Wordsworth was perhaps the most fortunate among the romantic poets of the earlier part of the nineteenth century, in being granted a much longer life than the others. He lived up to the ripe old age of eighty. Although his productivity covered a long period of time, yet the years between 1798 and 1808 were the most fruitful years of his poetic career when almost all his great works were composed. The 'Lyrical Ballads' was first published in 1798 and was considerably enlarged in subsequent editions. The two volumes of poems appeared in 1807. It was almost entirely during this period that he composed 'The Prelude', an autobiographical poem on the growth of the poet's mind. No other production of the poet gives us such a comprehensive as well as penetrating view of his feeling for Nature, and the relation that he believed existed between Nature and the Soul of Man. "The Excursion" which he began to compose during this period was completed in 1814, and "The Recluse", a fragment was composed in 1800, but not published before 1884. We are indebted to Mathew Arnold for the knowledge he supplied to us in this respect, that is, that Wordsworth wrote his greatest poetry during the period between 1798 and 1808, a view which has since become quite general.
"Wordsworth composed verses", he writes, "during a space of some sixty years and it is no exaggeration to say that within one single decade, between 1798 and 1808, almost all his really first class work was produced."\(^1\)

Critics are usually in general agreement with the spirit of the statement, though one or two may not agree with its letter. F.W. Bateson opposing the view says:

"It is only gradually over a period of years that artistic maturity is reached, and the complementary process of artistic degeneration is equally gradual."\(^2\) Then referring to the poetic manner of Wordsworth, he adds,

"What we do find during these years are changes from one poetic manner to another and back again, . . . . . . but it must be emphasised that these were not changes from bad poetry to good poetry or vice versa, but simply from one genre to another genre."\(^3\)

After this the modified opinion he offers almost reechoes Arnold—

"Wordsworth wrote very good poems in both his early and later manners, but I am not aware of the existence of one poem of his written after he reached poetic maturity in 1797 and before the gradual degeneration set in about 1805, that can be called a really bad poem."\(^4\)

The point that the author is at pains to bring home to us is that Wordsworth did not achieve 'good poetry all of a sudden nor did he decline into bad poetry in the same manner, and so his good poetry should not be exclusively confined within

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3. Ibid., P. 7.
4. Ibid., P. 4.
the limits of the years between 1798 and 1808. Of course the fact that there was a gradual development and a gradual decline of his poetic genius will not be denied by any one; but it does not disprove what Mathew Arnold has said, that is, the best period of his poetic output is the years between 1798 and 1808. There may be, and there surely is good poetry before this period and after, but the amount of such work is meagre and almost negligible in comparison with what he wrote during this period.

Two other statements made by Mathew Arnold in his learned Preface have often met with adverse criticism. One of these runs as follows:—

"'The Excursion' and 'The Prelude', his poems of greatest bulk are by no means Wordsworth's best works. His best work is in his shorter pieces, and many indeed are there of these which are of first-rate excellence." 1 About 'The Excursion', the trend of critical opinion is not very favourable, but about 'The Prelude', it has changed particularly after the first version of 'The Prelude' had been made available since 1926, when the joint efforts of Earnest de Selicount and Helen Darbishire brought to the light for the first time the original version of the work. Now it is thought to be "the finest fruit of Wordsworth's great period," 2 and it is "the essential living document for the interpretation of Wordsworth's life and poetry." 3

The other statement which has been criticised so often and is still criticised is that the best way of Wordsworth's approach to poetry in not through philosophy

1. Poems of Wordsworth, ed. Mathew Arnold; Preface, Xi
2. Helen Darbishire: The Poet Wordsworth, P.75
3. The Prelude ed. by Earnest de Selicount, 1953, P.xi
which he seeks to embody in his poems but through poetic truth which represents the source of his real strength. We shall discuss this point of view later on. We shall now take up the discussion of "The Prelude", and try to show that his greatest achievement lies in this poem.

For a proper appreciation of this poem, we should be acquainted with its original text. It is well known that Wordsworth in his later years introduced considerable changes in the original text, but the extent of such changes was not known until the publication of the poem along with the original text made by Earnest de Selincourt.

It is generally accepted that in the early months of 1798, Wordsworth came under the compelling and genial influence of Coleridge and that being spurred by his enthusiastic encouragement he made the decision to launch upon a long philosophic poem to be entitled "The Recluse", or Views on Man, Nature and Society*. The first fifty-four lines of 'The Prelude' which Wordsworth referred to later as the 'glad preamble' were composed in 1798 according to Professor Garrod and Helen Darbishire. But in this connection Helen Darbishire has drawn our attention to a few lines in the sixth book of 'The Prelude' which describe how Wordsworth dedicated himself to poetry during the second long vacation at Cambridge.

"Those were the days
Which - also first encourag'd me to trust
With firmness hitherto but lightly touch'd
With such a daring thought, that I might leave
Some monument behind me which pure hearts
Should reverence."

She believes that these lines refer to the fact that the conception of the great poem was taking shape in his mind in the year 1788. These verses, however, appear to me to refer to "An Evening Walk" which he seems to have been writing at this date. It is but likely that the original conception of "The Prelude" was a result of the suggestion by Coleridge about a philosophic poem, and this would not be possible before the two came to be intimate with each other during their residence at Alfoxden in 1797.

On the 11th March, 1798, Wordsworth wrote to James Losh:

"I have written thirteen hundred lines of a poem which I hope to make of considerable utility. Its title will be 'The Recluse, Views on Nature, Man and Society.' These were most probably the lines written on the spur of the moment, and a part of which was afterwards printed as the "Prospectus to the Excursion". The rest, Professor Garrod thinks, must be the beginning of "The Prelude." In another letter written in the same month, he says,

"I know not anything which will not come within the scope of my plan."

He is confident that he will be able to complete the work within two years. But alas! the enthusiasm did not last for long. He was not able to write beyond the 1,300 lines already composed. His mind was diverted to the composition of poetry

1. The Prelude, VI, 64-69
2. Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1787-1805) ed. Earnest de Selincourt, P.190
3. Ibid P.188 (W.W. to James Tobin).
of a different kind. "The Lyrical Ballads". Before he embarked on his enterprise he wanted a respite to search his soul and find out if he had the strength for such a great venture. He is baffled, he says, and the great impulse soon gave way to doubt.

"I yearn towards some philosophic song
Of truth that cherishes our daily life;
With meditations passionate from deep
Recesses in man's heart, immortal verse
Thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre;
But from this awful burthen I full soon
Take refuge, and beguile myself with trust
That mellower years will bring a riper mind
And clearer insight."¹

He thinks that he is a truant running away from his duty. He would do something great but he did not yet know how.

"I recoil and droop, and seek repose
In listlessness from vain perplexity,
Unprofitably travelling towards the grave,
Like a false steward who hath much received
And renders nothing back."²

Then he began a searching examination of his own soul. Was it laziness and timidity that prevented him from undertaking the task? Or, was he incapable of writing such a great poem? He will find out an answer to all these questions by taking stock of his own powers. He would find out first how far Nature and Education had qualified him for his task. So he composed "The Prelude". This is how he stated it in his

¹. The Prelude, I, 230-238
². Ibid 267-71
Preface to the first edition of "The Excursion" in 1814. First he tells us that "The Excursion" is only a portion of a poem, forming the second part of a long work consisting of three parts, which will be called "The Recluse". Then he goes on to explain the origin of the poem "The Prelude." Referring to the composition of "The Recluse", he says:—

"As subsidiary to this preparation, he (the poet himself) undertook to record in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them: That work addressed to a dear Friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, and to whom the Author's intellect is deeply indebted, has been long finished. . . . . . . . The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two works have the same kind of relation to each other . . . . as the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic Church... The first and third parts of "The Recluse" will consist chiefly of meditations in the author's own person; and in the intermediate part ('The Excursion') the intervention of characters speaking is employed, and something of a dramatic form adopted."¹

In the above passage we get a clear idea of the origin of "The Prelude". But what is confusing is the time mentioned by Wordsworth for beginning the composition of this poem. He tells us that he began the composition when "The Author retired to his native mountains."² Here he clearly indicates the time

¹ Preface to the first edition of the "Excursion" in 1814.
² Ibid.
when he and his sister moved into Dove Cottage which was on the 21st December, 1799. But from the letters and the manuscripts it appears that the idea of the poem came to his mind in the early months of 1798. Also from the manuscripts it appears that the First Book of "The Prelude" went through its first draft during the winter months of 1798-9 when he was in Germany. The letters that he wrote to Coleridge during this period show that he was writing passages in blank verse. From Dorothy's "Journals" we learn the mass that William had written recording early experiences and afterwards incorporated in the first and the fifth book of "The Prelude". The skating passage, "There was a Boy", and the episode of the stolen Boat all belong to this period.

Among the recollections of his early childhood recorded in verse when he was at Goslar, there is a passage which seems to suggest that the plan of a poem which should knit together all the separated and disjointed incidents of his life occurred to him during that period.

"Nor while, though doubting yet not lost, I tread
The mazes of this argument, and point
How Nature by collateral interest
And by extrinsic passion peopled first
My mind with beauteous objects, may I well
Forget what might demand a loftier song."¹

He is most probably thinking here of "The Recluse" which he had put aside for some time.

It is clear that in its initial stages Wordsworth

¹ Quoted by Helan Darbishire in "The Poet Wordsworth", P.88.
regarded his autobiographical poem as a part of "The Recluse" and not as a poem preparatory to it. The idea of treating the poem as a part of "The Recluse" is suggested to him by a letter of Coleridge of 12th October 1799, in which Coleridge importunes his friend to continue with his composition of "The Recluse" and to treat the autobiographical poem as a tail-piece to it. He is delighted to learn, he says, that the poem is going to be addressed to him. So here is a definite suggestion of "The Prelude" being treated as an integral part of "The Recluse". Coleridge refers to "The Prelude" as "The Recluse" in his letters. Dorothy at so late a date as 1804 calls it "an appendix to 'The Recluse.'" On March 6, says Helen Darbishire, "Wordsworth refers to it as 'tributary to the Recluse'; but a little later, as 'introductory to' and as 'a portico to the Recluse.'" It was on account of this that no definite title was given to it. Wordsworth refers to it as a poem of his early life. Dorothy calls it the poem to C (Journal 26th December, 1804 and 11th January 1803). Coleridge refers to it in "The Friend" (1808-9) as an "unpublished poem on the Growth and Revolution of an Individual Mind." The idea of treating the poem as an introductory poem came to the poet's mind later, as has been stated in the Preface to "The Excursion", already referred to. The title by which the poem is known now a days was given to it by Mrs. Coleridge, when it was published in 1850, after Wordsworth's death.

The first two parts of "The Prelude" were written

2. The Poet Wordsworth, P.89.
before Wordsworth moved to Dove Cottage in December 1799. After he had settled down in Grasmere, his time was occupied in composing other poems. He wrote "Poems on the Naming of Places" and "Michael" and "The Brothers" and similar other pastoral poems of which we have no definite record. He also wrote a poem in blank verse describing his sojourn of the first four months at Grasmere. To it he gave the title of 'Home at Grasmere' which was adopted later on as the first book of the first part of "The Recluse". "The Prelude" for the time being was set aside. For three years we hear nothing about it. There is more than one evidence in Coleridge's letters that he urged his friend to the noble task of the composition of this poem and advised him not to fritter away his energy in his attempt to compose shorter poems. In a letter written to Poole in October 1803, Coleridge says:-

"He has made a beginning to his Recluse . . . . . . .

The habit of writing such a multitude of small poems was hurtful to him - I rejoice therefore with a deep and true joy that he has at length yielded to my urgent and repeated, almost unremitting requests and will go on with 'The Recluse' exclusively. A great work in which he will sail on . . . . . . this is his natural Element. The having been out of it has been his disease."¹ It is obvious that Coleridge meant "The Prelude" by 'The Recluse'. The prospect of Coleridge's going abroad in 1804 to recoup his failing health acted as a stimulus to Wordsworth and he wrote within a short time the

¹. Unpublished Letters I, 291-2
next three books thus completing it in five books, in which he traced the growth of his own mind up to the nineteenth year, that is, 1788. But shortly after, he made up his mind to include in the poem his experience in France, and subsequent despair followed by the return of hope. So he brought his story down to 1798, adding eight more books. Thus the original text of "The Prelude" was completed in thirteen volumes; the first two being written between 1798 and 1799 and the remaining eleven between 1804 and 1805. Between 1806 and 1814, the composition of "The Excursion" which was intended to form the second part of "The Recluse" engaged his attention.

Wordsworth's debt to Coleridge in the matter of the composition of 'The Prelude' cannot be overestimated. Coleridge acted as a constant source of inspiration to his friend not only by offering him encouragement and moral support, but by enriching his mind through their conversation, with the ideas that he had gathered and deeply brooded on from the books of poets and philosophers, past and present. So it is no wonder that the book should be addressed to him, the one "Who in my thoughts art ever at my side."  

It acquires a tone of intimate conversation which we miss in the 1850 version, when Wordsworth, conscious of its being too personal in character, introduced changes in some places which in any way cannot be regarded an improvement. Some lines as -

"I speak bare, truth
As if to thee alone in private talk"  

were removed later on. In a deleted passage which was intended

2. Ibid., 372-3.
to form the beginning of Book II, and which appears in a
draft of the last lines of the first book of "The Prelude",
the poet addresses his friend thus:

"Friend of my heart and Genius, we had reach'd
A small green island which I was well pleased
To pass not lightly by, for though I felt
Strength unabated, yet I seemed to need
Thy cheering voice, or are I could pursue
My voyage, resting else forever there"

Coleridge was his friend in the literal as well as the spiritual
sense. It is true that he did not and could not come up to the
expectation of Coleridge in writing "The Recluse", but even in
the composition of his autobiographical poem, he needed
Coleridge's help at almost every step. Wordsworth's genius
was intensely subjective. So the ambitious design of "The
Recluse" which demanded the possession of an objective view of
Nature, Man and Society was outside the scope of Wordsworth's
genius. Moreover when he began composing "The Prelude", he
raided his mind so thoroughly in search of all available
resources, that after its composition, all the wealth that his
mind possessed proved inadequate for such a venture as the
composition of 'The Recluse'. But we should not regret on this
account. Wordsworth gave us what he was capable of. He has
composed "The Prelude" and it is a magnificent poem. He was
right in making this choice. He could write on topics based on
his own experiences and findings. The autobiographical poem
was a splendid expression of his genius.

"The Prelude" is written in the manner of an epic. In the opening lines there is an outburst of joy which the poet experienced in an atmosphere of freedom after years of anxiety. He is now free to dedicate himself completely to poetry which is his vocation. For this freedom he is grateful to his benefactor, who bequeathed a legacy of nine hundred pounds to him. After this effusion, he traces his own life history from the 'seed-time' of infancy to the days of his intimate relationship with Coleridge and Dorothy. Books I-IV relate the history of his early life reaching the first great climax when he dedicates himself to poetry. In book V, he reviews his indebtedness to other writers and their works. His life-history is recounted again in books VI and VII, reaching to the second great climax, that is, the awakening of his vital interest in man which has been described in book IX. Book VIII is devoted to a retrospective view of the whole period of preparation. Book X relates the story of his despair and disappointment in France. Books XI to XIII record the history of his reconciliation and restoration. After the experiences he had had of man in the past years, he regained his faith in man and embraced the vocation of a poet.

Both Wordsworth and Milton gave a reorientation to the epic. It was no longer to be restricted to military exploits, but should be based on a spiritual conflict. Elia Selincourt is of opinion that Wordsworth's adventures as related in "The Prelude" form a suitable theme for epic treatment though the poet was rather humble in his comments on "The
Prelude. He would like to reserve that little for the "The Recluse". He candidly confesses that he composed the "The Prelude" because he was diffident of his own powers and was unprepared to treat any more arduous subject. Yet it has a universal appeal. It is the story of a mind conscious of its own problems trying to establish an enduring relationship with an external world which is full of mysteries. He has not succeeded in solving the problems for us, but has been able to show the unique relationship in which one stands to the other. "This is the modern epic", says L. Abercrombie, "this the heroic strain today, the grand theme of man's latter experience, and grandly 'the Prelude', its first enunciation, declares it. Like 'The Iliad', 'the Aeneid', 'the Divine Comedy', 'Paradise Lost' the Prelude inaugurates in poetry with things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme. And like those other inaugural poems, it is not only conspicuous because it is the first to be so inspired, but because this very priority carries with it a sort of pioneering energy which shows itself in a new splendour of art."  

Wordsworth is chiefly known to us as the poet of Nature. The origin of his poetic inspiration is to be found in his relationship with her and "The Prelude" is no more than a history of this relationship. The very opening lines of the poem tell us about this intimacy:

"Oh there is a blessing in this gentle breeze, A visitant that while it fans my cheek Doth seem half conscious of the joy it brings From the green fields, and from your azure sky."  

1. The Art of Wordsworth  
2. The Prelude (1850), I, 1-4
The cooling breeze brings physical pleasure which is rather primitive in nature. But what does he say further? The breeze seems to be half conscious of the joy that it brings from green fields and azure sky and this joy is transmitted into the soul of the poet who becomes conscious of the process. The giver and the receiver of pleasure are both aware of their functions and it is in the perception of this intricate process that poetry is born. This experience has nothing to do with thought. It is known to be like this intuitively by the poet. "The Prelude" reveals to us the growth of this type of mind, with which it has become habitual to apprehend intuitively at deeper layers, the relationship that exists between it and Nature. In this poem he tells us not only 'how exquisitely the Individual Mind' is fitted to the external world, but "how exquisitely too, the external world is fitted to the Mind." It is on account of this unique experience that "To me the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."3

Such a great book as the Prelude could not have been written without the acquisition of wide knowledge of the past. Sufficient notice has not been taken of this side of Wordsworth's life. He himself refers to books as "Powers only less than Nature's self, which is the breath of God".4 In the fifth book of the Prelude he gives us but a scanty account of the "Books" that he read in his school-days. Yet he tells us that as a boy he read voraciously. When he was at Cambridge, he tells us "many books were skimmed, devoured or studiously perused."5 Beatty tells us that he was well read in

1. The Recluse, 1, 63.
2. The Recluse, 66, 68
3. Ode on Intimations of Immortality
the philosophy of the eighteenth century. He has also told us that he had a great passion for travel books. "The Prelude" contains a large number of images, similies and metaphors drawn from books of travel. But Wordsworth was chiefly interested in the study of English poetry. His acquaintance with the minor eighteenth century poets is revealed in "The Descriptive Sketches", "The Vale of Esthwaite" and other poems. Before he began the composition of "The Prelude", he tells us, he was convinced that there were four poets worth studying and whom he must have continually before him as examples. Those were Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton.1 "The Prelude" contains reminiscences of Shakespearean and Spenserian phrases and images, and above all, those of Milton. Not only in the lofty theme of the poem and the way in which it is handled do we catch the echoes of Milton, but the style in which it is written is also distinctly Miltonic. Like some of the poems of the "Lyrical Ballads", it was not written to illustrate his theory of poetic diction, but it demonstrates well enough the crucial point of the argument, that is, "a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation," adapted to the purposes of poetic composition. For the language he uses in it is a selection from the wide field of his experience and the style in which it is dressed is determined by the intensity of his own emotions. Coleridge must have been a great help to him in this respect, but the style in which he composed the great poem is peculiarly Wordsworthian which could not have been mistaken for that of another poet. Herein lies the originality of the poet.

The original version of "The Prelude" was completed as we know in 1805, but it was not published until

2. Herbert Read, Wordsworth, 105-6
1850. In the interval a great many changes were introduced in point of style as well as the ideas contained in several passages. The two texts, when read side by side, throw a fresh light not only upon the nature of the revolution of the poet's mind, but also upon the great labour he bestowed upon it from an artistic point of view. He realised later on that his definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"¹ was misleading. Such feelings are only the raw material of poetry. A poet can give expression to his feelings through the medium of a language not adequately defined, but sufficient for the poet himself to apprehend it, but this is not sufficient for the apprehension of others. His experience is to be communicated to others and this is a difficult task which can not be accomplished without hard labour and persistent application. The amount of labour that Wordsworth spent on the revision of the original text was stupendous. Wordsworth knew very well that for the artistic expression of any poem, care should be taken of innumerable details. So it is not the subject-matter alone but the manner also, which should be taken into account by a poet. So even if "The Prelude" was published earlier, it is likely that Wordsworth would have revised it several times before its publication. As such, certain changes in point of style were bound to occur.

When in his later years it became more and more evident that "The Recluse" would remain a dream, not possible for him to realise during his life-time, he

¹ Preface to the Second Edition of the "Lyrical Ballads"
occupied himself with the revision of "The Prelude" so as to leave it in a fit condition for publication after his death. The most important changes were introduced, Helen Darbishire tells us, in 1828, 1832, and 1839. The Printed text of 1850 as we have it now was taken from a copy embodying his last corrections.

When we compare this with the original text, we find that there are three categories of changes made. These are changes in point of style; changes relating to his personal life and changes in respect of his attitude to life and nature.

From the point of view of artistry, the 1850 version is definitely an improvement upon the original version. The poem was originally intended, as we know, to be addressed to Coleridge. So the language has often the quality of rapid writing and of thinking aloud as it were. Not much care is taken to embody the thoughts in the most precise, brief and telling manner. In the later version, all circumlocutions of speech were avoided and phrases like 'I mean,' 'we might say', were removed. The lines as Earnest de Selincourt tells us,

"Yet do not deem, my Friend, though thus I speak
Of man as having taken in my mind
A place thus early which might almost seem
Pre-eminent, that it was really so,"

were shortened to

"Yet deem not Friend! that human kind with me
Thus early took a place pre-eminent."

1. The Prelude, VIII, 471-474
2. The Prelude, VIII (1850), 340-341.
By introducing stylistic changes, he succeeded at times very well in giving a clearer outline to his thought and making it more expressive:— Here is a passage which will illustrate the fact:

"Magnificent
The morning was, in memorable pomp,
More glorious than I ever had beheld.
The sea was laughing at a distance; all
The solid mountains were as bright as clouds"\(^1\)

This was changed to

Magnificent
The morning rose, in memorable pomp,
Glorious as e'er I had beheld - in front
The sea lay laughing at a distance; near
The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds"\(^2\).

But these changes do not indicate any difference in the theory of style and were made to render his language clearer and more expressive. In the latter version, rough and crude expressions were smoothed out, vagueness and repetitions were removed, all slovenly and careless composition was avoided. There are of course diffuse and monotonous lines which he could not avoid writing when he wanted to convey to us certain philosophical ideas, for poetry does not readily lend itself to the discussion of abstract ideas. Sometimes the language becomes so literal and commonplace that it repels lovers of poetry, but when his emotions are roused, he can carry us with him to the highest flights where things are observed to be steeped in an atmosphere of the most exalted imagination.

1. The Prelude, IV, 330-334,
2. The Prelude (1850), IV, 323-327.
But it must be admitted that all stylistic changes did not seek to improve the language. When his creative energy was on the wane, he fell a prey to the decorative and artificial language against which he revolted so much in his theory of poetry as well as practice. The language has definitely deteriorated by changing "the woman" into "a female" in the line "the woman, and her garments vex'd and tossed." The idea plain and simple as it is "Plants, insects, beasts in field, and birds in bower" appeals to us more than an elaboration of it in the following lines:

"Boldly seeking pleasures nearer heaven
On wings that navigate cerulean skies."

Another kind of change introduced related to the personal life of the poet. The intimate relationship he had with Coleridge ended in 1810. Accordingly the passages which describe the happier relationship were omitted or changed to lines of a more impersonal character. Moreover the poet was anxious to make the poem suit the public taste. Any poem having too much of personal colouring may fail to have a general appeal. These thoughts led him to introduce changes in the 1850 version. He can frankly protest his innocence in the presence of his friend, but this will appear egotistical to others. So the lines

"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,

2. The Prelude, XI, 28
3. The Prelude (1850), XII, 36-7
Or those of dissolute pleasure, were by me
Unshared."¹

were omitted from the 1850 version.
The tender words "Most loving soul"² in which Coleridge is
addressed "³ changed to "Capacious Soul"."⁴

Similar changes were introduced by the poet with
regard to his life at Cambridge and in France. The poem was
completed when he was thirty-five and he went on revising it
up to the age of seventy-three, the memory of youthful days
having lost most of its power at the distance of time. He
wrote this poem when he was enjoying the height of his power,
but even then he felt that the celestial apparel with which
his imagination had clothed the objects of nature was rapidly
vanishing and that a day might come when he would be able to
see the light no more. And the day did come in his life.
With his advancing age and weakening physical strength he
became narrow-minded and timid. While he was at Cambridge,
he never ceased to recognize that

"I was not for that,
Nor for that place,"⁴

But in the revised edition he shows more concern for his Alma
Mater and lines such as -

"Why should I grieve? I was a chosen son . . . . .
I was a Freeman, in the purest sense
Was free, and to majestic ends was strong,"⁵

having the ring of a true emotion were omitted from the later
version. He thought it better to soften down the tone of

1. The Prelude, III, 531-536
3. The Prelude (1850), XIV, 277
4. The Prelude, III, 81-82
5. Ibid, 82-90.
rebellion and to absolve, the university of a certain amount
of responsibility for this waywardness, which is indicated in
the lines:

"Yet why take refuge in that plea?
This, I repeat was mine, mine be the blame".1

Wordsworth has thrown very little
light upon the period of his life intervening between his
departure from France and settling down at Racedown. In the
earlier version of "The Prelude", he grows enthusiastic over
the description of the sympathy he bore for the French Revo-
lution. But with the passing of time this sympathy cooled
down and the revised version bears testimony to this. He
tells us about the grip that the French Revolution had upon
the minds of English radicals:

' Creed which ten shameful years have not annul'd'.2

This line was omitted from the later version. What was
originally a bare record of his return from France was much
enlarged to which an account of glowing tribute to the shores
of Albion was added. Earnest de Selincourt tells us of
innumerable changes which were thus introduced.

Of more vital importance are the
changes he introduced in the ideas concerning his faith in
the relationship between man and nature and the place of God
in the scheme of things. When he wrote 'The Prelude', he was
in full accord with the faith he had expressed in the
'Lines composed a few miles above 'Tintern Abbey'. That poem
gives us an account of the poet's great faith in the inherent
goodness of human nature. Left to itself a child will grow

1. The Prelude, (1850), VI, 188-189
2. The Prelude, X, 179.
and develop morally as well as intellectually in daily communion with Nature, his nurse as well as sole guide. She will leave her own stamp on his senses and the impressions thus made will be linked together and they will act upon one another by means of the Law of association. Thus the child will pass from infancy to adolescence and from adolescence to maturity. This idea has its origin in the sensationalism of the eighteenth century, particularly in the theory of the Law of association of David Hartley. Coleridge paid a glowing tribute to this philosopher in his 'Religious Musings' which goes to show that even that great poet was not free from his influence. But the Hartley with whom Wordsworth became acquainted was Coleridge's Hartley who underwent further modifications, steeped in an atmosphere of the mystical experience of the poet. It is through 'the gospel of eyes and ears' that a man attains to his full moral and intellectual stature. Yet there are moments when 'the light of sense goes out' but not before it had revealed the glory of the Infinite Being. In the highest moments of exaltation, the poet visualises one life in all, in the objects of Nature as well as in the mind of man.

"One interior life

In which all beings live with God, themselves
Are God, existing in the mighty whole,
As indistinguishable as the cloudless east
Is from the cloudless west, when all
The hemisphere is one cerulean blue."¹

When Wordsworth finished the first

¹ From a fragment found in a MS. note book containing Peter Bell, quoted by Earnest de Selincourt in the Introduction to the Prelude (1805) text, 1953, P. XXXIII.
version of the 'Prelude', he was far from being a dogmatic Christian. The temple in which he worshipped God was the temple of the Universe and his Bible constituted in the lessons he learnt from his daily communion with Nature. He had an intuitive knowledge of God who was all embracing and he struggled life-long to convey that idea to us. This is the Central Creed of the 'Tintern Abbey' as it is the central creed of 'The Prelude'. With the passing of years this vision became first blurred and then gradually died away. But we cannot live for long without some kind of faith in the Eternal Being. So the living faith of Wordsworth's early years was replaced by orthodox Christianity. In his later years he tried to interpret his naturalistic religion through a Christian dogma. Both Helen Darbishire and Earnest de Selincourt to whom all lovers of Wordsworth's poetry should be grateful have established this fact by placing the lines of the two versions side by side. I shall quote only a few examples. The apostrophe in Book X,

"Great God! 
Who send'st thyself into this breathing world 
Through Nature and through every kind of life, 
And mak'st man what he is, Creature divine"\(^1\)

is altered to

"O power Supreme! 
Without whose care this world would cease to breathe
Who from the fountain of thy grace dost fill 
The veins that branch through every frame of life 
Making man what he is, Creature divine"\(^2\).

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1. The Prelude, X, 386-9
2. The Prelude (1850), X, 420-423.
There is a vital difference of thought between the earlier and later versions. God sends His Divine Essences through the World of Nature and we partake of it. This sounds somewhat like the language of Spinoza. But the later Wordsworth, who became orthodox in his religion, must change it so as to fit it into the framework of Christianity. Similarly,

"God and Nature's single sovereignty (IX,237)
is rewritten as

"Presences of God's mysterious power
Made manifest in Nature's sovereignty."¹

And,

"I worshipped then among the depths of things
As my soul bade me . . . . .
I felt and nothing else," (XI 234-38)
is changed to

"Worshipping then among the depths of things
As piety ordained . . . . .
I felt, observed, and pondered".²

"The Prelude" abounds in instances of natural piety. Blake's comment was that the natural man being at enmity with God, there cannot be any such thing as natural piety. But we know that in Wordsworth's case the central fact of religion was the submerging of his soul into the divine soul in Nature. But this natural piety gave place to Christian piety in his later life. So

"The feeling of life endless, the great thought
By which we live, Infinity and God"³

is replaced by

"Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought
Of human Being, Eternity and God"⁴

¹ The Prelude (1860), IX,234-5  ² The Prelude (1850),XI,184-8
³ The Prelude XIII,183-4  ⁴ The Prelude (1850), XIV, 204-5.
and the lasting inspiration of imaginative rapture
"Sanctified by reason and by truth"¹ is later
"Sanctified by reason and by faith".²

Feeling and truth are replaced by faith. All other qualities
give way to humility, the supreme quality of man's mind.
Such changes have particularly been introduced in the last
book of 'The Prelude' and they leave an altogether different
impression upon the mind. Later on, he came to realise the
inherent weakness of human nature which requires some strong
support. This can be given him by his own religion. So
Wordsworth took shelter in a less independent creed. It
was by no means a false position now assumed. "Insincerity"
is an epithet the least applicable in the case of Wordsworth.
He had his eye still fixed on the centre, which is God, but
in his search for true essence, he had travelled along the
circumference of a half circle and at the end stood at a point
diametrically opposite to the one where he had stood before.

But he would have surely done better if he had not
tampered with the original text and had left unattempted the
compromise between the poetic faith embodied in "The Prelude"
and other poems, and the traditional Christian faith of the
Anglican Church. It succeeded in reconciling him to his lot
but it was not able to rouse him to ecstasy any more. In a
passage of 'The Prelude' he tells us that while living amongst
thousands of human beings he is at times conscious of his own
unity with God through the link that Nature provides:

"When strongly breath'd upon
By this sensation, whencesoe'er it comes

¹. The Prelude, XIII, 443-444
². The Prelude (850), 445-6
Of union or communion doth the soul
Rejoice as in her highest joy: for there,
There chiefly, hath she feeling whence she is,
And passing through all Nature rests in God.\(^1\)

And in the later version there is no mention of Nature working
as an intermediary force:

"The soul when smitten thus
By a sublime idea, whencesoe'er
Vouchsafed for union or communion feeds
On the pure bliss, and takes her rest with God.\(^2\)

The natural piety has been sacrificed to Christian piety and
the living fact of his own experience has been replaced by an
intellectual statement.

1. The Prelude, VIII, 830-5
2. The Prelude (1850), 672-5.