CONCLUSION

Wordsworth's poetic career spans over fifty years. From 1787 to 1846 he composed 523 sonnets, 68 form the liberty group and akin to it is the group of 14 sonnets dedicated to Independence and Order, 34 form the Duddon Series, 132 are Ecclesiastical Sonnets, 113 are written as memorials of tours, 14 on the punishment of death, 122 are categorised as Miscellaneous Sonnets and the rest are scattered over under different titles. All of them taken together are ruminative, mystic, political, ecclesiastical, patriotic, descriptive, occasional, topical and miscellaneous. The liberty group shows the poet's love for the native soil and provides the moral basis of freedom. In them Wordsworth tells the English people that national independence cannot be conferred. Everyman should work for it. It cannot be given by "all the blended powers of Earth and heaven". The sonnet "Two voices" calls upon everybody to act in such a spirit that liberty can survive. All the sonnets written on the progress of war in Spain, and Portugal and addressed to Germans, Italians and others are imbued with nationalism. All sonnets evince Milton's influence and the poet's overflowing and unrestrained love of liberty but the ardour is subdued in the 14 sonnet-group addressed to 'Independence and Order' because by that time he had attained sobriety and maturity of vision but all of them express his magnanimous patriotism, his dauntless passion for liberty and his deep sympathy with the oppressed.
The Duddon Series is a sustained nature poem local in character and metaphorical in nature. It symbolises the river of his life and actions in the course of his poetic career. It stands for eternity also whose source like the river is enwrapped in mystery and is lost in the unknown sea of eternity. The poet traces the course of the river passing through many vicissitudes and ultimately mingling with the sea. The poet's own experiments in poetic form through modest achievements culminate in the sonnet "After thought". The Ecclesiatical series in three divisions traces the introduction of Christianity into England upto his own time. The poet adopts the pedestrian method and appears as a dull versifying chronicler except on occasions and detached moments when he thinks of infinity which invokes sublime flashes of poetry as in 'Mutability' wherein he seems to recover his own vision. The sonnets written during the tours undertaken from 1820--1837 contain his memory of various spots which attracted his attention during his ramblings in the country and on the continent. He calls them "memorial rhymes that animate my way". In the series of 14 sonnets 'Upon the Punishment of Death,' he muses on the punishment of death. The series shows a sense of fear in aging Wordsworth and so he pleads for the retention of the power of Capital punishment by the state to save the country from anarchy and disorder and guard the general interest. The sonnets included in Miscellaneous series and
other scattered sonnets put under different titles are on various themes and topics. They bear the stamp of his rich personality. They were written at all hours and in every condition, weather or circumstance. As he travelled by day or night, on boat or by coach, every object by the wayside, every group of wayfarers, every cottage, ruin or mansion or vista of landscape provided matter for these sonnets.

It is a commonplace of criticism that after the 'Great decade' or say after *The Excursion* Wordsworth lost his poetic power. But a study of his sonnets shows that the poetic power never completely deserted him, though it had declined. While this poetic energy is at its peak in many sonnets written during the 'great decade', as for instance in "The world is two much with us" "Composed upon Westminster Bridge", "Milton! Thou shouldest he living at this hour", "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic". In them the language is equal to the occasion; there is perfect fusion of thought and form. There is coherence of metaphor and aptness of language. Many of them are poignant in situation, skilful in rhetoric, harmonious in tone and vigorous in idea. These poetic flashes appear in many sonnets of later dates too. The "After Thought" concluding the Duddon Series of 1819 is notable for profundity of thought and flow of language. There are poetic
jewels like 'King's chapel' and 'Mutability' in Ecclesiastical Series of 1822 too though it is dull reading on the whole. In the latter sonnet the idea of growth and decay is suggested through the mere word "dissolution" as both are parts of the same single process. The idea of change and time acting mysteriously is enforced not only by the imagery but also by the skilful use of rhyme and sound. In the last line a series of light stress, short vowels and the delicate pattern of the consonants support the idea of the subtle working of the imperceptible forces. Even in the sonnets written as memorials of tours, a few show Wordsworth at lesser summits of his poetry. His sonnet written on the departure of his dear friend Scott is another sonnet where the mountain glory is charged with sorrow. The sonnets written during the continental tour of 1837 also show his subdued poetic power. Thus, there are flashes of that poetic power which is perceptible during the 'great decade', though there is evident decline of the imaginative energy. It is only on certain moments that the old Wordsworth recovers his old self and old vision and such moments are only a few during which he could produce excellent sonnets — a dozen in number, of which William Sharp in his introduction to Sonnets of the Nineteenth century writes:

No poet of our own or any language
could show ten sonnets equal in breadth
of thought, verity of poetry and beauty
of expression to the ten greatest of Wordsworth.
In fact, in these sonnets the language like the thought is that of a great master. They are written under genuine inspiration. He produced them when some passing scene took on a sudden universal value or unfamiliar splendour or when some profound thought was passionately conceived or some high ideal kindled into a pure flame in the poet's mind. In them the language flows pure and effortless; the rhyme comes unsought.

Wordsworth records in his sonnets his responses to places, times, actions, current and historical events, small episodes, paintings, books, dogmas, transitions in emotions, challenges to faith and concepts, permanence and change. He always regarded the sonnet as particularly suited to the expression of personal emotion. He confirms in prose what he declares in verse that "With this Shakespeare unlocked his heart", yet a study of his sonnets shows that he had in mind depth and directness of emotion rather than autobiographical disclosure. What degree of detachment he assigned to his use of the pronoun "I" is revealed in his patient explanation for Lady Beaumont in May 1807 of the sonnet "With Ships the sea was sprinkled" (quoted in full in Miscellaneous Sonnets Series part III). In it the reader is invited to "rest his mind as mine is resting". In short, the poet is less interested on this occasion in the single ship or the whole scene than he is in the
mood and powers of the human mind. He is more interested in the
genesis of the "Lover's 'look" than in either the lover or what
he looked at. He has found an "objective correlative" for
changes of mood. His use of the sonnet form is subjective but
hardly personal. The sonnet had been notably a form of love
lyric in its origin and in Elizabethan England, but Wordsworth
produced no love sonnet whether in 1802 or thereafter. Instead,
he devised intricate and indirect expressions like that beginning
"Shame on the faithless heart" set in Oxford on May 30, 1820 with
Mary by his side. On the surface this sonnet indicates the poet's
infidelity to Cambridge in his momentary transport over Oxford
although this infidelity reveals insensitivity to Mary. Thus, it
does not meet Wordsworth's own criteria of simplicity and direct­
ness of emotion.

As an acknowledged major sonnet writer of his age. Wordsworth
exercised considerable influence over the early Victorians. His
influence is evident in both subject-matter and technique. Though
the Italian and Elizabethan influences continued to affect the
Victorian love sonnets, they did not rival the Miltonic Words­
worthian force. Wordsworth wrote mainly religious, descriptive
and political sonnets, and religion and nature descriptions are the
principal subjects for sonneteers from 1828 to 1850. Wordsworth
earned the title of a pioneer in the field of religious sonnets by writing *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822) and his influence predominated in 1830 in the religious sonnets of R.C. Trench, Sir Aubrey de Vere, Isaac Williams and also minor authors as T. Roscoe, Edward Irving, W.S. Roscoe, and H.E. Milman. Trench used most frequently the abba acca octave and praised Wordsworth in his well formed poems. Sir Aubrey de Vere probably derived the idea of his group sonnets from *Ecclesiastical Sketches*. Isaac Williams in *The Altar* (1847) in more than 374 sonnets deals with religious subjects. After 1839 the religious sonnet displaced the descriptive as the most popular type. With the increase in number, its quality decreased. During the decade 1840-1850 the religious sonnet too bears out Wordsworth's influence. The Younger Aubrey de Vere wrote more than over fifty theological sonnets; his sonnet resembles Wordsworth's in structure as well as matter. One fourth of his sonnets omit the pause after the octave and two sestet schemes cdo, dee and odd, cee so frequently in Wordsworth, are also used by him.

Wordsworth's and Milton's political sonnets and the former's attitude towards the sonnet as a didactic-descriptive genre did not however get favour with the Victorians. They considered this form of poetic composition well suited for pure thoughts and delicate fancies but too calm and too restrained in its structure and
progress to afford a possible vehicle for the bursts, starts, throes, and outpourings of madness which was characteristic of the last reigning school of the age of Elizabeth. Moreover, Housman held an idyllic conception of this form. But the appearance of numerous tour sequences and sonnets descriptive of foreign places are probably modelled on Wordsworth's notion of composing tour cycles. John Browning's "Sonnets written During a Late Tour in Italy", Sir Aubrey de Vere's "Atlantic Coast Scenery" Catherine Godwin's "Four sonnets Written During a Summer Tour On the Continent" and Francis Skurray's sonnets descriptive of Alpine scenery show Wordsworth's influence. These sequences also show looseness comparable to Wordsworth's. Thus, Wordsworth may be credited with inspiring a revival of the sonnet sequence or at least loose sonnet group; for there were few groups before 1620 and all groups written between 1620-1650 are either descriptive or religious. All important sonnet writers of these decades Sir Aubrey de Vere, Hartley Coleridge, Tennyson Turner, Henry Ellison, Richard Howitt, Thomas Burbidge and Frederick -- are influenced by Wordsworth. Sir Aubrey de Vere's "Intimations of Past Existence" repeats the thought of Wordsworth's famous "ode" and "The way of the world" seems modelled on Wordsworth's "The World is too much with us" Richard Howitt's sonnets on violates, the evening, child-
ren and the influence of nature on the imagination approach
Wordsworthian themes. Fabre's sonnets more than a hundred are
on nature. His sonnets "On the Heights Near Devoke Water"
and "Admiration of Nature" sound Wordsworthian. Burbidge used
frequently the abba, acca, octave. Ellison resembles Wordsworth
in his usual omission of the regular pauses and the occasional
employment of the abba, acca, octave as well as in the sentiment
of his few descriptive sonnets. Hartley Coleridge resembles the
lake poet in his careful observation of even the humblest aspects
of nature and also in the use of run-on-lines. Tennyson Turner's
classical polished style recalls Wordsworth. He adopted Words­
worth's phrase "the sonnet's humble plot of ground" as the motto
of his earliest volume. Thus upto the year 1850 the influence of
Wordsworth was predominant and as late as 1876 when D.G.Rosseth's
work had achieved considerable fame. Wordsworthian type in the
first half of the nineteenth century was an established standard
type and even later the Miltonic Wordsworthian tradition continued
with additions and modifications, a step nearer our times, in
which it still flourished though his influence decreased in the
second half of the nineteenth century with those sonnet writers
predominating who considered sonnet a fit vehicle for the expres­
sion of the languor of a melancholy and despondent love and hence
brought forward the forgotten sonnet writers of the Elizabethan age.

Although most of Wordsworth’s poetry, as he himself claimed, was born of tranquil recollection, his sonnets are the product of a more relaxed mood. They are topical in nature, and often express a passing impulse or a fleeting impression. Wordsworth grouped together sonnets sharing a kindred mood. His best work in the sonnets is of a piece with his major poetry. In both his voice rings true when he deals with his favourite themes of nature and liberty. But a large number of his sonnets are devoted to themes of an ephemeral nature. These belong to the later phase of his poetical career when his creative power was on the wane and also when like Tennyson, he was more conscious of his social responsibilities as a poet laureate. Then he chooses to express a generalised opinion or a public sentiment, as for instance in the series “Sonnets upon the Punishment of Death” dealing with the punishment of death. There we miss the poignancy of a personal emotion. While going through the large bulk of Wordsworth’s sonnets one therefore finds much uneven quality, and one feels the necessity of competent editing, as Arnold advised in the case of his major poetry.

Considered in the perspective of history, it can be said that Wordsworth took up the sonnet where Milton left off, and made it more roomy and flexible for purposes of self-expression.
He further enlarged its scope by treating of a greater variety of subjects, of both permanent and ephemeral value. It is remarkable that he did not deal with conjugal love like the traditional sonneteer of the earlier times, and yet wrote with passion and fervour on themes of nature and liberty. In respect of technique, he took greater freedom, almost behaving like a libertine, violating the conventional rhyme pattern rather wilfully to suit his requirements. We might even say that at his worst there is no correspondence between thought and structure, and this we may regard as an abuse of the sonnet form and a serious artistic blemish. Nevertheless, even if we take away these sonnets of an inferior quality, we will have a sizable residue, where we find the poet capable of rising to great heights and imparting the touch of the master to his work. Sonnets like 'It is a beauteous Evening, calm and free', 'Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour', 'The world is too much with us; late and soon', 'Thought of a Briton on the subjugation of Switzerland', are some of these very best. In the history of the English sonnet Wordsworth's place is therefore very secure.