XIV

THE HUMAN AFFECTIONS IN THE
EARLY CHRISTIAN TIME; OR

THE EREMITE AMBROSIUS HIS EPISTLE UNIO

MARCELLA, A.D. 410

Knew I not, O Virgin, or ever thy messenger had arrived, how it fared with thee? For nine years (which is thy life half-told) thy feet failed not, following the precept of thy Mother, to climb, wellnigh daily, these crags. Now and again hath the sunrise greeted me first from thy white garment. When thou camest not, I said, “One from the valley hath found her, and detained her in the path of flowers.” The snows also on yonder ridge, burn they not twice in the day with celestial roses? O roses of earth, on you, too, descend the dews of heaven! To you also hath God given a breath of sweetness; and in the yearly renewing of your beauty Time pleaseth himself with an image of Eternity. In your
fruitful bosoms Immortality is quickened—but not the Rest of Immortality.

Thy letter is spread before me on the rock, and in it thou desirest of me the continuance of my prayers, and ghostly counsel how thou, a maid and a child, shalt walk well and trip not in the novel regions of womanhood and terrestrial life: and “Is this lower?” thou inquirest. And again, thou demandest, as in an afterthought, is it superstition to give ear unto thy old nurse, now blind, when she prattleth of a certain flower, which, being gathered before sunrise, hath virtue to preserve unto a woman the love of her husband for ever? “For ah,” thou sayest, “how many women were loved well that are not loved! Is this a punishment because they loved earth, or a discipline to raise their hearts unto heaven? Or is it the seasonable work of Nature, despoiling them, before she lulleth them asleep, of things most precious, even as she despoileth them of youth and the wingéd step, and the magic of winning grace?”

For my prayers, thou hast not mine only, but the prayers of all to whom piety and innocence are dear, and the youthful aspiration which, even if it lengtheneth its way, misseth not its goal. “Is this lower?” thou demandest. Blessed is the tender scruple that feareth to have offended. Though it were lower, yet were it not low. Who knoweth if it be lower? None hath ascended and touched with his hand the summit of Contemplation: none hath descended, and touched,
with his foot the utmost depth of Human Love. On all sides Infinitude doth gird us in; and all virtues are infinite. By nature the terrestrial life is the lower; but grace consecrateth nature, and raiseth the low. He that came from on high came in perfect Humanity. No bridal was His: yet at a bridal feast was He a guest; and there He wrought His first miracle. At the saying of her who was both perfect Purity and perfect Charity, he changed the water into wine, signifying that by His Presence the elements of lower earth were thenceforth elevated into the sacraments of the Life Divine. The excellence of that which thou leavest be unto thee the measure of the excellence of that whereunto thou attainest. The single life doth emblem, in a mystery, the Unity and Integrity of God: the marriage bond of Christians showeth forth the union of the soul with her Maker, and not less of the Church with her Lord. Grace raiseth us above terrestrial things, and again, grace sanctifieth terrestrial things. Religion buildeth new temples; and again, religion subdueth to a blissful rite the temples of the idols. Faith keepeth vigil on the mountain; and again, in the valley Faith lieth down and taketh her rest, because the Lord sustaineth her. From innocence thou goest, but unto innocence. Thou advancest from virtue to virtue—from the virginal honours to the matronly—from the heart placid within its zone, to the heart that compasseth a world as large as the earth—from the straiter commune with God, to the wider commune with God. Singleness,
with penetrating beam, shineth as a star: marriage dispenseth a more various light, coloreth all things, quickeneth the world, reneweth it. In Eden marriage was ordained: in the world marriage was abused: in the second Eden marriage was ordained and restrained, that it might be in elevation sustained.

If then thou demandest how thou shalt walk well and trip not, remember that, as the marriage of this world would be to thee as nothing, so the marriage of that first Eden is now to thee, and to all, impossible. But in the second Eden, which is the Church, there is a lower depth, and there is a higher height: and in it affections, by their nature perishable, are kept alive only by that which raiseth them unto imperishable ends. Children's voices amid its bowers keep note with voices in heaven. The ties of mortal life image the ties of the life immortal—for what else mean we when we say that God is our Father, and Christ our Brother? If they be thus entertained, the bonds which should otherwise have subjected us to this earth, being transferred, do bind us unto the supernal sphere. It was then not by a chain, but by a new dignity imparted to it, that marriage was restrained in the second Eden. "The time is short: henceforth let him that hath a wife be as he that hath none." And why restrained? Because in a world where evil hath a part, there too must sacrifice have a part. Without sacrifice there can be no sacrament. Without sacrifice aspiration offendeth through pride, and fainteth anon through weakness.
At first, and that the perfect life might be known beside every hearth, the mercy of God added unto the Church persecutions; and not hard seemed it to "have all things as though one had them not," when at the frown of the Prætor, all things might in a moment vanish, except the axe and the stake. Truly when eternity was ever at hand, easy was it to feel that time was short. But the Church conquered the world, and was, in part, conquered by that which she overcame. Arduous appeared it then to see in power but service, in wealth but opportunity, in wife and child and sister but things immortal in a sweet disguise. At that time, not in scorn but in reverence of human ties, there was added to man's life the vow monastic: yea, as the birds of the air have leave to build in the eaves of the temple, even so, through a converse charity, it was beneath holy roofs and beside hearths made pure that conventual aspirations first felt the breath of heaven come in under their wings. Then arose convents, like rock-built citadels of ancient virtue, surviving in a region reconquered by a savage race. Yet not to all who had conventual aspirations was accorded the conventual vocation, since thus the Life domestic would have been robbed of its best. If all had fled from the world, Christ must have died out of the world. In it then there remained not alone the worldly, but those also by whom God was willing to keep the world from corruption. Still do those children of eternity mingle with the children of time: and theirs is a twofold vow; the marriage vow in deed
and in truth; the monastic vow in spirit. For them self-sacrifice doth what persecution did of old; and possessing all things yea, and they alone possess them—they abide by all things mortal unpossessed. They walk as a spirit, while yet in the body, above the waves of mortal change: they walk and sink not. She that is of their number cleaveth unto her husband without equal or second, in all love, loyalty, and service; and yet, keeping ever the first commandment, which is the root of all, preferreth infinitely the Creator to the creature, and holdeth by Him as one nearer by far.

Wouldest thou, O Virgin, that the love between you should last? Let it make large your hearts. Let the chief of human ties lead you far on into the bosom of the humanities. It was given unto men to break down the prison of self-love. If the heart grow, then shall that love which is in the heart grow also. When it ceaseth to grow, then beginneth it to decay: then slackeneth its grasp daily; yea, though it clutch fiercely what is little and near. Affections wither when they fulfil not their appointed tasks. For the sake of that love ye bear each other, love all that bears the divine image: for the love ye bear your children, love the poor as your children: for the love ye bear the Church of God, love also your country, which cometh next to her in sacred claims. There is a love that maketh large the heart: and there is a love that maketh it small. The love that enlargeth it cometh from God, and rendereth us benign to all: the love that
contracteth it cometh from self, and returneth to self. An evil gift to him that is beloved is this love.

See also that the heart which is large be strong also; for together ye carry one Cross up the heavenly hills. Virtuous labours and noble cares make it strong; and then it is not a rose-leaf rolled up that can ruffle it, nor the sting of every insect that can inflame it. They that live but for each other love amiss; and, even if their love abide, yet the gladsomeness of love is gone. Rejoice rather than lament that the petty cares of mortal life rebuke its petty delights, and force the spirit upon its freedom. If thou striketh a root into time, let it enter deep enough to pass through time into eternity.

Love thou thy husband, not for that in him which flattereth thy choice, but for his virtue, and in that he is thy husband. Yet forget not in thy reverence that thou art the helpmate of his soul. Thou must either be the weight that retardeth him, or the Angel that goeth before him, shedding light on his paths. Henceforth thou voyageth no more alone. Be careful of a slender bark that holdeth twain. Inseparably are ye united, whether in presence or in absence; for your union, which is in God, is of the heart, and of the will, and of the vow. More near shall ye be drawn by sorrow than by joy, by trial and by proving;—most near by Death.

And thus, O Bride, shalt thou find, while seeking after a gift more exalted, that talisman also which
conserveth affection. How shall that husband surcease from rejoicing in his wife who findeth in her, not a conspirer with worldly temptations, but the health of his soul, the strength of his life, the glory and the peace of his house, the music that reawakeneth their youth in his nobler thoughts? That gift wherein female youth exulteth the Christian Wife less loseth than imparts and shares. How shall the dust gather upon her who, bathing perpetually in fresh fountains of grace, exulteth, lily-like, each morning as in the dews of a new baptism? Inexhaustible is she whose spirit is wedded unto things incorruptible and eternal. As soon shall spirits forget to love in heaven, as such spirits to love and be loved on earth.

Such was Saint Cecilia, whose husband, Valerian by name, when he had wondered at her long, received at last such grace that, his eyes being opened, he discerned that garland of angel-tended flowers which from her brows did ever disperse celestial odours through his palace. At that sight, being instantly converted to the Galilean Discesteemed (and his brother with him), he so persevered that ere long, with the Saint, he was honoured with a most happy martyrdom, and retaineth by merit the suffrages of all the churches. The youth that taketh thee to wife serveth not the false gods, so thou writest unto me, but serveth the one God, and goeth forth unto the command that he holdeth, accompanied by thee. So accompany him that benediction may accompany both! What is good make better; for the nest that thou raisest, the
saine shall sustain thee on high; and the nest that thou warmest, the same shall keep thee warm. Where most is to be gained, there also is most to be lost. Ah me, how great is that loss! A bewildered light leadeth on into the marsh, and vanisheth. The foot sinketh in what is soft. In sloth is sought content. Aspirations wither and drop as plumes of a moulting wing. Perforce the sympathies cling to what is near. In self-defence, the soul forgetteth what it prized of old. The larger charities it banisheth: the loftier hope it rebuketh. Such is the way downward; yet, through God's high mercy, no step is there on that downward way, beside which there goeth not forth that narrow path which leadeth again into the perfect way.

While fall the ruins of the Empire daily, and the Barbarians lay waste even the Holy City, thus have I written unto thee, less as worthy to instruct than as willing to detain thee. For so, on that first morning when thy Mother led thy childish steps up to this cloister of lonely Apennine, didst thou stand with dark devout eyes in attention raised, nor thinking to withdraw them till all was said. Such remembrances haunt age. Now writeth my hand no more—not chilled by age alone, but also by the evening wind that sigheth past the rocky summits. So passeth life as a sigh. But cast thou thy wings thereon, and lightly shall it bear thee aloft! The sun sinketh, and Soractè, as a dial, flingeth its shadow far across the plain. Swan of the mountain-lake, that didst in
solitariness stem the black water under the granite peak, float thou never upon yellow Tiber; for Clitumnus leadeth also most placid and pure waters through the peaceful mead; and beside it grazeth the milk-white steer, and the bird singeth, and man doth build. —Farewell!
It was about eight years before his death that I made acquaintance with Wordsworth. During the next four years I saw a great deal of him, chiefly among his own mountains; and, besides many delightful walks with him, I had the great honour of passing some days under his roof. The strongest of my impressions respecting him was that made by the manly simplicity and lofty rectitude which characterised him. In one of his later sonnets he writes of himself thus: "As a true man who long had served the lyre;" it was because he was a true man that he was a true poet; and it was impossible to know him without being reminded of this. In any case he must have been recognised as a man of original and energetic genius; but it was his strong and truthful moral nature, his intellectual sincerity, the abiding conscientiousness of his imagination, so to speak, which enabled that genius to do its great work, and bequeath to the England of the future the most solid mass of deep-hearted and
authentic poetry which has been bestowed on her by any poet since the Elizabethan age. There was in his nature a veracity which, had it not been combined with an idealising imagination not less remarkable, would to many have appeared prosaic; yet, had he not possessed that characteristic, the products of his imagination would have lacked reality. They might still have enunciated a deep and sound philosophy; but they would have been divested of that human interest which belongs to them in a yet higher degree. All the little incidents of the neighbourhood were to him important.

The veracity and the ideality which are so signally combined in Wordsworth’s poetic descriptions of Nature made themselves at least as much felt whenever Nature was the theme of his discourse. In his intense reverence for Nature he regarded all poetical delineations of her with an exacting severity; and if those descriptions were not true, and true in a twofold sense, the more skilfully executed they were the more was his indignation roused by what he deemed a pretence and a deceit. An untrue description of Nature was to him a profaneness, a heavenly message sophisticated and falsely delivered. He expatiated much to me one day, as we walked among the hills above Grasmere, on the mode in which Nature had been described by one of the most justly popular of England’s modern poets—one for whom he preserved a high and affectionate respect. “He took pains,” Wordsworth said; “he went out with his pencil and notebook, and jotted
down whatever struck him most—a river rippling over the sands, a ruined tower on a rock above it, a pro-
montory, and a mountain-ash waving its red berries. He went home, and wove the whole together into a poetical description.” After a pause Wordsworth re-
sumed with a flashing eye and impassioned voice: “But Nature does not permit an inventory to be made of her charms! He should have left his pencil and notebook at home; fixed his eye, as he walked, with a reverent attention on all that surrounded him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. Then, after several days had passed by, he should have interrogated his memory as to the scene. He would have discovered that while much of what he had ad-
mired was preserved to him, much was also most wisely obliterated. That which remained—the picture sur-
viving in his mind—would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene, and done so, in a large part, by discarding much which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic. In every scene many of the most brilliant details are but accidental. A true eye for Nature does not note them, or at least does not dwell on them.” On the same occasion he remarked: “Scott misquoted in one of his novels my lines on Yarrow: He makes me write—

“The swan on sweet St. Mary’s lake
Float double, swans and shadow.

but I wrote—

“The swan on still St. Mary’s lake.
Never could I have written 'swans' in the plural. The scene when I saw it, with its still and dim lake, under the dusky hills, was one of utter loneliness; there was one swan, and one only, stemming the water, and the pathetic loneliness of the region gave importance to the one companion of that swan—its own white image in the water. It was for that reason that I recorded the swan and the shadow. Had there been many swans and many shadows, they would have implied nothing as regards the character of the place, and I should have said nothing about them." He proceeded to remark that many who could descant with eloquence on Nature cared little for her, and that many more who truly loved her had yet no eye to discern her—which he regarded as a sort of "spiritual discernment." He continued: "Indeed, I have hardly ever known any one but myself who had a true eye for Nature—one that thoroughly understood her meanings and her teachings—except" (here he interrupted himself) "one person. There was a young clergyman called Frederick Faber,¹ who resided at Ambleside. He had not only as good an eye for Nature as I have, but even a better one; and he sometimes pointed out to me on the mountains effects which, with all my great experience, I had never detected."

Truth, he used to say—that is, truth in its largest sense, as a thing at once real and ideal, a truth including exact and accurate detail, and yet everywhere

¹ Afterwards Father Faber of the Oratory. His "Sir Launcelot" abounds in admirable descriptions of Nature.
subordinating mere detail to the spirit of the whole,—this, he affirmed, was the soul and essence not only of descriptive poetry, but of all poetry. He had often, he told me, intended to write an essay on poetry, setting forth this principle, and illustrating it by references to the chief representatives of poetry in its various departments. It was this twofold truth which made Shakespeare the greatest of all poets. "It was well for Shakespeare," he remarked, "that he gave himself to the drama. It was that which forced him to be sufficiently human. His poems would otherwise, from the extraordinarily metaphysical character of his genius, have been too recondite to be understood. His youthful poems, in spite of their unfortunate and unworthy subjects, and his sonnets also, reveal this tendency. Nothing can surpass the greatness of Shakespeare where he is at his greatest; but it is wrong to speak of him as if even he were perfect. He had serious defects, and not those only proceeding from carelessness. For instance, in his delineations of character he does not assign as large a place to religious sentiment as enters into the constitution of human nature under normal circumstances. If his dramas had more religion in them, they would be truer representations of man, as well as more elevated and of a more searching interest." Wordsworth used to warn young poets against writing poetry remote from human interest. Dante he admitted to be an exception; but he considered that Shelley, and almost all others who had endeavoured to outsoar the human-
ities, had suffered deplorably from the attempt. I once heard him say: "I have often been asked for advice by young poets. All the advice I can give may be expressed in two counsels. First, let Nature be your habitual and pleasurable study—human nature and material nature; secondly, study carefully those first-class poets whose fame is universal, not local, and learn from them:—learn from them especially how to observe and how to interpret Nature."

Those who knew Wordsworth only from his poetry might have supposed that he dwelt ever in a region too serene to admit of human agitations. This was not the fact. He was a man of strong affections—strong enough on one sorrowful occasion to withdraw him for a time from poetry. Referring once to two young children who had died about forty years previously, he described minute details of their illnesses with an exactness and an impetuosity of troubled excitement such as might have been expected if the bereavement had taken place but a few weeks before. The lapse of time appeared to have left the sorrow submerged indeed, but still in all its first freshness. Yet I afterwards heard that at the time of the illness, at least in the case of one of the two children, it was impossible to rouse his attention to the danger: He chanced to be then under the immediate spell of one of those fits of poetic inspiration which descended on him like a cloud. 'Till the cloud had drifted he could

1 "For us the stream of fiction ceased to flow" (dedicatory stanzas to "The White Doe of Rylstone").
see nothing beyond. Under the level of the calm there was, however, the precinct of the storm. It expressed itself rarely but vehemently, partaking sometimes of the character both of indignation and sorrow. All at once the trouble would pass away and his countenance bask in its habitual calm, like a cloudless summer sky. His indignation flamed out vehemently when he heard of a base action. "I could kick such a man across England with my naked foot," I heard him exclaim on such an occasion. The more impassioned part of his nature connected itself especially with his political feelings. He regarded his own intellect as one which united some of the faculties which belong to the statesman with those which belong to the poet; and public affairs interested him not less deeply than poetry. It was as patriot, not poet, that he ventured to claim fellowship with Dante.¹ He did not accept the term "reformer," because it implied an organic change in our institutions, and this he deemed both needless and dangerous; but he used to say that, while he was a decided conservative, he remembered that to preserve our institutions we must be ever improving them. He was, indeed, from first to last, pre-eminently a patriot—an impassioned as well as a thoughtful one. Yet his political sympathies were not with his own country only, but with the progress of humanity. Till disenchanted by the excesses and follies of the first French Revolution, his homes and

¹ See his sonnet on the seat of Dante, close to the Duomo, Florence (Poems of Early and Late Years).
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sympathies associated themselves ardently with the new order of things created by it; and I have heard him say that he did not know how any generous-minded young man, entering on life at the time of that great uprising, could have escaped the illusion. To the end his sympathies were ever with the cottage hearth far more than with the palace. If he became a strong supporter of what has been called "the hierarchy of society," it was chiefly because he believed the principle of "equality" to be fatal to the wellbeing and the true dignity of the poor. Moreover, in siding politically with the crown and the coronets, he considered himself to be siding with the weaker party in our democratic days.

It has been observed that the religion of Wordsworth's poetry, at least of his earlier poetry, is not as distinctly "revealed religion" as might have been expected from this poet's well-known adherence to what he has called emphatically "The Lord and mighty Paramount of Truths." He once remarked to me himself on this circumstance, and explained it by stating that when in youth his imagination was shaping for itself the channel in which it was to flow, his religious convictions were less definite and less strong than they had become on more mature thought; and that, when his poetic mind and manner had once been formed, he feared lest he might, in attempting to modify them, become constrained. He added that on religious matters he ever wrote with great diffidence, remembering that if there were many subjects too low
for song, there were some too high. Wordsworth's general confidence in his own powers, which was strong, though far from exaggerated, rendered more striking and more touching his humility in all that concerned religion. It used to remind me of what I once heard Mr. Rogers say—viz. "There is a special character of greatness about humility; for it implies that a man can, in an unusual degree, estimate the greatness of what is above us." Fortunately, his diffidence did not keep Wordsworth silent on sacred themes. His later poems include many distinct as well as beautiful confessions of Christian faith; and one of them, "The Primrose of the Rock," is as distinctly Wordsworthian in its inspiration as it is Christian in its doctrine. Wordsworth was a "High Churchman," and also, in his prose mind, strongly anti-Roman Catholic, largely on political grounds; but that it was otherwise as regards his mind poetic is obvious from many passages in his Christian poetry, especially those which refer to the monastic system and the Schoolmen, and his sonnet on the Blessed Virgin, whom he addresses as

Our tainted nature's solitary boast.

He used to say that the idea of one who was both Virgin and Mother had sunk so deep into the heart of humanity that there it must ever remain fixed.

W o r d s w o r t h's estimate of his contemporaries was not generally high. I remember his once saying to me: "I have known many that might be called very
clever men, and a good many of real and vigorous abilities, but few of genius; and only one whom I should call 'wonderful.' That one was Coleridge. At any hour of the day or night he would talk by the hour, if there chanced to be any sympathetic listener, and talk better than the best page of his writings; for a pen half paralysed his genius. A child would sit quietly at his feet and wonder, till the torrent had passed by. The only other wonderful man whom I have known is Sir William Hamilton, of Dublin: and he is very like Coleridge.” I remember that when I recited by his fireside Alfred Tennyson’s two political poems, “You ask me why, though ill at ease,” and “Of old sat Freedom on the heights,” the old bard listened with a deepening attention, and when I had ended, said after a pause, “I must acknowledge that those two poems are very solid and noble in thought. Their diction also seems singularly stately.” He was a great admirer of Philip van Artevelde. Of my father he said to me, “I consider his sonnets to be certainly the best English sonnets of modern times;” adding, “Of course I am not including my own in any comparison with those of others.” He was not sanguine as to the future of English poetry. He thought that there was much to be supplied in other departments of our literature, and especially he desired a really great history of England; but he was disposed to regard the roll of English poetry as made up, and as leaving place for little more except what was likely to be eccentric or imitative.
In his younger days Wordsworth had had to fight a great battle in poetry; for both his subjects and his mode of treating them were antagonistic to the maxims then current. It was fortunate for posterity, no doubt, that his long "militant estate" was animated by some mingling of personal ambition with his love of poetry. Speaking in an early sonnet of

The poets, who on earth have made us heirs
Of truth, and pure delight, by heavenly lays,

he concludes—

Oh! might my name be numbered among theirs,
Then gladly would I end my mortal days.

He died at eighty, and general fame did not come to him till about fifteen years before his death. This might perhaps have been fifteen years too soon, if he had set any inordinate value on it. But it was not so. Shelley tells us that "Fame is love disguised"; and it was intellectual sympathy that Wordsworth had always valued far more than reputation. "Give me thy love; I claim no other fee," had been his demand on his reader. When Fame had laid her tardy garland at his feet, he found on it no fresher green than his "Rydalian laurels" had always worn. Once he said to me: "It is indeed a deep satisfaction to hope and believe that my poetry will be, while it lasts, a help to the cause of virtue and truth, especially among the young. As for myself, it seems now of little moment how long I may be remembered. When a man pushes off in his little boat into the great seas of Infinity and
Eternity, it signifies little how long he is kept in sight by watchers from the shore.”

Such are my chief recollections of the great poet, whom I knew but in his old age, but whose heart retained its youth till his daughter Dora’s death. He seemed to me one who from boyhood had been faithful to a high vocation; one who had esteemed it his office to minister, in an age of conventional civilisation, at Nature’s altar, and who had in his later life explained and vindicated such lifelong ministration, even while he seemed to apologise for it, in the memorable confession—

But who is innocent? By grace divine,
Not otherwise, O Nature! are we thine.1

It was to Nature as first created, not to Nature as corrupted by “disnatured” passions, that his song had attributed such high and healing powers. In singing her praise he had chosen a theme loftier than most of his readers knew—loftier, as he perhaps eventually discovered, than he had at first supposed it to be. Utterly without Shakespeare’s dramatic faculty, he was richer and wider in the humanities than any poet since Shakespeare. Wholly unlike Milton in character and in opinions, he abounds in passages to be paralleled only by Milton in sublimity, and not even by Milton in pathos, and spirituality. It was plain to those who knew Wordsworth well that he had kept his great gift pure, and used it honestly and thoroughly for that purpose for which it had been bestowed. He had

1 “Evening Voluntary.”
ever written with a conscientious reverence for that gift; but he had also written spontaneously. He had composed with care—not the exaggerated solicitude which is prompted by vanity, and which frets itself to unite incompatible excellences, but the diligence which shrinks from no toil while eradicating blemishes that confuse a poem's meaning and frustrate its purpose. He regarded poetry as an art; but he also regarded art, not as the compeer of Nature, much less her superior, but as her servant and interpreter. He wrote poetry likewise, no doubt, in a large measure, because self-utterance was an essential law of his nature. If he had a companion, he discoursed like one whose thoughts must needs run on in audible current; if he walked alone among his mountains, he murmured old songs. He was like a pine-grove—vocal ever as well as visible. But to poetry he had devoted himself as to the utterance of the highest truths brought within the range of his life's experience; and if his verse has been accused of egotism, the charge has come from those who did not perceive that it was with a human, not a mere personal, interest that he habitually watched the processes of his own mind. He drew from the fountain that was nearest at hand what he hoped might be a refreshment to those far off. He once said, speaking of a departed man of genius, who had lived an unhappy life and deplorably abused his powers, to the lasting calamity of his country; "A great poet must be a great man; and a great man must be a good man; and a good man ought to be a
happy man.” To know Wordsworth was to feel sure that if he had been a great poet, it was not merely because he had been endowed with a great imagination, but because he had been a good man, a great man, and a man whose poetry had, in an especial sense, been the expression of a healthily happy moral being.

P.S.—Wordsworth was by no means without humour. When the Queen on one occasion gave a masked ball, some one said that a certain youthful poet, who has since reached a deservedly high place both in the literary and political world, but who was then known chiefly as an accomplished and amusing young man of society, was to attend it dressed in the character of the father of English poetry—grave old Chaucer.

“What!” said Wordsworth, “M—— go as Chaucer! Then it only remains for me to go as M——!”

SONNET—RYDAL WITH WORDSWORTH.

BY THE LATE SIR AUBREY DE VERE.

What we beheld scarce can I now recall
In one connected picture; images
Hurrying so swiftly their fresh witcheries
O’er the mind’s mirror, that the several
Seems lost, or blended in the mighty all.
Lone lakes; rills gushing through rock-rooted trees;
Peaked mountains shadowing vales of peacefulness;
Glens echoing to the flashing waterfall.
Then that sweet twilight isle! with friends delayed
Beside a ferny bank ‘neath oaks and yews;
The moon between two mountains peaks emblazoned;
Heaven and the waters dyed with sunset hues:
And he, the poet of the age and land,
Discoursing as we wandered hand in hand.

The above-written sonnet is the record of a delight-
ful day spent by my father in 1833 with Wordsworth at Rydal, to which he went from the still more beautiful shores of Ullswater, where he had been sojourning at Halsteads. He had been one of Wordsworth’s warmest admirers when their number was small, and in 1842 he dedicated a volume of poems to him.¹ He taught me when a boy of eighteen years old to admire the great bard. I had been very enthusiastically praising Lord Byron’s poetry. My father replied, “Wordsworth is the great poet of modern times.” Much surprised, I asked, “And what may his special merits be?” The answer was, “They are very various; as, for instance, depth, largeness, elevation, and, what is rare in modern poetry, an entire purity. In his noble ‘Laodamia’ they are chiefly majesty and pathos.” A few weeks afterwards I chanced to take from the library shelves a volume of Wordsworth, and it opened on “Laodamia.” Some strong, calm hand seemed to have been laid on my head, and bound me to the spot till I had come to the end. As I read, a new world, hitherto unimagined, opened itself out, stretching far away into serene infinitudes. The region was one to me unknown, but the harmony of the picture attested its reality. Above and around were indeed

• An ampler ether, a diviner air,
  And fields invested with purpureal gleams;

¹ *A Song of Faith, Devout Exercises, and Sonnets* (Pickering). The dedication closed thus: “I may at least hope to be named hereafter among the friends of Wordsworth.”
and when I reached the line—

Calm pleasures there abide—majestic pains,

I felt that no tenants less stately were fit to walk in so lordly a precinct. I had been translated into another planet of song—one with larger movements and a longer year. A wider conception of poetry had become mine, and the Byronian enthusiasm fell from me like a bond broken by being outgrown. The incident illustrates poetry in one of its many characters—that of the "Deliverer." The ready sympathies and inexperienced imagination of youth make it surrender itself easily despite its better aspirations, or in consequence of them, to a false greatness; and the true greatness, once revealed, sets it free. As early as 1824 Walter Savage Landor, in his "Imaginary Conversation" between Southey and Porson, had pronounced Wordsworth's "Laodamia" to be "a composition such as Sophocles might have exulted to own, and a part of which might have been heard with shouts of rapture in the regions he describes"—the Elysian Fields.

Wordsworth frequently spoke of death as if it were the taking of a new degree in the University of Life. "I should like," he remarked to a young lady, "to visit Italy again before I move to another planet." He sometimes made a mistake in assuming that others were equally philosophical. We were once breakfasting at the house of Mr. Rogers, when Wordsworth, after gazing attentively round the room with a benig-
nant and complacent expression, turned to our host, and, wishing to compliment him, said: "Mr. Rogers, I never see this house, so perfect in its taste, so exquisite in all its arrangements, and decorated with such well-chosen pictures, without fancying it the very house imaged to himself by the Roman poet when, in illustration of man's mortality, he says: *Linguenda est domus.*"—"What is that you're saying?" replied Mr. Rogers, whose years, between eighty and ninety, had not improved his hearing. "I was remarking that your house," replied Wordsworth, "always reminds me of the ode (more properly called an elegy, though doubtless the lyrical measure not unnaturally causes it to be included among Hörace's odes) in which the Roman poet writes: *Linguenda est domus*; that is, since, ladies being present, a translation may be deemed desirable, *The house is, or has to be, left;* and again, *et placens uxor*—and the pleasing wife; though, as we must all regret, that part of the quotation is not applicable on the present occasion." The Town Bard, on whom "no angle smiled" more than the end of St. James's Place, did not enter into the views of the Bard of the Mountains. His answer was what children call "making a great face," and the ejacula-
tion, "Don't talk Latin in the society of ladies." When I was going away, he remarked, "What a stimulus the mountain air has on the appetite! I made a sign to Edmund to hand him the cutlets a second time. I was afraid he would stick his fork into that beautiful woman who sat next him."
Wordsworth never resented a jest at his own expense. Once when we had knocked three times in vain at the door of a London house, I exclaimed, quoting his sonnet written on Westminster Bridge—

Dear God, the very houses seem asleep.

He laughed heartily, then smiled gravely, and lastly recounted the occasion and described the early morning on which that sonnet was written. He did not recite more than a part of it, to the accompaniment of distant cab and carriage; and I thought that the door was opened too soon.

Wordsworth, despite his dislike to great cities, was attracted occasionally in his later years

To the proud margin of the Thames
And Lambeth’s venerable towers,

where his society was courted by persons of the most different character. But he complained bitterly of the great city. It was next to impossible, he remarked, to tell the truth in it. "Yesterday I was at S— House; the Duchess of S——, showing me the pictures, observed: 'Here is the portrait of my brother' (naming him), 'and it is considered very like.' To this I assented, partly perhaps in absence of mind, but chiefly, I think, with an impression that her Grace's brother was probably a person whose face every one knew or was expected to know; so that, as I had never met him, my answer was in fact a lie! It is too
bad that, when more than seventy years old, I should be drawn from the mountains to London in order to tell a lie!" He made his complaint wherever he went, laying the blame, however, not so much on himself or on the Duchess as on the corrupt city; and some of those who learned how the most truthful man in England had thus suddenly been subverted by metropolitan snares came to the conclusion that within a few years more no virtue would be left extant in the land. He was likewise maltreated in lesser ways. "This morning I was compelled by my engagements to eat three breakfasts—one with an aged and excellent gentleman, who may justly be esteemed an accomplished man of letters, although I cannot honestly concede to him the title of a poet; one at a fashionable party; and one with an old friend whom no pressure would induce me to neglect, although for this, my first breakfast to-day, I was obliged to name the early hour of seven o'clock, as he lives in a remote part of London."

But it was only among his own mountains that Wordsworth could be understood. He walked among them not so much to admire them as to converse with them. They exchanged thoughts with him, in sunshine or flying shadow, giving him their own and accepting his. Day and night, at all hours, and in all weathers, he would face them. If it rained, he might fling his plaid over him, but would take no admonition. He must have his way. On such occasions, dutiful as he was in higher matters, he remained incurably wayward.
In vain one reminded him that a letter needed an answer or that the storm would soon be over. It was very necessary for him to do what he pleased; and one of his dearest friends said to me, with a smile of the most affectionate humour: "He wrote his 'Ode to Duty,' and then he had done with that matter." This very innocent form of lawlessness, corresponding with the classic expression, *Indulge genio*, belonged to his genius, not less than the sympathetic reverence with which he looked up to the higher and universal laws of Duty. Sometimes there was a battle between his reverence for Nature and his reverence for other things. The friend already alluded to was once remarking on his varying expressions of countenance: "That rough old face is capable of high and real beauty; I have seen in it an expression quite of heavenly peace and contemplative delight, as the May breeze came over him from the woods while he was slowly walking out of church on a Sunday morning, and when he had half emerged from the shadow." A flippant person present inquired: "Did you ever chance, Miss F——, to observe that heavenly expression on his countenance as he was walking into church on a fine May morning?" A laugh was the reply. The ways of Nature harmonised with his feelings in age as well as in youth. He could understand no estrangement. Gathering a wreath of heather on one occasion—then an old man—he murmured, as he slipped it into the ribbon which bound the golden tresses of his youthful companion—
And what if I enwreathed my own?
'T were no offence to reason;
The sober hills thus deck their brows
To meet the wintry season.¹

¹ I need hardly say that when recalling Wordsworth's conversation after an interval of years, it is the substance of what he said that I record, not always his exact words.