The poetry of no other English poet, in my opinion, has been subjected to so much criticism both favourable and unfavourable as has been that of Wordsworth. Specially in the twentieth century, when there is so much struggle for existence, people can ill-afford to pay attention to the poetry of Wordsworth, not to speak of deriving solace from his nature-poetry. Douglas Bush in his essay "Wordsworth: a minority Report" expresses in a telling manner, this phase of criticism of Wordsworth's poetry. He tells us how he felt when he was invited to deliver a lecture on the occasion of the centenary celebration of the poet's death at the Princeton University.

"The invitation from Princeton came to me during my first summer on a farm in Vermont, and I hoped that the green mountains might bring about the redemption of Peter Bell. However, though there were plenty of old gray stones on which to dream the time away, I sat on a step-ladder with a can of paint; I could not reap the harvest of a quiet eye because my eyes were swollen with hay fever; I could not slake my thirst at every rill because our two springs had been condemned by the state laboratory; instead of cuckoos and skylarks singing outside, we had bees and hornets buzzing in the kitchen; instead of

The silence that is in the starry sky
The sleep that is among the lovely hills,
We were kept awake through the night by a neighbour's horses trampling and snorting under our window.  

Wordsworth's love of Nature has been criticised in a somewhat different way by Aldous Huxley. He says that his love for Nature grew because he lived in thoroughly domesticated areas of

---

1 Wordsworth: Centenary Studies ed. T. Gilbert, 1951, p.3
the natural world, and that a voyage through the venomous and the vicious tropics would have caused the poet to give up his too cozy faith. H.G. Wells also seems to echo the same opinion when he says that to lie on the lap of nature is to cuddle up to a Siberian tiger. In all these criticisms, the central creed of Wordsworth's nature-poetry seems to have been missed. Wordsworth could not have possibly denied the existence of human sufferings and agony. That is evident from the great concern he showed over the French Revolution. Human life as it is, is fully of sorrows. But it should be the purpose of an artist to allay and not to aggravate these sorrows, by showing to men a meaning and an end in human existence as he understands it. Wordsworth showed the way as he understood it. Evil and misery are not the last words of creation, as disease cannot be said to be a permanent condition of a healthy human life. We have to transmute our sorrows if we wish to enjoy true happiness. This happiness, Wordsworth tells us, is within the reach of every human being if he can realise his own affinity with the smallest atom of this universe, and through this affinity he can ultimately realise his affinity with God. For this, he tells us to open our hearts to nature. A true religion can only be cultivated in solitariness. The words of Alfred North Whitehead are worth quoting in this connection:

"The great religious conception which haunt the imaginations of civilized mankind are scenes of solitariness ...................... Thus religion is solitariness; and if you are never solitary, you are never religious.............. Religion is what the individual does with his own solitarness." 3

Wordsworth as we all know was a mystic poet and his poetry failed when his mysticism failed. So it was essential for him to remain solitary, to remain in close

---

1 "Wordsworth in the Tropics", Do What you Will, New York, 1930
2 Wordsworth, ed. Gilbert J. Dunklin, p.157
3 Religion in the Making, p.16-19
touch with nature instead of living among crowds. He was pre-eminent a poet of solitude.

Secondly those who deride him for giving a false picture of nature by representing her cosy and comfortable aspect forget that there are two aspects of nature as there are two aspects of human nature. A human being can worship God or Devil. Nature too can be spiritual as well as sinister. Wordsworth chose the elevating aspects of nature as these appealed to him for an understanding of the principle of unity in diversity which is not at variance with the principles of modern science. There is the principle of natural selection, but side by side, there is the law in the biological world which tells us that there is the same life-force operating in all - from the smallest blade of grass to the highest type of humanity. The only difference is a difference of degree. So to say he falsified nature is not to understand his greatest poetry.

Another type of criticism levelled against him, is that he was not consistent in his thoughts regarding his theory of poetry or philosophy of nature. It is true that in the great moments of inspiration he did not follow his theory, but for that we should be rather glad than take him to task. In his youth he was a thorough-going radical and one of the greatest champions of the cause of freedom. In politics this is evinced by the support he lent to the cause of the French Revolution, and in literature by the raising of a cry against the eighteenth century poetic diction. In fact, it was his ardour for the French Revolution that made him turn away from the aristocratic to the middle and poorer classes both for the subject matter and the language of his poetry. Whether he followed his own theory
to the letter or not is a different matter, but it cannot be denied that his theory was a great innovation in the history of literary criticism, the benefit of which was enjoyed by contemporary as well as later poets.

Those who blame Wordsworth for not giving a systematic exposition of his thoughts upon Nature forget the fact that he was a poet and not a philosopher. It is his own experience that matter to a poet-experience in relation to the external world and other human beings, whereas a philosopher takes an objective view of the world. He does not allow his own self to colour the object of his thought. So there is a consistent body of thought in the works of a philosopher, which we do not usually find in the work of a poet. The experience of any person in any situation cannot be the same at the age of ten, twenty, or forty. With the growth of his mind his experience with reference to a particular object is bound to vary. The so-called philosophy of Wordsworth consists in the body of poetry he wrote on Nature wherein he has linked up his own experiences in relation to Nature. He has recorded his experiences in contact with her when he was a child, a youth, and a full-grown man. Even in these stages he has shown how nature was shifting from the forefront of his mind to a relatively remoter corner. But she is still held to be shedding the divine glory and moulding the poet's life. But later we find imagination taking an important place in his scheme and what was said of nature shedding the divine glory and moulding the poet's life is contradicted. It is the imagination of the poet which performs the wonder and nature is no longer considered to be playing an active part in moulding the poet's mind. Here his attitude to nature seems to be different from what he had said before on the
subject. As I have already stated, a poet is not a philosopher, and as such, his way of thinking is bound to differ from that of a philosopher.

Arnold, one of the first critics of Wordsworth seems to have given the right turn to this kind of criticism. Referring to Leslie Stephen's appreciation of Wordsworth, he says, "The Wordsworthians are apt to praise him for the wrong things, and to lay far too much stress upon what they call his philosophy. His poetry in the reality, his philosophy, - so far at least as it may put on the form and habit of a scientific system of thought, and the more that it puts them on, - is the illusion." 1

What he meant to say is that Wordsworth's experiences as a poet are of real value to us, whereas his beliefs, based on an analysis of such experiences, should not matter to us, because we do not get any systematic exposition of his thought in them. Though this has not been stated so clearly by Matthew Arnold as it has been by Basil Willey in his essay on Wordsworth. Matthew Arnold tells us:

"Wordsworth's poetry is great because of the extra-ordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered in the simple primary affections and duties; and because of the extraordinary power with which, in case after case, he shows us this joy and renders it so as to make us share it." 2

Basil Willey's remark on this is that, supposing we are lacking in Wordsworth's sense of the sacredness of the created world, of the dignity of the human spirit, and of the affinity between Nature and Soul, how are we going to share it? The reply he gives is what I have already suggested, that is, it is the experience of a poet that matters to us, not his beliefs. So for a proper appreciation of Wordsworth's works his suggestion is

1 Poems of Wordsworth, ed. Matthew Arnold, P.XVII-XIX
2 Ibid
3 Basil Willey: The Eighteenth Century Background, 1049
that a selection of those poems should be made where he tells us about his feelings, and not his beliefs about his feelings.¹

He further tells us that Wordsworth turned to Nature because he thought that being of an impersonal character, it has got a greater healing power over a sick mind. He quotes examples of such writers as Cowper, Rousseau, Gray, Thomson and Arnold who could find in it a surrogate for religion because of the commanding opinion which had gained a great favour on the English soul, on account of the open air being conducive to physical and mental health. The divinization of Nature which culminated in Wordsworth began with eighteenth century writers from whom later poets learnt to see the visible universe as the clearest evidence of God. I do not agree with Basil Willey on the point that Wordsworth turned to Nature because he was sick and found in her a healing power. All mystics more or less prefer to lead a life of solitude in the midst of natural surroundings. They do not turn to Nature because they are sick, but because they want to be acquainted with the mystery of the universe and feel a sort of companionship with all the objects created by God. It is the awakening of a dim consciousness of the existence of something, call it God, or by any other name, who lies beyond our senses and to whose footstool we are led through the avenues of our senses. This consciousness came to Wordsworth instinctively as he tells us in so many passages of "The Prelude" and in other poems. But I agree with Professor Basil Willey's remark that his poetry is of value to us when dealing with the experiences of his life:

"Nor sedulous as I have been to trace
How Nature by extrinsic passion first
Peopled my mind with beauteous forms or grand,"

¹ Basil Willey: The Eighteenth Century Background, 1949, p.273-274
² Basil Willey: The Eighteenth Century Background, P.272
And made me love them, may I here forget
How other pleasures have been mine, and joys
Of subtler origin; how I have felt,
Not seldom, even in that tempestuous time,
Those hallowed and pure motions of the sense
Which seem in their simplicity, to own
An intellectual charm, that calm delight
Which if I err not, surely must belong
To those first born affinities that fit
Our new existence to existing things,
And in our dawn of being, constitute
The bond of union betwixt life and joy." 1

Here is a mystical faith not based on any dogma, but direct personal experience leading the poet to a vision of Life Eternal which is the source of joy. Argument or philosophy there is none, as the poet is not embodying any argument or using a rhetorical language to convince us of what he says. He is relating one of his mystical experiences and the vividness of his experience gives the poem its chief vitality. "His poetical Thought", says W.P. Ker, "is not the poetical verifying of philosophical ideas conveyed to his mind in books, it is the interpretation of his own experience. His ideal or the poetical world is the real world of ordinary life, but perceived by him, William Wordsworth, at different stages, day after day, in various illuminating ways. As he reflects on his own way of seeing the world in 'Tintern Abbey', 'The Prelude', he knows that his mind is transcendental; but what he sees is a revelation. Possibly at times under the metaphysical influence of Coleridge he may have been led to describe his mode of vision in terms like those of the idealist philosophers. But as one who attends to Wordsworth's poetry can believe that anything like regular philosophy was at the beginning of his ideas." 2

1 The Prelude, I, 571-585 2 Form and Style in Poetry, ed. by R.W. Chambers, London: 1928, 118-119
I think that no better account of the development of Wordsworth’s poetic thought and its priority and relative importance to his philosophical thoughts has been given by any other critic. Sir Kenneth Clark in his study "Landscape into Art" institutes a comparison between the Painter Constable and Wordsworth and draws our attention to a particular passage in Traherne which I feel tempted to quote here:

"You never enjoy the world aright, till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the... Yet further, and you never enjoy the world aright till you so love the beauty of enjoying it that you are covetous and earnest to persuade others to enjoy it." 1

Modern readers are divided in their opinion about Wordsworth’s poetry. There are readers who find that Wordsworth is a too Christian poet for the modern age. There are others who find him actually dangerous to the Christian faith. How do we account for these contradictory opinions about his poetry in the present age? From the points of view of both these classes of people; what they say seem to be correct, though in a different way. Judged from certain elements in his poetry, he can be hailed a Christian poet though not in the sense that Dante or Donne was a Christian poet. His preference for plain living and high thinking, for a life of humbleness and quiet contemplation, and his search for peace, and his sense of the possibility of illumination and enlightenment, in contact with the mysterious forces of the universe link up the essential teaching factors of Christianity. When we speak of a poet as being religious, we do not expect him to follow any particular religion with complete orthodoxy, but what we mean is that in his poetical utterances we come across the expression of a firm faith in God. From this point of view Wordsworth may well be regarded as

1 Landscape into Art, p. 79
Christian in his outlook.

Now let us turn to the other side of the picture. How is it that Wordsworth is spoken of as a poet not only alien to Christianity, but to a great extent dangerous to it? Professor Fairchild says that he is dangerous because his religion is said to consist in a mere religious emotion. His failure to formulate any dogma, and to conceive God and the nature of man in their true perspectives show the ineffectiveness of his attempt to understand the true nature of Christianity, for which he apparently seemed to have discovered an attractive substitute. He does not stop here. In the right classical manner he arraigns all romantic poets and says that a large part of our present ills, especially man's direct and conscious inhumanity to man is owing to the irresponsible thought that the romantic poets sought to express in their poetry.

It is true that in the highest poetry of Wordsworth, that is, the poetry of the great decade, we do not come across any reference to the doctrinal faith of the Church. Of Christian virtues he speaks but without any reference to their Christian origin. He does not speak to us of evil in the Christian sense, or of the fall of man due to sin which is inherent in his nature, and the need of his redemption. Yet we feel, as we read his poems, that there is definitely something Christian, or, we may use the word in a broader sense, religious, in the substance of those poems. We find in them those elements or rather raw materials which Christianity with all other religions of the world shares. "Mysticism", says Dean Inge, "has its origin in that which is the raw material of all religion and perhaps of all philosophy and art as well, namely, that dim consciousness

---

of the beyond which is part of our nature as human beings."

It is from that source that Wordsworth derived sustenance for his poetry. We are now able to find out how the poetry of Wordsworth appears obnoxious to one class of people because it has too much of a Christian flavour, and to others, because it is anti-Christian, in the dogmatic sense of course.

The second question has been already discussed. The issue which arises out of the first question is why should the poetry of Wordsworth appear repugnant to the modern taste on account of the Christian elements in it? Are those who oppose him anti-Christian? The answer is to be found in the lack of force, gusto and vitality which a moderner detects in the poetry of Wordsworth; it is what we call the lack of the Byronic force or 'eagle' as T.S. Eliot would have it, who accounts for a decline of Wordsworth's genius to the "Still sad music of infirmity". This bird "eagle" seems to symbolise the successful spiritual or poetic life. It is the quietism of Wordsworth that irritates a modern reader. His denial of sexuality deprives his poems of a living force, of an air of highheartedness and self-assertiveness. It is the hot direct relationship with the godhead, or the sources of life that a moderner craves for. This kind of criticism was passed on the poetry of Wordsworth a long time ago by Hartley Coleridge. Though it is an unkind parody of the Lucy poems, it is worth quoting as it will give us some idea about the hostility felt against his poetry on account of its being apparently docile and simple:

1 Dean Inge: Christian Mysticism, p.5
2 "Wordsworth and Coleridge". The Use of Poetry and the use of criticism, Cambridge, Mass, 1933. p.60
He lived amidst the untrodden ways
To Rydal Lake that lead;
A bard whom there were none to praise,
And very few to read.

Behind a cloud his mystic sense
Deep hidden who can spy
Bright as a night when not a star
Is shining in the sky.

Unreal his works - his 'Milk White Doe'
With dust is dark and dim,
It's still in Longman's shop, and oh
The difference to me!

In the "Memorial Verses" Arnold refers to the Byronic courage when he says -

"The cloud of mortal destiny,
Others will front it fearlessly."

And about Wordsworth he says -

"But who, like him, will put it by?"

It is not that we do not come across instances of courage in Wordsworth's poetry. Michael, The Leechgatherer and Margaret in "The Ruined Cottage" afford good examples of courage but their courage is associated with "rocks, and stones and trees" against the backgrounds of which their emotions have been described. It is a courage of the mute insensate things from which they seem to learn this quality.

In "The Nation", Chase says that of all Victorians, Mill has been able to make a true assessment of the modern mind by hinting out its major weaknesses. "The first", he says, "is its morose desire for dogmatic certainty. The second is its hypersthesia:
its feeling that no thought is permissible except an extreme thought, that every idea must be directly emblematic of concentration camps, alienation, madness, hell, history and God; that every word must bristle and explode with the mystic potency of our plight."

The grand poetic achievement of Wordsworth was that he made us feel an intense joy in the widest commonalty spread.

No better achievement of his poetic achievement comes to the mind than the "Memorial Verses" that Matthew Arnold wrote after the death of the poet in 1850:

"He too upon a wintry clime
Had fallen on this iron time
Of doubts, dispécts, distractions, fears.
He found us when the age had bound
Our soul in its benumbing round;
He spoke and loosed our hearts in tears.
He laid us as we lay at birth
On the cool flowery lap of earth;
Smiles broke from us and we had ease;
The hills were round us, and the breeze
Went o'er the sunlit fields again;
Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.
Our youth returned; for there was shed
On spirits that had long been dead;
Spirits dried up and closely furled,
The freshness of the early world."

It is on account of this deep emotional quality in Wordsworth's poetry that we value him. But it can be well argued that there is no want of feeling in modern literature. On the contrary, the feeling that modern literature serves to us is burning hot.

1 The Nation, April 8, 1950, 330.
2 Fragment From The Recluse.
taken from the very source of life. We do not of course find this fiery quality in Wordsworth's poetry. But this extreme heat which seems to give a special taste to the palate defeats its own purpose in the long run. Soon after, the heat produces an uneasy sensation, as a result of which the subject suffers from gloom and depression. It is here that Wordsworth comes to our help. His poetry, instead of adding to our gloom helps to dissipate it. He produces in our minds a healthy appreciation of all the good things of life. He may not always be sure of his way, but he is unmistakably sure of his intention, that is, the end of our human existence is communion with God. What he knew he told us. If he could embody his grievance against the literature of violence, it would be somewhat like this:

For evoking our feeling and justifying our life, violence is not necessary. Even the meanest flower is sufficient for that purpose. Feeling is necessary of course for poetic endeavour, but feeling should be tempered by will, otherwise like an unbridled horse it will do more harm than good.

It has become a fashion of late to decry Wordsworth's poetry which deals with his mystic communion with God through physical phenomena. "It is as difficult for us" writes Geoffrey Bullough, "as for Pope to rise through the contemplation of hedge-rows into direct communion with 'something far more deeply interfused'. Astronomical researches, as startling as those of the Renaissance, have widened the physical, but for the time being, narrowed the spiritual universe." \(^1\) Douglas Bush also writes in a similar vein:

"But though it is customary to see much of Wordsworth's finest

\(^1\) The Trend of Modern Poetry, 1/2.
writings in his poems of passivity and joy, it may be doubt-ed - in spite of Centenary Essays of 1950 - if the modern reader can bring a willing suspension of disbelief to the poet's animistic view of nature or is captured by the smaller voice of Wordsworth the Bird-watcher." 1

It is true that before the close of the nineteenth century science shook the faith of the intellectual people in all religions, not to speak of natural religion. Tennyson's view of nature as "red in tooth and claw" was shared by his contemporaries and later writers, yet, in this connection, it is worth quoting the opinion of one of the greatest scientists of the modern world, that is, Professor A.N. Whitehead, regarding Wordsworth's nature-poetry. He has not only called our attention to Wordsworth's interpretation of nature, but he is long of opinion that it goes a way towards the formation of any comprehensive view of the real world. The aesthetic interpretation of nature is as important as the scientific interpretation. The two views should be taken to be complementary to each other. He not only attaches value to Wordsworth's ideas about her, but he regards the poet's approach to nature as of special value to us. We cannot give any complete account of her without the imaginative apprehension of our life. 2

Even if judged from a modernist's standpoint, the poetry of Wordsworth will appear to be of immense value to us. "Poetry", says Frederick A. Potte, "is the kind of speech which expresses the qualities of experience." 3 Speaking about the modern poets in general, V.de S. Pinto says:

"To achieve complete success, they (modern poets) would have to

1 English poetry: The main currents from Chaucer to the present. 131
2 Science and the Modern World. (Lyon Lectures) Chapter 7, pp. 103-
3 The Idiom of Poetry. 80. 1927
would have to escape from the vulgarized commercial world of contemporary actuality into themselves and recreate a new sort of poetic sensibility and a new means of self-expression, and at the same time, they would have to go out to meet the vulgarized commercial world and turn it into material of poetry, which they would also have to create a new language for poetry which would be comprehensible to a world which had almost entirely lost the poetic sense.  

"Poetry", says Bullough, "is at once the poet's reaction to the world without and the verbal harmony imposed upon it by his imagination."  

All the functions of poetry as have been enumerated above are found to have been fulfilled more or less by the poetry of Wordsworth. It is the successful depiction of a poet’s own experience that makes his poetry so great. This opinion is cherished by other modern critics also, chief among whom is Basil Willey, Herbert Read and James Sutherland. The first two I have already quoted elsewhere. I shall quote here a few lines from Sutherland in support of this argument:

"To W................... the important thing is always the experience in all its original purity. If his power is successful, he has made us feel exactly what he himself felt at the time; the very wind of it passes across our brow, the taste of it is on our lips..... The experience in each poem of Wordsworth's is fresh and unspoilt; it has not been fingered, nothing has been done to it."  

Secondly it becomes successful, it has been said, when the poet is able to make the inward escape, and to find a medium of self-expression, and, at the same time, to go out to meet the contemporary life. This is the tendency we find in the Imagistic poetry

1 Literature and Life: London, 1948 "Live Dog and Dead Lion" by V.de.S Pinto, 79. 2 The Trend of Modern Poetry, i. 3 A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry, i.
of Herbert Read and others. Their later poems do not give us pictures of the vulgarity and ugliness of contemporary facts but they record successfully the sense of spiritual emptiness which is a significant fact of the industrial world. In the poetry of Wordsworth we find the same quality of an inward escape as a result of his reaction to the world without. We also get in it a sense of harmony that he succeeded in imposing upon the world by his imagination. What his poetry seeks to impress upon us is the sense of harmony and "central peace subsisting in the heart of endless agitation," what Eliot calls "The still point of the turning world" in "Burnt Norton". It is true that Wordsworth does not give us the picture of contemporary life in the sense that Byron does, yet we should do well to remember the warning he gave to the readers of his "Lyrical Ballads". "Readers ................. if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion will perhaps frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awareness ...... .......... It is desirable that such readers for their own sakes, should not suffer the solitary word poetry, a word of very disputed meaning to stand in the way of their gratification; but that while they are persuing this book, they should ask themselves if it contains a natural delineation of human passions, human characters and human incidents; and if the answer be favourable to the author's wishes, that they should consent to be pleased in spite of that most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our own preconceived codes of decision. "2 Does this passage not sound like a voice of revolt of a modern poet raised against our pre-established codes of decision? Does he not tell us in the same manner to struggle with feelings of strangeness and


2 Advertisement to the Lyrical Ballads of 1798.
awkwardness? "Genuine poetry", says Mr. Eliot, can communicate before it is understood."  

Wordsworth's poetry of course does not exasperate us with obscurity in the same sense that some of the poems of Auden or T.S. Eliot do. But he is at one with them in giving importance to the private experiences of the poet, however strange or awkward these may appear to be to the common reader. His poems may be said to have achieved greater success in this respect, because, as has been stated by Bullough, "Communication of this elementary sort is only preparatory to the final work of poetry; full communication is contingent on "understanding, on the linking of associations, of ideas."  

Thirdly as has been mentioned before, the modern poets "would also have to create a new language for poetry which would be comprehensible to a world which had almost entirely lost the poetic sense." In this respect also we find Wordsworth to have struck the right path. He did create a new language for poetry which was comprehensible not only to the world of his own age which had almost entirely lost the poetic sense, but it is comprehensible to the present-day world too. Wordsworth........

has no style in the sense that Shakespeare or Milton had it. But he created a new idiom for it which is "bald as the bare mountain-tops are bald, with a baldness which is full of grandeur." Retorting Matthew Arnold, a recent critic, George Reynolds says: "Where is style to be found if not in poetry? Where is poetry if not in Wordsworth?"

"Herbert Read", says Herford, "declares that he would always send out The Solitary Reaper into the world of letters to represent the quintessence of English poetry." These remarks show the influence

1 The Trend of Modern Poetry, 165.  2 Ibid  
3 Matthew Arnold: Poems of Wordsworth, XXIV  
4 C.H. Herford: Wordsworth - 236  
5 Ibid
of his plain style on the minds of modern writers.

Wordsworth's claim to a place among the greatest of English poets has been stated very well by A.C. Bradley in his 'Oxford Lectures on Poetry'. Rightly enough he traces this to his originality of thinking and originality of putting it into verse-forms, for originality is an element in all but he is no less a poet of man than a poet of nature; for through the Same laws of nature alike rolls the divine something far more deeply interfused. "There is no sharp cleavage between his poetry of nature and his poetry of man. His men are always in tune with their natural surroundings. His Leechgatherer, his Solitary Reaper, his Lucy Gray, his Cumberland Beggar are all touched with the loveliness and the mystery of nature. Even duty to whose power he succumbed in his later life has been imagined by the poet to have its analogue in the natural world. It is on account of this law that the stars move in their prescribed orbits. To be one with nature meant for Wordsworth to be a vital part of her, to be

"Rolled round in Earth's diurnal course With rocks and stones and trees." ¹

He has written some of the greatest poems on man and nature, but the range of such poems is narrow. He could write about solitary men and women facing the sublimities and simplicities of nature. But to depict the sorrow encircled within the walls of cities ² was not within his power. He had a great contempt for naturalists and he did not aim at giving a transcription of external nature. He tended always to be personal. He values natural objects for their simplicity or their pathos and for their power to enkindle a noble rapture or ecstasy.

¹ A slumber did my spirit seal
² Fragment from the Recluse.
Those rightly watched and observed have the power of transmuting sorrow into happiness and ennobling the human soul. It is in this way that nature can be said to be performing the same function as any religion. The most vital part of this religion of nature remains for many of us a true thing and will remain so as long as human nature does not change.

His influence on the English poetry was great, and it still continues to be great. His poetry was a great corrective for the romantic exuberance of Coleridge, Keats, Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites, the first three of whom he influenced more or less in different ways. His moral purpose, his patriotic fervour, his connection with the spiritual appeal that lies in common things and the nobility of his theme afford a great contrast to the absorption of poetry for its own sake, to an escape to the world of supernaturalism or to the world of mediaeval romance, qualities which distinguish him from other romantic poets. The contrast is still more apparent in the sphere of style and diction. His way of writing was strong, pure and plain and we rarely come across such colour and pure enchantment in his poetry as we find "In Kubla Khan". But in spite of these differences, he can be said to be a poet as well as a poet for us all, for he influences and is still influencing the poets, as also us, the common readers.

His influence on Coleridge is apparent in his "Ode to Dejection" and "The Lines to a Gentleman", which bear some resemblance to Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality' and 'The Prelude'. There is a verbal echo of Wordsworth in Coleridge's Odes, and in the Blank verse he wrote, he also, reminds us of Wordsworth's practice. Of all the contemporary poets, Keats seems to have been most deeply influenced by Wordsworth. His love for Nature, his minute observation of the world of
natural phenomena, his concern for the vocation of a poet, the pains that he undertook to achieve mastery in his style, in all these aspects he was no doubt influenced by the elder poet.

His poetry, even such revolutionary poets as Byron and Shelley, in spite of the contempt expressed by both for his poetry. We find verbal echoes of Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' in Shelley's 'Alastor' and his mystical pantheism, though it is richer and subtler than Wordsworth's; derives from the same source, that is Plato. Wordsworth influenced Byron but indirectly through Shelley which is apparent in "Childe Harold".

Among the poets of the Victorian era Tennyson and Matthew Arnold were the most deeply influenced by him. Like Wordsworth, he was a keen observer of natural phenomena, but unlike him, his poems are often pervaded by a melancholy air which is one of the chief features of Victorian poetry. His poem "Dora" may be said to be an experiment in the plain style of Wordsworth, which aims at using "The real language of men". His "Idylls" at some places reflect Wordsworth's plain manner, blank verse and his great ethical concern. Wordsworth's influence is more clearly noticeable in the poetry of Matthew Arnold, for to Tennyson, plainness of manner was not natural. Matthew Arnold seemed to have tested the relieving power of Wordsworth's poetry on his own melancholy, but it failed in his case, as his melancholy had taken a deep root in his heart which was not be mitigated by any optimistic poetry. But still Wordsworth's influence on him is apparent in his poetry, particularly his "Scholar Gypsy" for his deep love for Nature may be likened to Wordsworth's whose state of calm repose in the midst of Nature's beauty was a condition which Arnold
tried to attain without success. Coventry Patmore and Sir William Watson can also be counted among Wordsworth's debtors. In his plainness of style and the deeply religious vein of his poetic theme, Patmore may be said to be a true disciple of Wordsworth. His poem "The Toys" reminds us of Wordsworth's poems "We are seven", "Anecdote for Fathers" in which the filial affection and the innocence of children find such poignant expression. Watson along with Robert Bridges and Lawrence Binyon have been said to be "self-conscious heirs of the aureate strain in English poetry of Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson." Watson, of all the poets, was deeply influenced by the mighty poets especially the Romantics. His sonnets and other poems are reminiscent of Wordsworth's patriotism and his love of nature.

Even the modern poets are not altogether free from his influence. Hopkins whose greatness as a poet has been acknowledged in the modern age was Wordsworth's debtor in some respects. In him, as in Wordsworth, a deeply sensuous appreciation of beauty was joined to an intensely felt religious fervour and a high intellectual quality.

Apart from the great innovations that he introduced into the technique of poetry, which has since been imitated and perfected by later writers, there is a unique quality in his poems which Wordsworth even could not so well master. The quality consists in an air of easy skill with which he played with his images drawn from natural objects. This is particularly to be found in 'The Blessed Virgin compared with the air we breathe.' Wordsworth apprehended with two sense-organs, whereas Hopkins "apprehended all things vividly - their colour form, movement, touch, taste and smell."
His influence is to be observed though in a somewhat different way upon the poetry of Herbert Read and T.S. Eliot. The war left Read a cynic. He could not trust love since love turns to hate. But later on he was able to find support in a sense of apprehension of cosmic unity. Like Wordsworth, the Being whom he sought in all living beings was not the Christian absolute but the impersonal totality of the universe. 'The Retreat', which is one of his finest poems, records in the manner of Wordsworth a yearning of the soul for childhood's innocence and the state of pre-existence. Our miseries and agonies indicate the agonies of our souls towards the universal rhythm.

In this poem, Sir Herbert Read departs from romantic pantheism, which is held by some to colour the nature-poetry of Wordsworth. Eliot's affinity to Wordsworth is not so easily traceable as in the cases of other poets. Yet there is some sort of resemblance, one feels, between the mystic ways of approach to life of both. Both the poets being shocked at the spiritual emptiness of the men and women of their times made an inward escape, to revive a life of imaginative experience more intense than the life lived in the midst of actual experiences. There is the desperate cry of the soul in the case of T.S. Eliot who never attained mystic communion with God, though he has recorded his experiences of passing through "The Dark Night of the Soul", when he is said to be at the first evening of the third stair of a flight of steps leading from earthly to heavenly things. This has been very well depicted in the poem "Ash Wednesday". In the case of Wordsworth, as has been reported by himself, he had glimpses of the Eternity in certain moments of his life. But like a true mystic he did not press forward slighting all difficulties that stood in the way, as
a result of which his mystic vision failed him in his later life. Wisdom is required for a mystic union with God, says Eliot,

"The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility, humility is endless." ¹

The discussion of the works of the poets Herbert Read and Eliot with reference to the works of Wordsworth reminds us of an important aspect of modern poetry, that is pure poetry. Modern theory of poetry is much concerned with purity as one of its elements, in our times to separate poetry from science which is a result of the analytical tendency of the modern mind. Frederick A Pottle in his book entitled "The Idiom of Poetry" alludes to this tendency and says in a humorous vein: "When our descendents of the next century seek for an epithet with which to damn our times, they might well choose something like 'The Era of Purity'. Our present day phritanism is not content with a demand for pure religion poetry and pure science, it yearns also for pure religion, pure politics, pure food and pure business. The modern temper disapproves of the amateur and thinks that everything had better be turned over to the expert. Consequently we have science without poetry and poetry without science.............. We have split the rich monism of the Age of Innocence up into many separate compartments and insist on living in each of them by turns." ²

I agree with Mr. Pottle in this respect. Purity of poetry is commendable in theory only. In practice, since it stands in the way of our appreciation of longer poems consisting of descriptions of natural scenery and delineation of human passions and emotions, it does not much appeal to me.

¹ East-Coker
² The Idiom of Poetry, pp.81-82
Moreover in pure poetry there is no limit to which the private experiences of a poet may not extend, where we may not be able to follow him. So pure poetry may often result in obscurity.

Now let us turn back and discuss what pure poetry means and if Wordsworth can claim to have any share in it. Coleridge is said to have suggested the doctrine of pure poetry. "A poem of any length", he says, neither can be, nor ought to be, all poetry. But the doctrine took a definite shape and form in the hands of Edgar Allan Poe. A poem, according to Poe, is to be read at a single sitting. 'Paradise Lost' is to be considered as a series of short poems embedded in prose. Poe was of opinion that the function of poetry is to excite and all excitements are short-lived. Poetry bears the same relation to taste as passion and truth to moral sense and intellect, and, truth and passion can be expressed in a much better way through the prose-medium. These should be introduced sparingly in poetry when heightening the general effect is aimed at, just as discards may be introduced in music by way of contrast. So here we find that Poe has made some provision for the didactic and discursive elements in poetry. But in practice poets usually have a tendency to drive to the extreme end. Pure poetry did not find favour in England and America for some time. In France it thrived in the works of such poets as Bande-Laise, Verslaine, Malarme and Valery. In England their examples were followed by a number of poets chief among whom are Mr. Pound, Sir Herbert Read and Mr. Eliot. There are all shades of distinction in pure poetry, but for the sake of convenience Mr. Pottle lumps these two varieties, one he calls Imagistic and the...
other Elliphical. In the Imagistic group he includes Keats' 'Ode to Autumn' and Wordsworth's *Extempore of April 16, 1802* and such other poems which are free from didactive and discursive elements, where the chief aim of the poet is to communicate to us an objective view of his own experience. By way of contrast, he quotes the lines of the song in "Pippa Passes" which are somewhat similar to Wordsworth's poem mentioned above, but which ends in

"God's in his heaven
All's right with the world."

Browning did not stop after relating his own experience but drew some definite conclusion. In Wordsworth's poem, we do not find any such attempt:

"The cock is crowing
The stream is flowing
The small birds twitter,
The lake doth glitter,
The green field sleeps in the sun;
The oldest and youngest
Are at work with the strongest;
The cattle are grazing,
Their heads never rising
There are forty living like one."

The second stanza of the poem has also been written in a similar strain.

In the second group of Pure Poetry terms "Elliphical", Mr. Pottle includes T.S. Eliot and Herbert Read. It is not our concern to discuss in full this kind of poetry as it does not fall within our purview. It will suffice to say that by

---

1 Lines written in March
"Elliphical" he meant that the doctrine or ideas, the contemplation of which is forbidden in pure poetry are squeezed out of the poem and the reader is expected to supply them. Eliot's "Four Quatrets" and "Ash Wednesday" are examples to the point.

Objectivity is one of the elements of pure poetry, though not of all kinds of pure poetry. That Wordsworth was capable of composing such poetry will appear from a review of a few poems that he wrote on flowers, birds and butterflies included in the first edition of the "Lyrical Ballads". Such poems as "The Green Linnet", "To a Butterfly," and "Louisa" afford good examples of this kind of poetry:

"Beneath these fruit tree boughs that shed
Their snow-white blossoms on my head,
With brightest sunshine round me spread
Of springs unclouded weather,
In this sequestered nook how sweet
To seat upon my orchard seat!
And birds and flowers once more great
My last year's friends together." ¹

The poet tells us of the delight he experienced one sunny morning, when, in an idle mood, he sat in an orchard and observed the fluttering bird and heard its gushing song. There is no attempt to formulate any ideas or to convey any moral. The only flaw of the poem is the use that the poet makes of such a phrase "presiding spirit" or "a presence like the air." A pure poet would not most probably have ventured to use such a phrase. There is also another flaw in the poem judged from the point of view of an advocate of pure poetry. There is a metaphysical idea embodied

¹ The Green Linnet
in the last four lines of the poem:

"As if by that exulting strain
He nocked and treated with disdain
The voiceless Form he chose to feign
While fluttering in the bushes."  

This kind of idea would not have occurred to a purist, for the expression, if not the form, is apparently subjective. But such flaws are not to be observed in the poem "Louise", though a literary phrase "beneath the moon", which comes from King Lear has been used in it. But the words have been put within quotation marks to show that these are borrowed phrase.

Pure poetry should be free from any explicit message, from annotation or interpretation, in short, from meaning in the ordinary sense of the word. The doctrine of pure poetry appears to be sound when applied to the theory of poetry. But as soon as an attempt is made to write a completely pure poem the result is disastrous. It is the question of the degree of purity which should be taken into account by a poet, while applying the theory to practice.

"The definition of the sensibility of an age", writes Mr. Pottle, becomes the vice of that age; and purity in poetry is our vice as 'correctness' was the vice of the neo-classics."  

And again he says,

"Poetry should be no purer than the purpose demands. The sensibility of our modern age seems to demand an unusual, high degree of purity, and there is nothing more to be said about it."  

1 The Green Linnet
2 The Idiom of Poetry, p.97
3 Ibid, 99