CHAPTER XIX

WORDSWORTH

ALTHOUGH Wordsworth is one of the most important figures in English poetry, he is also one of the most tiresome, most vapid, most commonplace of English poets in certain respects. Although he has written some of the best poems in English literature, he has also written an astonishing quantity of nonsense. I should never find fault with anybody for detesting Wordsworth, yet at one time Wordsworth was so much beloved as a poet that it was considered a mark of bad taste to find fault with him. It required considerable courage to tell the truth about Wordsworth before Matthew Arnold boldly proclaimed it. And the truth is that very little of Wordsworth will live. I have before me here a volume of the complete poems of Wordsworth representing very nearly a thousand pages, of small type—two columns to a page.* And I am very sure that everything really great and precious in the book could be printed in considerably less than one hundred pages. In regard to inequality, few poets are worse than Wordsworth. You must try to think of him as a man who wrote poetry as regularly and untiringly as a machine cuts or saws wood. Nevertheless, at rare moments, some sudden inspiration rushed into the soul of the man, and made him a true poet. I do not think that he himself ever knew when he did his best. And the difference between his best and his worst is so great, so extraordinary, that we cannot understand it; it is one of the great mysteries of English literature.

Enough then to say that if a man has patience to pick out the good poetry which is to be found in the midst of the great mass of rubbish written by Wordsworth, he will

* *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth.* With an Introduction by John Morley. London, Macmillan & Co. 1891 [Hearn Library, No. 259].

be rewarded for his pains. Yet how many of you would like to read one thousand double-columned pages of small type in order to find fifty pages of beautiful poetry? I imagine very few. Happily this selection has been done for us by such anthologists as the late Mr. Palgrave and by such critics as Matthew Arnold, who made the best existing selection. You need not try to read the whole of Wordsworth. You need not even try to read the whole of the selection by Matthew Arnold. Indeed, this selection is not altogether the best possible for Japanese students. But every literary graduate of this university ought at least to know the name of Wordsworth and to be able to say something about his place in English literature. To state this latter fact as briefly as possible and to illustrate it by examples from his poems, will be the object of this lecture.

I am not going to speak of Wordsworth's history; that does not concern us now. I want only to tell you about Wordsworth as a nature poet, and to explain how he is related to other poets. There were two men in the eighteenth century — two poets of the Age of Johnson, — who greatly influenced Wordsworth. One of these poets was Cowper; the other was Crabbe. They were both of them natural poets in a certain sense, although following classical rules of composition. Cowper wrote about the fields, brooks, birds; about dogs, horses and cows; about farmers, labourers and village-women — in short, about natural things exactly as he saw them. He saw them in a happy way, and what he said about them makes us happy to read. Crabbe was very different, though quite as great a poet. Crabbe wrote about farmers and about village-women and country life, exactly as he saw them; but he saw the pain and the weariness and all the ignorance and suffering of the English peasant; so that what he says about them makes us very sad to read, all the more sad because we feel that it must be true. Before Cowper and Crabbe there were no poets in England who wrote as they did about these different aspects of nature and of human life.

Wordsworth is their immediate successor. He followed the methods both of Cowper and of Crabbe, though he did not copy their forms of verse. He imagined that much good work could be done by writing in simple verse about common things. Old poets had written only about grand things, heroic things, ideal matters, before the time of Cowper and of Crabbe. But both Cowper and Crabbe had shown that beautiful poetry could be written about horses, dogs, cows,—or about the sufferings of poor ignorant people, mountain peasants or city labourers. So Wordsworth resolved to write only about such matters. At least, he began with this resolution. Later on, it is true, he wrote about history, politics, religion; but it is in his poems about common life that he is often great, and it is only of such poems that I intend to speak.

In what respect, you may ask, does he differ from Cowper and Crabbe? I think that we may say especially in reflection. He is nearer to Cowper than to Crabbe; for Crabbe is a great realist, who scarcely ever indulges in reflections or comments. Cowper, on the contrary, often reflects, but his thoughts at such times are mostly of a narrow religious kind. Wordsworth was more of a philosopher. He was religious by character, without being religious according to dogma. And his spirit of reflection was something new in English poetry. It was generous, large, tolerant, and almost pantheistic in tone. There was in it a kindly melancholy that exactly suited the English mind of fifty years ago. Probably the English mind to-day would require something much larger than Wordsworth's poetical philosophy.

Now we have said all that is necessary as to Wordsworth's literary relation to the eighteenth century. It remains to state how far he exemplifies his own theory of poetry. It must be acknowledged that even here he is very imperfect and disappointing. He did not have the artistic judgment either of Cowper or of Crabbe. He had no sense of the ridiculous. Cowper and Crabbe knew that there were

common subjects which really could not be treated in poetry, subjects which were unworthy of poetry. But Wordsworth never learned this. Whatever interested him must, he thought, interest everybody; and he wrote much verse upon subjects which are not worth a moment's consideration. However, sometimes he succeeded in carrying out his theory to the full; and by his successes he belongs to the very first rank of English singers.

Wordsworth was a man who composed nearly all of his shorter poems standing up. He lived in the country, and would make a poem as he walked about in the fields and the woods, whenever he saw anything that interested him. For example, two little beggar boys asked him for money, and he at once composed a poem about the little beggar boys. Or he sees a child using a wash-tub for a boat — sitting in it, and paddling with his hands, just as we see little boys doing in Japanese brooks and rivers every summer — and he makes a little poem about the boy and his boat. Or he is charmed by some beautiful sunset, some display of flowers, the song of a bird, the song of a girl working in the fields; and as he walks back home he composes a poem about the sunset, the flowers, the bird or the peasant girl. I imagine that he was about the only English poet that ever worked constantly in this way—although we know that Sir Walter Scott used to compose songs while riding at full speed on his horse. Now let us take examples of Wordsworth on the topics mentioned. Let us begin with a poem about a peasant girl singing, called "The Solitary Reaper." In England as in Japan the women often sing while at work in the fields. Japanese poets have made songs on this subject, but I do not think that any of them have become so widely known here as Wordsworth's poem has become widely known abroad.

It contains a few lines that are quoted in thousands of books and that might be justly described by Tennyson's verse regarding

"jewels five-words-long
That on the stretch'd forefinger of all Time
Sparkle for ever."*

THE SOLITARY REAPER

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands:
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending;—
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

* *Princess*, Canto II, ll. 355—7.

The first two stanzas merely interest us by their suggestion of the charm of the young voice, and its effect upon the poet. The third stanza is the famous one — famous because it expresses so much with a very few simple words. The air is melancholy and strange; and the poet listening wishes he could find out what the song is about — that he could learn the words of it. But he knows that it would be useless to question the girl herself; she would not understand why a stranger would approach her with such a question, and she would probably become at once shy and distrustful. And there is no one else to tell him what the song is, so he cannot know. But he tries to imagine its meaning from the melancholy air of the melody. Perhaps it is a ballad of ancient times — a ballad about very sad things that happened in past centuries — a ballad about old kings and chieftains, and great forgotten battles. Most Highland ballads are about such matters. But please observe how many words I have been using only to say very badly what Wordsworth says so beautifully in eight short words:

> Old, unhappy, far-off things,
> And battles long ago.

Those few little words express whole pages of meaning. And critics have well recognized the extraordinary suggestiveness of the phrase, "old, unhappy, far-off things." Then the last stanza has an almost equal charm of narrative truth. We should, any of us, do exactly as the poet did under the same circumstances, and feel just as he felt. Charmed by the sweetness of the voice, and the melancholy of the song, we should feel sorry when the silence came; and as we turned homeward, the voice would still be in our memories, or, as the poet more beautifully puts it, in our hearts.

Well, you have here one example of a very common subject made beautiful by the art of a very uncommon mind. When Wordsworth wrote that, he had one of his fine fits of inspiration.

Now take the subject of flowers, a subject so much treated in English poetry that, before Wordsworth's time, it had been almost worn threadbare — that is to say, become almost tiresome, and apparently exhausted. But this threadbare subject under Wordsworth's touch magically regains all its ancient freshness. There is nothing philosophical, novel or artificial in the following verses; everything said there has been said before, and never in a more simple way—yet how the little picture burns itself into the memory, with all the colours of the bright day described!

THE DAFFODILS

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

The daffodil is a bright yellow flower, and a bed of daffodils in blossom really produces such a blaze of colour as would remind a Japanese traveller of the blossoming of the *Natane** in some parts of this country. The effect described by the poet must have been greatly enhanced by the proximity of the dancing lake-water beyond the flowers, bright blue under the sun. You know what a fine contrast is made by the meeting of blue and yellow. This is a bit of painting from the English lakes. But the point of the poem, written nearly one hundred years ago, is not in the description; it comes, like a surprise, with the last stanza. Have you ever noticed what the effect of certain bright scenes may be upon your own senses? It is at night particularly that the phenomenon may be studied. You blow out the lamp and lie down to sleep, and close your eyes; then, all at once, in the dark you see in bright sunshine some incident that impressed you during the day. Perhaps it is a street, with people passing by, and children playing; and perhaps it is the face of a friend with whom you have been talking. Or it is a scene of travelling, — a stretch of sea beach, with waves breaking silently. This may come to you again and again—come to you also in dreams, and you will never entirely forget it. I am told that old persons see these after-images more clearly than young persons; but everybody sees them at times. This is more than what is commonly called imagination or memory; perhaps we might call it perfected visual memory. It may be pleasant or unpleasant. But if the experience thus recalled be of a happy and beautiful kind, a visual memory is accompanied by the revival of the same happy feeling.

It is so in the poet's case. He felt more than common pleasure in the sight of the yellow flowers swaying in the summer breeze beside the sunlit water; and afterwards, whenever the picture returned to his memory, he felt the joy of the moment again—the happiness of the season, and of the sunlight and of the bright air, all of which seem to

* The rape.

him expressed by the "dancing" of the yellow flowers. One expression in the last stanza I hope you will remember, as it is now very famous—"that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude." Of course the poet means, by "inward eye," the faculty of imagination; and imagination indeed makes the pleasure of solitude—that is, enables its possessor to be happy in spite of being alone.

Sometimes common things make the poet more serious, as in the famous lines about a kitten playing with dead leaves. We all see little cats doing this in the autumn days, when the ground is covered with fallen leaves, which occasional gusts of wind send spinning and rustling in circles. At such a time a kitten delights to run after the wind-blown leaves, or to leap up and catch them as they flutter down; and it is one of the prettiest things that we could wish to see. But we do not often think seriously of the picture, as Wordsworth does. I am going to quote from this poem for another reason. I want you to observe one charming fact in regard to Wordsworth. When he becomes serious he does not become melancholy. The seriousness of Wordsworth is of a decidedly happy kind, except in those cases where he is telling a story with a naturally pathetic ending.

THE KITTEN AND FALLING LEAVES

That way look, my Infant, lo!
What a pretty baby-show!
See the Kitten on the wall,
Sporting with the leaves that fall,
Withered leaves—one—two—and three—
From the lofty elder-tree!
Through the calm and frosty air
Of this morning bright and fair,
Eddying round and round they sink
Softly, slowly: one might think,
From the motions that are made,
Every little leaf conveyed
Sylph or Faery hither tending,—

To this lower world descending,
Each invisible and mute,
In his wavering parachute.
——But the Kitten, how she starts,
Crouches, stretches, paws, and darts!
First at one, and then its fellow
Just as light and just as yellow;
There are many now—now one—
Now they stop and there are none:
What intenseness of desire
In her upward eye of fire!
With a tiger-leap half-way
Now she meets the coming prey,
Lets it go as fast, and then
Has it in her power again:
Now she works with three or four,
Like an Indian conjurer;
Quick as he in feats of art,
Far beyond in joy of heart.

The only remarkable lines in the above, though the whole is very pretty, are the lines describing the look of the kitten:—

What intenseness of desire
In her upward eye of fire.

These are often quoted and admired. Now, the picture having been painted, the poet goes on to reflect that the kitten, wonderful as her jumping and catching must seem to any one watching it, never thinks of trying to show how clever she is, never thinks about who is looking at her, nor cares whether anybody is looking at her. It would be just the same, he says, if a thousand people looked at her or if nobody looked. She is a perfect little athlete, a wonderful little conjurer, the most graceful and pretty and funny little creature, but what she is doing she is doing out of the joy of her own heart, out of the pure delight that the exercise gives her. We have here a suggestion as to the duty of the poet, the man of letters. He should not try to

write something beautiful only in order to make people praise him and to show how clever he is, but he should write what is beautiful out of pure love of beauty and of truth, without caring whether anybody likes it or does not like it.

But the incident suggests more than this to Wordsworth, as he stands there before the kitten with his own baby daughter in his arms. The delight that the child feels at seeing the kitten jumping and catching is quite as wonderful and as beautiful a thing in its own way, as the pranks of the little animal. Both the jumping of the kitten and the laughing of the child proceed from pure gladness of heart.

Such a light of gladness breaks,
Pretty Kitten! from thy freaks,—
Spreads with such a living grace
O'er my little Dora's face;
Yes, the sight so stirs and charms
Thee, Baby, laughing in my arms,
That almost I could repine
That your transports are not mine,
That I do not wholly fare
Even as ye do, thoughtless pair!
And I will have my careless season
Spite of melancholy reason,
Will walk through life in such a way
That, when time brings on decay,
Now and then I may possess
Hours of perfect gladsomeness.
—Pleased by any random toy;
By a kitten's busy joy,
Or an infant's laughing eye
Sharing in the ecstasy;
I would fare like that or this,
Find my wisdom in my bliss;
Keep the sprightly soul awake,
And have faculties to take,
Even from things by sorrow wrought,

Matter for a jocund thought,
Spite of care, and spite of grief,
To gambol with Life's falling Leaf.

Simply worded as this is, it will make you think a good deal if you read it carefully. For the poet is preaching to us an excellent sermon upon the way to find real happiness. And that way is to sacrifice pride. The kitten is not proud of her grace and her beauty, and she does not want praise, and she is able to find joy in playing with the simplest thing, even a dead leaf. And the child, in babyhood, thinks nothing about praise or profit; she can be quite happy without ever troubling her mind as to what other people think. The least little thing makes her happy, makes her laugh; and the sight of the kitten jumping gives her more joy than you or I would receive from watching the greatest of dramatic performances. To be perfectly happy in a relative sense, one should keep something of the freshness of the child in one's heart, and something of the independence of the kitten. Poets and great artists really do this. There is also this suggestion—that we should be able, at any time of life, to take some pleasure in little things. Many of us are too proud to do this; we imagine that the sight of a kitten at play, or the little devices of children at play, are not worthy subjects for our mature minds. Yet this is a great mistake. The man who cannot find honest pleasure in little things, never can be happy, and never can do anything really great in literature or in art. Little things that are mean, bad, contemptible, we should not trouble ourselves with, but of little things that are beautiful there are thousands all about us, and not to see them, not to love them, is decidedly a great misfortune. Even much more than this might be said about Wordsworth's reflections on the kitten.

Indeed, it may be said that the man who cannot find pleasure in little things cannot be, in the best sense of the word, a good father. To be a good father one must be capable of

understanding and of sympathizing with the pleasures and the play of a child. Great poets who are commonly said to retain all their lives something of child-character, have been famous in many cases for their comprehension of child nature; and the same may be said of great men of letters in other departments of literature. Victor Hugo has become widely famous for his poems of child life; and he was himself a model parent. Many examples might be quoted. In later times Stevenson, the best novelist of his generation, and one of the finest masters of style in all English literature,—though he had no children of his own,—distinguished himself by writing "A Child's Garden of Verses,"—the most wonderful book of its kind, in relation to child psychology, ever published in England. One would say that the terrible science of mathematics, at least, would have the effect of dulling sympathy with small and childish things—we should not expect to find a great mathematician playing with toys. But the best of all children's books ever made, — a book translated into almost all European languages, — "Alice in Wonderland," was written by a professor of mathematics, Charles Dodgson, one of the most learned, most reserved, and otherwise most unsociable of men, a person who was never kind except in the presence of children. Indeed it is the very greatest minds that seem to be able to find supreme pleasure in little things.

I said before that we have to make a distinction — that little things that are bad and ugly and immoral, ought not to get our attention at all. But in the case of a parent, even the smallest faults of a child ought to be seen and understood and, under particular circumstances, even sympathized with. Wordsworth has given us one illustration of the way in which a father ought to understand. You will find it in a poem called "Anecdote for Fathers" — a poem which was for a long time condemned by critics thoughtlessly as being absolute nonsense. Wordsworth did write a great deal of nonsense, but this poem is not nonsense at all. And those who called it nonsense only showed themselves incapable of

understanding little things. I am sorry that even Taine, who in most cases is an admirable critic, spoke of this poem slightingly. After having justly condemned Wordsworth's habit of writing verse about anything and everything, he observes that when Wordsworth's little son happened to tell a lie, the father thought it was a good subject for a poem. But I wonder whether in this case the poem was read. This is the substance of the narrative, which is told in fifteen stanzas of four lines each — perhaps at too great length. Wordsworth is walking out in the country with his little son; the day is very beautiful, and it occurs to him to ask the boy whether he likes to be in the country or by the seashore on so fine a day. The boy, who is only five years old, answers that he would rather be by the sea.

"Now, Little Edward, say why so:
My little Edward, tell me why."—
"I cannot tell, I do not know."—
"Why, this is strange," said I;

"For, here are woods, hills smooth and warm:
There surely must some reason be
Why you would change sweet Liswyn farm
For Kilve by the green sea."

At this, my boy hung down his head,
He blushed with shame, nor made reply;
And three times to the child I said,
"Why, Edward, tell me why?"

His head he raised—there was in sight,
It caught his eye, he saw it plain—
Upon the house-top, glittering bright,
A broad and gilded vane.

Then did the boy his tongue unlock,
And eased his mind with this reply:
"At Kilve there was no weather-cock;
And that's the reason why."

If any of you have been in the habit of talking to little

children, child brothers or sisters, you ought to be able to understand this. When the father first asks the boy, "Which do you like best, the seashore or these beautiful fields?"—then the boy answers truthfully, "The seashore." But when the father asks him why he likes the seashore best, then he cannot answer. A child can always express truthfully some dislike or some liking, but he is not always able to explain the reason of either. For example, a child will say, "I do not like that man," and it is no use to ask him why; he is speaking from instinct, therefore he cannot tell. Now the charm of the seashore is also something which he cannot explain; the bright salt air, the smell of seaweed, the shapes of the sand, the mysterious motion and noise of the waves, all these make the charm, but he cannot tell how or why. Then the father, only wishing to make him talk, says, "O, but you must have a reason, tell me why—why—why." Then the little fellow is ashamed—imagines that he has said something foolish—wants to please his father by trying to explain the unexplainable; and out of innocence and timidity tells a foolish little lie, suggested by the first thing that he sees—"I like the sea best because there is no weather-cock on the seashore." If you force a child to explain what he cannot explain, he will tell a little lie; and you must not be angry with him, for he is doing this only in the hope of pleasing you, only because he is ashamed, and wants to say something. Wordsworth understood the situation immediately; it only made him love his boy the more. But some people would have scolded the child and said, "How dare you tell me such a lie!" The fault, if any fault there was, was with the parent. He had asked "Why?" The child had truthfully replied, "I cannot tell—I do not know"; and then the parent had persisted, saying, "But you must have a reason." Then the boy blushed, thinking, "Father believes that I am not telling the truth, so I must try to tell him something that he will believe."

Several other poems by Wordsworth are famous, not only as poems, but as studies in child psychology. I think

that some of you must have read the poem entitled "We are Seven." It was an incident which occurred during his long country walks, that inspired Wordsworth to write this poem, one of his earliest "lyrical ballads." He meets in the country a little girl playing alone, and talks to her as a grown-up person commonly talks to children when he feels, and wishes to show that he feels, sympathy with them. Under such circumstances we commonly begin by asking, "How old are you?—What is your name, dear?—Have you any brothers or sisters?" The little girl questioned by Wordsworth, a little peasant girl, told him that she was eight years old, and that she had six brothers and sisters. "We are seven in all," she said. Then he questioned her a little more, and she told him that two of the brothers had gone to a distant town, that two others had become sailors, that one brother and one sister were buried in the neighbouring churchyard, and that she now lived with her mother. The poet thought it lonesome for her, and remarked sympathetically—

"You say that two at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea,
Yet ye are seven!—I pray you tell,
Sweet Maid, how this may be."

Then did the little Maid reply,
"Seven boys and girls are we;
Two of us in the church-yard lie,
Beneath the church-yard tree."

"You run about, my little Maid,
Your limbs they are alive;
If two are in the church-yard laid,
Then ye are only five."

Why does the poet tell the little girl that her limbs are alive? Because he has perceived from her answer that she does not understand the difference between life and death. Children do not understand death at all up to a certain age —which may vary according to the innocence of the little

mind. Even when the loving mother dies, a child of five or six years will not understand what has really happened. The child will grieve terribly, may sometimes even die of sorrow, but this is only because of the knowledge that he will never see his mother again, never feel her caress. That is all. The really cruel fact is quite unknown. Therefore we often find children exclaiming as they walk along a street, "O, there is brother!"—or, "There is little sister!"—referring to some dead brother or sister whom they imagine they see among the people passing by. Then we say, "O, no — you are mistaken; that is a stranger." The child then acknowledges his mistake, but does not think that it would be at all impossible to see the dead person. That is one form of child-innocence. Wordsworth thought that he would try to reason the matter with that little peasant girl, who, being eight years old, ought to be able to understand. And he argues with her; but she always answers, "No, we are seven." He talks about the two who are buried. She answers, "O yes! their graves are quite near our house, so that I can go there sometimes and sing to them. And when I have a chance," she adds, "I take my supper to the graveyard and eat it beside the graves." "But," the poet protests, "your brother and sister are in heaven; therefore, how can you talk about your being seven?"

'Twas throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said, "Nay, we are seven!"

Nobody could make her understand what death means except by such cruelty as no gentle nature could possibly think about.

In the quiet country valley where Wordsworth lived he found many such incidents of life among the peasants to furnish him poetic subjects. For example, one very cold winter a little girl was lost in the snow, and that sad occurence has given him the subject of the ballad "Lucy Gray." Again he makes a child whose cloak became en-

tangled in a wagon-wheel the subject of the poem of "Alice Fell"—not so good, but striking in its way. These are very well known; and I refer to them only to illustrate Wordsworth's capacity in the interpretation of child-life.

I now want to speak of some poems dealing with adult emotion—the emotions of love and grief and regret. Of sexual love there is scarcely anything in Wordsworth; but love of children, love of kindred, and love of country and friends—these forms of affection have found in his verse the most beautiful expression which English poetry can offer.

About the following there is a Japanese simplicity which I think you will appreciate, because I have read various Japanese poems much resembling it — not in form, but in feeling. It might be the love of a boy for a girl, before the time at which a boy would know what love means; or it might be the love of a brother for a sister, so pure it is and so touching.

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
  Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
  And very few to love:

A violet by a mossy stone
  Half hidden from the eye!
—Fair as a star, when only one
  Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
  When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
  The difference to me!

This needs no explanation or paraphrase, but how pretty it is, how touching, how truly a bit of world-poetry! The very little that is said means so much more to us than many elaborate pages could mean — the whole story of this charming country girl, obscurely loving, and obscurely loved. And it reminds us of one of the sad things of

existence — namely, that the most beautiful things of life never can be largely known. We think the persons whom we most love — our fathers, mothers, sisters, sweethearts — better than anybody else's. Jests have been made about this very natural weakness of human nature. But is it really weakness? and is it really foolish? I am inclined to think that it is not. The persons whom we love best are really better to us than any other human beings could be, and the best side of their souls or nature is shown only to us. No human being is exactly the same to all other human beings. We cannot show the best and kindest side of us without great caution and long experience. In the household all experience exists for us, and we know that caution is quite unnecessary; therefore at home we can be our true selves. This is possible also in the case of a betrothed maiden and her lover. Elsewhere it is not possible. So it may be said that we can see the best side of human hearts only at home, and there we really do see it, and it is not unreasonable that we should consider those we love superior to all other human beings. They are that for us—though for us only. Everybody, soon or late, comes to feel this, and having felt it, one must also feel a little sad at the thought that the most beautiful hearts and minds which we know can never be known to anybody but ourselves. The consolation is, of course, that everybody has the same experience. But this is something of a digression. Please observe in the foregoing poem that the whole effect is given by a single interjection. The exclamation "Oh," means everything, coming as it does before the childishly simple phrase about the "difference." The girl is dead, and the world is changed thereby to one mind — the sun is not now so joyous and bright as it used to be, nor are the fields so green, nor the sky so blue. But the great world of humanity knows nothing about what has happened, and would not care if it did know.

Friendship is, however, a dearer emotion to Wordsworth than romantic love, and he gets plenty of inspiration from it. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of his house there was

a little school, and the poet made a friendship with the old schoolmaster. They used to take long walks together, climbing the hills and wandering into the woods. They told each other all their ideas, and Wordsworth has preserved for us several touching things which the old man said. One example is furnished by the poem entitled "The Two April Mornings."

> We walked along, while bright and red
> Uprose the morning sun;
> And Matthew stopped, he looked, and said,
> "The will of God be done!"
> . . . . . .
> "Yon cloud wi h that long purple cleft
> Brings fresh into my mind
> A day like this which I have left
> Full thirty years behind.
>
> "And just above yon slope of corn
> Such colours, and no o her,
> Were in the sky, that April morn,
> Of this the very brother.
>
> "With rod and line I sued the sport
> Which that sweet season gave,
> And, to the church-yard come, stopped short
> Beside my daughter's grave.
>
> "Nine summers had she scarcely seen,
> The pride of all the vale;
> And then she sang;—she would have been
> A very nightingale.
>
> "Six feet in earth my Emma lay;
> And yet I loved her more,
> For so it seemed, than till that day
> I e'er had loved before."

The morning is an April morning, and the curious shape of a cloud in the sky reminds the old man of another April

morning, thirty years before, when he had seen another cloud of the same kind. And the cloud memory reminds him of a sadder memory; for on that morning thirty years before, when returning from a fishing trip, he had stopped a moment to visit the grave of his little daughter who had died at the age of nine. But there is nothing very extraordinary in the fact of visiting a daughter's grave on a particular morning, to make a man remember the experience with pain after a period of thirty long years. Why did he sorrowfully remember that particular morning? Something else must have happened to make the memory so sharp—something much more impressive than the vision of a purple cloud. This was it:

"And, turning from her grave, I met,
Beside the church-yard yew,
A blooming Girl, whose hair was wet
With points of morning dew.

"A basket on her head she bare;
Her brow was smooth and white:
To see a child so very fair,
It was a pure delight!

"No fountain from its rocky cave
E'er tripped with foot so free;
She seemed as happy as a wave
That dances on the sea.

"There came from me a sigh of pain
Which I could ill confine;
I looked at her, and looked again:
And did not wish her mine!"

Not a ghost, this lovely girl with dewdrops in her hair, and fair skin and bare feet, standing in the morning sun—not a ghost, but a charming living creature, much more beautiful even than the dead girl It was a joy merely to look at her. But why did the old man say, "I looked at her and looked again, *and did not wish her mine*"? There

might be several explanations. You may guess for yourselves, if you wish. One would say that a bereaved father under such circumstances would very much wish to have so beautiful a creature in his house, to take the place of his dead child. Another poem gives the explanation. It is called "The Fountain."

> We talked with open heart, and tongue
> Affectionate and true,
> A pair of friends, though I was young,
> And Matthew seventy-two.

Old Matthew in this poem tells his friend many things of his life, his sorrows, the death of all who loved him. And the poet, out of sympathy, exclaims—

> "And, Matthew, for thy children dead
> I'll be a son to thee!"
> At this he grasped my hand, and said,
> "Alas! that cannot be."

This explains the other poem. He did not wish the beautiful girl whom he had seen at the church-yard to be his daughter for the very same reason that he said to Wordsworth, "Alas! that cannot be." No matter how beautiful or strong or wise, or good or fair, or loving, or loyal, no child not our own can ever be to us exactly the same as our own child; and no living stranger can ever take the place of the dead. Supposing even that the bereaved father had adopted the fair child whom he had seen in the church-yard, he never could have loved her as he had loved the dead, nor could she ever have understood him so truly as his own child. Nor is this all; for the poem is very deeply suggestive. The presence of the living beauty in the house would prove constantly a reminder to the father of the other girl in the grave; the sound of her step, the tone of her voice, would recall another footstep and another voice, and would compel comparisons not to the advantage of the adopted child. Thirdly, one who very deeply loves a dead

person, feels that it would be a sort of unkindness to the dead to allow any living person to take the empty place. In brief, the loss of a child is irretrievable, irreparable, inconsolable; and Matthew's words simply presented this plain fact to the poet's mind, in so strong but new a way that he never could forget the utterance. Wherefore he says:

> Matthew is in his grave, yet now,
> Methinks I see him stand,
> As at that moment, with a bough
> Of wilding in his hand.

Apparently they had been collecting flowers together; Wordsworth could not perhaps have told you what the flowers were — so long ago that happened. But he remembered the bough in the old man's hand, because it was just after cutting it that Matthew told him about the memory of the first April morning and the vision of the beautiful girl in the graveyard. Common truths seldom strike our minds forcibly until they are presented to us in some relation to human pain.

Love of country, especially of one's native home, is another subject beautifully touched by Wordsworth. In the last poem which I repeated to you, memory is revived by the sight of a purple cloud of curious shape in the spring sky. In the next poem which I shall quote, we have an example of memory vividly and painfully reawakened by the song of a bird. The best known English singing bird is the thrush, and in some parts of the country it is very pleasant of a spring or summer morning to hear the thrushes sing. They do not sing so well in cages, but they can be tamed, and are often sold like other singing birds. A servant girl walking in the gloomy streets of London hears a caged thrush singing in front of a shop. It startles her to hear the song of the bird in that place, and she stops to listen. And as she stops, the song of the little creature brings back to her mind the sunny country village where she played as a child. She no longer sees the ugly streets;

she no longer hears the roar of London; now she sees flowers and trees and flowing water, and smells the sweet smell of hay and hawthorn blossoms. But only for a moment.

THE REVERIE OF POOR SUSAN

At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,
Hangs a Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years:
Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the Bird.

'Tis a note of enchantment; what ails her? She sees
A mountain ascending, a vision of trees;
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

Green pastures she views in the midst of the dale,
Down which she so often has tripped with her pail;
And a single small cottage, a nest like a dove's,
The one only dwelling on earth that she loves.

She looks, and her heart is in heaven; but they fade,
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade:
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes!

The part of London referred to here by the poet is the most gloomy, most crowded and busy of the city districts. It is in the middle of this busy place that the girl has heard the caged bird sing the song that reminds her of her peasant home in the country. She imagines that she sees again the beautiful mists of a summer morning — that is what the poet means by the "bright volumes of vapour." The reference to the pail—meaning probably a milk pail—indicates her former occupation on her father's farm. But it is only for a second that she can see all this; presently she can see only the dusty pavement, and hear only the roar of the traffic.

Yet in Wordsworth's time London was not what it is to-day—a city of six million people, the most awful and the

most gloomy of all cities in the world. The date of the poem is 1797, more than a hundred years ago. London was then not more than a quarter of its present size; there were green fields and valleys all about it, which have long since disappeared under square miles of solid masonry. I do not think that any mortal man could find objective beauty in London to-day, though he might find beauty of another kind. But in Wordsworth's day it was not impossible, and one of his most famous short poems is a description of London as seen from Westminster Bridge. The date of this poem is 1802.

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

Architecturally, Westminster Bridge is now much more beautiful than it was in Wordsworth's day; the modern structure is of steel and stone, and is made to harmonize in style with the splendid Houses of Parliament which are situated immediately next to the bridge. Yet notwithstanding the magnificence of the neighbouring architecture, to-day all the neighbourhood of Westminster Bridge has a dark and gloomy aspect, caused by the heavy atmosphere and smoke of London. As for green fields, you would now have to take a railroad train to reach them from Westminster Bridge—or at least a steamer—for they are very far away. Also, the Thames at Westminster is now confined

between high embankments of stone, and it is not at all beautiful, but very dirty and black. Reading this poem only enables us to imagine what the scene may have been like a hundred years ago. It is a fine piece of composition, severely beautiful, and such as even Tennyson would not have been ashamed of. The adjective "bare" refers to the clear appearance of objects seen in the morning atmosphere; they appear without any mists, sharp and clear of outline. Such clear air is never seen in London to-day. Of course it is quite impossible to describe in a few lines the multitudinous details of a city view; even if it were not impossible, the result would probably prove confusing or tiresome. But the poet's sudden exclamation of delight—"Dear God!" —conveys his own emotion to any person reading the poem who has seen the place described, and enables the reader who knows London to remember very vividly the effect of morning sunlight upon the miles of masonry, the broad river, and the waiting ships. Also the expression "mighty heart," referring to the great metropolis as the heart of the industrial life of England, has been justly admired. It was but little later that the great German poet Heine, visiting England, spoke of London as "the world's pyloric artery."

This much of Wordsworth, as illustrative of his methods of finding beauty in simple and common things, ought to interest the student in his lighter work. The main object of this short lecture has been to call attention to this lighter work rather than to the more serious verse. But something must be said, even in the shortest lecture, about his deeper poetry, because of its vast influence upon the poetry of the Victorian period. However, before we speak of that, I want to tell you again that it is of no use to try to read the whole of Wordsworth, — to read him, for example, in a volume like this — nearly a thousand pages of small type, two columns to the page. The best selection from Wordsworth is perhaps that of Matthew Arnold; and you will find in any anthology, from that of Palgrave to that of Quiller-Couch, an excellent selection of the best things. The student

ought not to waste time by attempting to read more than a selection from Wordsworth; because the greater part of his work is not good, and very much of it is rubbish.

Now, to speak of the more serious poetry, I may first observe that you need not pay much attention to the sonnets. Wordsworth wrote an immense, even an extraordinary, number of sonnets, and the majority of them might just as well not have been written at all. Certainly you would do well to read none of the sonnets except those which you may find selected for reading by some great critics, such as Arnold or Palgrave. In serious poetry Wordsworth chiefly succeeded in blank verse. Much of "The Excursion" and much of several other blank verse compositions are worthy of very close study, though even these can best be studied through selection. Wordsworth is splendid only for a few hundred lines together. On the other hand, Tennyson is splendid through a hundred pages of blank verse, more splendid than Wordsworth. Nevertheless, if Wordsworth had not existed, Tennyson could never have been so great. Very much of Tennyson's finest inspiration came directly from Wordsworth, though he was also much influenced by Keats. In order to give you an idea of how Wordsworth at his best can be compared with Tennyson, let me quote a few lines describing the sensations of a skater on a beautiful winter night:

> All shod with steel
> We hissed along the polished ice, in games
> Confederate, imitative of the chase
> And woodland pleasures,—the resounding horn,
> The pack loud-chiming, and the hunted hare.
> So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
> And not a voice was idle: with the din
> Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;
> The leafless trees and every icy crag
> Tinkled like iron; while far-distant hills
> Into the tumult sent an alien sound
> Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,

Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.*

To any person who has skated upon clear winter evenings the truth, not less than the beauty, of these lines makes powerful appeal. The rest of the poem is all equally fine, so fine that perhaps nothing in English is better; but this is only a matter of about a hundred lines. I have quoted it particularly because I want you to compare it with a description in Tennyson's "Passing of Arthur," where the bold Sir Bedivere is carrying the body of the wounded king to the ruined church by the lake shore. That magnificent description in Tennyson is actually based upon these lines of Wordsworth. You will find not only every simile there, but every word of significance which Wordsworth uses—"smitten," "din," "icy crag," etc. You may prefer the work of Tennyson; it is grander, because the conception is grander. But Wordsworth is not describing anything heroic, nothing but a happy company of students skating on a river. Out of that description of skating students, however, Tennyson obtained inspiration for the very finest passage in the whole of the "Idylls of the King," and that shows very well what value can be found in Wordsworth's best work by a fine judge of poetry.

One word more about Wordsworth's studies of childhood. You may wonder why I have not quoted to you anything from the famous ode on "Intimations of Immortality," for this, although on the subject of child-feeling, is one of the very greatest of his efforts in serious and stately verse. One reason is that I believe many of you have already studied the poem in government schools; another reason is that the real beauty of the composition is much more a beauty of workmanship than a beauty of thought, and therefore less likely to serve a good purpose of illustration in this short lecture. But I may say at least a few words about it. Unless you have been fully told all about the Christian ideas behind it, you might mistake the poet's meaning very easily.

* *Influence of Natural Objects*, ll. 33–46.

The general subject of the poem is this — in childhood we see everything more brightly, and find more pleasure and joy and beauty in the world than we do as men. Why should this be? Perhaps, answers the poet, it is because the soul of the child still remembers a more beautiful world in which it lived before birth.

Scientific criticism has sadly ridiculed this presentation of the facts, and the theory with which Wordsworth attempted to explain them. It is quite true that children feel more joy and delight in sunshine, in flowers, in playing among the fields than grown-up people do; but this is not because they really perceive and feel more keenly than adults. As a matter of fact, a child cannot see or feel so deeply as a grown-up person, and the senses of the child are comparatively undeveloped. No little child can possibly understand the beauty of a landscape, the beauty of clouds, the beauty of running water, for to comprehend and to see such beauty requires much more experience than a child possesses. That is why one of Wordsworth's critics calls this poem nonsense. I am afraid the critic was quite right. A child does indeed see things with a pleasure which we cannot feel, but that is because the same things which please the child have become familiar to us—we know more about them than the child does, to whom they are new and strange. It is also true that intuition, the instinctive sense or knowledge of good and evil, danger or safety, is much more vivid in the child than with grown-up persons, for grown-up persons are trained to use their reason in opposition to their feeling, and the child, with no reasoning power yet developed, has only feelings to guide him. Again it is true that a child can notice details in small things which escape us; but that is because the child gives all his attention to little things, remaining incapable of observing contrast, of imagining general laws. Lastly, it is true that the mind of a child is most beautiful, delicate, imaginative; but that is because the child, like the savage, who is also a poet, sees things in a peculiar way, a ghostly way, imagin-

ing rocks, trees, flowers to be alive — to think and feel like himself. A child can tell you wonderful things about a chair or a table, because he thinks of them in a fetishistic way,—imagines them sentient. But to say that a child can see or feel the beauty of nature more than a grown person, more than a poet or an artist, is not true. Certain forms of beauty, the highest, a child cannot see at all. He sees things differently, but not by any means better than we do.

Now as for the theory of remembering pre-existence, you will have noticed that Wordsworth was half afraid to utter his theory; he apologizes for it at the beginning of his poem, and tries to prove that it is not contrary to Christian beliefs. If Wordsworth had been able to think the thoughts of a later time, and had bravely stated that the mind of a child proves the remembrance of other lives possible, then, I think, he would have been quite right. That way of studying child-psychology has some scientific foundation. But Wordsworth's theory is, not that a child can remember former lives in the body, but that a child remembers having been in heaven, in Paradise. The idea from which Wordsworth worked is a very old one in the Christian world, though not much expressed by Protestant writers. It is that a separate soul is newly made for every new body—made in heaven by God, and then sent down to earth into the mother's womb. I do not mean that this is a dogma; I mean only that it is an opinion expressed by old ecclesiastical writers. As soon as a child is conceived upon earth, then God in heaven creates a soul for that child and sends it down; and Wordsworth's idea is that, during its rapid passage from heaven to earth, the little soul keeps remembrance of something that it was allowed to see in heaven. Neither as science nor as metaphysics does this poem bear criticism, but it is a beautiful piece of musical composition, and contains many lines which will never die.