jane Worthington Smyser, "Wordsworth's Dream of Poetry and Science," *PMLA*, LXXI (1956), pp. 269–75.

5. Enough.

To cleave unto this man; but when I prayed  
 To share his enterprise, he hurried on  
 Reckless of me: I followed, not unseen,  
 For oftentimes he cast a backward look,  
 Grasping his twofold treasure.—Lance in rest, 120  
 He rode, I keeping pace with him; and now  
 He, to my fancy, had become the knight  
 Whose tale Cervantes tells; yet not the knight,  
 But was an Arab of the desert too;  
 Of these was neither, and was both at once. 125  
 His countenance, meanwhile, grew more disturbed;  
 And, looking backwards when he looked, mine eyes  
 Saw, over half the wilderness diffused,  
 A bed of glittering light: I asked the cause:  
 'It is', said he, 'the waters of the deep 130  
 Gathering upon us'; quickening then the pace  
 Of the unwieldy creature he bestrode,  
 He left me: I called after him aloud;  
 He heeded not; but, with his twofold charge  
 Still in his grasp, before me, full in view, 135  
 Went hurrying o'er the illimitable waste,  
 With the fleet waters of a drowning world  
 In chase of him; wherèat I waked in terror,  
 And saw the sea before me, and the book,  
 In which I had been reading, at my side.<sup>4</sup> 140

Full often, taking from the world of sleep  
 This Arab phantom, which I thus beheld,  
 This semi-Quixote, I to him have given  
 A substance, fancied him a living man,  
 A gentle dweller in the desert, crazed 145  
 By love and feeling, and internal thought  
 Protracted among endless solitudes;  
 Have shaped him wandering upon this quest!  
 Nor have I pitied him; but rather felt  
 Reverence was due to a being thus employed; 150  
 And thought that, in the blind and awful lair  
 Of such a madness, reason did lie couched.  
 Enow<sup>5</sup> there are on earth to take in charge  
 Their wives, their children, and their virgin loves,  
 Or whatsoever else the heart holds dear; 155  
 Enow to stir for these; yea, will I say,  
 Contemplating in soberness the approach

Of such great overthrow, made manifest  
 By certain evidence, that I methinks  
 [1160] Could share that maniac's anxiousness, could go 160  
 Upon like errand. Oftentimes at least  
 Me hath such deep entrancement half-possessed  
 When I have held a volume in my hand—  
 Poor earthly casket of immortal verse—  
 [1165] Shakespeare or Milton, labourers divine. 165

Mighty, indeed supreme, must be the power  
 Of living Nature which could thus so long  
 Detain me from the best of other thoughts.  
 [1170] Even in the lisping time of infancy 170  
 And, later down, in prattling childhood—even  
 While I was travelling back among those days—  
 How could I ever play an ingrate's part?<sup>6</sup>  
 Once more should I have made those bowers resound,  
 [1175] And intermingled strains of thankfulness 175  
 With their own thoughtless melodies. At least  
 It might have well beseemed me to repeat  
 Some simply fashioned tale, to tell again  
 In slender accents of sweet verse some tale  
 [1180] That did bewitch me then, and soothes me now.<sup>8</sup> 180  
 O friend, O poet, brother of my soul,  
 Think not that I could ever pass along  
 Untouched by these remembrances; no, no,  
 But I was hurried forward by a stream  
 And could not stop. Yet wherefore should I speak,  
 Why call upon a few weak words to say 185  
 [1185] What is already written in the hearts  
 Of all that breathe—what in the path of all  
 Drops daily from the tongue of every child  
 Wherever man is found? The trickling tear  
 Upon the cheek of listening infancy 190  
 Tells it, and the insuperable look  
 [1190] That drinks as if it never could be full.

That portion of my story I shall leave  
 There registered. Whatever else there be  
 Of power or pleasure, sown or fostered thus— 195

6. Behave like an ungrateful person; "ingrate" is applied by God to Adam in *Paradise Lost*, III, 97. "Travelling back" (1805, 171; 1850, 172) refers to Wordsworth's return, in memory, to his childhood in the process of composing *The Prelude*.

8. "Of my earliest days at school," Wordsworth commented in 1847, "I have little to say but that they were very happy ones, chiefly because I was left at lib-

erty \* \* \* to read whatever books I liked. For example, I read all Fielding's works, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and any part of Swift that I liked; *Gulliver's Travels*, and the *Tale of the Tub*, being both much to my taste" (*Memoirs*, I, p. 10).

Still earlier reading can be deduced from the references to fairy-stories in lines 364–69 below, and to the *Arabian Nights*, in 482–500.

Of an event so dire, by signs in earth  
 Or heaven made manifest, that I could share  
 That maniac's fond anxiety, and go 160  
 Upon like errand. Oftentimes at least  
 Me hath such strong entrancement overcome,  
 When I had held a volume in my hand,  
 Poor earthly casket of immortal verse,  
 Shakespeare, or Milton, labourers divine! 165

Great and benign, indeed, must be the power  
 Of living nature, which could thus so long  
 Detain me from the best of other guides  
 And dearest helpers, left unthanked, unpraised.  
 Even in the time of lisping infancy, 170  
 And later down, in prattling childhood even,  
 While I was travelling back among those days,  
 How could I ever play an ingrate's part?<sup>6</sup>  
 Once more should I have made those bowers resound,  
 By intermingling strains of thankfulness 175  
 With their own thoughtless melodies; at least  
 It might have well beseeemed me to repeat  
 Some simply fashioned tale, to tell again,  
 In slender<sup>7</sup> accents of sweet verse, some tale  
 That did bewitch me then, and soothes me now.<sup>8</sup> 180  
 O Friend! O Poet! brother of my soul,  
 Think not that I could pass along untouched  
 By these remembrances. Yet wherefore speak?  
 Why call upon a few weak words to say  
 What is already written in the hearts 185  
 Of all that breathe?—what in the path of all  
 Drops daily from the tongue of every child,  
 Wherever man is found? The trickling tear  
 Upon the cheek of listening Infancy  
 Proclaims it, and the insuperable look  
 That drinks as if it never could be full. 190

That portion of my story I shall leave  
 There registered: whatever else of power  
 Or pleasure, sown or fostered thus, may be

7. Graceful.

- [195] Peculiar to myself—let that remain  
 Where it lies hidden in its endless home  
 Among the depths of time. And yet it seems  
 That here, in memory of all books which lay  
 Their sure foundations in the heart of man, 200
- [200] Whether by native prose, or numerous verse,<sup>9</sup>  
 That in the name of all inspirèd souls—  
 From Homer the great thunderer, from the voice  
 Which roars along the bed of Jewish song,  
 And that, more varied and elaborate, 205
- [205] Those trumpet-tones of harmony that shake  
 Our shores in England, from those loftiest notes  
 Down to the low and wren-like warblings, made  
 For cottagers and spinners at the wheel  
 And weary travellers when they rest themselves 210
- [210] By the highways and hedges: ballad-tunes,  
 Food for the hungry ears of little ones,  
 And of old men who have survived their joy—  
 It seemeth in behalf of these, the works,  
 And of the men who framed them, whether known, 215
- [215] Or sleeping nameless in their scattered graves,  
 That I should here assert their rights, attest  
 Their honours, and should once for all pronounce  
 Their benediction, speak of them as powers<sup>1</sup>  
 For ever to be hallowed—only less 220
- [220] For what we may become, and what we need,  
 Than Nature's self which is the breath of God.

- Rarely and with reluctance would I stoop  
 To transitory themes,<sup>3</sup> yet I rejoice,  
 [225] And, by these thoughts admonished, must speak out 225  
 Thanksgivings from my heart that I was reared  
 Safe from an evil which these days have laid  
 Upon the children of the land—a pest  
 That might have dried me up body and soul.<sup>4</sup>
- [230] This verse is dedicate to Nature's self 230  
 And things that teach as Nature teaches: then,

9. A reminiscence of *Paradise Lost*, V, 150. "Native": produced by nature; natural, not artificial (Johnson's *Dictionary*). "Numerous": harmonious; consisting of parts rightly numbered (*ibid.*).

1. Compare *1805*, XII, 309–12, where the poet records his own ambition to create a work that "might become / A power like one of Nature's."

3. In the central 200 lines of the *Book (1805, 223–422)* Wordsworth's thoughts turn to the "transitory theme" of educational theory.

4. Compare "vain th' attempt / To advertise in verse a public pest" (Cowper, *The Task*, IV, 500–1). The "evil" that Wordsworth refers to was the plague of educational theories that had followed the publication of Rousseau's *Émile* (1762). Among the most recent and influential of these works was *Practical Education*, published by Maria Edgeworth and her father in summer 1798, and read by Coleridge when he and the Wordsworths were at Hamburg in September (Griggs, I, p. 418).

Peculiar to myself, let that remain 195  
 Where still it works, though hidden from all search  
 Among the depths of time. Yet is it just  
 That here, in memory of all books which lay  
 Their sure foundations in the heart of man,  
 Whether by native prose, or numerous verse,<sup>9</sup> 200  
 That in the name of all inspirèd souls,  
 From Homer the great Thunderer, from the voice  
 That roars along the bed of Jewish song,  
 And that more varied and elaborate,  
 Those trumpet-tones of harmony that shake 205  
 Our shores in England,—from those loftiest notes  
 Down to the low and wren-like warblings, made  
 For cottagers and spinners at the wheel,  
 And sun-burnt travellers resting their tired limbs,  
 Stretched under wayside hedge-rows, ballad tunes, 210  
 Food for the hungry ears of little ones,  
 And of old men who have survived their joys:  
 'Tis just that in behalf of these, the works,  
 And of the men that framed them, whether known,  
 Or sleeping nameless in their scattered graves, 215  
 That I should here assert their rights, attest  
 Their honours, and should, once for all, pronounce  
 Their benediction; speak of them as Powers  
 For ever to be hallowed;<sup>1</sup> only less,  
 For what we are and what we may become, 220  
 Than Nature's self, which is the breath of God,  
 Or his pure Word by miracle revealed.<sup>2</sup>

Rarely and with reluctance would I stoop  
 To transitory themes;<sup>3</sup> yet I rejoice,  
 And, by these thoughts admonished, will pour out 225  
 Thanks with uplifted heart, that I was reared  
 Safe from an evil which these days have laid  
 Upon the children of the land, a pest  
 That might have dried me up, body and soul.<sup>4</sup>  
 This verse is dedicate to Nature's self, 230  
 And things that teach as Nature teaches: then,

2. Wordsworth's reference to Christian revelation appears in the revisions to *MS. D* (1832 or 1838/39).



- Oh, where had been the man, the poet where—  
 Where had we been we two, beloved friend,  
 [235] If we, in lieu of wandering as we did 235  
 Through heights and hollows and bye-spots of tales  
 Rich with indigenous produce, open ground  
 Of fancy, happy pastures ranged at will,  
 Had been attended, followed, watched, and noosed,<sup>5</sup>  
 Each in his several<sup>6</sup> melancholy walk,  
 [240] Stringed like a poor man's heifer at its feed, 240  
 Led through the lanes in forlorn servitude;  
 Or rather like a stalled ox shut out  
 From touch of growing grass, that may not taste  
 A flower till it have yielded up its sweets  
 [245] A prelibation<sup>7</sup> to the mower's scythe. 245

- Behold the parent hen amid her brood,  
 Though fledged and feathered, and well pleased to part  
 And straggle from her presence, still a brood,  
 And she herself from the maternal bond  
 [250] Still undischarged. Yet doth she little more 250  
 Than move with them in tenderness and love,  
 A centre of the circle which they make;  
 And now and then—alike from need of theirs  
 And call of her own natural appetites—  
 [255] She scratches, ransacks up the earth for food 255  
 Which they partake at pleasure. Early died  
 My honoured mother, she who was the heart  
 And hinge<sup>8</sup> of all our learnings and our loves;  
 She left us destitute, and as we might  
 [260] Trooping together. Little suits it me 260  
 To break upon the sabbath of her rest  
 With any thought that looks at others' blame,  
 Nor would I praise her but in perfect love;  
 Hence am I checked,<sup>9</sup> but I will boldly say  
 [265] In gratitude, and for the sake of truth, 265  
 Unheard by her, that she, not falsely taught,  
 Fetching her goodness rather from times past  
 Than shaping novelties from those to come,  
 Had no presumption, no such jealousy—  
 [270] Nor did by habit of her thoughts mistrust 270  
 Our nature, but had virtual<sup>1</sup> faith that He

5. Fitted with a halter.

6. Separate.

7. An offering of the first fruits, or of the first taste. In *1805* and *1850*, 238–45, Wordsworth has in mind the reduction of literature to edifying tales such as those of Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* (1783–89) and Maria Edgeworth's *Parents' Assistant* (1796–1801).

8. Pivot.

9. Wordsworth, as R. D. Havens has pointed out, hesitates to praise his mother by contrasting her sympathy with the lack of understanding shown by her relatives, the Cooksons, after her death. For Dorothy's account of the Cooksons' petty tyrannies, see *EY*, pp. 3–5.

1. Effective, powerful.

Oh! where had been the Man, the Poet where,  
 Where had we been, we two, beloved Friend!  
 If in the season of unperilous choice,  
 In lieu of wandering, as we did, through vales 235  
 Rich with indigenous produce, open ground  
 Of Fancy, happy pastures ranged at will,  
 We had been followed, hourly watched, and noosed,<sup>5</sup>  
 Each in his several<sup>6</sup> melancholy walk  
 Stringed like a poor man's heifer at its feed, 240  
 Led through the lanes in forlorn servitude;  
 Or rather like a stallèd ox debarred  
 From touch of growing grass, that may not taste  
 A flower till it have yielded up its sweets  
 A prelibation<sup>7</sup> to the mower's scythe. 245

Behold the parent hen amid her brood,  
 Though fledged and feathered, and well pleased to part  
 And straggle from her presence, still a brood,  
 And she herself from the maternal bond  
 Still undischarged; yet doth she little more 250  
 Than move with them in tenderness and love,  
 A centre to the circle which they make;  
 And now and then, alike from need of theirs  
 And call of her own natural appetites,  
 She scratches, ransacks up the earth for food, 255  
 Which they partake at pleasure. Early died  
 My honoured Mother, she who was the heart  
 And hinge<sup>8</sup> of all our learnings and our loves:  
 She left us destitute, and, as we might,  
 Trooping together. Little suits it me 260  
 To break upon the sabbath of her rest  
 With any thought that looks at others' blame;  
 Nor would I praise her but in perfect love.  
 Hence am I checked:<sup>9</sup> but let me boldly say,  
 In gratitude, and for the sake of truth, 265  
 Unheard by her, that she, not falsely taught,  
 Fetching her goodness rather from times past,  
 Than shaping novelties for times to come,  
 Had no presumption, no such jealousy,  
 Nor did by habit of her thoughts mistrust 270  
 Our nature, but had virtual<sup>1</sup> faith that He

Who fills the mother's breasts with innocent milk  
 Doth also for our nobler part provide,  
 Under His great correction and controul,  
 [275] As innocent instincts, and as innocent food. 275  
 This was her creed, and therefore she was pure  
 [280] From feverish dread of error and mishap  
 And evil, overweeningly so called,  
 Was not puffed up by false unnatural hopes,  
 Nor selfish with unnecessary cares, 280  
 Nor with impatience from the season asked  
 [285] More than its timely produce—rather loved  
 The hours for what they are, than from regards  
 Glanced on their promises<sup>2</sup> in restless pride.  
 Such was she: not from faculties more strong 285  
 Than others have, but from the times, perhaps,  
 [290] And spot in which she lived, and through a grace  
 Of modest meekness, simple-mindedness,  
 A heart that found benignity and hope,  
 Being itself benign.

My drift hath scarcely 290

I fear been obvious, for I have recoiled  
 From showing as it is the monster birth  
 Engendered by these too industrious times.  
 Let few words paint it:<sup>3</sup> 'tis a child, no child,  
 But a dwarf man; in knowledge, virtue, skill, 295  
 In what he is not, and in what he is,  
 The noontide shadow of a man complete;  
 A worshipper of worldly seemliness—  
 [300] Not quarrelsome, for that were far beneath  
 His dignity; with gifts he bubbles o'er 300  
 As generous as a fountain; selfishness  
 May not come near him, gluttony or pride;  
 [305] The wandering beggars propagate his name,  
 Dumb creatures find him tender as a nun.  
 Yet deem him not for this a naked dish 305  
 Of goodness merely—he is garnished out.<sup>4</sup>  
 [310] Arch are his notices, and nice his sense  
 Of the ridiculous;<sup>5</sup> deceit and guile,  
 Meanness and falsehood, he detects, can treat  
 With apt and graceful laughter; nor is blind 310

2. Anticipations of the future. "Regards": looks.

3. The description of the Infant Prodigy (lines 294–369) was written in February 1804 as a contrast to the Wordsworthian assimilation of "natural wisdom" in "There was a boy" (lines 389–422, be-

low), now first incorporated in *The Prelude*.

4. I.e., the child's (affected) goodness is garnished with elegance.

5. His "notices" (remarks, observations) are witty, and his sense of the ridiculous (in others) is precise.

Who fills the mother's breast with innocent milk,  
 Doth also for our nobler part provide,  
 Under His great correction and control,  
 As innocent instincts, and as innocent food; 275  
 Or draws for minds that are left free to trust  
 In the simplicities of opening life  
 Sweet honey out of spurned or dreaded weeds.  
 This was her creed, and therefore she was pure  
 From anxious fear of error or mishap, 280  
 And evil, overweeningly so called;  
 Was not puffed up by false unnatural hopes,  
 Nor selfish with unnecessary cares,  
 Nor with impatience from the season asked  
 More than its timely produce; rather loved 285  
 The hours for what they are, than from regard  
 Glanced on their promises<sup>2</sup> in restless pride.  
 Such was she—not from faculties more strong  
 Than others have, but from the times, perhaps,  
 And spot in which she lived, and through a grace 290  
 Of modest meekness, simple-mindedness,  
 A heart that found benignity and hope,  
 Being itself benign.

My drift I fear

Is scarcely obvious; but, that common sense  
 May try this modern system by its fruits, 295  
 Leave let me take to place before her sight  
 A specimen pourtrayed with faithful hand.  
 Full early trained to worship seemliness,  
 This model of a child is never known  
 To mix in quarrels; that were far beneath 300  
 His dignity; with gifts he bubbles o'er  
 As generous as a fountain; selfishness  
 May not come near him, nor the little throng  
 Of flitting pleasures tempt him from his path;  
 The wandering beggars propagate his name, 305  
 Dumb creatures find him tender as a nun,  
 And natural or supernatural fear,  
 Unless it leap upon him in a dream,  
 Touches him not. To enhance the wonder, see  
 How arch his notices, how nice his sense 310  
 Of the ridiculous;<sup>5</sup> nor blind is he

- To the broad follies of the licensed<sup>6</sup> world;  
 Though shrewd, yet innocent himself withal,  
 [314] And can read lectures upon innocence.  
 He is fenced round, nay armed, for ought we know,  
 In panoply complete;<sup>7</sup> and fear itself, 315
- [307] Natural or supernatural alike,  
 Unless it leap upon him in a dream,  
 Touches him not.<sup>8</sup> Briefly, the moral part  
 Is perfect, and in learning and in books  
 He is a prodigy. His discourse moves slow, 320  
 Massy and ponderous as a prison door,  
 Tremendously embossed with terms of art.<sup>9</sup>  
 Rank growth of propositions overruns  
 The stripling's brain; the path in which he treads  
 Is choked with grammars. Cushion of divine 325  
 Was never such a type of thought profound  
 As is the pillow where he rests his head.<sup>1</sup>  
 The ensigns of the empire which he holds—  
 The globe and sceptre of his royalties—  
 Are telescopes, and crucibles, and maps.<sup>2</sup> 330
- [316] Ships he can guide across the pathless sea,  
 And tell you all their cunning;<sup>3</sup> he can read  
 The inside of the earth, and spell the stars;  
 He knows the policies of foreign lands,
- [320] Can string you names of districts, cities, towns, 335  
 The whole world over, tight as beads of dew  
 Upon a gossamer thread. He sifts, he weighs,  
 Takes nothing upon trust.<sup>4</sup> His teachers stare,  
 The country people pray for God's good grace,  
 And tremble at his deep experiments.<sup>5</sup> 340  
 All things are put to question: he must live  
 Knowing that he grows wiser every day,

6. I.e., given license to ignore conventional restraints.

7. Full armor.

8. Wordsworth himself had grown up "Fostered alike by beauty and by fear" (1805, 306, above). In lines 315–18, accordingly, the child is not being praised for bravery, but is shown to have armed himself against one of the two major beneficial influences of Nature.

9. Technical language.

1. In Wordsworth's rather labored irony, the prodigy's pillow is an even better emblem ("type") of profound thought than the cushion on which the parson's Bible rests in front of a pulpit.

2. Scientific instruments and maps symbolize the intellectual power that he wields, just as the globe and scepter symbolize the sovereignty of a king.

3. Art, skill, knowledge (Johnson's *Dictionary*).

4. "I have known some who have been *rationaly* educated, as it is styled," Coleridge wrote in October 1797: "They were marked by a microscopic acuteness; but when they looked at great things, all became a blank and they saw nothing—and denied (very illogically) that any thing could be seen \* \* \* [they] called the want of imagination Judgment, and the never being moved to Rapture Philosophy!" (Griggs, I, pp. 354–55).

5. Ignorant country people are terrified lest his experiments go *too* deep, become a search for forbidden knowledge. Maxwell draws attention to Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, Part I, III, i, 50; where Glendower refers to his practices in magic as "deep experiments."

To the broad follies of the licensed<sup>6</sup> world,  
Yet innocent himself withal, though shrewd,  
And can read lectures upon innocence;  
A miracle of scientific lore, 315  
Ships he can guide across the pathless sea,  
And tell you all their cunning;<sup>3</sup> he can read  
The inside of the earth, and spell the stars;  
He knows the policies of foreign lands;  
Can string you names of districts, cities, towns, 320  
The whole world over, tight as beads of dew  
Upon a gossamer thread; he sifts, he weighs;  
All things are put to question;<sup>4</sup> he must live  
Knowing that he grows wiser every day

- [325] Or else not live at all, and seeing too  
 Each little drop of wisdom as it falls  
 [327] Into the dimpling cistern of his heart.<sup>6</sup> 345  
 [337] Meanwhile old Grandame Earth is grieved to find  
 The playthings which her love designed for him  
 Unthought of—in their woodland beds the flowers  
 [340] Weep, and the river-sides are all forlorn.<sup>7</sup>

- Now this is hollow, 'tis a life of lies 350  
 From the beginning, and in lies must end.  
 Forth bring him to the air of common sense  
 And, fresh and shewy as it is, the corps<sup>8</sup>  
 Slips from us into powder. Vanity,  
 That is his soul: there lives he, and there moves— 355  
 It is the soul of every thing he seeks—  
 That gone, nothing is left which he can love.  
 Nay, if a thought of purer birth should rise  
 To carry him towards a better clime,  
 Some busy helper still is on the watch 360  
 [335] To drive him back, and pound him like a stray  
 With the pinfold of his own conceit,<sup>9</sup>  
 Which is his home, his natural dwelling-place.  
 Oh, give us once again the wishing-cap  
 Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat 365  
 Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood,  
 And Sabra in the forest with St George!<sup>1</sup>  
 [345] The child whose love is here, at least doth reap  
 One precious gain—that he forgets himself.

- These mighty workmen of our later age 370  
 Who with a broad highway have overbridged  
 The froward<sup>3</sup> chaos of futurity,  
 [350] Tamed to their bidding<sup>4</sup>—they who have the art  
 To manage books, and things, and make them work

6. Wordsworth's image is of a rain barrel with water dripping into it.

7. Compare lines 346–49 with *Intimations Ode*, 77 ff., also presumably written in February 1804. The phrase "old Grandame Earth" is a conflation of references in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, Part I, III, i, 32 and 34, to "old beldame earth" and "our grandam earth."

8. The earlier spelling of "corpse" (*NED*).  
 9. If the child's thoughts should stray beyond himself, the educationalist is always ("still") on the watch to impound ("pound") him like a stray in the enclosure ("pinfold") formed by his own conceit.

1. Fortunatus, owner of the magic purse, had also a hat that would transport him

wherever he wanted to go; Jack the Giant-Killer ridded the land of giants by virtue of a coat that made him invisible, shoes that gave him speed, and a magic sword; St. George rescued Sabra from a dragon, and married her.

3. Unruly.

4. Lines 370–422 go back in their original form to winter 1798–99, where they show "There was a boy" being used as part of a discussion of education, *before* being printed without introductory lines in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). The "mighty" educationalists of line 370 are diminished by implicit comparison with Sin and Death, who in *Paradise Lost*, X, 282–305 built a bridge over Chaos.

Or else not live at all, and seeing too 325  
 Each little drop of wisdom as it falls  
 Into the dimpling cistern of his heart:<sup>6</sup>  
 For this unnatural growth the trainer blame,  
 Pity the tree.—Poor human vanity,  
 Wert thou extinguished, little would be left 330  
 Which he could truly love; but how escape?  
 For, ever as a thought of purer birth  
 Rises to lead him toward a better clime,  
 Some intermeddler still is on the watch  
 To drive him back, and pound him, like a stray, 335  
 Within the pinfold of his own conceit.  
 Meanwhile old grandame earth is grieved to find  
 The playthings, which her love designed for him,  
 Unthought of: in their woodland beds the flowers  
 Weep, and the river sides are all forlorn.<sup>7</sup> 340  
 Oh! give us once again the wishing cap  
 Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat  
 Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood,  
 And Sabra in the forest with St. George!<sup>1</sup>  
 The child, whose love is here, at least, doth reap 345  
 One precious gain, that he forgets himself.<sup>2</sup>

These mighty workmen of our later age,  
 Who, with a broad highway, have overbridged  
 The froward<sup>3</sup> chaos of futurity,  
 Tamed to their bidding; they who have the skill 350  
 To manage books, and things, and make them act

2. Alongside the passage on the Infant Prodigy Wordsworth wrote in *MS. B*, "This is heavy and must be much shortened." The final version—reached in

1839—is twenty-six lines shorter than 1805, thirty-eight having been cut and twelve added.



- Gently on infant minds as does the sun 375  
 Upon a flower—the tutors of our youth,  
 The guides, the wardens of our faculties  
 And stewards of our labour, watchful men  
 And skilful in the usury of time,
- [355] Sages, who in their prescience would controul 380  
 All accidents, and to the very road  
 Which they have fashioned would confine us down  
 Like engines<sup>5</sup>—when will they be taught  
 That in the unreasoning progress of the world
- [360] A wiser spirit is at work for us, 385  
 A better eye than theirs, most prodigal  
 Of blessings, and most studious of our good,  
 Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?
- There was a boy<sup>6</sup>—ye knew him well, ye cliffs
- [365] And islands of Winander—many a time 390  
 At evening, when the stars had just begun  
 To move along the edges of the hills,  
 Rising or setting, would he stand alone  
 Beneath the trees or by the glimmering lake,
- [370] And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands 395  
 Pressed closely palm to palm, and to his mouth  
 Uplifted, he as through an instrument  
 Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls  
 That they might answer him. And they would shout
- [375] Across the wat'ry vale, and shout again, 400  
 Responsive to his call, with quivering peals<sup>7</sup>  
 And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud,  
 Redoubled and redoubled—concourse wild  
 Of mirth and jocund din. And when it chanced
- [380] That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill, 405  
 Then sometimes in that silence, while he hung  
 Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize  
 Has carried far into his heart the voice  
 Of mountain torrents;<sup>8</sup> or the visible scene
- [385] Would enter unawares into his mind 410  
 With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,  
 Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received  
 Into the bosom of the steady lake.

5. In confining natural development, tying the child down to a specific course of study, educationalists resemble constricting implements (“engines”) of torture.

6. For the original version of “There was a boy” (lines 389–413), written by Wordsworth in the first person, together with drafts of 1799, I, see *MS. JJ*, *MS. Drafts and Fragments*, 1 (d), below.

7. Used more generally than at present; “a succession of loud sounds” (*Johnson’s Dictionary*).

8. “This very expression, ‘far’”, wrote Thomas De Quincey in 1839, “by which space and its infinities are attributed to the human heart, and to its capacities of re-echoing the sublimities of nature, has always struck me as with a flash of sublime revelation” (*Recollections*, p. 161).

On infant minds as surely as the sun  
 Deals with a flower; the keepers of our time,  
 The guides and wardens of our faculties,  
 Sages who in their prescience would control 355  
 All accidents, and to the very road  
 Which they have fashioned would confine us down,  
 Like engines;<sup>5</sup> when will their presumption learn,  
 That in the unreasoning progress of the world  
 A wiser spirit is at work for us, 360  
 A better eye than theirs, most prodigal  
 Of blessings, and most studious of our good,  
 Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?

There was a Boy: ye knew him well, ye cliffs  
 And islands of Winander!—many a time 365  
 At evening, when the earliest stars began  
 To move along the edges of the hills,  
 Rising or setting, would he stand alone  
 Beneath the trees or by the glimmering lake,  
 And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands 370  
 Pressed closely palm to palm, and to his mouth  
 Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,  
 Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,  
 That they might answer him; and they would shout  
 Across the watery vale, and shout again, 375  
 Responsive to his call, with quivering peals,<sup>7</sup>  
 And long halloos and screams, and echoes loud,  
 Redoubled and redoubled, concourse wild  
 Of jocund din; and, when a lengthened pause  
 Of silence came and baffled his best skill, 380  
 Then sometimes, in that silence while he hung  
 Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise  
 Has carried far into his heart the voice  
 Of mountain torrents;<sup>8</sup> or the visible scene  
 Would enter unawares into his mind, 385  
 With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,  
 Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received  
 Into the bosom of the steady lake.

- This boy was taken from his mates, and died  
 [390] In childhood ere he was full ten years old. 415  
 Fair are the woods, and beauteous is the spot,  
 The vale where he was born; the churchyard hangs  
 Upon a slope above the village school,  
 And there, along that bank, when I have passed  
 [395] At evening, I believe that oftentimes 420  
 A full half-hour together I have stood  
 Mute, looking at the grave in which he lies.<sup>1</sup>  
 Even now methinks I have before my sight  
 That self-same village church: I see her sit—  
 [400] The thronèd lady spoken of erewhile— 425  
 On her green hill, forgetful of this boy  
 Who slumbers at her feet, forgetful too  
 Of all her silent neighbourhood of graves,  
 And listening only to the gladsome sounds  
 [405] That, from the rural school ascending, play 430  
 Beneath her and about her. May she long  
 Behold a race of young ones like to those  
 With whom I herded—easily, indeed,  
 We might have fed upon a fatter soil  
 [410] Of Arts and Letters, but be that forgiven— 435  
 A race of real children, not too wise,  
 Too learned, or too good, but wanton, fresh,  
 And bandied up and down by love and hate;  
 [415] Fierce, moody, patient, venturous, modest, shy, 440  
 Mad at their sports like withered leaves in winds;  
 Though doing wrong and suffering, and full oft  
 Bending beneath our life's mysterious weight  
 Of pain and fear,<sup>2</sup> yet still in happiness  
 [420] Not yielding to the happiest upon earth. . . 445  
 Simplicity in habit, truth in speech,  
 Be these the daily strengtheners of their minds!  
 May books and Nature be their early joy,  
 And knowledge, rightly honored with that name—  
 [425] Knowledge not purchased with the loss of power!
- Well do I call to mind the very week 450  
 When I was first entrusted to the care  
 Of that sweet valley—when its paths, its shores  
 And brooks, were like a dream of novelty  
 [430] To my half-infant thoughts—that very week, 455  
 While I was roving up and down alone  
 Seeking I knew not what, I chanced to cross

1. There is little reason to suppose that Wordsworth had in mind the death of a particular Hawkshead school friend.

2. Pain and fear are "mysterious"—be-

yond normal human understanding—but may of course be beneficial, as at 1805, I, 306, above.

This Boy was taken from his mates, and died  
 In childhood, ere he was full twelve years old.<sup>9</sup> 390  
 Fair is the spot, most beautiful the vale  
 Where he was born; the grassy churchyard hangs  
 Upon a slope above the village school,  
 And through that churchyard when my way has led  
 On summer evenings, I believe that there 395  
 A long half hour together I have stood  
 Mute, looking at the grave in which he lies!<sup>1</sup>  
 Even now appears before the mind's clear eye  
 That self-same village church; I see her sit  
 (The thronèd Lady whom erewhile we hailed) 400  
 On her green hill, forgetful of this Boy  
 Who slumbers at her feet,—forgetful, too,  
 Of all her silent neighbourhood of graves,  
 And listening only to the gladsome sounds  
 That, from the rural school ascending, play 405  
 Beneath her and about her. May she long  
 Behold a race of young ones like to those  
 With whom I herded!—(easily, indeed,  
 We might have fed upon a fatter soil  
 Of arts and letters—but be that forgiven)— 410  
 A race of real children; not too wise,  
 Too learned, or too good; but wanton, fresh,  
 And bandied up and down by love and hate;  
 Not unresentful where self-justified;  
 Fierce, moody, patient, venturous, modest, shy; 415  
 Mad at their sports like withered leaves in winds;  
 Though doing wrong and suffering, and full oft  
 Bending beneath our life's mysterious weight  
 Of pain, and doubt, and fear,<sup>2</sup> yet yielding not  
 In happiness to the happiest upon earth. 420  
 Simplicity in habit, truth in speech,  
 Be these the daily strengtheners of their minds;  
 May books and Nature be their early joy!  
 And knowledge, rightly honoured with that name—  
 Knowledge not purchased by the loss of power! 425

Well do I call to mind the very week  
 When I was first intrusted to the care  
 Of that sweet Valley; when its paths, its shores,  
 And brooks were like a dream of novelty  
 To my half-infant thoughts; that very week, 430  
 While I was roving up and down alone,  
 Seeking I knew not what, I chanced to cross

9. The child's age is increased from ten to twelve in a correction to *MS. A*, probably of 1816/19.

- One of those open fields, which, shaped like ears,  
 Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite's Lake.
- [435] Twilight was coming on, yet through the gloom  
 I saw distinctly on the opposite shore 460  
 A heap of garments, left as I supposed  
 By one who there was bathing. Long I watched,  
 But no one owned them; meanwhile the calm lake
- [440] Grew dark, with all the shadows on its breast,  
 And now and then a fish up-leaping snapped 465  
 The breathless stillness. The succeeding day—
- [443] Those unclaimed garments telling a plain tale—  
 Went there a company, and in their boat
- [447] Sounded with grappling-irons and long poles:  
 At length, the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene 470  
 Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
- [450] Rose with his ghastly face, a spectre shape—  
 Of terror even.<sup>4</sup> And yet no vulgar fear,  
 Young as I was, a child not nine years old,  
 Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen 475  
 Such sights before among the shining streams
- [455] Of fairyland, the forests of romance—  
 Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw  
 With decoration and ideal grace,  
 A dignity, a smoothness, like the words 480  
 Of Grecian art and purest poetry.<sup>5</sup>
- [460] I had a precious treasure at that time,  
 A little yellow canvass-covered book,  
 A slender abstract of the *Arabian Tales*;<sup>6</sup>  
 And when I learned, as now I first did learn 485  
 From my companions in this new abode,  
 That this dear prize of mine was but a block
- [465] Hewn from a mighty quarry—in a word,  
 That there were four large volumes, laden all  
 With kindred matter—'twas in truth to me 490  
 A promise scarcely earthly. Instantly  
 I made a league, a covenant with a friend
- [470] Of my own age, that we should lay aside  
 The monies we possessed, and hoard up more,  
 Till our joint savings had amassed enough 495  
 To make this book our own. Through several months

4. James Jackson, schoolmaster at the neighbouring village of Sawrey, was drowned on June 18, 1779, while bathing in Esthwaite Water. For the original text of lines 450–73 (1850, 426–51), composed ca. January 1799, see 1799, I, 258–79.

5. Compare Coleridge in the letter of

1797 quoted at 338*n*, above: “from my early reading of Faery Tales, and Genii &c &c—my mind has been habituated to the *Vast*—and I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief” (Griggs, I, p. 354; Coleridge's italics).

6. *The Arabian Nights*.

One of those open fields, which, shaped like ears,  
 Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite's Lake:  
 Twilight was coming on, yet through the gloom 435  
 Appeared distinctly on the opposite shore  
 A heap of garments, as if left by one  
 Who might have there been bathing. Long I watched,  
 But no one owned them; meanwhile the calm lake  
 Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast, 440  
 And, now and then, a fish up-leaping snapped  
 The breathless stillness. The succeeding day,  
 Those unclaimed garments telling a plain tale  
 Drew to the spot an anxious crowd; some looked  
 In passive expectation from the shore, 445  
 While from a boat others hung o'er the deep,<sup>3</sup>  
 Sounding with grappling irons and long poles.  
 At last, the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene  
 Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright  
 Rose, with his ghastly face, a spectre shape 450  
 Of terror;<sup>4</sup> yet no soul-debasing fear,  
 Young as I was, a child not nine years old,  
 Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen  
 Such sights before, among the shining streams  
 Of faëry land, the forests of romance. 455  
 Their spirit hallowed the sad spectacle  
 With decoration of ideal grace;  
 A dignity, a smoothness, like the works  
 Of Grecian art, and purest poesy.<sup>5</sup>

A precious treasure I had long possessed, 460  
 A little yellow, canvas-covered book,  
 A slender abstract of the Arabian tales;<sup>6</sup>  
 And, from companions in a new abode,  
 When first I learnt, that this dear prize of mine  
 Was but a block hewn from a mighty quarry— 465  
 That there were four large volumes, laden all  
 With kindred matter, 'twas to me, in truth,  
 A promise scarcely earthly. Instantly,  
 With one not richer than myself, I made  
 A covenant that each should lay aside 470  
 The moneys he possessed, and hoard up more,  
 Till our joint savings had amassed enough  
 To make this book our own. Through several months,

3. Lines 444–46 were inserted in 1816/19, and place the solitary experience recorded in 1799 and 1805 in an untypically social context.

Religiously did we preserve that vow,  
 And spite of all temptation hoarded up,  
 [475] And hoarded up; but firmness failed at length,  
 Nor were we ever masters of our wish. 500

And afterwards, when, to my father's house  
 Returning at the holidays, I found  
 That golden store of books which I had left  
 Open to my enjoyment once again,  
 [480] What heart was mine! Full often through the course 505  
 Of those glad respites in the summertime  
 When armed with rod and line we went abroad  
 For a whole day together, I have lain  
 Down by thy side, O Derwent, murmuring stream,  
 [485] On the hot stones and in the glaring sun, 510  
 And there have read, devouring as I read,  
 Defrauding the day's glory—desperate—  
 Till with a sudden bound of smart reproach  
 Such as an idler deals with in his shame,  
 [490] I to my sport betook myself again. 515

A gracious spirit o'er this earth presides,  
 And o'er the heart of man: invisibly  
 It comes, directing those to works of love  
 [495] Who care not, know not, think not, what they do. 520  
 The tales that charm away the wakeful night  
 In Araby—romances, legends penned  
 For solace by the light of monkish lamps;  
 Fictions, for ladies of their love, devised  
 [500] By youthful squires; adventures endless, spun 525  
 By the dismantled warrior<sup>7</sup> in old age  
 Out of the bowels of those very thoughts  
 In which his youth did first extravagant<sup>8</sup>—  
 These spread like day, and something in the shape  
 [505] Of these will live till man shall be no more. 530  
 Dumb yearnings, hidden appetites, are ours,  
 And they must have their food. Our childhood sits,  
 Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne  
 That hath more power than all the elements.<sup>9</sup>  
 [510] I guess not what this tells of being past,<sup>1</sup> 535  
 Nor what it augurs of the life to come,  
 But so it is;<sup>2</sup> and in that dubious hour,

7. Time has dismantled the warrior and stripped him of his usefulness.

8. Indulge; literally to wander at large, roam at will.

9. Forces of Nature. Compare Shakespeare's *King Lear*, III, ii, 16: "I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness." Wordsworth's context suggests that the

child's "throne," the seat or basis of his power, consists in undiminished imaginative response.

1. I.e., the past state of being.

2. Wordsworth, who has very probably just completed the *Intimations Ode*, declines on this occasion to speculate about preexistence, or an afterlife.

In spite of all temptation, we preserved  
 Religiously that vow; but firmness failed, 475  
 Nor were we ever masters of our wish.

And when thereafter to my father's house  
 The holidays returned me, there to find  
 That golden store of books which I had left,  
 What joy was mine! How often in the course 480  
 Of those glad respites, though a soft west wind  
 Ruffled the waters to the angler's wish  
 For a whole day together, have I lain  
 Down by thy side, O Derwent! murmuring stream,  
 On the hot stones, and in the glaring sun, 485  
 And there have read, devouring as I read,  
 Defrauding the day's glory, desperate!  
 Till with a sudden bound of smart reproach,  
 Such as an idler deals with in his shame,  
 I to the sport betook myself again. 490

A gracious spirit o'er this earth presides,  
 And o'er the heart of man: invisibly  
 It comes, to works of unproved delight,  
 And tendency benign, directing those 495  
 Who care not, know not, think not what they do.  
 The tales that charm away the wakeful night  
 In Araby, romances; legends penned  
 For solace by dim light of monkish lamps;  
 Fictions, for ladies of their love, devised 500  
 By youthful squires; adventures endless, spun  
 By the dismantled warrior<sup>7</sup> in old age,  
 Out of the bowels of those very schemes  
 In which his youth did first extravagant;<sup>8</sup>  
 These spread like day, and something in the shape 505  
 Of these will live till man shall be no more.  
 Dumb yearnings, hidden appetites, are ours,  
 And *they must* have their food. Our childhood sits,  
 Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne  
 That hath more power than all the elements.<sup>9</sup>  
 I guess not what this tells of Being<sup>1</sup> past, 510  
 Nor what it augurs of the life to come;  
 But so it is,<sup>2</sup> and, in that dubious hour,



- That twilight when we first begin to see  
 This dawning earth, to recognise, expect—
- [515] And in the long probation that ensues,  
 The time of trial ere we learn to live 540  
 In reconciliation with our stinted powers,  
 To endure this state of meagre vassalage,  
 Unwilling to forego, confess, submit,
- [520] Uneasy and unsettled, yoke-fellows  
 To custom, mettlesome and not yet tamed 545  
 And humbled down—oh, then we feel, we feel,  
 We know, when we have friends.<sup>3</sup> Ye dreamers, then,  
 Forgers of lawless tales, we bless you then—
- [525] Impostors, drivellers, dotards, as the ape  
 Philosophy will call you<sup>4</sup>—then we feel 550  
 With what, and how great might ye are in league,  
 Who make our wish our power, our thought a deed,  
 An empire, a possession. Ye whom time
- [530] And seasons serve—all faculties—to whom  
 Earth crouches, th' elements<sup>5</sup> are potter's clay, 555  
 Space like a heaven filled up with northern lights,  
 Here, nowhere, there, and everywhere at once.

- It might demand a more impassioned strain  
 To tell of later pleasures linked to these,
- [536] A tract of the same isthmus which we cross 560  
 In progress from our native continent  
 To earth and human life<sup>6</sup>—I mean to speak  
 Of that delightful time of growing youth
- [540] When cravings for the marvellous relent,  
 And we begin to love what we have seen; 565  
 And sober truth, experience, sympathy,  
 Take stronger hold of us; and words themselves
- [545] Move us with conscious pleasure.

- I am sad
- At thought of raptures now for ever flown,  
 Even unto tears I sometimes could be sad 570  
 To think of, to read over, many a page—  
 Poems withal of name—which at that time
- [550] Did never fail to entrance me, and are now

3. I.e., writers of imaginative literature.

4. Wordsworth denounces the kind of analytic and rational philosophy which condemns works of imaginative fiction as false and trivial.

5. Here, "the four elements" (earth, air, water, fire) of which the ancient world believed matter to be composed; not, as in 1805, 533, 1850, 509, above, the forces of Nature.

6. The literary pleasures that followed Wordsworth's childish reading are seen as part of the same "isthmus," a strip of land connecting preexistence (the "native continent") to adult participation in the earth and human life. It is interesting that his image should derive from Pope: "Plac'd on this isthmus of a middle state" (*Essay on Man*, II, 3)—see 594n, below.

That twilight when we first begin to see  
 This dawning earth, to recognise, expect,  
 And in the long probation that ensues, 515  
 The time of trial, ere we learn to live  
 In reconcilment with our stinted powers,  
 To endure this state of meagre vassalage;  
 Unwilling to forego, confess, submit,  
 Uneasy and unsettled, yoke-fellows 520  
 To custom, mettlesome, and not yet tamed  
 And humbled down; oh! then we feel, we feel,  
 We know where we have friends.<sup>3</sup> Ye dreamers, then,  
 Forgers of daring tales! we bless you then,  
 Imposters, drivellers, dotards, as the ape 525  
 Philosophy will call you:<sup>4</sup> *then* we feel  
 With what, and how great might ye are in league,  
 Who make our wish, our power, our thought a deed,  
 An empire, a possession,—ye whom time  
 And seasons serve; all Faculties; to whom 530  
 Earth crouches, the elements<sup>5</sup> are potters' clay,  
 Space like a heaven filled up with northern lights,  
 Here, nowhere, there, and everywhere at once.

Relinquishing this lofty eminence  
 For ground, though humbler, not the less a tract 535  
 Of the same isthmus, which our spirits cross  
 In progress from their native continent  
 To earth and human life,<sup>6</sup> the Song might dwell  
 On that delightful time of growing youth,  
 When craving for the marvellous gives way 540  
 To strengthening love for things that we have seen;  
 When sober truth and steady sympathies,  
 Offered to notice by less daring pens,  
 Take firmer hold of us, and words themselves  
 Move us with conscious pleasure. 545

I am sad  
 At thought of raptures now for ever flown;  
 Almost to tears I sometimes could be sad  
 To think of, to read over, many a page,  
 Poems withal of name, which at that time  
 Did never fail to entrance me, and are now 550

- Dead in my eyes as is a theatre  
 Fresh emptied of spectators. Thirteen years, 575  
 Or haply less, I might have seen when first  
 My ears began to open to the charm
- [555] Of words in tuneful order, found them sweet  
 For *their own sakes*—a passion and a power—  
 And phrases pleased me, chosen for delight, 580  
 For pomp, or love. Oft in the public roads,  
 Yet unfrequented, while the morning light
- [560] Was yellowing the hilltops, with that dear friend  
 (The same whom I have mentioned heretofore)<sup>8</sup>  
 I went abroad, and for the better part 585  
 Of two delightful hours we strolled along  
 By the still borders of the misty lake  
 Repeating favorite verses with one voice,
- [565] Or conning<sup>9</sup> more, as happy as the birds  
 That round us chaunted. Well might we be glad, 590  
 Lifted above the ground by airy fancies  
 More bright than madness or the dreams of wine.  
 And though full oft the objects of our love
- [570] Were false and in their splendour overwrought,<sup>1</sup>  
 Yet surely at such time no vulgar power 595  
 Was working in us, nothing less in truth  
 Than that most noble attribute of man—  
 Though yet untutored and inordinate<sup>2</sup>—
- [575] That wish for something loftier, more adorned,  
 Than is the common aspect, daily garb, 600  
 Of human life. What wonder then if sounds  
 Of exultation echoed through the groves—  
 For images, and sentiments, and words,
- [580] And every thing with which we had to do  
 In that delicious world of poesy, 605  
 Kept holiday, a never-ending show,  
 With music, incense, festival, and flowers!

- Here must I pause: this only will I add  
 [585] From heart-experience, and in humblest sense 610  
 Of modesty, that he who in his youth  
 A wanderer among the woods and fields  
 With living Nature hath been intimate,  
 Not only in that raw unpractised time

8. John Fleming, mentioned at 1805, II, 352–53 (1799, II, 382–83), above.

9. Learning by heart; compare *Intimations Ode*, 102.

1. It is probably James Macpherson, imitated and echoed in Wordsworth's *The Vale of Esthwaite* (1785–87), yet condemned in the 1815 "Essay Supplementary," whom Wordsworth has in mind.

The works Macpherson published as translations of the Gaelic poet Ossian (1760–63) were doubly false—not merely oversplendid, but a fake.

2. Unordered. For Wordsworth the "most noble attribute of man" was aspiration, the reaching out imaginatively, or through depth of feeling, beyond immediate circumstance.

Dead in my eyes, dead as a theatre  
 Fresh emptied of spectators. Twice five years<sup>7</sup>  
 Or less I might have seen, when first my mind  
 With conscious pleasure opened to the charm  
 Of words in tuneful order, found them sweet 555  
 For their own *sakes*, a passion, and a power;  
 And phrases pleased me chosen for delight,  
 For pomp, or love. Oft, in the public roads  
 Yet unfrequented, while the morning light  
 Was yellowing the hill tops, I went abroad 560  
 With a dear friend,<sup>8</sup> and for the better part  
 Of two delightful hours we strolled along  
 By the still borders of the misty lake,  
 Repeating favourite verses with one voice,  
 Or conning<sup>9</sup> more, as happy as the birds 565  
 That round us chaunted. Well might we be glad,  
 Lifted above the ground by airy fancies,  
 More bright than madness or the dreams of wine;  
 And, though full oft the objects of our love  
 Were false, and in their splendour overwrought,<sup>1</sup> 570  
 Yet was there surely then no vulgar power  
 Working within us,—nothing less, in truth,  
 Than that most noble attribute of man,  
 Though yet untutored and inordinate,<sup>2</sup>  
 That wish for something loftier, more adorned, 575  
 Than is the common aspect, daily garb,  
 Of human life. What wonder, then, if sounds  
 Of exultation echoed through the groves!  
 For, images, and sentiments, and words,  
 And everything encountered or pursued 580  
 In that delicious world of poesy,  
 Kept holiday, a never-ending show,  
 With music, incense, festival, and flowers!

Here must we pause: this only let me add,  
 From heart-experience, and in humblest sense 585  
 Of modesty, that he, who in his youth  
 A daily wanderer among woods and fields  
 With living Nature hath been intimate,  
 Not only in that raw unpractised time

7. Wordsworth's emendation of 1805, rather than accuracy. It dates probably "thirteen years", has the air of poeticism from 1816/19.

- [590] Is stirred to ecstasy, as others are,  
 By glittering verse, but he doth furthermore, 615  
 In measure only dealt out to himself,  
 Receive enduring touches of deep joy  
 From the great Nature that exists in works
- [595] Of mighty poets.<sup>3</sup> Visionary power  
 Attends upon the motions of the winds 620  
 Embodied in the mystery of words;  
 There darkness makes abode, and all the host  
 Of shadowy things do work their changes there
- [600] As in a mansion like their proper home.  
 Even forms and substances are circumfused 625  
 By that transparent veil with light divine,  
 And through the turnings intricate of verse  
 Present themselves as objects recognised
- [605] In flashes, and with a glory scarce their own.<sup>4</sup>

- Thus far a scanty record is deduced 630  
 Of what I owed to books in early life;  
 Their later influence yet remains untold,  
 But as this work was taking in my thoughts
- [610] Proportions that seemed larger than had first  
 Been meditated, I was indisposed 635  
 To any further progress at a time  
 When these acknowledgements were left unpaid.<sup>5</sup>

3. Wordsworth's claim is that a country child will feel a special joy in poetic descriptions of Nature.

4. Wordsworth in *1805*, 622–29 (*1850*, 598–605) is playing on two senses of the word "darkness." At one level the dark is physical, and inhabited by fairies who

work their magic transformations; at another, it has the common eighteenth-century meaning of something mysterious, difficult to understand.

5. A version of lines 294–607, 630–37, formed the last half of Book IV of the five-Book *Prelude*.

Is stirred to extasy, as others are, 590  
 By glittering verse; but further, doth receive,  
 In measure only dealt out to himself,  
 Knowledge and increase of enduring joy  
 From the great Nature that exists in works  
 Of mighty Poets.<sup>3</sup> Visionary power 595  
 Attends the motions of the viewless winds,  
 Embodied in the mystery of words:  
 There, darkness makes abode, and all the host  
 Of shadowy things work endless changes there,  
 As in a mansion like their proper home. 600  
 Even forms and substances are circumfused  
 By that transparent veil with light divine,  
 And, through the turnings intricate of verse,  
 Present themselves as objects recognised,  
 In flashes, and with glory not their own.<sup>4</sup> 605

Thus far a scanty record is deduced  
 Of what I owed to books in early life;  
 Their later influence yet remains untold;  
 But as this work was taking in my mind  
 Proportions that seemed larger than had first 610  
 Been meditated, I was indisposed  
 To any further progress at a time  
 When these acknowledgements were left unpaid.<sup>6</sup>

6. There is no manuscript support for the omission of lines 606–13 in the first edition.