Chapter : 4.
A critical analysis of Wordsworthian conception of common man.

Wordsworth's attitude to, and conception of, the common man deserves a critical analysis, and the analysis, at the first instance, requires a thorough probe into the factors which are responsible for, and contributory to, the growth and development of such a conception. These factors are:

Wordsworth himself,
Coleridge,
The Age in which the poet lived, and
Nature.

Wordsworth himself:

No poet of the eighteenth century felt so intensely for the common people as Wordsworth, and this feeling had its origin in Wordsworth himself. In course of the delineation of the pictures of the common people he can never imagine his separate entity, nor can he remain as a detached or stoic philosopher on their affairs. He is not a mere on-looker of their joys and sorrows, happiness or misery. On the one hand, their social deprivation, physical languishment, psychic torment and mental bereavement pain him at heart, and, on the other, their peace and prosperity, grace and grandeur give him relief of mind, and on every occasion he is one with them without any different existence. This is because the poet with his keen power of sensation of the physical senses observes the causes and effects of life earnestly and the observation develops in him a
superhuman power which enables him to see through the hearts of
things. This is a sort of mystical intuition. But this mystic
perception evolves not mysticism, nor does it bring in anything
didactic, but reveals the truth of the life of the common man
in its entirety without any veil of obscurity around it. He
sees, he feels, and he depicts. The depiction reveals the
portraiture of the real-self of the common man and the poet
appears to be a poet of the common people, for the common people.

Now, the question, which is pertinent in this context,
arises automatically as to why does this happen with the poet?

Wordsworth since his childhood had the ample scope of
association with the common peasantry, the shepherds and the
like, and also with men and women belonging to different levels
of life far from nobility, and had the chance of acquaintance in
his own life with various types of abnormal, yet common people,
viz. desolate soldier, wanderer, blind man, man ragged with
age, tramps, vagabonds, even idiots, forlorn women, dejected
lover, frantic woman, etc. Such close association and acquain-
tance with these people had enabled him to ascertain the cross-
currents of their daily life. The poet has never lost sight of
the truth of life of these people, and has drawn the pictures
with all his sincerity and ability, and thus has acted as an
advocate of the causes of the common people, and ultimately
desires to sing

some philosophic song

Of Truth that cherishes our daily life.

(The Prelude, Book I, lines 223-230)
The poet's inborn dislike of, and an attitude of aversion to, the people of high origin has augmented his sympathy towards the common people, and an 'early love' thus developed has enabled him to perform 'high service' of singing the songs of 'simple worshippers' from within.

The loss the poet sustained with the members of his family through the dealings of the people of high origin has no less contribution towards his choice of common men and also towards exultation of their causes. The poet "had an inborn dislike of 'the great' who were great by reason of birth or wealth only, and this dislike had been sharpened by what his family had suffered and was still suffering at the hands of Lord Lansdale". (1) The poet's inborn sympathy with the poor and deprived people consequent upon his habitation with them in the free world and the causes of his personal sufferance have given him the power of penetrating scrutiny into the feelings as well as into the causes of the hardships of those who were born to a 'poor and humble lot', and have developed in him an objective approach to life. He has understood that the sufferings of life and poverty are not matters of glorification, and so he does not call on the public to admire people because they are poor. He simply realises the moral dangers of hardship, and gives the distinct and life-like sketches of his people vis-à-vis the far-reaching consequences of the social evils. The question of this treatment at issue is eternal, but

(1) William Wordsworth : A Biography
The Early Years,
1770-1803,
Mary Moorman.
the final method of the poet's projection is novel. The poet puts this problem of social injustices in a new light in a blank verse fragment presumably meant for inclusion in The Recluse:

What then can we hope
From one who is the worst of slave, the slave
Of his own home? The light that shines abroad,
How can it lead him to an act of love?
Whom can he comfort? Will the afflicted turn
Their steps to him, or will the eye of grief
And sorrow seek him? Is the name of friend
Known to the poor man? Whence is he to leave
The sweet creative voice of gratitude?

The poet raises a series of questions as to the condition of common people in this world, and leaves the questions unanswered. What he does is that he takes an intense interest and the consequences of this interest is the speculation on life in its entirety and in completeness.

Wordsworth, the poet, is always identified with Wordsworth, the man. He has persistently developed the relationship with man, indulged in his nobility and simplicity perfectly. Thus the poet's psychic make-up becomes also contributory to his choice of, and attitude to, the common man. He has ever cherished the desire of becoming one with them. He has appreciated the spirit of oneness, and himself admits:

".... had I been born in a class which would have deprived me of what is called a liberal education, it is not unlikely that, being strong in body, I
should have taken to a way of life such as that in which my Pedlar passed the greater part of his days. At all events, I am here called upon freely to acknowledge that the character I have represented in his person is chiefly an idea of what I fancied my own character might have become in his circumstances. (2)

The poet's admittance is no simple fantasy, nor subjective state of his mind for a particular moment, but it is the confession of his heart.

Wordsworth's early education has a great impact on his choice of common people. The boy taught in an obscure grammar school and brought up among plain people, has learnt to believe that a man, privileged, either by wealth or by birth, cannot be superior to an unprivileged man only for reason of birth or wealth; the real quality of respect and attention lies elsewhere, and the village-folk who have given him their own plain speech, admiration for familiar ways of life and love of simple things are embodiment of indigenous virtues. This realisation has inclined the poet to some degree of indulgence towards the frailties and simplicities of men of low and ordinary origin; this inclination is not the out-come of superfluous knowledge of the worth and dignity inherent in the qualities of their lives, but it is the consequence of an acute sense of perception which has enabled him to discover the greatness of the common man. The greatness is haloed by a mysterious ring. So the poet is in a

crux to assert the causes, and exclaims:

Oh / mystery of man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours. I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands; but this I feel,
That from thyself it comes, that thou must give,
Else never canst receive.

The Prelude, Book XII, lines 272 - 277.

The poet realises that the magnanimity of man is hidden in man himself, and 'the worth and dignity' is confined to man

Of whom we read, the man whom we behold
With our own eyes.

The Prelude, Book XIII, lines 82 - 84.

The poet has presumed too much on the gift of his close connection with common people and the frame of his mind being given and re-given to the particular state of affairs has rendered permanency on it, and the poet has carried on his pursuit for achievement of consolation by establishing a relation between a living soul and an active universe. The poet has made human friendship which has helped him to realise 'man as man' and to know man as 'a living being, intrinsically and properly one and individual'. This is definitely an elevated idea of the common man, and the poet has derived this from his primary concept of action and re-action of man in relation to the process of human history leading to human destiny. The concept of man reveals the knowledge of man, and construes the idea of man's divine image. It is the
doctrine of human nature that has preoccupied his field of enquiry since his boyhood, and the poet has discovered the divinity in his common man. Mary Woorman says:

"... as a little boy at Cockermouth he had felt an awed attraction to the solitary figures who haunted the roads—tramps and discharged soilders and even mad men. At Hawkshed he formed an intimacy with a person who was to become an important figure in his poetry, whom he made first into the 'Pedlar' of The Ruined Cottage; who probably was the chief inspiration of the 'Matthew' poems; and who finally; having dropped his pack became the 'Wanderer' of The Excursion. The 'Packman' wandered round the neighbourhood, visiting the distant farms and hamlets with his pedlar's pack of wares, an honest Autolycus selling 'what maids lack from head to heel'. He possessed a room, fifth part of a house in Hawkshed which he used as a sort of base. Thither Wordsworth would come and, leaning by the door, listen to the tales of his youth as a shepherd boy in the Perthshire hills, when he was

hir'd to herd cattle

On a hill-side for forty pence a year;

........................................

"The old man had been attracted to Wordsworth, he tells us, 'for his grave looks', and they became companions in many a ramble:
Many a time
He made a holiday and left his pack
Behind, and we two wandered through the hills
A pair of random travellers.

"Wordsworth was becoming more deeply attracted to a character which had learnt to 'suffer with those whom he saw suffer' — without being embittered or depressed. Serene and cheerful in himself, with no self-pity, he had gathered a store of 'home-felt wisdom' which he imparted to his young companion in many a story and comment. He was alive

To all that was enjoyed where 'er he went,
And all that was endur'd.

There was about him a freshness, a sympathy, an insight which made an indelible impression upon Wordsworth's mind. There can be little doubt that this good creature influenced more than any other human being Wordsworth's own approach in later years to 'the mystery of man'. The Packman's virtues were those which Wordsworth came to regard as the best of which human nature was capable".(3)

Wordsworth's relation to common people and his keen insight into the phenomena of their lives have enabled him to see into the hearts of things objectively and made him able to exercise judgment on himself and on his surroundings. He has learnt to find delight in the 'plain living' human

The Early Years.
1770 - 1803.
(Oxford at the Clarendon Press)
1967.
pp.51-52.
beings around him and to feel pity and sadness in their misfortunes. This feeling for the common people remains ever predominating in his mind and ultimately teaches him to nourish interest in the sufferance of the common people of the society. The poet realises that such people with their totality are no mere fantasy, but living realities, the part and parcel of the chain of human society. The poet is thus in a position to appreciate afresh the values of common life in its all-comprehensiveness, and also to understand the mysterious relation between the incidents of daily life and its resultant consequences. This is a sort of spiritual recognition of the existent reality and this recognition has made him a man of 'dust' to sing the song of life of his fellowmen. "He was burdened with the mystery and the heavy and the weary weight of all this intelligible world. He felt the general sorrow of mankind. He heard the still, sad music of humanity. He saw the race moving in a mighty caravan of pain. In particular he was aware of man's inhumanity to man". (4) The poet with such an attitude of mind towards the humble lots of the humble people becomes a co-sharer of the cross-currents of their daily life. This sort of conception of the common man vis-a-vis Wordsworth's own contribution to this is a kind of discovery to him.

Undoubtedly, he had possessed a soft corner in his heart for ordinary people since his childhood, but, as days passed on, he enjoyed more subtly their proceedings, and delighted in affairs of the

woodmen and shepherds, and in fine, discovered unparalleled dignity in them. It is the discovery of intense wonder and delight. The poet now begins to feel that "not only were these neighbours kindly people with strongly-marked individuality, but their lives, their economic and social circumstances, their joys and their sorrows, were exactly such as to appeal to Wordsworth's sympathy and compassion and justify his conception-formed many years earlier among similar people at Hawkeshed - of the best kind of life of man." (5)

So Wordsworth's idiosyncratic love and compassion for the low and humble people, inborn hatred for, and aversion to, people of high origin together with his early education, personal sufferance at the hands of people of high rank, and his close connection since childhood with common people of different colours - all have greatly influenced his choice of common and ordinary people; and this choice has endowed him with a celestial power to concentrate his poetic power on 'the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd', to unveil the souls which issue forth a light, a glory though enveloped with earthly sorrows and sadness, and lastly, to convey a message of revelation: a communication between the mundane and the moral realms of human existence.

Coleridge:

It is perhaps the necessity of history that Coleridge and Wordsworth emerged in the same age. Hegel says that the history of the world is the judgment of the world and the emergence of these two great poets in the same age is the

(5) : William Wordsworth: A Biography
The Early Years: 1770 - 1803.
Mary Moorman
actualisation of the energy of human history. It is verdict of a judgment, the manifestation of reality which is historically conditioned and mythically designed. The essential creed of necessity of this emergence is the reciprocity to supplement each other for the growth and development of their poetic processes and potentialities. Coleridge has ever craved for an 'understanding' of the condition of his mind for his development and 'Wordsworth', to him, 'is a very great man, the only man to whom at the times and in all modes of excellence I feel myself inferior', So, Coleridge, with such a state of mind, would definitely require Wordsworth for appreciation of his emotional and intellectual qualities. Wordsworth, on the other hand, feels the necessity for complement, stimulating and challenging simultaneously, through intellectual communication with the mind of a man who is in perfect equipoise in spirit and mind with him. Coleridge is that man and Wordsworth needs him. Coleridge becomes the part and parcel of his life in all times, an object of delight:

.... Thou art with us, with us in the past,  
The present, with us in the times to come:  
There no grief, no sorrow, no despair,  
No languor, no dejection, no dismay,  
No absence scarcely can there be for those  
Who love as we do.  
*****  ****  ****  ****

I, too, have been a Wanderer; but, alas/  
How different is the fate of different men  
Though Twins almost in genius and in mind /
Unknown unto each other, yea, and breathing
As if in different elements, we framed
To blend at last to the same discipline,
Predestin'd, if two Beings ever were,
To seek the same delights, and have one health,
One happiness.

The Prelude (1805), Book VI Lines 251 - 256,
261 -269.

The influence of Coleridge on Wordsworth is immeasurable, and
it is not confined to the 'Fair seed-time' of the poet,
rather it is all-pervasive. The 'diffus'd' state of the poet's
mind in 'two natures',
joy the one
The other melancholy,

The Prelude (1805), Book X, Lines 869 - 870.
is set aright by the benign influence of Coleridge, and when
the poet
lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
Yielded up moral questions in despair,

The Prelude (1805), Book X, Lines 898 -901.
it is Coleridge who saved him from dejection and set him to
carry on 'a mission of the poetic spirit'. Wordsworth himself
confesses:

Ah / then it was
That Thou, most precious friend / about this time
First known to me, didst lend a living help
To regulate my Soul

The Prelude (1805), Book X, lines 905 - 908.
Coleridge's admiration for Wordsworth is no less great. He has regarded him as one of the greatest men of 'genius', and has declared:

"Wordsworth possessed more of the genius of a great philosophical poet than any man I ever knew, or, as I believe, has existed in England since Milton."

(c)

In a letter to Cottle, he confesses:

'... I feel myself a little man by his side, and yet do not think myself the less man than I formerly thought myself....'

It is the appreciation of a genius for another genius, the realisation of a friend of the heart of another friend. Coleridge has wanted Wordsworth to be the king of the philosophers as well as the poets. But Wordsworth with his inborn poetic faculty would ever be a poet to think 'On man, on Nature, and on Human life', and to sing of

The good and evil of our mortal state, like the 'patriot', who

By birth .... rank'd
With the most noble, but unto the poor
Among mankind he was in service bound
As by some tie invisible, oaths profess'd
To a religious Order. Man he lov'd
As Man.

The Prelude (1805) Book IX, lines 306-313.
The two great English poets, strictly speaking, are neither a
preceptor nor a pupil of each other, but they unite and excel
in the sphere of their thought and their mutual influence create
a marvel in the chronicle of poetry. They have felt
Gleams like the flashing of a shield;—the earth
And common face of Nature

_The Prelude, Book I, Lines 586-587._
give them clue to 'rememberable things'. So, in course of conver-
sation at Alfoxden, they indulged in the most pertinent question
as to the subject-matter of poetry, and in this regard "they
were guided by a practical rather than a speculative aim: by
no less an aim, indeed, than the initiation of a genuine poetry.
And the function of such a poetry as they conceived it was to
add 'the interest of novelty' to common appearance, not by
arbitrarily distorting them into the fashion of an unreal world,
but by a treatment of them which, faithful in external, should
yet reveal their underlying significance". (7) Thus it is
Wordsworth's collaboration with Coleridge that is to be reckoned
with high seriousness to indicate the origin of Wordsworth's
choice of the common man as the subject-matter of poetry. The
result of the collaboration becomes all the more significant
when the peculiarity in the treatment of the common man is
indicated. The figures of the poetry contain in themselves the
state of being and also that of becoming. These characters are
static with dynamism and vice versa, and they present both the

(7) : Coleridge - Biographia Literaria Vol I.
ed. J. Shawcross.
(Oxford University Press) 1958. p. XXII.
subjective and objective impressions of the poet's mind personal yet pertinent experience, and are far apart from their conventional counterparts.

Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* is a defence of Wordsworth's 'Preface', and serves as a guiding principle to ascertain the cardinal points of poetry and Coleridge's influence on his choice of the common man. Says Coleridge:

"... the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination .... The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part, at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affection by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real .... For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such, as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves".(8)

It is an idea which has occasioned the emergence of *Lyrical Ballads*, wherein, "Mr. Wordsworth, ..... was to propose to

himself as an object, to give the charms of novelty to things of every-day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of customs, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us; and inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand". (9) Wordsworth in communion with 'the stimulating mind of Coleridge' has begun 'to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout', because from the time of Lyrical Ballads onwards the poet indulges in episodes which present both subjective and objective impressions of mind. The theory propounded in the 'Preface' proves that the poet realised the function of a poet. 'He is a man speaking to men : a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are proposed to be common among mankind'. So, the poet considers no man as humble. What he does is that he discovers familiarity in the common man, and consequently, he presents the pictures of an old shepherd and his son, an infirm beggar, a leech-gatherer, frantic women, an idiot boy, simple cottage girls, solitary figures, dejected lovers, men and women in distress, and etc. etc. He also discovers his themes in the characteristics common to all men, but his presentation distinguishes one from the other. The common people are common with their occupations, and simple with their positions.

(9) op. cit. p. 6.
in life, and are less affected with the customs of the society. Coleridge admits that "the persons introduced are by no means taken from low or rustic life in the common acceptation of those words"; (10) they are some thing more with 'independence' from 'servitude' or 'daily toil', "yet not above the necessity of industry and a frugal simplicity of domestic life". (11)

Now, Lyrical Ballads is the product of a prolonged discussion between the two poets who seem to be actuated by the purpose of delivering "their subjects or interests from the incidents of domestic or ordinary life". (12) It is also significant because it bears witness of the development of Wordsworth. This development has been possible consequent upon, to a great extent, the influence of Coleridge who has cherished the desire that Wordsworth should be a poet of those who suffer in life because he himself could not afford to suffer for them. Coleridge has influenced Wordsworth to reject the intellectual approach to natural objects, and has enabled him to find in man an object of delight. Wordsworth has studied man where he is found best in his natural state:

Among the natural abodes of men,
Fields with their rural works;

The Prelude, Book XIII, Lines 102 - 103.

The poet took people of 'low' origin and people with 'rustic life' as the heroes and heroines of his poems for the assertion of

(10) : op. cit. p. 31.
(11) : loc. cit.
'judicious knowledge of the worth and dignity of the individual man'. The depth and closeness of the intimacy between the two poets accelerated their intellectual, spiritual, and poetic development; but Coleridge with the eminency of his critical faculty inspired Wordsworth to manifest his power of meditation in himself for the creation of astoundingly interesting figures with singularity and uniqueness of character. Wordsworth never failed to reciprocate this influence, and carried on his pursuit of depiction of the figures of common people with earnestness of heart and mind.

Lyrical Ballads is the direct outcome of the earnestness and is a collection of poems of 'the unfortunate, the out-cast, or the abnormal members of the society'. The female vagrant is a destitute widow who is a victim of the evils of war. Goody Blake is exposed to extreme poverty. Simon Lee and the leech-gatherer are portraits of 'visionary dreariness' with their abject poverty and physical sufferance. The shepherd in the poem, The Last of the Flock displays his propensity of his mind towards his 'hard-won property'. The mothers in The Complaints of a Forsaken Indian Woman, The Thorn, The Mad Mother ('Her Eyes Are Wild') are all extreme instances of Wordsworth's objective manner. They are unfortunate and dejected women, and represent a gloomy vision of desolation and betrayal. The cottage girl of We Are Seven is an innocent child who is firm in her idea that death has no meaning in the existence or otherwise of essential being. So innocent is the idiot boy of the poem of that name. He is the manifestation of supreme joy and delight. The convict is the real picture of a victim of oppression and distress. Expostulation and Reply and The Table
Turned explain the value of education Nature imparts on man through experience of natural scenery. Thus the characters and figures of *Lyrical Ballads* contain in themselves men and women of poor condition of life, the misguided and abandoned, pure and innocent girls and boys, and even the insane and the criminal, and stand as the recognition of Coleridge's influence on him, and the poet, in his turn, pays a wonderful tribute to his friend to recognise the impact perpetually:

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O rapacious Soul /
Placed on this earth to love and understand,
And from thy presence shed the light of love,
Shall I be mute, ere thou be spoken of?
Thy kindred influence to my heart of hearts
Did also find its way.
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_The Prelude, Book XIV, Lines 277 - 282._

**The Age in which the poet lived:**

The age in which the poet lived was so eventful and colourful that its very impact brought a vast change on almost every sphere of life. He was born in an age of historical importance when Pitt, the Elder, who made England the first country in the World during his life-time, was still alive, and when he died Disraeli and Gladstone were established politicians -- the former as the champion of colonialism and the latter as an advocate of liberalism. And it is significant that during the life-time of this poet of man, the political-philosophers of men, Marx and Engels constructed a philosophy of 'scientific socialism' **which prophesied that men**

** **Communist Manifesto appeared in 1848.**
belonging to the lowest rung of the ladder would have a world to win. Lastly, the age witnessed the growth of the sense of democracy throughout the Continent as a result of the teachings of different philosophers and thinkers, who advocated that liberty and equality in the social, political and economic spheres of life are the fundamental rights of mankind. So, as an eventuality of this growth, the states were re-organised not only to maintain the geographical compactness but also to foster a new spirit of individualism amongst the people of all classes through racial integration and solidarity in accordance with the principles of democracy. Governments of democratic forms were established to widen the scope of ordinary people's right to participation in the machinery of management of public affairs from different stations and positions, and thus to develop the sense of leadership from within. Socially the traditional attitude of looking down upon the humble and poor people as objects of indifference and negligence became a matter of fierce criticism consequent on the manifestation of the upsurge spring from psychic fervour of the common people in general, and, as a course of action, several reformatory legislations were brought in to cater to the demand of the day. Time-honoured dogmatism in the sphere of religion and ecclesiastical affairs were swept away by the concept of liberalism and the people of humble origin who were so far treated inhumanly in the name of religion through denial of the basic rights of life gained grounds. The impact of various revolutions including the French Revolution inspired the vast multitude of masses with a new spirit, and awoke the social conscience which ushered in a radical change in the existing value.
of society and politics. Industrial developments and commercial expansionism contributed to a large scale to the change of common people's attitude to life and its related events. Above all, psychologically, an all-pervasive consciousness of the people and its subsequent expression in the social affairs led to an abrupt change in the established codes of conduct in the fields of history and politics, morality and ethics and had its sharp reflection in the society through democratisation of the elementary needs and creeds of life. Thus there was the rise of democracy in every aspect of life and the poor and oppressed people, who were so far considered as social pests and nuisance, were, atleast, thought of as integral parts in the cycle of social order and became objects of serious considerations being transferred from the state of deliberate ignorance and disregard.

Of course, the people belonging to the lowest level of the society yet remained victims of political tyranny and social suppression, but the emergence of the spirit of democracy in ethics and politics gave rise to an intense concern for their states of affairs and the conditions of their lives were reckoned with high seriousness. Wordsworth with the extremity of feeling and exuberance of emotion for the suffering humanity could not be a detached on-looker of the entire upheaval, and, as if, as a logical inevitability, took keen interest in the affairs of the common people in conformity with the rise of democracy in the country. The sailor of Guilt and Sorrow, Marmaduke and Oswald of The Borderers, the Packman of The Ruined Cottage, the Wanderer and the Solitary of The Excursion are all the poet's objective realisation of the 'secret spirit' of democracy. It is the
oppressor's pride and strength that evoke in him a sense of humanity out of the sense of democracy and the poet realises the conditions of the convict in the poem of that name in his exactness in conformity with the sense inherent in him. The gypsies of the poem of the same name are also indicative of the preponderance of the spirit of democracy which induces him to indulge in their affairs with the warmth of heart and the passion of mind. The leech-gatherer of Resolution and Independence Simon Lee, the old Cumberland Beggar are all understood as objects of repudiation of the basic principles of democracy, and, accordingly, the poet depicts the true pictures of their lives in the most objective manner. The minor characters of various poems also spring from the poet's realisation of the spirit of democracy, but the spirit in relation to his love of mankind finds the supreme expression when he sees Europe ... thrilled with joy,
France standing on the top of golder hours,
And human nature seeming born again.

The Prelude, Book VI, lines 339-341.
And, accordingly, the poet desires
to equalise in God's pure sight
Monarch and peasant,
and observing the rapid growth of the sense of democracy, he feels that
my heart was all
Given to the people, and my love was theirs.

The Prelude, Book IX, lines 123 -124.

Thus the rise of democracy in the society and politics in the
Continent and the poet's interest in the common man become correlated and the poet's feelings find the culmination again in an Ode of 1847 wherein he considers war and despotism as passion's basest game.

Madly played to win a name:

and it is in conformity with this sort of feeling that the poet's heart is filled with sympathy for the common and ordinary people.

Now, the period of eight complete decades from 1770 to 1850, which comprises the span of his life, exclusively belongs to him. It is an age which is named after him -- The Age of Wordsworth. The most colourful age of Romanticism which relates to the period from 1780 to 1830 forms a part of the age, which again marked the opening of a new era, and there was a strange impact of the age on everything. All that was so far considered to be in order or to be established was thrown away, as if, by a sudden blast of wind passing by the country, and everything was transferred to another dimension, the dimension of strangeness and novelty. It was, primâ facie, an age of literary revolution.

Prof. John F. Danby sums up the essence of the literary revolution uniquely:

"Literary revolutions, notoriously, are only aspects of changes affecting a wider field. The romantic need for a new mode of writing reflected the need of a new world, for the marriage, Blake would call it, of both the worlds:

The new Jerusalem descend,
The new creation rise". (13)

(13) : The Simple Wordsworth.
(Routledge and Kegan Paul)
The spirit of this literary revolution caused the emergence of
the spirit of a sort of renaissance or an intellectual re-birth,
and the great movement which stood in an integrated but complicated
intellectual relation to this revolution was Romanticism. A new
conception of the dignity and significance of man as man, of
revelation of the glories of the worlds of art and nature, and of
a strange perception of the integrity in relation between art
and nature, nature and man, and also between man and man, contri-
buted to its growth and development. No poet of this era could
escape the all-pervasive influence of Romanticism, and they had
the culmination of the manifestation of their poetic power,
broadly speaking, in the following processes:

1) the revival of Romance,
2) the 'Return to Nature',
3) the 'Renascence of Wonder'.

Elevation of the beauty of the lakes and mountains, assertion of
worth and dignity of the peasants and shepherds, discovery of
mysterious elements in mediaeval aisles and attics, and indomitable
curiosity and wonder in every sphere of life and nature were the
essential creeds of the age. Almost all the principal poets of the
age are sons of this English Revolution, and they have excelled
in the development of their poetic genius in one direction or
another by indulging in their own ideals in connivance with the
spirit of the age. Thus Burns has performed a meritorious action
by establishment of an intimate and spiritual relation between the
life of the antiquity and the life of the age; Blake by the
accomplishment of a spiritual intuition of the cycle of human life
through a mystic revelation; Coleridge in his metaphysical specu-
lation of the phenomena of human life and its relation with the supernatural world; Shelley in his revolutionary philosophy aspiring for a millennium; Keats in his sensuousness and in indulgence of mediaevalism. But Wordsworth who is the pioneer and the most formidable personality of the age has exceeded all, and the spirit of the age brought for him, inter alia, a novel meaning for, and a new quest into, the life of ordinary people and the related phenomena. The poet has not only to philosophise on how the world and its inhabitants were made but also he has to face the joys and sorrows, pains and pleasures of them. In a letter written in 1798 he admitted:

"My object is to give pictures of Nature, Man and Society. Indeed I know not anything which will not come within the scope of my plan", (14)

and accordingly, the humble and distressingly miserable lots of thousands of men have given him a new vision of life. In a blank verse fragment written just before the poem, Hart-Leap Well, the feeling expressed for the animal is analogous to his feeling for distressful man:

haunted beast, who there

Has yielded up his breath, the awful trance,

The vision of humanity, and of God

The Mourner, God the Sufferer, when the heart

Of his poor creature suffers wrongfully.

It is the intense feeling of the poet who sympathises with the

(14) : The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth (1787-1805)
Arranged and edited by E de Selincourt.
(Oxford at the Clarendon Press) 1935. p. 188.
sufferance of mankind, but it is again the spirit of the age that
sets him in conciliation with the essential conditions of man's
life through the 'return to Nature' by unveiling the mystery of
the state of being and that of becoming of man's life:

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, makes them cling together
In one society. How strange that all
The terrors, pains, and earthly miseries,
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,
And that a needful part, in making up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself.


It is obviously an objective realisation of the vaules of life
and this type of conception has endowed him with a fruitful
endeavour and a characteristic contemplation of human figures who
are humble, yet bathed in some sort of consecrated illumination.
Simon Lee, the leech-gatherer, Ruth, Goody Blake, the mothers
of The Sailor's Mother and The Thorn, and Michael are such
figures who are set amidst 'Natures's unambitious underwood'
and bear testimony to the poet's exultation of the miserable
conditions of ordinary people in their reality. The revolutionary
spirit has taught him to discover the essence of dignity in
sufferance in ordinary men and women, and the leech-gatherer,
amongst others, is superb example of the poet's equivocal
success. The mode of living of the leech-gatherer has 'perplexed'
the poet and when,

My question eagerly did I renew;
'How is it that you live, and what is it you do?'
He with a smile did then his words repeat;
And said that, gathering leeches, far and wide
He travelled; stirring thus about his feet.
The waters of the pools where they abide.

Resolution and Independence, lines 118-123

It is thus the spirit of literary revolution that has offered him
to perceive that pains of sufferance, sorrows of endurance and
the sense of pleasure and tranquillity are integral parts of the
cycle of human life, and the one cannot be separated from the
other. This feeling of the poet, prima facie, appears to be an
object of inhumanity, but the poet, in allegiance to the spirit
of the age, which is repugnant to the existing attitude to the
conception of man, has carried relentlessly an insight to
establish for the conditions of reality a unique correspondence
with the solemn spirit of the universe by formally exposing the
essential circumstances of human life. The poet feels serenity in
turmoil, peace in sufferings, and ultimately finds conciliation
in controversy, and perceives man in a new light with a new
meaning and everything new around him, and finds that 'What in
man is human and divine'.

The age in which the poet lived was marked by the develop­
ment in the sphere of industry. There was depression in the field
of agriculture as an inevitable corollary of the industrial
expansion, and the rural institutions of spinning and weaving
EBSB declined, because 'manufacturing towns' grew up. The entire structure of rural economy was shaken up at its very root, and this change in economic system had a serious impact upon the farmers of the dales and the small statesmen, who lived on cultivation of their few acres of land as well as on the sale-proceeds of the clothes and yarns produced in handlooms. The Wordsworths lived in the community of these rural people who had very hard times then. The shadow of hunger and poverty hung over them, and they were in constant debt and misery. They had to change their habits and occupations to cope with the demand of the time. Social system was greatly changed and it was greatly vitiated as the mode of life of the common people became heterogeneous as well as ignominious. The normalcy in social set up was jeopardised. War and political conflicts between contestant factions for power and dominance at home and abroad added fuel to the fire, and caused inhuman sufferance of thousands of people in every aspect of life. The poet fathomed the depth of the evils of war and the so-called civilisation which was the offspring of the industrial development. The hardship of the common people increased day by day, and the social conditions became more and more uncongenial for their existence in society. In addition to this, there was the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the people who were 'great' by virtue of birth or rank. These people became powerful and devoid of the essential goodness of human character because of "the natural tendency of power to corrupt the heart of man", (15)

their apathetic attitude towards the poor and humble people aggravated their wretchedness. Wordsworth is not a utopian nor an arcadian poet with the attitude to philosophise on the disgraceful conditions of common people. He is a poet of keen insight into the hearts of things and the deplorable conditions of the life of these people afforded him a new outlook and attitude to man and the poet has presented his men and women against the background of this socio-economic context. The female vagrant and the sailor of Guilt and Sorrow, Marmaduke, the benevolent hero and his lieutent, Oswald of The Borderers and the widow of An Evening Walk are victims of war; Margaret of The Ruined Cottage, the farmer of the Tilsbury Vale, Poor Susan, Goody Blake, Simon Lee, the Old Cumberland Beggar and the others are the objects who are treated oppressively by the society. These figures are the products of the poet's objective realisation of the position and condition of men in a society where they receive apathetic and inhuman treatment despite essential purity and goodness of heart. Social misfits and outcasts of The Convict and Gypsies, persons indulging in crimes and vicious actions as presented in The Borderers and Guilt and Sorrow, the betrayed and dejected figures of The Thorn, The Mad Mother ('Her Eyes Are Wild'), Ruth, and of other poems are all victims of the malicious influence of the age. The evils of the age and the abj ection from goodness to depravity of Luke in Michael are also identical. They suffer in life though the basic traits of their characters are far from badness. It is only the system of the society that leads them to ignominious state of life. Their humble and tragic lots
and the vices of the age bear a harmonious correspondence.

The poet's concept of labour against the background of the industrial expansion is remarkable and conspicuous with his aversion to this change. It has offered him the opportunity to project the figure of Michael. Michael is labour incarnate, and it is his sense of dignity of labour that has made him immortal in the realm of poetry. The poet's conception reaches its climax when he finds a harmonious correspondence of the 'labourer' with the 'sweetness' of the phenomenal world:

And, in the meadows and the lower grounds,
Was all the sweetness of a common dews,
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
And Labourers going forth into the fields.

The Prelude (1805), Book IV, lines 336-339.

The French Revolution left no far-reaching and permanent influence on Wordsworth who understood that the course of the Revolution was rapidly moving in the direction quite prejudicial to, and un congenial for, transformation of the 'general Will' in to an ideal society and was detriment to all freedom. But the Revolution at its initial stage appeared to him to advocate the cause of equality, liberty and fraternity not only for the people of any particular country but also for mankind as a whole. The poet mingled his voice with the spirit of the Revolution, and

_ wish'd that Man should start
Out of the worm-like state in which he is,
And spread abroad the wings of Liberty,
Lord of himself, in undisturb'd delight —

The Prelude (1805), Book X, lines 836-839.
The French Revolution with a charter of high hope held the poet fascinated and he felt that 'human nature seeming born again', and

the multitudes of men will feed
And fan each other. \[The Prelude, Book IX, lines 369-370.\]

The spirit of the Revolution taught the poet to hope in man,
Justice and peace. \[The Prelude, Book IX, lines 395-396.\]

So the poet recognised the French Revolution as a historical necessity, but its subsequent failure through excess, the poet thought, was destructive of his imaginative life in particular and resulted in the perversion of the psychic process of the people in general. The attitude of the poet to the French Revolution is categorically expressed in different poems and the poet has perceived the image of the common man in this light. Oswald as presented in \[The Borderers\] is a young man of vast potentialities who afterwards turned into a criminal by 'reflection', and is the product of the poet's 'study of human nature' in the perspective of his disillusionment with the atrocities of the French Revolution. The poet says in the prefatory notes to \[The Borderers\]:

"... sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities, so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart, and the perversion of the understanding to which they may carry their slaves. During my long residence in France, while the revolution was rapidly advancing to its extreme of wickedness, I
had frequent opportunities of being an eye-witness of this process". (16)

Thus Oswald with his villainy, Marmaduke who serves as a foil to Oswald with his benevolence, and the other figures of *The Borderers*, the female vagrant, the sailor and the victimised sailor's wife of *Guilt and Sorrow*, and several other characters of *Lyrical Ballads* are the products of the direct and indirect impact of the French Revolution on the poet.

The Solitary of *The Excursion* is another creation in conformity with the poet's hopelessness with the effects of the French Revolution. The Solitary has plunged into the state of an absolute disillusionment with the failure of the Revolution —

'The glory of the times fading away —

The splendour, which had given a festal air
To self-importance; hallowed it, and veiled
From his own sight — this gone, he forfeited
All joy in human nature; was consumed,
And vexed, and chafed, by levity and scorn,
And fruitless indignation, galled by pride;
Made desperate by contempt of men who threw
Before his sight in power or fame, and won,
Without desert, what he desired; weak men,
Too weak even for the envy or his hate /

*The Excursion*, Book II, lines 293-303.

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Bo the Solitary has retreated into the 'rugged hills' to escape the dire consequences of the time where now he dwells, And wastes the sad remainder of his hours, Steeped in a self-indulging spleen, that wants not Its own voluptuousness; (The Excursion, Book II, lines 309-312.)

thus is the Solitary, and this is the poet.

Lucy, the cottage girl and heroine of the poem of that name is another creation of the poet who himself has abandoned all hopes in the Revolution, and has returned back to his original object of solace. Lucy with the spiritual solemnity of the star and the physical shakiness of the violet is the source of his consolation, and the poet with his longings for Lucy returns to the abode of peace to forget the consequences of the Revolution:

'Tis past, that melancholy dream / Nor will I quit thy shore A second time; for still I seem To love thee more and more.

The philosophy of an age is always marked by the distinctive characteristics and features of that particular age, and leaves an impact on the intellectuals of the age. The influence of the eighteenth century philosophy was all-pervasive and Wordsworth was under the spell of different philosophers at different periods of his life, and the principles and ethics of these philosophers influenced him greatly in the regulation of his poetic course in general and also in his choice of the common man in particular. Newtonian scientific conception of the universe, Rousseauistic conviction of the necessity to draw
out of human nature, of the equality of rights, and of the common brotherhood of men and Godwinian doctrine of benevolence, Hartleian associationism and Spinozistic psycho-physical parallelism and monistic pantheism, Berkeleyian conception of the combination of the sensational theory of knowledge with immanent theism and Lockian sensationalism, Kantian ethics of the control of feeling and impulse by the dictates of practical reason and his theory of transcendental imagination, Shaftesburian concept of morality and the Platonic theory of immanence — all these offered him the creed of poetry. But the poet was never the slave to any philosophical office. He reciprocated the philosophical element up to the necessity of the manifestation of the creative activity of the mind, and never attempted to establish any particular philosophical dogma through his poetry. So, Wordsworth's philosophy is the song of life and he treats philosophy neither as an instructive instrument nor as a source of didacticism. Philosophy, to him, is the means to resuscitate the mind with the love of wisdom and to endow it with the power to realise the problems of life:

One impulse from 

May teach you more of man,

Of moral evil and of good,

Than all the sages can. (The Tables Turned, lines 21-24.)

But the poet is not concerned with the assertion of his knowledge and his power of perception of the problems of life, rather wisdom and its related phenomena become contributory factors for the accomplishment of the characters of men in the existent reality. The poet employs himself to create man anew because
he receives a new excitement and assurance for man from philosophy, and a new power of mind too:

I was a chosen Son.

For hither I had come with holy powers
And faculties, whether to work or feel:
To apprehend all passions and all modes
Which time, and place, season do impress
Upon the visible universe, and work
Like changes there by force of my own mind.
I was a Freeman; in the purest sense
Was free, and to majestic ends was strong.

_The Prelude (1805), Book III, lines 82-90._

The freeness or power of mind endows him with the quality of the highest order to visualise 'the native and naked dignity of man' and philosophy comes to his aid for such realisation. Wordsworth has seen poverty and its consequent anti-social habits of his neighbours at its worst, and has understood with the eyes of a Godwinian student of social phenomena that man being pressurised by circumstances is apt to commit crime and to resort to ignoble and disgraceful actions in life despite the elementary perfectibility of mind. Thus the inadequacy of means for subsistence and the consequent stringency of poverty of Goody Blake allures her to the means of theft. Simon Lee and the old Cumberland beggar are exposed to the physical infirmity and poverty, and are victims of the injustices of the society. The women figures of the poems, _The Mad Mother_ ('Her Eyes Are Wild'), _The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman_, and _The Thorn_ suffer from the ill-treatments of social systems, and
are the exponents of the poet's view on the injudicious regulations of the society. *The Borderers* and *Guilt and Sorrow* are studies in criminal psychology within the perspective of Godwin's theory of benevolence. In *The Borderers*, Oswald whose master passion of mind is fame and pride resorts to criminal actions for self-gratification, Marmaduke, notwithstanding the nobility and broadness of mind, is deceived to murder an innocent, old and blind man and himself becomes a victim of Oswald's diabolical inhumanity; in the Salisbury Plain, the sailor commits a murder because the state of his extreme poverty and his instinct of hunger compel him to have recourse to this sort of action. The results of the treatment of the society and Government also act as factors for his desperation. Thus the figures of these common people testify to the practical results of Godwin's influence on the poet. But there is a paradox of Godwin's influence on him. "The man who holds with Godwin that poverty is the cause of every vice and the source of all the misery of the poor is naturally astonished to find that the so-called evil, the offspring of human institution, is a vigorous instinct closely interwoven with the noblest feelings. It represents familiar and dearly-loved fields, a hereditary cottage, and flocks every animal of which has its own name!" (17) Wordsworth has fully understood the value of this instinct of love for material things of human life and the shepherd of *The Last of the Flock*, the farmer of the Tilsbury vale and Michael in the poem of that name are the outcome of his recognition of this impulse.

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of the human mind. The Convict again echoes Godwin's humanitarian ideas, and contains the suggestion for abolition of the policy of colonisation and reform of penal measures.

Wordsworth is 'a son of Rousseau' and like his preceptor has an absolute faith in 'man and his noble nature'. Rousseau has great concern for 'the idyllic uncivilized man', and has no less an impact on Wordsworth and on his choice of the common man. The element of Rousseauism abounds in the figures of the poems of Lyrical Ballads. The poet has also "retained some trace of Rousseauism in his preference for the rustic, the untutored, the innocent, as against the sophisticated and urban".(18)

Spinoza, another philosopher whose influence on Wordsworth's conception of the common man is also cognisable. The problems of mind and matter have the instinctual flux and re-flux in both of them. Both possess intense ethical passion, and are concerned with wisdom and virtue as means for the discipline of mind. Michael with the 'Judaic' quality and Lucy with the aspect of 'spirit' and of 'extension' bear witness of Spinoza's influence on his choice of the common man.

The two fundamental systems of Hartley's philosophy -- benevolence and association -- have a great impact on Wordsworth's idea of the common man. Wordsworth's interest in associational psychology is evident in his 'Preface', where he expresses that the purpose of poetry is 'to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement', and thus the poems of Lyrical Ballads and the poems, There Was a Boy,

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18) : Wordsworth -- A Philosophical Approach.
Melvin Radar.
and Michael bear testimony to the Hartley's influence on his conception of the common man. It is certain that psychology of Hartley and the innermost essence of the poems are not correlated, but the psychology provides only the framework for expression of his emotions and feelings which culminate in his conception of human figures of common and ordinary origin. Ruth is another product of Hartleianism. "Ruth's husband lived in the open air, in England, in Georgia, and on the ocean; but he got nothing but evil. Why is this? Because he gave nothing in the way of feeling, so that his mind had nothing to transmute into the higher forms of feeling, and he developed into a savage, and never reached the moral height of a man". (19) This account of the poem evinces that it contains in itself the spirit of Hartleian optimistic necessitarianism. An analytical penetration into Peter Bell establishes the conclusion that Peter, the wild ruffian with his subsequent 'inward shaping' for 'a profound spiritual conversion' is also subject to Hartleian philosophy.

The spirit and essence of Wordsworth's conception of the common man centres round two cardinal concepts - the poet thinks that man is born free, 'from Freedom it comes, in Freedom it rests, and unto Freedom it returns', and believes in the essential purity of human mind, and feels that 'Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God'. (Matthew, V. 8.) These two concepts have offered him to perceive the common man

in a new light and the ethics of different philosophers, specially Newton, Berkeley, Locke, Kant, Shaftesbury and Plato have provided him with the background and materials for expression of his poetic intuition and feeling of which the poet himself may not be conscious at all times and on all occasions. But these creeds leave great impact, both direct and indirect, conscious and unconscious, on the sub-conscious state of the mind of the poet, and inspire him with an almost mystic and spiritual power to pay homage to 'the native and naked dignity of man' as man.

Nature:

The poetry of Wordsworth is spoken of as 'inevitable' and the poet's choice of the common man is the necessity of inevitability. Wordsworth since his childhood was aware of the 'infinite variety' of Nature and

From Nature and her overflowing soul
I had receiv'd so much that all my thoughts
Were steep'd in feeling;

The Prelude (1805), Book II, lines 416-418.

Nature and the related phenomena delight him as well as give him a vision of power. The poet realises this intuitive potentialities of mind, and indulges in the sense of the sublime:

Oft did I leave
My Comrades, and the Crowd, Buildings and Groves,
And walked along the fields, the level fields,
With Heaven's blue concave rear'd above my head;
And now it was, that, from such change entire
And this first absence from those shapes sublime
Wherewith I had been conversant, my mind
Seem'd busier in itself than heretofore;
At least, I more directly recognised
My powers and habits: let me dare to speak
A higher language, say that now I felt
The strength and consolation which were mine.
As if awaken'd, summon'd, rous'd, constrain'd,
I look'd for universal things: persued
The common countenance of earth and heaven;
And, turning the mind in upon itself,
Pored, watch'd, expected, listen'd: spread my thoughts
And spread them with a wider creeping: felt
Incumbences more awful, visitings
Of the Upholder of the tranquil Soul,
Which underneath all passion lives secure
A steadfast life.

The Prelude (1805), Book III, lines 97-118.

The poet establishes an inseparable identity with Nature, and
cannot imagine his seclusion therefrom. He himself admits:
"I was often unable to think of external things as
having external existence, and I communed with all
that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in,
my own immaterial nature". (20)

Nature is the abode of peace and the abode of beauty for him; she
inspires, stimulates and encourages during the 'Fair seed-time'

    ed. A.B. Grosart
and the poet exclaims:

O Nature / Thou has fed
My lofty speculations; and in thee,
For this uneasy heart of ours, I find
A never-failing principle of joy
And purest passion.


And she is

The Anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my mortal being.

_Tintern Abbey_, lines 109 - 111.

Nature has awarded him a 'priest-like' task and the poet carries
the high pursuit with all the seriousness of his mind being aided
with the gift of Nature who enriches him with the benign
influence as well as regulates his course of action:

Nature then was sovereign in my mind.

And mighty forms, seizing a youthful fancy,

Had given a charter to irregular hopes.

_The Prelude_, Book VI, lines 333-335.

But then comes the crisis. The sufferance of mankind consequent
upon an all-pervasive social disorder and political chaos pain
him at heart. The poet mingles his voice with one of the tragic
heroes, and says:

We hear

Of towns in flames, fields ravaged, young and old
Driven out in troops to want and nakedness;
Then grasp our swords and rush upon a cure
That flatters us, because it asks not thought:
The deeper malady is better hid;
The world is poisoned at the heart.

*The Borderers*, lines 1030 - 1036.

She comes to his rescue, and sets him aright. Wordsworth admits through the revolutionary who is disillusioned:

Nature was my guide,
The Nature of the dissolute.

*The Excursion*, Book III, lines 807-808.

Nature corrects the 'deeper malady' of mind, and affords him the power to visualise man and his humble lot in a new light.

The poet hears

The still, sad music of humanity,
and the 'main region' of his haunts becomes the sad and wretched figures of humble and suffering people:

My first human love,
As hath been mention'd, did incline to those
Whose occupations and concerns were most
Illustrated by Nature and adorn'd.
And shepherds were the men who pleas'd me first.

*The Prelude* (1805), Book VIII, lines 178-182.

Because

Then rose
Man, inwardly contemplated, and present
In my own being, to a loftier height;
As of all visible natures crown;

*The Prelude* (1805), Book VIII, lines 631-634.

Now a penetrating investigation into Nature's influence on the poet's choice of the common man shows that the action of
Nature depends on circumstances, and the most congenial circumstances may be attributed to the people who lead 'humble and rustic life'. These people find themselves untutored and humble persons, farmers, shepherds, frantic and abandoned women, children, and even idiots and vagabonds, whose lives and activities have a harmonious correspondence with Nature because of the organic interrelatedness with each other. These people cannot behave in conformity to the principles of ecological society, and transcendentalised 'hold communion with the invisible world'. Nature instils 'power' in them, and hence the highest bliss that can be known is theirs.

The Prelude (1805), Book XIII, lines 107-108.

Lucy, the common girl of the cottage, is also the favourite child of Nature. The life of Lucy originates from Nature, and is interrelated with her. The same is true of Michael, Peter Bell, the wagonner, the man of The Animal Tranquility and Decay, the leech-gatherer, the mother of The Thorn, the solitary reaper, the high-land girl, Lucy Grey, the Danish boy, the boy of the poem There Was a Boy and even the idiot boy: they all seem to create a piece of universe around them, and maintain their relations with Nature through their elemental powers within the domain of Nature.

Wordsworth treats Nature as an educative force and this perception of Nature has offered him to visualise the figures of Matthew and of the poems, Expostulation and Reply and The Tables Turned, and The Two April Mornings and The Fountain bear witness of the poet's indebtedness to Nature's influence for
perception of the figures of self-schooled men and children
within the domain of Nature. These pupils of Nature,
ordinary in every sphere of life, appeal to the senses of the
mass of men, and act as agents of Nature to mobilise people
to listen to her message:

Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your Teacher.

The Tables Turned, lines 14-15.

Wordsworth has been regarded as a poet of fortitude. He
is more concerned with compassion than joy. The intensity of
the feeling of his mind centres round the 'wounded society'—
poverty, the pessimistic attitude to life, the curse of loneliness,
desertion and even death—- the related phenomena of
the wounds of the society find expression in his poetry. It is
the result of the poet's spiritual education received from
Nature through a series of 'visitations' which have given him
a sense of delight and fear simultaneously and have endowed
him with the power of mind to maintain an integrated relation
between the individual-self and the representatives of the
wounded world. Nature gives him an almost spiritual power to
express his sorrows for the sufferings of these unfortunate
human beings. Matthew with his loss of child, Simon Lee, the
old Cumberland beggar, the leech-gatherer, Goody Blake with
their poverty and physical infirmities, poor Susan with her
distress, the women of the poems, The Mad Mother ('Her Eyes Are
Wild'), The Thorn, The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman,
The Affliction of Margaret, Maternal Grief with their mental
pains and physical miseries, Margaret of The Ruined Cottage
with her sufferings and bad lot are all dedicated first to endurance and then to tenderness.

Wordsworth's portraiture of the tragic figures with their courage in sufferance is not the final word about Nature's influence on him. The concept of fortitude is immersed in the light of spiritualism, and is an antithesis of reason as well as custom. Michael 'beside the unfinished sheep-fold', the leech-gatherer 'on the lonely moor', Poor Susan in 'single small cottage' — all exhibit the spiritual strength. They live in the land where 'imagination' and 'intellectual love' 'are each in each', and teach the final lesson to their fellow men:

Here must thou be, 0 Man /
Strength to thyself; no Helper hast thou here;
Here keepest thou thy individual state:

*The Prelude (1805), Book XIII, lines 188-190.*

So, Nature's impact on Wordsworth for the preference of the common man is immense both in image and in dimension. She has influenced the poet consciously and unconsciously — the conscious Wordsworth is involved in 'religious love' and the unconscious Wordsworth indulges in mystic and spiritual intuition, and the two combined present man as man, a product made 'of substance and of fabric' divine.

**Criticism:**

Now, a critical analysis of different influences on Wordsworth with regard to his treatment of the common man leaves the impression that each of the figures is individual — an ultimate reality, the terminus of existent differentiation. It
is the difference of individualism which constitutes a particular individual with the extremity of nature and depth in emotion. Wordsworth perceives individualism in a peculiar sense: an individual contains the seeds of distinction in himself with his origin from great pain and the burden of uncongeniality, and is transcendentally not with the light of intellectualism, but in the revelation of a particular desire which remains unaccomplished and ultimately is lost in the realm of a higher synthesis possessed only by God. Wordsworth’s concept of individualism with its intensity of feeling, excellence of emotion as well as with an almost dramatic setting and attitude of the figures is akin to supernaturalism. But the supernaturalism is neither adventitious nor an irrelevant proposition of the poetic mind; it is conciliatory process for attainment of sovereign settlement by establishing a relation between the extremes of sublimity with the mystic suggestion inherent in it and the moral aim of human existence. It has grown out of a primitive intuition for an expiation of human phenomena through an intuitively transcended imagery, not of fancy or of vision, but of incident and reality.

Next, the heroes and heroines of Wordsworthian concept of the common man appear to be uniquely uncommon despite possession of qualities quite common to human beings. Their actions verbalise certain facts of life known to mankind, but the process of presentation of these figures with their thoughts and experiences of life is almost allegorical, and, not only affords the scope for considering the events of their lives as subjects for philosophical study, but also provides a clue to apprehend
their existence as a false assertion. But this sort of criticism is ruled out when the emotional qualities of their minds are considered. These figures are shown encircled by a peculiar surrounding — the surrounding of anxiety and anguish, of pain and misery, of dejection and depression, and, in few cases, of joys and exultations. The natural setting of the environment is characteristic to the condition of the persons concerned. Thus the environment, in all cases, consists in itself the germs of conversion into abnormality, and these figures within such atmosphere and with such burden of mind are apt to behave in such a manner as justifies the course of only mythical men. But Wordsworth’s men are free from mythical pattern of existence by virtue of possession of emotion in exuberent quality. It is the force of violent emotion that comes to their aid to enable them to assume their existent shapes in conformity with their respective moods and the existent reality, and ultimately allow them to prefer claims of existence in the world of reality.

Another salient feature of the common men of Wordsworth is their servile obedience. The principle of obedience is good because an intimate relation is maintained between God and man in supernatural and natural planes through obedience. The idea of obedience is Biblical, and is antithesis to freedom. So it means submission to the decree of an indwelling power which controls the vast mechanism of the universe. Any indulgence in the act of transgression amounts to disobedience. Adam acts inimical to the principles of obedience by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and consequently he has to suffer from the curse of God. It is a qualitative fall because it maintains an
integrity in Adam's conversion from innocence to experience. So there is a method in Adam's sufferance. But Wordsworthian common men suffer for no such ethical cause of disobedience. They suffer from the uncongenial conditions of life for which they themselves are not responsible; yet they have to submit to the will of God with their sufferance without raising any question as to the propriety or otherwise of their hardships. This sort of submission is servile in character, and appear to be unmethodical. But Wordsworth is a poet of fortitude. He is not desirous of creating the character of an epic hero; his intention is to represent man as man, as an entity with all the ordinary qualities of life. They are far away from any epic grandeur or dramatic subtlety. They come of humble origin, and are quite common in their attitude and demeanour, and consequently the habitual servility of manner and spirit is quite adaptable to their psychic make-up. No casual principle of determinism can oppose the development of this action of mind; nor can serve as the alternative to the spirit of submission. They submit in silence for sublimation with the elements of another dimension -- the dimension of the infinite and the sublime.

Almost all the men and women who are products of the poet's perception of the common man appear to be tragic, and lead lives wherein pain preponderates over pleasure. Life is not worth-living because it is full of miseries, and is devoid of the objects of desire. In no case the torments can be transferred and the life ever remains a terrible void. It emits the essence of a tragic tone, and leaves an impression of pessimism around it. But Wordsworth treats these figures in a
strange way, and makes them establish a communion with Nature who helps these people to transmute the material miseries into sublimity, and endows them with an exceptional power of mind to endure the tragic episodes of life in silence. The essential elements of pessimism is lost in the illumination of a calm tolerance through the benign and graceful mercy of Nature. A shrill outcry of corporeal deprivation is submerged in the flow of courage of forbearance. The man in sufferance becomes dominant and no impression of pessimism he leaves as the poet's concern centres round the man and his related phenomena, and he dwells on the demerits of sufferance and the merits of fortitude, the motif of love and that of hate concurrently, and seems to echo Milton:

How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth
Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shown
Of Man ....

Paradise Lost, Book I, lines 217-219.

The sense of pessimism ultimately evokes the spirit of sacrifice -- the ransom 'with his own dear life' and the heavenly patience outdoes the hellish pessimism.

The Wordsworthian common men bring in a variety of approach to life -- genetical and anthropological, philosophical and historical, and a critical analysis of the cross-currents of their lives in commensuration with the above contents bequeaths the idea that these figures serve as media of interconnection between the present and the past and the future. Each of them appears to be modicum of a strange concept of manhood, which had its existence in the past, still exists to-day, and will
remain with the existent reality in future. These people form a part of the chain of human cycle, but Wordsworth has differentiated them from the rest of the society by attributing unusual qualities to them, and he has succeeded in dispensing with the familiar elements altogether. They have been exposed to the oddity of life, and have been left for attainment of final settlement. The poet gives a full account of life in its entirety, and brings to light its problems. He is at pains when he realises the existing state of each of the men, women and children, and is convinced that a radical reform of the socio-political affairs of the society is essential to do away with the basic problems of human life. But the poet never suggests the means for the solution. The poet's feeling is akin to that of Marx who realised the miserable state of affairs of men and propounded the theory of historical interpretation of the events of life which had its culmination in the speculation of establishment of scientific socialism. Marx, unlike Wordsworth, visualised a glorious future for the oppressed as they would have a world to reign by overthrowing the oppressors through the process of revolution. But the poet has no such speculation about their future, because he is not a social philosopher. He expresses 'the universal element of human nature and in life', and consequently cannot be concerned only with the 'particular'. Assertion of the problems of life and suggestion for its solution is the subject of study of social thinkers, but Wordsworth is out and out a poet and the field of his enquiry is the revelation of 'truth' through the process of transformation of the facts of life:
a life complete in itself with a mutual sympathy with the forces
of Nature and the compassion of the poet:

Live, and take comfort. Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies,
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends and exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

To Toussaint L'Ouverture, lines 9 - 14.