Poetry and Politics

In the month of October, 1787, he was sent to St. John's College, Cambridge, of which his uncle had been a Fellow. With his rough manners, his unattractive figure and his northern burr, he could not gain much popularity at Cambridge. Speaking of this period he says, 'I was not for that hour, Nor for that place.' The chief blessings of the period were "independent solaces" that he carried with him:

"to mitigate the injurious sway of place
Or circumstance,"

Solaces derived from his frequent communion with Nature. He was able to turn his mind upon himself whenever he wished to do so. The terms in the college were spent in idleness and the vacations in revelry. He tells us also about 'a treasonable growth' in this period:

" Of indecisive judgments that impaired
And shook the mind's simplicity."

It does not of course speak favourably of the benefits that Wordsworth derived from a University education. But one fact in this connection is worth noticing. From his early childhood up to the age of twenty-one, when he left Cambridge, he grew up in an atmosphere of freedom without feeling any necessity to repress his instincts. He faced the world with

1 The Prelude, III 80-81
2 Ibid (1850), III, 101-3
a mind and spirit accustomed to an atmosphere of freedom.
So the conventionalities and artificialities that had entered into politics, religion and society of England in those days did not affect him. He grew up somewhat like Rousseau's Emile or his own Lucy.

It was during 1787 and 1789 that his first considerable poem "An Evening Walk" was composed. It is written in a poetic convention recalling the manner of Dryden and Pope, and it cannot be called in any sense an original poem. There is a vast difference between a poet's highest and his least creditable work, but in no other poet the difference appears greater than in Wordsworth. Wordsworth's imagination did not manifest itself during these years. It was the revolution in the following years that quickened his imagination and made it an active force. This will be evident by a comparison of the same incidents as described in "An Evening Walk" and in some of his later poems. In "An Evening Walk" revised by him in 1794 and preserved in a manuscript form, there appears a significant passage. This passage is a prototype of the famous passage in "Tintern Abbey" beginning with "And I have felt a presence"; but it lacks its vigour and force, the apt phrases and the illuminating touches. The passage runs as follows:-

"Harmonious thoughts, a soul by truth refined,
Entire affection for all humankind,
A heart that vibrates evermore, awake
To feeling for all forms that life can take,
That wider still its sympathies extends,
And sees not any line where being ends.
Sees sense through Nature's rudest forms betrayed,
Tremble obscure in fountain, rock and shade,
And while a secret power those forms endears,
Their social accents never vainly hears".


Here he is trying to express in a more complicated and a roundabout way his perception of one essence in all - in the round ocean, the living air and the mind of man which he consecrated in "Tintern Abbey". Thus he is trying to discover the sure and confident touch of a great literary artist that he was to become later on.

There is noticeable also a like change in the description of natural images. In "An Evening Walk", the image of the mountain with the play of clouds overhead is described thus:

"And shades of deep embattled clouds were seen
Spotting the Northern cliffs with lights, between".

In "The Prelude" the image reappears in a far more beautiful form:

"Oh soul of Nature, excellent and fair!
That didst rejoice with me, with whom I too
Rejoiced through early youth, before the winds
And powerful waters, and in lights and shades
That marched and counter-marched about the hills
In glorious apparition."

The important point about this poem that Wordsworth emphasises in the Fenwick Notes is that many of the images, used in the poem were based on actual observation. He cites one of them:

"And fronting the brightest, you oak entwines
Its darkening boughs and leaves in stronger hues"

1 An Evening Walk 55-56
2 The Prelude, XI, 133-143.
3 Grosart III, P.4
4 An Evening Walk, 193-4.
He says that this impressed him on a certain spot on the road between Hawkeshed and Ambleside.

"The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets - and I made a resolution to supply in some degree the deficiency. I could not have been at that time more than fourteen years of age."¹

"The Vale of Ssthwaite", a mention of which has been made in the previous chapter, and "An Evening Walk" have in them the promise of a greater poet that was to be born some ten years later. They have the merit of providing us with abundance of true and clear images of Nature. Among the powers required for the composition of poetry, it is significant to note, that he places first, those of observation and description - that is, the ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves.

Now to come back to the point, it is the revolution as I had said before that wrought the change in the poet. It is not merely a change in diction that was effected, but a change that touched the deeper springs of his inner life. Besides this, there were other factors also which brought about the transformation - the Annette-Vallon episode, his giving up of all moral questions in despair, influence of Godwin and the subsequent restoration of his normal mood through the benign influence of his sister Dorothy and Coleridge. I shall discuss all these questions in their

¹ Grosart III, P.4 (That he began composing poems from the age of fourteen has been mentioned in "The Idiot Boy": "I to the Muses have been bound These fourteen years by strong indentures!"
Wordsworth has given several accounts in 'The Prelude' and the 'Excursion', of the important change that came over his life on account of the French Revolution. It has been described by De Quincey in his chapter on Wordworth in 'The Lake Poets'. "Mighty was the transformation which it wrought in the whole economy of his thoughts; miraculous almost was the expansion it gave to his human sympathies; chiefly in this it showed its effects - in throwing his thoughts into grand meditations upon man, his final destiny, his ultimate capacities of elevation; and secondly, in giving to the whole system of the thoughts and feelings a firmer tone, and a sense of the awful realities which surround the mind; by comparison with which the previous literary tastes seemed fanciful and trivial."

But this change did not come before 1791 when after his education was over, he went over to France and stayed at Paris, Blois and Orleans for nearly thirteen months. During his last vacation at Cambridge, that is, in 1790, he went on an expedition to the Alps inspired by a keen desire at this time to see the light of glory streaming from the land of liberty. This was his first visit to France and he was not much concerned about the Revolution at this time. But once in France, he was anxious to visit Switzerland. He was accompanied in this expedition to the Alps by a fellow collegian named Robert Jones. A record of this tour has been kept in the form of a letter written by Wordsworth to his sister at this time.
"My spirits have been kept in a perpetual hurry of delight, by the almost uninterrupted succession of sublime and beautiful objects which have passed before my eyes during the course of the last month." But this statement is contradicted by the melancholy air which pervades the "Descriptive Sketches", a poem which records the incidents of the poet's life during this period. This poem which is a record of the Swiss tour was actually composed in 1791-2 on the banks of the Loire, during his second visit to France, as he tells us, but published simultaneously with "An Evening Walk" in 1793.

Though actually the incidents related in the 'Descriptive Sketches' took place in his life at a time when he did not fall a prey to the influence of the French Revolution, he started composing it when he was imbued with its spirit after his second visit. Besides this, there were other factors. During this second visit, he came in contact with a French woman in France, Annette Vallon by name, fell in love with her, could not marry her on account of financial and other difficulties, but was obliged to leave her due to dire necessity, and this, after a child was born to her. So there is no wonder that any poem composed during this period should have an air of despondency and gloom about it. It does not depict as it should "a holiday tour, but the objectless wandering of a soul in despair". He tells us in this poem as he wanders through the villages, 'The maidens eye him with enquiring glance', and detect in his

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1. Early letters, 1935, p.30, quoted by
2. Crosart III, p.7
3. H.W. Garrd, Lectures and Essays, p.46
4. Descriptive Sketches, 42.
appearance 'Crazing Care'\(^1\) or 'desperate love'\(^2\) while "Nature loves to show'\(r\)

Soft on his wounded heart her healing pow'r".\(^3\)

But besides the lines already quoted above from a letter written by the poet to his sister at this time, there are further evidences in 'The Prelude' which contradict what the poet says about his mental state in the "Descriptive Sketches". He speaks of this time as "A glorious time, a happy time that was".\(^4\) M. Legouix thinks this melancholy to be a mere modish affectation, which was in fashion in those days. But there seems to be something quite genuine in his despair. It was a sort of Byronic gloom that settled upon his mind, which, no doubt, had something to do with a strong disapproval of his own self. Perhaps this was the reason why Wordsworth made so many alterations and additions in the subsequent editions of the book. The original text was considerably changed in the edition of 1815, and again in 1820, 1827, 1832, 1836, 1845 and in 1846. He was not able to make it a good poem in spite of the changes. In the original version there are passages in the poem which are marked by a sensual quality:

"Farewell to those forms that, in the noontide shade,
Rest, near their little plots of wheaten glade,
Those steadfast eyes, that beating breasts inspire
To throw the 'sultry ray' of young Desire;
Those lips, whose tides of fragrance come and go,
According to the cheek's unquiet glow;
Those shadowy breasts in love's soft light array'd,
And rising by the moon of passion sway'd".\(^5\)

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\(^1\) Descriptive Sketches, 43
\(^2\) Ibid 44
\(^3\) Ibid 13-14.
\(^4\) The Prelude, VI, 754
\(^5\) Descriptive Sketches (1793) 148-155
This is rare in Wordsworth and this may testify to the fact that the description was coloured at this stage with the emotions he cherished for Annette and this may also account for the gloomy atmosphere of the poem.

There is one significant point about this poem. There is an air of religious scepticism in it. The last four lines describing the poet's pilgrimage to the shrine of Einsiedeln will illustrate this point:

"Without one hope her written grief to blot
Some in the land where all things are forgot,
My heart, alive to transports long unknown,
Half wishes her delusion were her own."

This passage was omitted from the later editions of the book. But what is worth remembering in this connection is that this was not the religious mood of the poet in 1790, which will become clear from a letter written by him to Dorothy at this time:

"Among the awful scenes of the Alps, I had not a thought of man, or of a single created being: My whole soul was turned to Him who produced the terrible majesty before me. This conception of a God, the Creator of Nature, hardly finds place in his poems of the great decade, certainly not until "The Excursion". Only in that poem again after twenty years do we come across the same Wordsworth who believes in God, the maker of this Universe. It was after his initiation into the ideals of the French

1. Descriptive Sketches, 676-679.
2. The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1787-1805), ed. E. de Selincourt, 1935, P. 33
Revolution that Wordsworth became a semi-atheist, as his friend Coleridge remarked.  

Another fact deserves mention in the discussion of this poem, that is, Wordsworth's theory of poetic inspiration. The poem was written two years after his tour through France and Switzerland. This gap between the incident and the narrative marks the first step towards the suggestion of a theory of poetry in the poet's mind. Poetry 'takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.' He illustrates this point beautifully in the Epilogue to the Waggoner:

"But a shy spirit in my heart 
That comes and goes - will sometimes leap 
From hiding places ten years deep, 
Or haunt me with a familiar face, 
Returning like a ghost unlaid 
Until the debt I owe is paid."  

This theory has been given an elaborate expression in the preface to the "Lyrical Ballads". This method of recollection, he tells us, helps the reproduction of the original impression with deeper truth. We do not know if this method is of universal applicability, but at least in the case of Wordsworth, it is. The greater the distance between the incident and the narrative, the more successful is the poet in communicating his experience to the readers. This Swiss tour has been described by Wordsworth in the sixth part of "The Prelude" too. If these incidents as narrated in "The Prelude" and in other...

1 Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Earnest Hartley Coleridge. Two volumes '1895, I, P 164. 
2 Preface to Lyrical Ballads, paragraph 32. 
3 210-215.
notes and letters are compared, the readers will easily find the truth of my previous statement. The description of the Crossing of the Alps is the central theme of the Swiss tour. It has been described with delicate and illuminating touches in "The Prelude", but it finds no place in "Descriptive Sketches". After Wordsworth and his friend had crossed the Simpion Pass, they became separated from their guide. They went on climbing and when they thought that they would have to climb farther in order to attain the highest point of the Alps, they were informed by a peasant that they had already crossed the Alps and that their way actually lay downward. The poet gives an account of it in the following lines: "Imagination", he says -

"That awful power rose from the mind's abyss
Like an unfathered vapour that enwraps,
At once, some lonely traveller. I was lost;
Halted without an effort to break through;
But to my conscious soul I now can say -
I recognise thy glory\(^1\) in such strength
Of usurpation, when the light of sense
Goes out, but with a flash that has revealed
The invisible world, doth greatness made abode,
There harbours; whether we be young or old,
Our destiny, our being's heart and home,
Is with infinitude, and only there,
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.\(^1\)"

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1 The Prelude, 1850, VI, 594-608.
Garrod aptly points out that the good faith of Wordsworth's memory is attested by the careful distinction that the poet makes between his original and later perception. The original perception or rather imagination has been compared to an unfathered vapour when the poet is not very sure of his own experience - the experience which actually occurred during his Swiss tour. It was at a later date when he undertook to mention this incident in "The Prelude" that he perceived the glory of imagination. Sir Herbert Read is however of opinion that the Wordsworth of 1805 (the time when this passage was written), wanted to give an impressive setting of this mystical experience, which most probably came to him in his back orchard ten years later, and that is why he had transferred it to this particular time and place in the Alps. 1

But I take Garrod's account to be truer for the reasons already stated above. All writings of Wordsworth corroborate the fact that he had mystic visions from early childhood - not to speak of such a later date as 1790, when the poem was composed. Moreover the letter he wrote to his sister already quoted above does not state the real emotions he felt at that time, in point of the vividness of what he saw. His frequent recourse to the accounts of Ramond de Carbonières (a French traveller with an intimate knowledge of the Alps) while composing 'Descriptive Sketches' shows that his spirits could not have been kept in a perpetual hurry of delight at the time of the actual tour. It was later on when he began composing that part of 'The Prelude' where the incidents are described.

1. H. Read, Wordsworth, p. 64.
that the objects seen by him during the tour took a definite shape and colouring. This again illustrates the theory of his poetic inspiration. It is true that Wordsworth has acknowledged his debt to Ramond de Carbonières in his notes on 'Descriptive Sketches' but his debt extends far beyond the limit ascribed to it by the poet. This has been brought to light by M. Legouis.

I have already lingered much too long over this poem, for, it is by no means a characteristic poem of Wordsworth, but I have done so to show the development of the poet's mind from childhood to youthful days in a setting of political and emotional experiences. In order to understand the full implication of his later poems, we should trace our way back from the 14th July, 1789, the date which

"The dread Bastille
With all the chambers in its horrid towers
Fell to the ground."¹

At this time Wordsworth was spending the long vacation at Penrith in the company of his dear sister Dorothy. It was most probably after his return to Cambridge at the end of the vacation that he realised partially the import of the event. But his native reserve did not allow him to grow enthusiastic over the matter. His ideas on politics did not take any definite shape at that time. It was not until his return to England in 1792, after his second visit to France, that he almost thought himself in terms of a

¹ The Excursion, III, 709-11.
Frenchman. The reason why the French Revolution failed to impress him at this time, is not far to seek. A merely speculative approach to any problem did not appeal to Wordsworth. First his emotions must be involved, then only he could justify himself on a reasonable ground at a later stage. So when he first visited France in 1790, the abstract principles of the Revolution were admired by him no doubt, but they were taken for granted. He had a faith in the essential goodness of human nature. It appeared only right to him that the French people should revolt against a form of Government designed to oppress and starve the common people. But the full import of the business was not realised by him until Beaupuy, a Republican officer, (with whom he had lodged for some time when in France) opened his eyes to the sharp realities of the situation in France. This happened in 1791. Besides this, other important events also took place in his life at this time.

After taking his degree at Cambridge on January 21st, 1791, Wordsworth spent a few months aimlessly without being able to make up his mind to enter into any profession. His uncle had ordained him for the clerical profession, but Wordsworth did not choose to embrace it, as he thought himself unfit for it. The account we get of this period of his life from "The Prelude" is very scanty. These do not give us a true picture of the poet. None of his biographers before Legouis have touched this part of his life. "Apparently none of Wordsworth's biographers," he says, "have laid sufficient stress upon the waywardness he
displayed at this period of his life. It is customary to regard him as having been a model for poets in the matter of a regular and dutiful life that they pass over his refractory youth without dwelling upon the obstinate refusal with which he met every suggestion of practical wisdom. Wordsworth's vocation made itself known through revolt. He had, as others had, his hours, his years of disobedience, obstinacy and rash defiance of fortune. Like them he was a cause of anxiety to those around him; and by his relations was long regarded as a stubborn and presumptuous young man who would "turn out badly." 

It was most probably to escape from Divinity and to learn the French language, (which would help him he thought in journalism later on) that he visited France a second time, in addition to a desire to see the land of liberty where

"All hearts were open, every tongue was loud
With amity and glee." 2

By this time he became it seems acquainted with much of Rousseau's and Paine's 'Right of Man'.

Wordsworth reached Paris on the last day of November, 1791. There he stayed for five days to see the sights and to enjoy the air of freedom. Then he started for Orleans where he took up lodgings with a few officers of the Cavalry among whom were included Beaupuis and a gentleman of Paris. But in the course of his search for lodging he came across a pretty French woman who was older than he by a few years. He was in search of some one to teach

1. Early Life, PP 163-64
2. The Prelude, VI, 408-9.
him French and this lady undertook the work gladly enough. The result was that the teacher and the taught fell in love with each other and before many weeks that girl

"Wanting yet the name of a wife
Carried about her for a secret grief
The promise of a mother." \(^1\)

This in short is the substance of the Annette-Vallon episode. Annette was the daughter of a surgeon of Blois. Her father having died, her mother married again, and she was living when Wordsworth met her, in her brother's house at Orleans. A few weeks after their meeting, Annette returned to her home in Blois where she was followed by Wordsworth. She returned to Orleans after staying there for seven months.

At Orleans, on December 15th., a daughter was born who was christened Anne Caroline Wordsworth. Meantime Wordsworth had fled to Paris, and from there to England by the end of December, after he had heard of the news of the birth of his own child. All these have been brought to light only in the present century through the researches of Harper and Legouis. Sir Herbert Read makes too much of this episode and reads into it a clue to the understanding of the poet and his poetry. He says: "It was this experience which Wordsworth saw fit to hide - to bury in the most complete secrecy and mask with long sustained hypocrisy." \(^2\) But most of Wordsworth's critics disagree with him in this respect.

1. The Prelude, IX, 608-10
2. Wordsworth, 71.
Sir Herbert writes:
"Wordsworth however carried with him a heavy burden of remorse. The whole period between this forced separation from Annette in 1793 and the willing confirmation of that separation by both parties nine years later, is one of deep mental stress for Wordsworth. It was a state of moral confusion which in its acute stages resulted in very little good poetry."^ 1

It is true that the Annette Vallon episode caused him mental worry for some time, but to say that he suffered from this state of mind for nine years does not seem to me right. He met Annette in 1791-92. His great period of productivity started from 1797, that is six years after the episode. One of his greatest poems "Tintern Abbey", parts of Prelude and the Goalar poems were all written before 1802, the year in which he married Mary Hutchinson after he arrived at a satisfactory settlement with Annette. Human beings are seldom, if ever, free from the follies of youth. But it does not mean that remorse will stick to them for long periods standing in the way of their natural progress and development. What Wordsworth did was to give an outlet to the natural human instinct, and he meant to marry the girl he fell in love with as the subsequent events of his life showed, but circumstances stood in the way. That he was not ashamed of having an illegitimate daughter, as Prof. Read would have us believe, will become evident from a perusal of the poem.

^ 1. Wordsworth - P. 86.
"Composed upon the Beach Near Colais, 1802," where he addresses his daughter as "dear Child: dear Girl."

From France Wordsworth came back to England and settled for some time in London. At this time he was deeply absorbed in the affairs of the French Revolution.

"Nature herself was at this unripe time
But secondary to my own pursuits
And animal activities, and all
Their pleasures; and long afterwards
When these had died away, and nature did
For her own sake become my joy, even then
And upwards through late youth, until not less
Than three and twenty summers had been told
Was man in my affections and regards
Subordinate to her."1

But the real crisis in his life began when France declared war against England in 1793. His faith in France as the deliverer of the world was rudely shaken for he loved England intensely and believed her to be a stronghold of liberty. Besides, there were other happenings in France which came into conflict with some of her most cherished ideas. People in France had turned a defensive war into an aggressive one. They had overthrown a despotic government which was replaced by one even more tyrannical. Napoleon came to power, and France under his leadership was eager to annex territories not belonging to her. Wordsworth in utter despondency and perplexity could not cherish any longer his former faith in France and the essential goodness of humanity. He found

1. The Prelude, VIII, 476-484.
that revolution was not a natural course of events, but it was man-made. He gives a vivid picture of his painful feelings in the tenth book of "The Prelude". He speaks of a heart

"Which had been turn'\textgreek{a} aside
From Nature by external accidents,
And which was thus confounded more and more,
Misguiding and misguided. Thus I fared,
Dragging all passions .........
........ X .... now believing
Now disbelieving, endlessly perplexed
........ ....... .......
........ ....... ....... till demanding proof,
And seeking it in everything, I lost
All feeling of conviction, and in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contraries,
Yielded up moral questions in despair."

From this despair he found a temporary relief and succour in a creed propounded by Godwin in his book entitled "The Political Justice". It appeared early in 1793 and appealed to him. In the prospectus of this book, there was no place for feeling. Everything must have its stand on reason. Man was a feelingless creature. Wordsworth's beliefs on the other hand were deeply rooted in passionate feeling. So this book of Godwin, though it held him for some time, could not exercise life long influence upon him.

Garrod divides the Godwinian phase of his life into two periods, the first lying between the spring

1. The Prelude, X 886-901.
of 1793 and the summer of 1795 and the second between July 1795 to 1797. The first period he calls the period of semi-Godwinism. Wordsworth tells us

"Meantime,

As from the first, wild Theories were afloat,
To whose pretentions, sedulously urged,
I had but lent a careless ear."¹

There is no doubt that he underestimated the influence of Godwin during this period. The influence was deep, but it was not deep enough to exclude anti-Godwinian influences. The fuller Godwinism in his life dated from 1795 and was over by the time he took up the composition of the lyrical ballads.

The year 1793 is important in the poet's life from the point of view of an added interest that he began to take in Nature and Man. He tells us in "The Prelude" and as has already been stated that up to the age of twenty-three man in his affections and regards, was subordinate to Nature. But elsewhere he tells us that until the year 1791 Nature remained, an exclusive interest with him. 'The hour of Man' was dominant to the exclusion of that of Nature from the latter part of 1791 to the early portion of 1793. While describing his residence in France when he visited her for the second time, he tells us that his attention was engrossed

"by novelties of speech

Domestic manners, customs, gestures, looks,
And all the attire of ordinary life."²

¹ The Prelude (1850), XI, 188-191
² The Prelude, IX, 82-84.
"But 'twas not longer this
Proved tedious, and I gradually withdrew
Into a noisier world; and thus did soon
Become a Patriot, and my heart was all
Given to the People, and my love was theirs." ¹

Whatever the implication is of these two contradictory statements, one point is clear, that is, up to the early part of 1793, one or the other of the two interests dominated separately the life of the poet. There was no interconnection between the two interests. It was most probably from August 1793, after he had visited the Tintern Abbey for the first time in the course of his tour through Salisbury Plain that the two began to be merged into each other and felt by the poet with an equal might. So late as his first visit to the Tintern Abbey, the poet says,

"Nature then to me was all in all."

The feeling for Nature had no need of any interest "unborrowed from the eye." It was only during the five years intervening between his first and second visit to Tintern Abbey that Wordsworth's view on man and nature in their inter-relationship was formed. But even at this time, Nature was thought of in relation to the individual and not in relation to humanity at large. He could hear "the still sad music of humanity" while looking on Nature not earlier than 1798, that is, not before five years had passed.

From 1793 when Godwin's 'Political Justice' appeared until 1822, the year in which Shelley, his illustrious son-in-law died, Godwin had a very strong hold

¹ The Prelude, 121-125.
upon the intellectual class in England, particularly the poets. The reason for this influence is not far to seek. Like Wordsworth, most of the intellectuals of the age, particularly in England, had suffered a rude shock, when the Revolution, which was taken to be an uprising of the entire body of the people became a weapon in the hands of powerful factions for committing atrocities. Godwin's "Political Justice" on the other hand, as is well known, preaches the gospel of individual will. In the preface to the first edition of the book, Godwin acknowledges his debt to Halbach, Helvetius and Rousseau. But we find that he discards Rousseau's "Social Contract" while praising his 'Emile', which is a triumph of individual will. Contract in any form is hateful to him, because, that is the expression of the general will. Nothing short of individual will is to be tolerated. So there is no wonder that his book should find such ardent admirers as Wordsworth and Shelley and even Coleridge for some time. From a retrospect of his own life and his connection with Annette, Wordsworth was able to realise later on that the individual will does not work. Moreover, he had an instinctive faith in the feelings of the heart. So naturally he retraced his steps from Godwinism to find solace in the heart of Nature and in the heart of Man.

Two significant books were composed during Wordsworth's Godwinian period; 'Guilt and Sorrow' composed in 1794, and 'The Borderers', a dramatic poem in 1796. The outline of the story as contained in 'Guilt and Sorrow' is this:
A sailor who had served in the American Wars was returning home to his wife, after demobilization. On his way, the small savings that he had with him were taken from him by fraud. As he neared home, the idea of his being penniless oppressed his mind so much, that he killed a traveller and robbed him of his money. Before the commission of this crime he had been so mild as not to hurt even a bird. Later he met a female vagrant who, since the death of her husband and children had been living on theft for three years. The two went to a village inn where they came across a dying woman. She happened to be the wife of the sailor, and she still had great faith in the essential goodness of her husband. Recognition follows and then confession. Shortly after the wife died. The husband surrendered himself and was hanged.

The connection of this poem with Godwinism is apparent. The central theme of the poem is that man is essentially good, but he is forced to lose his goodness by the law of necessity. It is, therefore, we find, at one with the necessitarian aspect of the Godwinian philosophy. Again, organisations like the courts of justice which summarily pronounce capital punishment on persons trapped into crime are the places where acts of injustice in their grossest forms are perpetrated. They are also the expressions of the general will. "Guilt and Sorrow" records a protest against the criminal law and the doctrine of capital punishment. The submission of the soldier to capital punishment is supposed by critics to be an after thought which did not form part of the poem when originally conceived. "The Female Vagrant" published
in 1798 originally formed a part of "Guilt and Sorrow". There in the manner of Godwin, Wordsworth protests against wealth and property (fifth stanza), against arms and profession of arms (fifteenth stanza). These were removed in a later edition by the poet in 1842.

"Guilt and Sorrow" is a morbid attack upon the whole social order. This is a depressing air about the poem which a casual reader cannot fail to note. It is in a sense not only unreal but immoral. If a good man can turn into a criminal in no time and if he is more prone to bad actions than a bad person, then this human existence seems to have no meaning. We are all miserable creatures being unable to resist the temptations and evil thoughts and actions with which we are surrounded.

We come across the same conception, the same feeling of morbidity and moral perversion with an added force in "The Borderers". In the intervening period between the composition of the two poems, some important events took place in the life of the poet. We do not get any relevant account of this period, but from his letters, and those of his sister, and from other sources we are able to thread together somehow these events. He completed his tour of Salisbury Plain and Tintern Abbey by the 30th August, 1793. We do not know anything about him between this date and the 17th of February 1794. Most probably after he had stayed for some time with the Calverts in Cumberland, he was in Halifax with his sister in February 1794. From the 24th of May to the 10th of January, 1795,
he was with his sister in the North. Calvert died early in 1795, leaving Wordsworth a legacy of nine hundred pounds. This made Wordsworth free from financial stringency.

Now we shall take up the discussion of the poem "Borderers". The central theme of the poem is this:

A good man in love with a good woman set sail for Syria in the reign of Henry III. Suspicion was created in his mind by the crew that the old Captain, the father of his beloved was involved in a plot against his honour. The man in a rage left the Captain on a desert to die from starvation. When he came back to England, he met a good man resembling him in all essential points, who was enjoying the love of a good woman. He had a keen desire that the man should suffer the same fate as he had suffered. Accordingly he joined the band of Borderers of whom his counterpart was the leader. He was able to gain his confidence in no time and succeeded in persuading his counterpart to leave the old and virtuous father of his beloved to die in a desert. This he was able to do by poisoning the mind of the leader against the old man. It is in this way that the father of the beloved of his counterpart was starved to death and he himself was slain by the Borderers. His counterpart started a life of penance and solitary wandering.

According to Swinburne the plot of this tragedy is characterized by "morbid and monstrous extravagance of horrible impossibility". M. Legouis does not agree with

1. Miscellanea, PP - 117 sqq.
this criticism. He takes the poem to be the beginning of a revolt against Godwinism. I think M. Legouis to be right though Garrod sides with Swinburne, and says that "the poem is built out of an essentially Godwinian idea". The poem was composed when Wordsworth had already come under the influence of his sister Dorothy, if not of Coleridge also. So the influence of Godwin though prominent in the poem must be on the wane. Coleridge appreciated both the poems of Wordsworth and enthusiastically praised them. But the praise of Coleridge must have been directed by a recognition of the powers of the poet's mind as revealed in these poems. Coleridge was the first among Wordsworth's critics to appraise the poet's real merits.

We shall discuss in the next chapter how the influence of his sister Dorothy and that of Coleridge helped to remove the gloom of the Godwinian philosophy, from the effects of which the poet had suffered for a few years and how a new era was ushered in in his life resulting in the composition of the "Lyrical Ballads".