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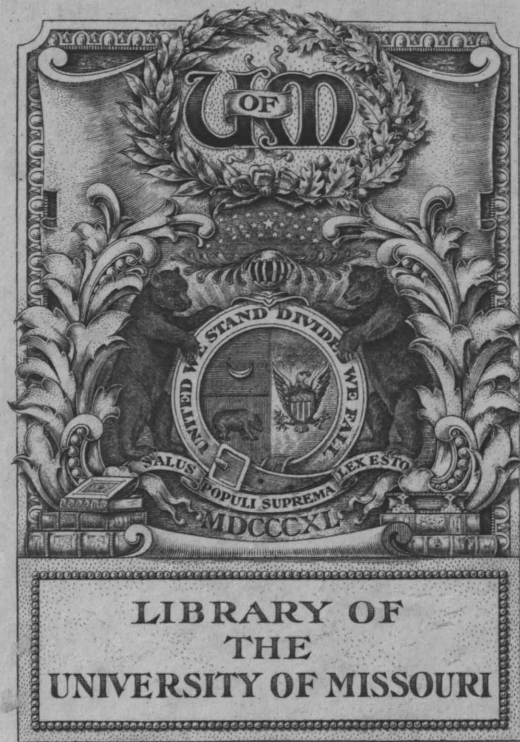
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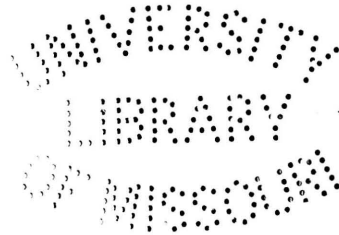
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Form 26

WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF DICTION.



A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE COMMITTEE OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIRE-
MENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

BY

Thekla Kahn. (A. B. 1902)

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WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF DICTION.

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In the following study, all references to Wordsworth's Literary Criticism are to Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, edited by Nowell C. Smith - published by Henry Frowde, London, 1905. The line references to the poems themselves are according to The Oxford Edition of Wordsworth's Complete Poetical Works, edited by Thomas Hutchinson - published by Henry Frowde, London, 1904.

WORDSWORTH'S THEORY OF DICTION.

Part I.

Many of the authors, indeed most of the authors of books or articles concerning Wordsworth, seem to be afraid to look his theory of poetic diction in the face. The life of the poet, his relation to his age, his politics, his philosophy, his ethics, his religion, his interpretation of nature--all of these have been treated at great length. In most of these articles, it is true, the Theory of Diction has been hinted at, or actually written on in a paragraph or two--sometimes a chapter or two, but usually in a half-hearted, apologetic, or around-the-bush fashion. Those critics who, like Jeffry of the Edinburgh Review, are lacking utterly in any sensitive appreciation of a poet's "first great gift, the vital soul",--1 and to whom Wordsworth, therefore, can make no appeal, simply say, "bad poet, bad theory," and dismiss poet, poetry, and theory with the words "This will never do!"--2. Such critics, we think, may be dismissed in the uncereemonious fashion they themselves have set.

In direct opposition to this class of critics, we have the almost blind worshippers of Wordsworth. Recognizing the

1. Prelude, Book I, 149.

2. Edinburgh Review, November 1814. The Excursion.

greatness of his poetry, they argue that the theory on which it is written is also great. When forced to admit that the poetry and the theory do not agree, they say that the theory is right, but awkwardly expressed. This is the stand taken in greater part by Caine --1, Dowden--2, Whipple--3, Matthew Arnold--4, and, though he is not particularly consistent, by Coleridge himself. --5. Wordsworth, they say, did not mean what he said. He was a poet, and the implication is that a poet cannot, or, at least, is not expected to write straightforward or forcible prose. That poets can write prose, and prose about whose meaning there is no doubt, we have ample proof. Shakespeare's dramas contain unrivalled prose passages. Collins says, "The truth is that Shakespeare's prose is a phenomenon as remarkable as his verse".--6. Spenser's State of Ireland, Milton's Areopagitica, are not lacking in clearness; Scott is as well known as the author of The Waverly Novels as he is as the author of The Lady of the Lake. Can we read The Letter to a Friend of Burns and be in doubt of Wordsworth's estimate of the author of Tam O'Shanter? Is there any uncertainty of Wordsworth's appreciation or the statement of his

1. Cobwebs of Criticism, Chapter I.
2. Introduction to Wordsworth's Poems, LVI.
3. Essays and Reviews, Vol. I, 234.
4. Introduction to Wordsworth's Poems.
5. Literary Biographia, Chapter XIX.
6. Studies in Shakespeare, 182.

appreciation, of the poem itself, when he says, "Who, but some impenetrable dunce or narrow-minded puritan in works of art, ever read without delight the picture which he has drawn of the convivial exaltation of the rustic adventurer, Tam O'Shanter? The poet fears not to tell the reader in the outset that his hero was a desperate and sottish drunkard, whose excesses were frequent as his opportunities. This reprobate sits down to his cups, while the storm is roaring, and heaven and earth are in confusion;--the night is driven on by song and tumultuous noise--laughter and jest thicken as the beverage improves upon the palate--conjugal fidelity archly bends to the service of general benevolence--selfishness is not absent, but wearing the mask of social cordiality--and, while the various elements of humanity are blended into one proud and happy composition of elated spirits, the anger of the tempest without doors only heightens and sets off the enjoyment within. I pity him who cannot perceive that, in all this, though there was no moral purpose, there is a moral effect." --1. Do we need a commentary to understand Wordsworth's feelings when he wrote a protest against the introduction of railways into his beloved Grasmere vale? If our poet is quite clear in these essays, what right have we to say--and positively--that in The Prefaces where his theory of poetry is set forth in detail, he was so unfortunate in choosing the words to express his thought that we must help him in his task? The critics of the second class have attempted to interpret Wordsworth's words

1. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 213.

in the Prefaces, and since there are almost as many interpretations of Wordsworth's theory as there are critics, much has been added to the general conclusion.

A third class of Wordsworthian critics gives the theory of diction only passing notice, or, more often ignores it entirely. This is the attitude of the popular magazine contributor. He seems afraid that the theory of poetry might deprive us of some of the poetry itself. Such, of course, would not be the case; if any theory of poetry excluded The Green Linnet, we would change or reject the theory, but we would keep the poem.

There is still a fourth class of critics. These men, and Mr. Raleigh is typical of this class, are not of the sort who willfully shut their eyes to either the excellencies or defects of Wordsworth. They see both. Moreover, these critics indicate that much of the discussion of Wordsworth's theory has arisen from^a confusion of questions. One critic asks, "Is Wordsworth's theory a correct one?", and another critic replies by answering the question, "Did Wordsworth practice what he preached?" or, "Is Wordsworth a truly great poet?"--while still another critic attempts to answer any one of these questions by writing an exposition of the theory itself.

With the questions, "What is Wordsworth's theory of diction?", "Did Wordsworth put his theory into practice?", and, indirectly, though necessarily, "Is Wordsworth's theory a

correct one?", this paper purposes to deal. In our study of these questions, we shall try to be just to Wordsworth, and true to the spirit of our own age, by considering briefly (1) the general character of the eighteenth century poetry against which Wordsworth protested, (2) the formal statement of this protest as it appears in the Advertisement of the Lyrical Ballads, and in the poems of that collection, and (3) the subsequent prefaces, particularly that of 1800, which grew out of the 1798 Advertisement, and all of Wordsworth's poems to which we think it at all likely his theory of diction was meant to apply. To these sources we shall trust for the "open sesame" that shall unlock the mystery.

Part II.

Paradoxical as the statement may seem, Wordsworth's theories and poetry are closely related to the theories, expressed or understood, and the poetry of the age just preceding him. We hear so much of Wordsworth's revolt, that we are apt to think of him as an anomaly, and to forget that every action tends to beget a reaction, that an artificial school will be followed by a natural one, that a Wordsworth will follow a Pope. No one has written of the literature of the last half of the eighteenth century who does not stress the regularity, the finished completeness of poetical composition of that age. So zealous for this formal perfection, became the writers of that period, that from being a means to an end, form became the end itself. The age has well deserved the epithet, unnatural or artificial. Wordsworth was not the only one who protested against this artificiality, this writing of mere "words, words, words". "A Return to Nature" was the watchword of the whole Romantic movement, of which our poet was "the most original and commanding figure" --1. In his Prefaces, and particularly in the appendix to the Lyrical Ballads of 1802, Wordsworth has traced what we may call the rise and fall of poetic diction, and given us his reasons for his own position in this matter. This has been well summarized by Coleridge when he says --"As far, then, as Wordsworth in his Prefaces contended, and most ably contended, for reformation in

1. Herford--Age of Wordsworth, 1.

our poetic diction; as far as he has evinced the truth of passion, and the dramatic propriety of those figures and metaphors in the original poets, which, stripped of their justifying reasons and converted into mere artifices of connection or ornament, constitute the characteristic falsity in the poetic style of the moderns; and as far as he has, with equal acuteness and clearness, pointed out the process by which this change was effected, and the resemblances between that state into which the reader's mind is thrown by the pleasurable confusion of thought from an unaccustomed train of words and images, and that state which is induced by the natural language of impassioned feeling; he undertook a useful task, and deserves all praise, both for the attempt and for the execution"-1.

Before examining Wordsworth's attempt, let us consider briefly the question, "What is poetic diction?", for only in the light of some definite answer to that question shall we be able to determine when Wordsworth is or is not poetical. Poetic diction is not a thing--it is a term, that, unfortunately, has been used to include many meanings. Unlike the highly inflected languages, Greek and Latin, where certain forms could be used in metrical composition, but never in prose, the English language has but few words which, isolated, and in themselves, ^{may} be called poetical. These words, moreover, are good Old English words, now obsolete in ordinary prose--as welkin, blow (for bloom), cull, even-tide, ere (for before), diminutives in let as streamlet, and the forms of the pronoun thou instead

of the more usual you. These instances are too rare for much consideration, for they make up a very minute portion of poetical language.

Poetic diction, then, does not exist in the word itself. Is it in the word order? For the sake of rhyme and meter, we know that words are often changed from their normal positions in a sentence. Do these unusual positions make a line poetical? If such were true, we should have to call the following lines (The Idiot Boy, 318-321) poetical.

"He with his Pony now doth roam
The clifts and peaks so high that are,
To lay his hand upon a star,
And in his pocket bring it home."

As one of his touchstones of poetry, Matthew Arnold gives

"And never lifted up a single stone." --1

Whether or not we consider the line a touchstone, we do consider it of poetical value--and the word order is certainly normal. So with lines 384-391 of the same poem:

"It was a work for us; and now, my son
It is a work for me. But, lay one stone--
Here, lay it for me, Luke, with thine own hands.
Nay, Boy, be of good hope;--we both may live
To see a better day. At eighty-four
I still am strong and hale;--Do thou thy part;
I will do mine--"

In spite of numerous examples of this kind, no one would be foolish enough to say that only words in normal order can be

poetical, for thousands of lines, ^{unpoetical} none, to every one of us, would contradict such assertions. Note, as a single instance, the first stanza of The Green Linnet:

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

In a very significant little footnote --1, Coleridge has settled this question of word order, when he tells us of the gentleman, who, "under the influence of the Tragic Muse contrived to dislocate, 'I wish you a good morning, Sir! Thank you, Sir, and I wish you the same' into two blank-verse heroics

"To you a morning good, good Sir! I wish.

You, Sir! I thank; to you the same wish I."

If poetic diction does not exist in the word itself or in the order of words (excepting, of course, the requirements of meter) it must be in the relation one word bears to another. Poetic diction lies in the significant combination of words, the bringing of words together in such a way that the mental images of which the words are but labels shall have value for the reader because they "reveal either desirable but unattained or perhaps hitherto unknown forms of experience." --2

1. Literaria Biographia, 186

2. Dr. Arthur H. R. Fairchild, Lectures in Literary Criticism.

long, and blue, and night, represent forms of experience familiar to us all, but which one of us has ever spoken of a long blue night (The Idiot Boy, 287). We all know the words breast, fluttering, hope, new-fledged, but it took a poet, it took a Wordsworth, to give us the combination:

"With new fledged hope still fluttering in his breast".
o--1

And so we might multiply examples of significant combinations that are poetic. In other words, diction that is poetical is imaginative, for the distinctive mark of imagination is combination. Hence it is that in all discussions of poet and poetry, Imagination plays the most important part. As Coleridge puts it, "Imagination is the soul of poetry."--2.

Having then a more or less definite idea of what is meant by poetic diction, and knowing the general character of the poetic diction of the eighteenth century against which Wordsworth protested, we are in a position to examine the first formal protest, the Advertisement to the Lyrical Ballads of 1798. In studying this preface, and also the preface to the 1800 edition, and the subsequent critical essays and letters, we shall consider not only the theory of poetic diction as such, but as necessary to a more complete understanding of this theory, Wordsworth's theory of a poet, and of poetry, especially its universality of appeal, its subject matter, and the end it has to attain--phases closely related to each other and to the theory of diction. ---3

1. The Ode on Immortality, 142.
2. Literaria Biographia, 151
3. I have chosen to consider the Advertisement of 1798 and the 1800 Preface (with the following essays) separately. This

The Advertisement to the Lyrical Ballads of 1798 covers but little more than two small pages in the edition of Wordsworth's Literary Criticism as edited by Mr. Smith. It contains but four main points--(1) a very general, and perhaps misleading statement concerning the subject matter of poetry; (2) a definite explanation of the diction to be found in some of the poems; (3) an expectation of the disapproval with which the volume would be met, with a warning against unthinking critics; (4) and a few notes concerning some of the poems.

Since Wordsworth said in the first sentence of this Advertisement, "It is the honorable characteristic of Poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind,--1, though I think he often confused "can interest" with "ought to interest" and "a human mind" with "the human mind", he may justify the subject matter of all the poems from The Idiot Boy to Tintern Abbey. The second paragraph begins, "The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to

I have done principally for purposes of historical study. The first edition of The Lyrical Ballads should be studied and criticized according to its own preface, not according to the later theories, when the author had grown in his appreciation of poetry, and was not only conscious of his own shortcomings in things poetical, but admitted his faults. Studied separately too, we are better able to determine which parts of his first theory Wordsworth considered vital, and so retained in the later prefaces; which parts he rejected or modified, and what additional points he gave us.

the purposes of poetic pleasure".--1. That statement is so perfectly clear that we wonder that it should have been so persistently misunderstood. Wordsworth did not say that all poetry was to be written in the language of the lower and middle classes. What he did say, was that he was trying to discover what use poetry might make of such language, and that the poems of this collection that were written in the language of the lower and middle classes were to be considered as experiments. As Mr. Smith, in his introduction to Wordsworth's *Literary Criticism* has pointed out, Wordsworth was not professing to put forth a system of poetics, but his critical writings have a direct reference to aspects of his own poetry. We also agree with Mr. Smith that in this Advertisement to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth meant (1) that the men and women of his ballads were drawn from middle and lower classes, and (2) that the language was that of conversation; but we cannot agree with him, that Wordsworth did not mean to imply that there was a difference between the conversational language of the so-called upper and lower classes. --2. It is true that the upper classes do not converse in the language of Gray's Ode to Spring, but it is just as true that there is a difference in the conversational language of the upper and lower classes anywhere, and the fact that Wordsworth specified his language as that of "conversation in the lower and middle classes" proves that he perceived this difference.

Turning now from theory to practice, from the Advertise-

1. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 1.
2. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, Introduction XV-XVII.

ment to the poems themselves, let us examine "the experiments".
In the Oxford Edition of Wordsworth's Complete Poetical Works,
we find the following poems dated as published in 1798:

Lines. (written while sailing in a boat at evening).

Remembrance of Collins.

Lines. (Left upon a seat in a yew-tree).

Anecdote for Fathers.

The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman.

The Last of the Flock.

The Idiot Boy.

Her Eyes are Wild.

The Thorn.

Tintern Abbey.

Expostulation and Reply.

The Tables Turned.

I heard a thousand blended notes.

To My Sister.

Simon Lee.

Goody Blake and Harry Gill.

Animal Tranquillity and Decay.

The Convict. (Never reprinted by Wordsworth.)

Much of the Wordsworthian warfare has centered around two poems of this list, The Idiot Boy and Tintern Abbey. The Idiot Boy, critics have said and truly said, is not poetical, and they have implied that it is not poetical because it is written in the language of the lower classes. That the last statement is not true, we shall try to point out a little later. These same critics, on the other hand, admit that Tintern Abbey is

poetical, and is poetical because it does not use the conversational language; and they would have us believe that Wordsworth himself did not perceive any difference between the two poems. It seems quite evident, however, from Wordsworth's remarks concerning the majority of these poems, that the author of The Lyrical Ballads was conscious of a difference in the kinds of poetry--not all of the poems were to be considered as experiments--even if he felt no difference in the poetic pleasure aroused by them, and was as much moved by The Idiot Boy--he tells us he never read it without pleasure --1, as he was by Tintern Abbey. Believing then that Wordsworth followed his own theory of poetic diction in The Idiot Boy, and departed from it in Tintern Abbey, many critics have come to the conclusion that Wordsworth wrote nonsense, when he kept to his precepts, and poetry only when he violated them.

Few, even of the professed Wordsworthians, can read The Idiot Boy without having their faith in their master falter. It surely cannot be that the fault is entirely in the language, which is made up, chiefly of words simple and ordinary. Few people object to The Reverie of Poor Susan, and its language is decidedly simple. Would not stately diction make The Idiot Boy only more incongruous? Is it not rather the subject matter than the diction that is the defect of this poem? Weak minded children are pitiable creatures; our hearts ache for the mother to whom they belong, but try as we may, there is always a feeling of repulsion towards the children. We do not want

them near; we certainly do not like poems about them. Objects which arouse repulsion can never be aesthetic, and unaesthetic objects are not suitable material for poetry, for they do not interest the human heart. Our daily papers are filled with accounts of accidents--of explosions, perhaps, after which the heads, arms, and legs of the victims have been found, scattered at a distance from the bodies. We read about murders--how a throat is gashed from ear to ear, or a face beaten beyond recognition. Is it agreeable reading? Do we want such descriptions in poetry? Should we be interested in reading in poetry the details of a surgical operation--however successful the operation may have been, or however beautiful, the surgeon who alone could take an aesthetic attitude toward the operation, may have pronounced it? Grief, however, is not repulsive. That it is a suitable theme for a poem, Wordsworth leaves us no room to doubt, when we read The Affliction of Margaret, The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman, or Michael. But weakness is always unaesthetic, and mental weakness not only unaesthetic, but repulsive. It surely is not fit subject matter for a poem.

The diction of The Idiot Boy is certainly not elevated or even dignified in its simplicity. Many of the words probably were the possession of the Cumberland dalesmen. Yet I have found even in this poem, which is supposed to be the example par excellence of Wordsworth's theory of diction put into practice, a long list of words, and what is more important, word combi-

nations --1, that do not belong to the conversational language of the lower classes. For instance:-- lonely shout (5), intent (17), piteous moan (20), as if her very life would fail (21), distress (23), sorely puzzled (25), doth abide (28), what will betide (31), travelling trim (37), post without delay (42), best delight (53), motionless and dead (79), skill in horsemanship (85), stands fixed (88), stead (107), a most diverting thing (125), demure (129), her life and soul were buried (131), vile reflections cast (158), sad mischances (178), prefaced half a hint of this (182), his horse forsook (214), wandering gypsy folk (225), lengthen out the tremulous sob (290), the long blue night (287), very soul of evil (333), strong indentures (338), my suit repel (343), of your further aid bereave me (344), sustain her fears (359), calm your terrors (363), a drunken pleasure quaffs (380), stifled with her bliss (385), betimes abroad (409) terrors met her (418), in tuneful concert strive (443),

The language of a people consists not less in the word order than in the words and word combinations. This poem is full of unusual sequence of words. It is scarcely reasonable to suppose that any peasant ever said anything like the following:

"His lips with joy they burr at you". (14)

"For what she ails they cannot guess." (26)

"To this did Johnny answer make

Both with his head and with his hand--" (62-3)

"He with his Pony now doth roam

The cliffs and peaks so high that are--" (318-19)

1. See page 9 above.

so we might point out numerous instances of unusual word order which, had it been normal, might have made good prose but changed for rhyme and meter has certainly not made poetry.

In this poem, however, there are some verses that have a certain poetical value. The fifth verse is not wholly without merit.-"He (the owl) lengthens out his lonely shout". Perfectly simple words are placed in perfectly natural order. How, then, does it differ from lines (115-16)

"Yet for his life, he cannot tell

What he has got upon his back?"

The line, "He lengthens out his lonely shout" is imaginative. Perhaps the alliteration gives a pleasing effect; perhaps the internal rhyme in out and shout, and, doubtless, the actual physical effort and time required to pronounce the word lengthen and the suggestion of the echo in the letters 'l' in lonely, all tend to strengthen the notion of the owl's long-drawn out and echoed cry. We might note, too, a verse like

"The streams with soft^test sound are flowing" (284),

True, the content is more or less familiar, yet the succession of the sibilants is smooth and soft and not unpleasing. The phrase "long, blue night" (287) is a splendid instance of imaginative combination- in fact, the only lines of the poem which are worth while are those containing some of the combination of words noted on page sixteen of this thesis.

So much for this oft discussed poem. The experiment failed. It failed, first, because of the subject matter and, second, because of the diction which, however, is not the

diction of Wordsworth's theory. The language we have found is not the language of the lower classes in words, word combinations, word order. The diction is at fault not because it is or is not the language used by any people, but because it is literal, matter-of-fact, bald, and not imaginative.

The Anecdote for Fathers has had its share of criticism— at times almost as severe as that of The Idiot Boy. It is not to be wondered at. In the first place, the subject matter while not repulsive is trivial and personal, not a subject which can "interest every human heart". The diction is neither conversational nor poetical. No father would talk to his small son in the words of this poem, and hope to be understood. Very few, indeed, of the words and phrases of this poem belong to even the middle classes. A few, selected at random, are typical ones: fond regrets to entertain (14), inward sadness had its charm (22), rustic dress (26), hill smooth and warm (41). While many of the phrases of the poem are imaginative, they violate what is fundamental in poetic diction, a harmony of word and content. We are told little Edward's "limbs are cast in beauty's mould" (3). When the little boy at last answers his "idle questioning" father, he does not simply say or speak, he unlocks his tongue (53). Is the expression not larger than the thing itself? Is it not the "gaudy and inane phraseology" Wordsworth told his readers they would be disappointed in not finding in The Lyrical Ballads? (1) When The Wanderer "unlocks his word hoard", it is in keeping with the story of his pent-up sorrow; when Wordsworth himself

1. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 1.

tells us that with the sonnet "Shakespeare unlocked his heart"-1 we feel the fitness of the expression, but we do not expect a five-year old "to unlock his tongue". Again we should say the experiment failed--but again we must admit that the failure is not due to the use of conversational language of lower and middle classes. Does it not seem probable that Wordsworth was led to believe that he was using the words of every-day conversation because he was writing about an every-day incident?

The Thorn is a splendid example of what happened when Wordsworth tried to write in accordance with his theory, while his imagination wandered where it would. The subject matter of the poem is of^a deserted mother's sorrow. We shall find, I think, that the proportion of lower and middle class words is greater in this poem than in either of the other two we have studied. The word order of these usual words, however, is often very unusual as in the following:

"You must take care and choose your time

The mountain when to cross." (58-9)

"This thorn you on your left espy". (28)

Consider also the seventh stanza (67-77):

"At all times of the day and night

This wretched woman thither goes;

And she is known to every star,

And every wind that blows;

And, there, beside the thorn, she sits.

When the blue daylight's in the skies,

And when the whirlwind's on the hill

1. Miscellaneous Sonnets Part II. Sonnet I.

Or frosty air is keen and still

And to herself she cries,

'Oh! misery! Oh! misery!

Oh woe is me! Oh misery!'" --1.

It does not take a Coleridge to see and feel the difference between this and the following lines (89-99):

"I cannot tell; I wish I could;

For the true reason no one knows:

But would you gladly view the spot,

The spot to which she goes;

The hillock like an infant's grave,

The pond-and thorn so old and gray,

Pass by her door--'tis seldom shut-

And if you see her in her hut-

Then to the spot away!

I never heard of such as dare

Approach the spot when she is there."

It does, perhaps, take a Coleridge to express this difference. He says--"But when I turn to the following stanza (the seventh) and compare this with the language of ordinary men, or with that which I can conceive at all likely to proceed in real life from such a narrator as is supposed in the note to this poem--compare it either in the succession of images or with the sentences, I am reminded of the sublime prayer and hymn of praise, which Milton, in opposition to an established liturgy presents as a fair expression of common extempore devotion, and such as we might expect to hear from every self-inspired minister of a l. The italics are mine.

conventicle! And I reflect with delight, how little a mere theory, though of his own workmanship, interferes with the processes of genuine imagination in a man of true poetic genius who possesses, as Mr. Wordsworth, if ever man did, most assuredly does possess 'the vision and the faculty divine'". -1

The "vision and the faculty divine" was lacking when Wordsworth's wrote Goody Blake and Harry Gill. It was a true story he said, --2, and evidently he thought his readers would be moved with pity for Goody whose sad case it was

"For very cold to go to bed;

And then for cold not sleep a wink--" (47-8)

But some way it does not distress grown-up readers and though we are never allowed to forget even for a moment that all the blankets and coats that the wicked Harry might wrap around him could keep his teeth from chattering, we never feel the cold that almost makes us shiver when we read even a single line like "The hare limped trembling through the frozen grass". It has been suggested that the poem makes no appeal to us because it centers around an impossible curse. The whole history of literature emphatically denies such a statement. Think what Coleridge made of the curse that came upon The Ancient Mariner, or Southey in The Curse of Kehama, or Byron in Manfred. Even Wordsworth's little song for the Wandering Jew makes us feel "the trouble of the wanderer" in our souls. Surely it is not the subject matter that is at fault here. Why may not a curse of cold be made as dreadful as a curse of sleeplessness or unceasing wandering? The fault lies rather in the literal, unimaginative, almost bald treatment, that Wordsworth adopted when,

conscious of his theory, he wished to describe the simplest of incidents. Instances of distorted word order are frequent, for example:

"By the same fire to boil their pottage,
Two poor old Dames as I have known,
Will often live in one small cottage;" (33-35)
"Then at her door the canty Dame
Would sit, as any linnet gay" (39-40)

Furthermore, there are expressions that are as far from being conversational as they are from being poetical. As a single instance consider "lusty splinter" (51). It would be interesting to examine the different mental images that the startling combination, "lusty splinter", would call up. The best lines in the poem, perhaps, are 29-32;

"Remote from sheltered village green,
On a hill's northern side she dwelt,
Where from sea-blasts the hawthorns lean,
And hoary dews are slow to melt--"

It is quite clear that these lines are not conversational. Our conclusion concerning the poem is that it is dull-not because of the subject matter but because of the language, which, however, is not conversational, though doubtless Wordsworth considered the diction as ordinary as the incident.

Simon Lee is as illustrative of Wordsworth's theory and practice as is Goody Blake and Harry Gill. The lines

"Oh Reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
Oh gentle reader--you would find

A Tale in everything". (65-8)

"I have heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning;
Alas! the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning". (93-96)

are surely not to be put in the same class with

"And he is lean and he is sick;
His body, dwindled and awry
Rests upon ankles swollen and thick;
His legs are thin and dry.
One prop he has, and only one
His wife, an aged woman
Lives with him, near the waterfall
Upon the village Common." (33-40)

In this stanza the adjectives, dwindled and awry, are bold descriptive words--and appropriately used, but none the less poetically used. As we read the word prop, we think of a cane and wonder at the poet's emphasis on the fact that Simon Lee has but one. That the old man's aged wife is his prop, is a startling revelation. Once more we have an everyday incident, but not described in everyday words.

The Last of the Flock, too, must be classed with the experiments that Wordsworth thought were written in accordance with his theory. The first four lines of the second stanza are--

"He saw me, and he turned aside,
As if he wished himself to hide:
And with his coat did then essay
To wipe those briny tears away." (11-14)

Go to K

If instead of these lines Wordsworth had written, "He turned away when he saw me, and tried to hide himself, and wiped his eyes on his coat sleeve", would he not have been truer to his own theory? In this poem, too, the words are so unusually placed that we cannot overlook them--

"And crazily and wearily

I went my work about; " (77-8)

would seem funny to anyone who was not, as Wordsworth was, absolutely lacking in a sense of humor. No conversational theory could admit such lines.

In The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman, Wordsworth's theory has been left behind. "Simple as can be" is the usual comment made upon it. Simple--yes, but anything but conversational. It is unnatural, if you please, in the sense that such words would never fall from the lips of a dying Indian woman, or be used by anyone, save a poet, who should tell her sad story. It is natural in that the words, simple, dignified as they are, make us know and share the grief--a grief, half suppressed, as the Stoical nature asserts itself and the woman says

"No pleasure now, and no desire

Then here contented will I lie!

Alone, I cannot fear to die." (18-20)

and, then, most passionate, when the mother-love rises above all other feelings and she yearns for the child given to another,

"A woman, who was not thy mother.

When from my arms my babe they took,

On me how strangely did he look!
 Through his whole body something ran,
 A most strange working did I see;
 - As if he strove to be a man
 That he might pull the sledge for me:
 And then he stretched his arms, how wild!
 Oh mercy! like a helpless child." (31-40)

Is that the conversational language of the lower and middle classes?

Since the poem called The Convict was never reprinted by Wordsworth, we need not discuss it here. Evidently its author thought it a failure. The theme is one that has been worn threadbare and, to me, there is an unpleasant jingle about the meter. However, not a single line contains conversational language, and the poem has images that far surpass many in The Idiot Boy.

In the two poems, Expostulation and Reply, and The Tables Turned, or rather in these two parts in one poem, for they are so closely connected that we never think of one without the other, Wordsworth clearly was trying to write in the language of the middle classes. The first stanza of each poem is more or less conversational, at least as far as words are concerned:

"Why, William, on that old gray stone
 Thus for the length of half a day,
 Why, William, sit you thus alone
 And dream your time away?"

"Up-Up! my friend, and quit your books,
 Or surely you'll grow double;
 Up-Up! my friend, and clear your looks,
 Why all this toil and trouble?"

If that style had been kept up throughout the poems we should have had more poems of the Simon Lee sort. But these poems were a plea for the great out-of-doors, and in pleading its cause, Wordsworth, the poet of nature, forgot all about the precepts of Wordsworth, the theorist. No dalesman has ever spoken, if indeed he has ever thought, of feeding "this mind of ours in a wise passiveness", or of "all this mighty sum of things forever speaking", of coming forth "into the light of things", and taking Nature as a teacher, or of the "single impulse of the vernal wood" that is full of meaning for the heart "that watches and receives".

The rest of the poems of the 1798 volume I believe Wordsworth did not mean to come under the head of experiments. Excepting the lines beginning "Her eyes are wild" and the poem, Animal Tranquillity and Decay, (surely not colloquial in its title) the poems are written from a purely personal standpoint. The 'I' of the poem is Wordsworth; he is using his own words to express his own thoughts and feelings--thoughts and feelings whose possession made him Wordsworth, and separated him from all his neighbors who lacked such thoughts and feelings and, therefore, needed not words to express them. The Lines (written while sailing in a boat at evening) embody a poet's hope; In Remembrance of Collins suggests the grief of the irresolute

and despondent Collins for his loved master, Thomson. The Cumberland dalesmen probably knew little or nothing of Collins or his grief--and if they had known the facts, they never would have said--

"Now let us, as we float along
For him suspend the dashing oar;
And pray that never child of song
May know that poet's sorrow more.
How calm! how still! the only sound,
The dripping of the oar suspended!
-The evening darkness gathers round

By virtue's holiest Powers attended." (17-24)

The Lines (left on the yew-tree seat), those addressed To My Sister, those beginning "It is the first mild day of spring", and, above all, those composed near Tintern Abbey, give us Wordsworth's interpretation of Nature. None of these are thoughts or incidents from the lower or middle classes of society.

Though I think that Tintern Abbey is not to be classed with the experiments, and, so strictly speaking, should not be considered in this connection, I am unwilling to leave The Lyrical Ballads without a word or two about the poem, because the simplicity of its language has been dwelt on so often, that some, impressed with the simplicity of Wordsworth's theory of diction, believe Tintern Abbey is the result of the theory. That Tintern Abbey is a great poem is almost universally acknowledged. Of all the critics that have eulogized it, perhaps Whipple is the most truly sympathetic. "Tintern Abbey", he says, "shows

spiritualization of nature--a mysterious sense of being pervading the whole universe of mind and matter--a feeling of vital connection between all the various forms and kinds of creation. It is the marriage of the soul of man with the visible universe and which constitutes the charm and depth of Wordsworth's 'philosophy divine'. The style becomes transfigured by the intense and brooding imagination which permeates it--the diction is still as simple as prose."--1. It is evident that Whipple knows the Tintern Abbey. He must have experienced that "blessed mood" in which the weary weight "of all this unintelligible world is lightened"; he must have harkened to the "still sad music of humanity"; he must have felt that "sense sublime", and it is because he has felt it, and knows that the poet has expressed what he felt that he says the diction is as simple as prose. Surely not the prose of conversation. In the entire poem, I find scarcely a sentence that is prose. One might say in speaking of the passage of time--"five years have passed", but would scarcely add "five summers with the length of five long winters". One might speak of feelings that have "no slight or trivial influence" on a man's life, but (1) I doubt if anyone but a poet would speak of the influence

"On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love." (32-35)

The feeling that is in Tintern Abbey is poetical, and the words that express it truly must be poetical whether they be in meter or not. Almost every line of the poem contains a picture

which we, though we had eyes, saw not, and a thought which our duller understandings had not grasped. Take the images at random-- the hedge-rows ^{are} "little lines of sportive wood run wild" (16); the sounding cataract haunts "like a passion" (76); joys are "aching" (84), raptures, "dizzy" (85); "the fever of the world hangs upon a beating heart" (53), and the memory is a "dwelling place for all sweet sounds and harmonies." (141-2). Do we use such images in our conversation?

Such, then, were the poems composing The Lyrical Ballads of 1798. The trivial ones, unfortunately, attracted most attention; review after review was written concerning The Idiot Boy -- Tintern Abbey was completely ignored. Since, however, some of the poems did embody some of Wordsworth's experimental principles, since some of the poems, as we have seen, were descriptive of incidents in the life of the middle or lower classes and did use, to a certain extent, the conversational language of those classes, many critics took it for granted that The Lyrical Ballads embodied all the principles of Wordsworth's theory. This, we think, is not the case. We have tried to show (I) that in some of the poems of this volume Wordsworth did not even attempt to put his theory into practice: (II) that Wordsworth did not, by any means, always use conversational language even in the poems that treated of everyday incidents. In these poems Wordsworth was led to believe that he was using conversational language because of the simplicity of his subject matter. The diction, in reality, while not always poetical, was seldom conversational; when it was conver-

sational as far as individual words were concerned, it often violated every written and unwritten law of conversational word order; moreover, Wordsworth's diction was not entirely free from the "gaudy and inane phraseology", he so seriously objected to; (III) that, in some of the simpler poems, the subject matter was at fault--being repulsive or trivial; (IV) that Wordsworth, the poet, often forgot Wordsworth, the theorist, and wrote, not as he would, but as he must. This last point is typical of any single poem, or of the collection as a whole. In the most dismal failure of the volume we noted instances of poetical worth. In Tintern Abbey we see the poet's genius at the height of its inspiration. So much for the 1798 poems.

PART III.

Mr. Raleigh has said, "A man should think twice or thrice before he writes a preface to his own work". --1. He is right. Had Wordsworth never written his prefaces, his great poems would now be holding their undisputed place among other great poems; his unworthy poems would have been forgotten, and our library of Wordsworthian criticism diminished by numbers of volumes. But the Advertisement of 1798 was written, and out of it grew the prefaces to the subsequent editions, particularly that of 1800. As we have noted, a perfect storm of ridicule and storm had greeted the first volume of The Lyrical Ballads, and the author to whom poetry was not a mere pastime, but a serious, even a sacred duty, --2, felt called upon to explain and justify the stand he had taken. This he attempted to do in the preface of 1800 and the following critical essays. That these prefaces did much to make him unpopular in his own day and that this unpopularity has prejudiced many minds of today against him, cannot be doubted. For those reasons we might wish them unwritten. For still more vital reasons we would not do without them. They throw light on almost every line of his poetry; they account in no small measure for the great differences within a single poem; and they make possible the belief that the author of Peter Bell and The Waggoner is also the author of Michael and The Ode on Immortality.

Though in the later prefaces and critical letters and essays, Wordsworth has repeated his ideas of 1798, that is not

1. Wordsworth, 86.

2. Prelude, Book IV, lines 332-338

all he has done. In attempting to explain his ideas he has not merely restated them. He has given us his theory of a poet, of poetry--its subject matter and diction, and his reasons for holding these particular theories. Some of these statements of the 1798 preface he has qualified--that of the subject matter of poetry; others--that of diction--he has enlarged, and made statements so general in their application that it is hard to feel they were to be confined to aspects of his own poetry. They are usually taken, and rightly, I believe, to be his theory of a poet, poetry, and poetic diction. Here, however, is the rock on which critics have been wrecked. Wordsworth certainly did profess in theory, and often in practice, a preference for and believe in a poetry of the people. That, however, does not mean that Wordsworth could not and did not recognize and appreciate other kinds of poetry. Indeed his references in the preface to poets who did not deal with the "common sights of Mother Earth", Book V of the Prelude--a glowing tribute to great poets of the past, his numerous expressions of gratitude in his poems to Spenser, Milton, and Shakespeare, and, what is more, his marked dependence on these poets prove beyond doubt that Wordsworth recognized different kinds of poetry and hence the different theories on which the different kinds are written.

That Wordsworth did not practice during his long life much that he professed in the theory of 1800 is doubtless true. But again I believe that he meant what he said--that is, that he wished to describe simple incidents in the language used in conversation by people of the lower and middle classes. He has

said this again and again. The Prelude composed between 1799 and 1805 is full of it. In Book XIII, beginning with line 221, we have a poetical summary of Wordsworth's theory of poetical subjects and their treatment:

"Here, calling up to mind what then I saw,
 A youthful traveller, and see daily now
 In the familiar circuit of my home,.
 Here might I pause, and bend in reverence
 To Nature and the power of human minds.
 To men as they are men within themselves.
 How oft high service is performed within,
 When all the external man is rude in show,-
 Not like a temple rich with pomp and gold,
 But a mere mountain chapel, that protects
 Its simple worshippers from sun and shower.
Of these, said I, shall be my song; of these
 If future years mature me for the task,
 Will I record the praises, making verse
Deal boldly with substantial things; in truth
 And sanctity of passion, speak of these,
 That justice may be done, obeisance paid
 Where it is due: thus haply shall I teach,
 Inspire; through unadulterated ears
 Pour rapture, tenderness, and hope, --my theme
No other than the very heart of man,
 As found among the best of those who live--
 Not unexalted by religious faith,

Nor uninformed by books, good books, though few--
In Nature's presence." --1.

For further references in this same poem, see Book I, 401-15; Book II, 175-204; Book IV, 208-234; Book VI, 105-116; Book VII, 740 ff.; in The Excursion, the same opinion is given expression in Book I, 342-6; Book IV, 365-72; Book V, 114-122. The Prologue to Peter Bell was written to make clear this point. We find it also in Simon Lee, 65-9; in A Poet's Epitaph, in The Ode on Immortality, 205-7, and, in fact, it is hard not to find this opinion expressed or implied in almost every poem Wordsworth wrote. It would seem quite clear, then, that Wordsworth often wrote with his eye not on his object but on his theory.

For a more complete understanding of Wordsworth's theory of diction as set forth in the later prefaces, some knowledge, at least, of his theory of a poet and poetry is necessary, since the one grew out of the other two and since they are all so closely interwoven, that it is practically impossible to say where one begins and the other ends. We have already noted that Wordsworth's theories were, in part, direct results of eighteenth century influence. --2. It requires no student of Wordsworth, however, to discover that the theories also grew out of the man himself. They are just such theories as we should expect from one of Wordsworth's character who lived the sort of life he lived, a life of "plain living and high thinking", a life of earnest contemplation which does not mean absolute listlessness or inaction, spent, for the most part, among
1. The italics are mine.
2. page 6 and 7 above.

the simple country folk in his beloved Cumberland mountains and dales, where, even as a child, he

"- - - - -held unconscious intercourse with beauty
Old as creation, drinking in a pure
Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths
Of curling mists, or from the level plain
Of waters, colored by impending clouds." --1.

This delicate sensitiveness to beauty is his first gift as a poet whom he thus describes--"A poet is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually compelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely other men are accustomed to feel in themselves;--whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts

and feelings which by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind arise in him without immediate external excitement." --1. This description of a poet Wordsworth has put in verse, in many of his poems, in many parts of the *Prelude*, *The Excursion*, and poem XLIII of the series dedicated to National Independence and Liberty.

To this theory of a poet, at least, (and it does not differ materially from the vast majority of theories), critics cannot say Wordsworth said one thing and lived another. With but one exception, the poet has described himself. I do not believe that he had a "greater knowledge of human nature than other men". Indeed, his knowledge of man was limited and consequently, for him, the writing of certain kinds of poetry was barred. It is seldom that his strictly narrative poems are of great value, and his one drama, *The Borderers*, the realm where knowledge of human nature must reign supreme is absolutely lifeless and wholly uninteresting, save as a study of a phase of his poetic development. Upon this very lack of understanding of human nature, moreover, I believe one of his most serious errors in the theory of poetry is founded--namely, the choice of subjects that can interest the human heart. Excepting, then, a knowledge of human nature, the other characteristics of a poet's ^{mind} described by Wordsworth, are Wordsworth's own. We have already noted his delicate sensibility; *Tintern Abbey* is one continuous ecstasy of "delight in his own passions and volitions", and his recognition of them in the "goings-on of the universe" about him. In it, too, he shows that he is strongly affected by

1. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 23.

absent things, as if they were present--a feeling which is "the bliss of solitude". Surely it was his tenderness that prompted him to write of Betty Foy--perhaps it is a lack of tenderness in us that makes the poem so objectionable. How many of us should have seen the tragedy in poor Susan's heart, as she stood at the corner of Wood street, and dreamed while she listened to the song of a caged thrush?

"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 colors have all passed away from her eyes!"
(13-16)

Tenderness and sympathetic insight are too apparent for comment.

Out of this theory of a poet, or rather side by side with it, grew the theory of poetry. For this we are to look not in any one place, but in all the prefaces and in all the poems--even in Peter Bell. We have already noted one requisite of poetry--its universality of appeal, hinted at in the opening sentence of the Advertisement of 1798, when Wordsworth wrote, "The materials of poetry are to be found in every subject which can interest the human heart." In the 1800 Preface Wordsworth stresses this point. He shows clearly that whatever he may have done in practice, in theory, at least, he recognizes the difference between a human heart and the human heart. He speaks of the universality of poetry, its truth being general, and the fact that it was written for Man. That the poet often wrote on subjects of interest to his neighborhood, his household, or

himself only, a very cursory glance at the titles of his poems would make evident. Note as an instance The Idiot Boy, the particular interest of which Wordsworth himself pointed out, when he wrote to a letter to Wilson, "The boy whom I had in my mind was by no means disgusting in his appearance, quite the contrary; and I have known several with imperfect faculties, who are handsome in their persons and features. There is one at present, within a mile of my own home, remarkably so--"

--1. For further examples of personal or local interest, recall Anecdote for Fathers, Poems on the Naming of Places, To the Spade of a Friend, and page after page of purely personal information in the Prelude and The Excursion. Someone has said that all of these instances would have furnished interesting subject matter for the pages of a diary; and so they would. Wordsworth, however, was not unconscious of this failing, for he says, "I am sensible that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently giving to things a false importance, I may have sometimes written upon unworthy subjects." --2. Wordsworth and the world at large would not agree, I think, on the meaning of the word unworthy in this connection. Both the letter to Wilson, written in 1800, and that to Lady Beaumont, --3, written in 1807, show clearly that Wordsworth considered nothing unworthy of a place in poetry that could teach, and he believed

1. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 9-10.
2. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 36
3. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 3, 47.

that everything that could teach ought to be of interest to the human heart. This point takes us back again to Wordsworth's choice of subjects, and his lack of knowledge of human nature that sometimes made his choice an unwise one.

Should poetry teach? The question has always called forth endless discussion. Many critics have found fault with Wordsworth's position in regard to this point. Our poet's answer to the question is very definite. He tells us "All poetry must teach--Every great poet is a teacher--I wish to be considered as a teacher or as nothing." Morley, one of Wordsworth's sympathetic admirers, doubts whether the general proposition--"All poetry must teach"--be at all true, and whether it is any more the essential business of the poet to be a teacher than it is the business of a Mozart.--1. But is not Morley's idea of teaching a narrow one? He says, in speaking of artists generally, they do not teach, but "attune the soul to high states of feeling--the direct lesson is as nought."--2 Attuning the soul to higher states of feeling--that is surely what Wordsworth meant by teaching, when he tells us his mission was "to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to bring the young of every age, to see, to think, and feel, and therefore become more actively and sincerely virtuous," --3, and when he wrote Tintern Abbey, The Green Linnet, or The Sonnet from Westminster Bridge.

The real question concerning poetry and teaching is not, "Should poetry teach?" but rather, "How should poetry teach?"
 1, 2, Studies in Literature, 35-6.
 3. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 48.

Should it teach directly, having a definite purpose or even a specific moral, or indirectly by making us recognize its purposesiveness? The most effective teaching is not done in school-book fashion. A beautiful poem needs no placard any more than a beautiful life does. Its very existence is reason for its own being--it is its own lesson. It is here that Wordsworth often failed. Because he did not fully know the human mind, he did not realize that "men must be taught as if you taught them not". He hesitated to send a poem on its mission unlabeled lest it miss its destination, the human heart, and so he marred the beauty of many a poem by tacking on a moral. In the lesser poems this moral is the rule rather than the exception. The last stanza of Peter Bell is a bit of missionary work:

"And Peter Bell, who, till that night
Had been the wildest of his clan,
Forsook his crimes, renounced his folly
And, after ten months' melancholy
Became a good and honest man."

In Hart-Leap Well, Wordsworth is not content to suggest a moral--he needs must drive it home:

"One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
Taught both by what she shows, and what conceals;
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels." (177-80)

Even in that exquisite little poem To the Skylark, the concluding lines show Wordsworth primarily a teacher:

"Type of the wise who soar, but never roam;

True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!"

We cannot agree with those who bring the charge of inconsistency against Wordsworth for making the two statements, "All great poetry must teach" and "The end of poetry is to produce excitement in coexistence with an overbalance of pleasure."--1. Far from believing that pleasure and teaching, or the end of teaching--knowledge of truth--are opposed, Wordsworth takes particular care to show that they are one. I refer to his discussion of Science and Poetry --2 and the definition of poetry as "the impassioned expression in the face of science". In the Literaria Biographia, Coleridge makes the same point, when he shows that "truth, moral or intellectual, ought to be the end of pleasure". --3.

Finally, in importance it might well be first, Wordsworth tells us that poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.--4. That definition deserves our attention, for every word carries with it its meaning. Poetry is feeling, not merely knowing or perceiving, but feeling--so deep and so powerful that it cannot be restrained, cannot be kept within the soul that first feels it, but breaks its boundaries and overflows into the universe--not because the poet wills to share his feeling, but because he must. All great poets have

1. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 32.
2. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 25-29.
3. Literaria Biographia, 148.
4. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 15.

recognized this element in their poetry. In The Prelude (Book I, 135-6) the poet's mind is said to have "goadings-on that drive her". When Wordsworth's feelings were so powerful that "poetic numbers came spontaneously"--1, no one objects to the poems he wrote or fails to share the feeling that prompted the poem. This result can be attained only when the poet translates his feelings into mental images, which, in turn, re-translated by the reader's mind, will give back the feeling of the original. Here again we see that it is imagination that is the soul of poetry. --2. Consider for a moment The Green Linnet. I cannot imagine any rainy day so gloomy that it could not be cheated of some of its sadness by reading that poem. Wordsworth does not say: "Spring is a vital and joyous season; it makes me happy, and should make you happy too." He breaks down this abstract and general concept into a number of appropriate concrete and particular images. We sit with the poet beneath the orchard trees, the fragrant snow-white petals fall down upon us as we watch the ever changing shadows, are conscious of all the "birds and butterflies and flowers", and our thoughts fly hither and thither with that musical bit of life, the Green Linnet, that is the "presiding spirit of the May" and, for a time at least, of our hearts as well. Was not Wordsworth's feeling in this instance powerful, and has he not made us share it?

Though Wordsworth knew and spoke the truth about the

1. Prelude, Book I, 54.

2. See page 10 above.

spontaneity of poetry and the reproduction of feeling, he often failed to reproduce the feeling, and he very often wrote not because he must, but because he willed. In Peter Bell the Third Shelley tells us very clearly what feeling Peter Bell the First caused in his mind and, doubtless, in many others too. I have often thought that Wordsworth expected The Waggoner to arouse the same feeling as Tam O'Shanter but it fails to do so, in spite of the fact that the general setting of the two poems is not unlike. Many of Wordsworth's poems, moreover, are stamped with the impress of his will. We have a whole cycle of Ecclesiastical Sonnets, some few of them truly inspired, but the cycle as a whole is uninteresting because there is no getting rid of the idea that Wordsworth had set himself the task; church history had better be told in prose. We have also the sonnets concerning punishment by death. Convincing though they be, poetry is not the vehicle of argument. We have page^s of The Prelude and The Excursion that surely serves no other purpose than that of filling up gaps between the inspired parts of the same poems. Even the most enthusiastic Wordsworthian must admit, and with regret, that Wordsworth did not comply with that "inexorable rule in the Muses' court, that compels a bard to report only his supreme moments", and the rule is "Either inspiration or silence".

With a clear understanding of what Wordsworth meant by a poet and by poetry, we are better able to judge what he said and what he meant concerning the choice of subjects and the choice of words--two points so closely connected that they

cannot well be separated either in thought or treatment. Our poet proposed to "choose incidents and situations from common life". --1. We have noted before the reason for this choice.--2 It lies in Wordsworth's deep love for truth, his desire, which was not always carried out, "to write with his eye on his object," --3, and "to keep his reader in the company of flesh and blood." --4. Poetry, he thought, was to be sought in Nature and Man--not in men disguised by idle fashion, social vanities, and intellectual pretensions, and to get away from this creature of a complex social life, Wordsworth turned to his countrymen and their simple lives.

Following is a complete list of all of Wordsworth's poems that deal with incidents chosen from common life; and from this list I shall select some typical poems for the study of the diction.

Guilt and Sorrow.

Foresight.

Address to a Child.

The Mother's Return.

Alice Fell.

Lucy Gray.

We are Seven.

Idle Shepherd Boys.

Anecdote for Fathers.

1. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 13.
2. See page 33-4 above.
3. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 18
4. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 18.

Rural Architecture.

The Pet Lamb.

The Brothers.

The Last of the Flock.

Repentance.

The Affliction of Margaret.

The Cottager to her Infant.

The Sailor's Mother.

The Childless Father.

The Emigrant Mother.

The Idiot Boy.

Michael.

Loving and Liking.

Her Eyes are Wild.

The Kitten and the Falling Leaves.

The Waggoner.

The Reverie of Poor Susan.

The Star-Gazers.

The Power of Music.

Beggars.

Ruth.

Resolution and Independence.

The Thorn.

The Wishing Gate.

Peter Bell.

Ellen Irwin.

Stepping Westward.

The Solitary Reaper.
 The Matron of Jedborough.
 The Blind Highland Boy.
 The Italian Itinerant.
 The Three Cottage Girls.
 The Highland Brooch.
 The White Doe of Rylestone.
 Expostulation and Reply.
 The Tables Turned.
 Matthew.
 The Spade of a Friend.
 The Old Cumberland Beggar.
 The Two Thieves.
 Andrew Jones.
 Simon Lee.
 The Fountain.
 Fidelity.
 The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale.
 The Convict.
 George and Sarah Green.

To this list we may add three or four of the Miscellaneous Sonnets, perhaps fourteen of the Ecclesiastical Cycle, and almost all of the narrative portions of The Prelude and The Excursion.

Perhaps Wordsworth would have us include in this list of poems dealing with incidents and situations of common life, all the Nature poems--as To the Daisy or The Skylark.

Such poems, I think, do not properly belong to this classification, for though a peasant sees a daisy or a skylark, he is not impressed with the beauty or simplicity of the flower, nor moved by the glorious flight and exultant song of the bird. Were we to include all the poems of Nature in this list, on the argument that a peasant lives close to Nature, we might as well include poems of reflection like The Ode to Duty, because the peasant undoubtedly has a duty, and in a way, defined or vague, understands the fact. The long list of subjects given above, written on from 1798 to 1849, indicates that Wordsworth was true to part of his theory, the choice of subjects, at least.

As far as Wordsworth was guided in his choice of subjects by his hatred of shams, he is to be commended, not condemned. We, too, feel that we should prize

"The ancient rural character, composed
Of simple manners, feelings unsuppressed
And undisguised, and strong and serious thought--"-1.

Wordsworth, however, went further, and gave to these rural characters, attributes and qualities, which unless this was a most unusual peasantry, they never dreamed of. In the 1800 Preface, he says: "Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can maintain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and con-

sequently may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and from the necessary character of rural occupations are more easily comprehended and more durable; and lastly because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of Nature."--1.

A beautiful theory--but it is not true. Such rustic communities, I fear, exist only in Arcadia. "Rustic and humble life"--what ideas do those words bring to the average person? Do they bring to our minds the beauties of Nature in her various moods? Do we think of the "far-travelled clouds", the rainbow "that comes and goes", "the meadows, groves, and streams--apparelled in celestial light", or the "silence that is in the starry sky, the sleep that is among the lonely hills"? If we did, we might claim fellowship with Burns. "Rustic and humble life" means to us, as it means to most of those who live it, a life of drudgery--a life, in which, as the poet himself has put it, the peasants

"Pace to and fro from morn till even-tide,

The narrow avenue of daily toil

For daily bread."--2

Under such conditions would not Nature be but "as pictures to the blind and music to the deaf"? Under such conditions could the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in

1. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 14
2. The Excursion, Book V, 599-601.

which to attain their maturity?

"These incidents or situations from common life were to be related or described throughout as far as was possible, in a selection of language, really used by men, and at the same time were to have a certain coloring of the imagination thrown over them."--1. Many critics have troubled themselves, and others, by trying to explain what Wordsworth meant by the "real language of men". It seems clear enough that he meant what he said time and time again, in both his prefaces and his poems, the words used by ordinary men in their ordinary conversation. Coleridge would have us believe that Wordsworth meant the "lingua communis", language equally good both in prose and poetry.--2. Of course such a "neutral style" exists, in fact, there are very few words that could not be used both in poetry and in prose, --3, but as we have tried to show, it is not words, but word combinations that are or are not poetical.--4. We have found, and shall find that Wordsworth's images are significant. By his own confession a poet differs from other men, --5, will it not follow then, that a poet's images differ too?

At first thought, this part of the theory, that wishes to describe common situations in common words, seems perfectly logical. We all speak glibly enough of the need of the "eter-

1. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 13-14.
2. Literaria Biographia, Chapters XIX, XX.
3. See page 7 above.
4. See page 9 above.
5. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 23.

nal fitness of things", and feel that everyday incidents should be related in everyday words. Is that really what we mean? We have found that it is not.--1. In The Complain of the Forsaken Indian Woman, the language is by no means that of everyday life and yet we feel that it is natural.--2. In parts of The Idiot Boy, The Thorn, and The Last of the Flock, the language was conversational and we said it was unpoetical, because it was unimaginative.

In theory, Wordsworth fully realized the importance of the imagination, for he says--"to throw over them (the common incidents) a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect".--3 When Wordsworth did this, when he threw over his common incidents the light of his imagination--no matter how simple the words--no one found fault. What he does not seem to have realized^d was that it is practically impossible to be imaginative and conversational, in any rustic sense, at the same time. As a rule, we describe things literally and without adornment. Mr. Raleigh has pointed out that Wordsworth more often failed in his imagination than in his diction--4, but it seems to be true that for purposes of poetic use imagination and diction are one. Let us see, by a study of some of the poems themselves, if this be not true.

1. See page 9 above.
2. See page 24 above.
3. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 14
4. Wordsworth, 97.

PART IV.

From the list of poems (page 45-6-7 above), I have selected twelve for a more or less detailed study of the diction. These twelve, I believe, are typical of Wordsworth's work as a whole, and are among the best known, and often his best poems. A second reason for this particular selection was the fact that this list includes poems written and published from 1798 to 1845, and hence will afford a comparison of Wordsworth's diction at different periods of his poetical career. Some have been selected for purposes of comparison, as Alice Fell and Lucy Gray, The Affliction of Margaret and The Sailor's Mother. In addition to the twelve, for the sake of those who insist that poems of Nature and Reflection should come under the title of "common and rustic incidents", I shall also examine The Lines to a Daisy, To a Skylark, and The Ode to Duty.

The incident related in Alice Fell happened to a Mr. Graham, who urged the poet to put it into verse for "humanity's sake". What has Wordsworth done with the incident? He has kept it ordinary by keeping it literal. The poem, perhaps, does not deserve all the ridicule it received at the hands of the early critics, but Humanity would not have lost much, if indeed it would have lost anything, had Wordsworth permanently--instead of temporarily--excluded it from his poetical works. "That is the sort of thing Wordsworth wrote when he followed his theory", we are told. It would be truer to say, "That is the sort of thing Wordsworth wrote when he thought he was following his theory". It is true that every stanza contains, perhaps, a large

majority of words that middle class people use in ordinary conversation, but every stanza also contains some words not of this conversational order, such as --career (1), at length (9), blast (15), piteous (18), bitterly (22), entangled (26), distress (42), tattered (48), pacified (52), and the word combinations, fierce career (1), ear was smitten (3), are by no means ordinary. Would anyone, startled by an unusual cry, ask, "Whence comes this piteous moan"? As a whole, the poem is a literal account of what has happened; the only parts of it that are worth while, are the verses that are not literal, but imaginative. "Fierce career" is not literal--neither is it sensible. It is too large an expression; it suggests Indians on a war-path, wild animals in a stampede, or perhaps waves in a storm, not a post-boy driving a chaise, drive he ever so rapidly. In the same way, the phrase "joint pains" (31), is at fault. For some images of merit, consider "clouds had drowned the moon" (2), "ear was smitten" (4), and "the thought would choke her heart" (45).

Wordsworth has placed the poem under the title of "Poems referring to the Period of Childhood." It would have been well had Wordsworth put a number of his poems under a title of "Poems for Children", and included Alice Fell under this classification. Children do like the poem, and it is right that they should appreciate it somewhere between the Mother Goose stage and the Longfellow period. But real appreciation of poetry is a growing appreciation; and that is not the highest form of poetry which contains nothing for grown-up children.

With Alice Fell it is interesting to ~~compare~~ Lucy Gray. Both poems are founded on pathetic incidents in the lives of little girls. Alice Fell is the literal transcription of what happened to one; Lucy Gray is the idealized occurrence of an event in the life of the other. A child would doubtless prefer Alice Fell; to him, the story is the thing and this story would be particularly pleasing because of the "happy-ever-after" ending. In Lucy Gray, the poet does not intend us to think of the story at all, and purposely departed from its truth. Had the poem told us that Lucy's body was found in the canal, the impression left upon us would have been one of pity and horror. Wordsworth's impression was not desolation, but solitude, or, as Hutton puts it, "His purpose was to paint a perfectly lovely flower, snapped for its very purity in its earliest bud, that it might remain an image of solitary beauty forever."--1. Such an idea is imaginative, and must be clothed in imaginative words. These words may be simple, and indeed in this poem, they are simple as those in Alice Fell, but they are handled differently. Wordsworth strikes the keynote of loneliness in the first stanza--Lucy is "a solitary child"; she has no mates or comrades; she dwells on a "wild moor", that is only reached by crossing "a wild". The poet purposely wrote of the fawn and hare, because of the timidity of those animals; Lucy herself is compared to the mountain-roe, and so from stanza to stanza images of loneliness are given. An occasional line

1. Literary Essays, 106.

makes us feel that Wordsworth was not altogether unconscious of his theory of diction when he wrote this poem, and, as a result, we have verses like "You to the town must go" (14), but these verses are the exception, and do little to keep us from an appreciation of the spiritualized meaning of the lot of Lucy Gray. So well, by means of his images, has Wordsworth made us share his feeling of solitude, so deeply imbued are we with the idea, that we are ready to believe with the village folk, that Lucy is still a living child, wandering about the lonesome vales, singing the melancholy songs that "whistles in the wind".

A year or two later than Alice Fell and Lucy Gray, Wordsworth wrote Stepping Westward, an imaginative poem based on the merest incident. No story here, with beginning, middle, and end to hold our attention. "What, are you stepping Westward?"-only five words asked by a soft-voiced woman as she passed Wordsworth and his sister on one of their walks. But the simple question is enough for a poetic imagination. The question is no longer a friendly greeting, it is the prophetic question of the soul speaking to the self; the long gloomy road that lay behind the travellers is no longer a mere road, but the road of life; the glowing sky, that leads us on, is the "bright region of Eternity". And yet over the entire poem, is the charm of that human voice, bringing with it a thought of fellowship that makes the gloomy road less gloomy and the "bright region of Eternity" brighter. These ideas could

not be conveyed in conversational words, and not a single line of the poem is conversational. Note just a few of the images, as in "guests of Chance" (5), "a sky to lead me on" (8), "'twas a sound of something without place or bound"(14), "spiritual right" (15), and the last four lines of the poem:

"The echo of the voice enwrought
Of human sweetness with the thought
Of travelling through the world that lay
Before me in my endless way."--(23-6).

"Passed a female who was reaping alone; she sung in Erse as she bended over her sickle; the sweetest human voice I ever heard; her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious, long after they were heard no more"--such were the words in Thomas Wilkinson's Tour of Scotland, that are responsible for what many people unhesitatingly call Wordsworth's masterpiece, The Solitary Reaper. It is impossible to read the poem, and think it was written consciously according to any theory. The numbers flow as unconsciously as the song of the Reaper. Here we have a favorite theme--somebody, something is solitary, almost melancholy. Wordsworth always sang his best in minor keys. As in Stepping Westward, there is a blending of the "human with the visionary". The Solitary Reaper is the personification of the spirit of the lonesome vale.

✓ The incident is from low and rustic life. What of the words? The poem contains one hundred and eighty-three words of which only one hundred and ten are notional. Of these notional words, as words, (if it be possible to separate word

from content), we have at least twenty, that I believe are not a part of everyday conversation, as -- behold (1), yon (2), solitary (2), lass (2), melancholy (6), strain (6), vale (7), profound (7), chaunt (9), haunt(11), thrilling (13), plaintive (18), numbers (18), lay (21), familiar (22), theme (25), mounted (30). As we have said so often, a word is poetical in its relation to other words. The word "single" is not unusual; any peasant might use it a number of times each day, but to speak of a person as "single in the field" is unusual. Each word in the last line of the first stanza is ordinary. What of their combination--"A vale profound is over-flowing with the sound"? At the end of the first stanza, the poet's art has put the reader in harmony with the idea of the poem. We feel its quiet, its solitude, its sadness. We can trace this feeling to the words--single, solitary, by herself, gently, alone, melancholy, profound, each word bringing with it a host of associations, limited only by the reader's experience.

The second stanza consists of two main images, foreign, I think, to a peasant mind. First a nightingale's song is heard with joy by wayworn travellers in an Arabian desert. It is interesting to note the poet's art--conscious or unconscious. It is the nightingale, he chooses, the bird of the "pensive note" and "shady wood"; his travellers are weary, and their journey across Arabian sands--a place, the very personification of solitude. For a moment we feel that the next image is going to be out of harmony with the feeling aroused. We find words like "thrilling", "cuckoo-bird", "springtime", all suggestive of

life, of activity, of happiness. But the cuckoo-bird is not the one that sings in our fields and meadows, it is a bird far away; its voice is not heard among other happy sounds, but breaks in upon "the silence of the seas".

What wonder, then, the poet questions, "Will no one tell me what she sings?". This is, perhaps, the most rustic line in the poem, and yet the very form of the question is unusual. In it we find a suggestion of longing, of indefiniteness, and this indefiniteness is elaborated in the following images--plaintive, unhappy, far-off things, battles long ago, natural sorrow, loss or pain--with their sombre associations. Who can read the poem and not listen "motionless and still"? If we take from the one hundred and ten ordinary words, those used to make up unordinary images, we have left but ten. Is Wordsworth true to his theory of diction here?

We are Seven is perhaps the best known of all of Wordsworth's poems. Most people first hear the poet's name in connection with this poem. The average child of nine years has not only heard it but can repeat verses from it. Most of us recall our first acquaintance with We are Seven, when we understood the actual story, and, in a way, most of the words. We were interested in the little girl and the rather inquisitive old gentleman who questioned her, and had a feeling of superiority towards the child who did not know the difference between alive and dead people. Years later, the poem began to take on a different meaning, and we began to understand, though vaguely, the child's insistent "We are seven". Later we heard

the poem praised for its simplicity; its charm was said to consist in its truthfulness to Nature, and the poem was always spoken of as typical of Wordsworth's theory of simple thoughts in simple words. The charm of the poem does lie in its simplicity, but its language is no more an illustration of Wordsworth's theory of diction than is the language of The Ode on Immortality. That does not mean that the diction of the two poems is identical. The same diction could not appropriately be used in such different aspects even of the same subject. We are Seven is a concrete instance of an idea of immortality; the Ode is an abstract conception. The one is as true as the other. The Ode is the greater poem, but there are thousands of people who could never understand the Ode, who do understand We are Seven.

"I met a little cottage girl

She was eight years old, she said;" (5-6).

If these words were not written in verse form no one would take them for poetry. But the beginning of the next stanza is different:

"She had a rustic, woodland air,

And she was wildly clad." (9-10)

These words are poetical--"A rustic, woodland air" is an image that is beyond a child's interpretation. In spite of its indefiniteness, the image brings ideas of simplicity, innocence, and out-of-doors. "Wildly clad" is even more indefinite. A little further on in the poem we find, "Her beauty made me

glad." (12). This is a poetical thought, a truly Wordsworthian one, and poetically expressed. Beauty does not make hosts of people glad; there are thousands who never see a sunset.

When we examine the words of the little girl herself, we find that her language is not that of a seven-year old. She uses such expressions as - seven in all (15), dwell (19), gone to sea (20), churchyard cottage (23), dwell near them (24), after sunset (45), when it is light and fair (46), she moaning lay (50), God released her of her pain (51), John was forced to go (59). Do such expressions make the poem unnatural? Yes, and no. Yes-if we mean to imply that the man actually questioned and the child actually answered in the words of the poem. No, for if the words bring to us the poet's idea, they are natural in a much broader sense than if they were the words used in actual conversation--and which many people would pronounce "true to life". No soldier on the guard ever spoke as did Bernardo in Hamlet when he described to his companions the appearance of the ghost, yet no one accuses Shakespeare of being unnatural and no one but feels the truth of Bernardo's description. We are Seven, it is true, does contain a number of lines that are literally "true to life" as --eat my supper there (48), sing a song to them (44), run and slide (58), when the grass was dry (54). Are these the best lines of the poem?

We are Seven is one of the poems referring to Period of Childhood that has a message for grown-up children as well.

Not so with the little poem of four stanzas called Foresight. In it Sister Anne is told not to pull the strawberry blossoms for, if left on the stem, spring will change them into berries. How does our realistic poet do it? He tells Anne it is a "work of waste and ruin" (1). Most Annes would not understand that, though the next line, "Do as Charles and I are doing" would be quite clear to them. That is, however, the only verse that is actually conversational. The other verses are simple, but more or less poetical. Consider, for instance, "Of the lofty daffodil, make your bed or make your bower" (14-15), violets, a barren kind (19), lurking berries (29), spring is fled (27), leafy bower (31). The verses not only contain images, but they have a number of words that we think of as poetical in themselves, as - flowerets (22), pluck (23), another (for next) (23), blowing (24), hither (27), is fled (27), bower (31). Foresight is a nice little poem, with a nice little moral, for nice little children.

The grief of parents was a theme of which Wordsworth never tired, and he has treated it again and again. In The Childless Father, there is something strikingly pathetic. It entwines the idea of old Timothy's sorrow with the joy of a village, and the reserve of Timothy's grief only heightens the pathos of the poem. The language is simple, with a simplicity not forced, but quite in keeping with the simple theme. It is, moreover, regular in its simplicity. In so many of the so-called simple poems of Wordsworth, we find a line or two of literal prose, followed by a line of great poetical value.

In The Childless Father there is little of that--perhaps the phrase "a liesurely motion" (17), is both unnatural and unpoetical in this connection. The lines

"And Skiddaw is glad with the cry of the hounds." (4)

"Now fast up the dell came the noise and the fray,

The horse, and the horn, and the hark, hark, away!"
(13-14)

bring, perhaps, the most vivid pictures, but the last line of the poem seems to me the best: "And he went to the chase with a tear on his cheek". Simple words, simple order, simple combination, and yet in perfect harmony with the simple theme. In other places it would have been doubtless prosaic, and yet where it stands it is just what it should be. In the single line, Wordsworth gives us the entire poem.

In The Sailor's Mother, we have the same theme but not the same regularity of treatment. The form is that of a dialogue--the form that would lend itself most naturally and most easily to Wordsworth's conversational theory. But the poet makes little use of his theory. The "I" of the poem says things as commonplace as --a woman on the road I met (3), and things as poetical as --majestic in her person (4), like a Roman matron (5), the ancient spirit is not dead (7), old times are breathing there (8), a dignity so fair (10), country bred such strength (10), and then, waking from his "lofty thoughts ", he addresses the woman he meets (who, by the way, was begging) in the very usual words:

"What is it, said I, that you bear

Beneath the covert of your cloak

Protected from this cold, damp air?"(14-16)

The poor mother, however, has no trouble in understanding this question for she has vocabulary enough at her command to use such expressions as --cast away (22), weary miles (23) aught (24), remain (24), boatings that hung upon his mind (3), pipe its song in safety (33), bear (36), and delight (36). If such were the real words of the mother, she was a most unusual beggar.

In the little town of Penrith, lived a widow, who for seven years had had no tidings of her son, an only child. Mrs. Wordsworth, the poet's sister, and the poet himself knew the afflicted mother, and had heard her question strangers, who chanced to pass her tiny shop--hoping against hope that some one will bring her news of her son. Once more we have the theme of parental sorrow, found in both The Childless Father and The Sailor's Mother, but different from these in that sorrow for the dead, is not to be compared with that combination of sorrow, fear, hope, and dread for one long absent and unheard of.

Has the poet told us in peasant language what Margaret said to strangers, and they to her? Not at all. The poet did not concern himself with Margaret's words; his business was with her grief. He has shown us the sufferer's heart, and made us share the feelings there. The poem contains not a single line, realistic according to theory, and only two lines that seems at all unnatural:

"He was among the prime in worth

An object beauteous to behold." (15-16)

Can we read the second stanza and not feel the "darkness" of Margaret's way? Do we need a better expression of her sorrow than

"I've wet my path with tears like dew

Weeping for him when no one knew" (34-5)?

The mother's distracted and over-wrought nervous condition could scarcely have been better suggested than in

"I dread the rustling of the grass;

The very shadow of the clouds

Have power to shake me as they pass;" (67-7.

Stanza seven is full of creative imagination--a dungeon hears thee grown (50), inheritest the lion's den (53), and

"Or has been summoned to the deep,

Thou, thou and all thy mates, to keep

An incommunicable sleep." (54-6)

The language of this poem is not conversational, but it is that "language which is at once real and ideal, at once the speech of the beings among whom we are moving here, and of the beings of that world, which exists only in the imagination of the poet." --1.

For the last two poems of my list, I have selected Peter Bell and Migchel. It is something of a shock to speak of the two poems in the same breath, and yet, just as many critics

1. Studies in Shakespeare, (195)

will tell us Michael is Wordsworth's theory put in practice, as will tell us Peter Bell is written according to the theory of the prefaces. It must be a very flexible theory that can cover both these poems. As a matter of fact, neither poem is typical of all the theory, though both show traces of it, and both are typical of Wordsworth's work.

Peter Bell was written in 1798 but not published until 1819. The fact that it was kept in manuscript for seventeen years, suggests that Wordsworth himself had some doubt about its poetical value, and the fact that it was finally published, with its explanatory preface to Southey, shows that Wordsworth had overcome his doubts, and still believed in his prefaces of 1798 and 1800. The poem, like much of Wordsworth's work, is irregular. It is inspired and uninspired; it is sublime and ridiculous; poetical and nonsensical; imaginative and literal. It contains the worst lines Wordsworth ever wrote, and many by which he is best known. In spite of Shelley's clever parody, Peter Bell the First is not so bad as Peter Bell the Third.

There are four different headings under which we may study the diction of Peter Bell--(1) single words that do not belong to the speech of the lower classes; (2) lines in which the theory of diction is followed; (3) lines in which the poet thought he was following his theory, because he was describing commonplace incidents; (4) lines that are truly imaginative and poetical.

Under the first heading, we may place such words as--gam-bols (68), nether (86), precincts (86), lore (110), impediment

(118), ethereal (151), and convened (161). --These words were taken almost at a single glance from a single page of the prologue of the poem.

Under the second heading, we could instance many lines. I have taken but six examples--all of them illustrating the theory of diction as far as words are concerned, and all of them violating the theory of imagination:

"Till my ribs ached, I'd laugh at you" (20)

"He turned the eyeball in his head." (439)

"He gave a groan and then another" (443)

"You little mulish dog,

I'll fling your carcass like a log

Head foremost down the river!" (458-60)

"The Woman waked--and when she spied

The poor Ass standing by her side,

She moaned most bitterly." (1023-5)

The passages that are deserving of any degree of ridicule are those in which trivial incidents are described in words that are not trivial. If Wordsworth wanted to improve the "gaudy and inane phraseology", he might well have begun at home in Peter Bell. When he wishes to tell us that Peter struck the ass harder than before, he says

"The staff was raised to loftier height

And the blows fell with heavier weight."

As further instances of this sort, note:

"Only the Ass, with motion dull

Upon the pivot of his skull

Turned round his long left ear." (413-15)

"The poor Ass staggered with a shock,
 And then, as if to take his ease
 In quiet uncomplaining mood,
 Upon the spot where he had stood
 Dropped gently down upon his knees." (426-30)

"An impious oath confirmed the threat--
 Whereat from the earth on which he lay
 To all the echoes, south and north
 And east and west, the Ass sent forth
 A long and clamorous bray." (461-5)

"- - - - -Peter leapt
 Upon the creature's back, and plied
 With ready heels his shaggy side;
 But still the Ass his station kept." (398-400)

Far from feeling the incongruity of such language, Wordsworth seems to have gloried in it, for each of these abundantly-clothed starved thoughts is repeated. The first in lines 422-5:

"Yet, with deliberate action slow
 His staff high raising, in the pride
 Of skill, upon the sounding hide
 He dealt a sturdy blow."

The never-to-be-forgotten lines about the Ass's ears are repeated verbatim in lines 418-20, and the donkey's bray, once more immortalized in lines 478-81:

"Once more the Ass did lengthen out
 More ruefully a deep-drawn shout
 The hard dry see-saw of his horrible bray!"

When we think of this side of the poem, we feel that the poet was wise in asking us to

"Pour out indulgence still, in measure

As liberal as ye can--" (794-5)

and the squire quite right when he told the poet "against the rules of commonsense your're surely sinning! "

But, fortunately, there is another side to Peter Bell, a side that makes us forget the hero and his dozen wedded wives, and the ass, long-suffering, long-eared, and long-brayed. This other side is what we may call the Nature phase of the poem. Wordsworth's love of Nature was the most intense of his feelings, and it was this that made him a poet, as he tells us over and over again in The Prelude. In writing of Nature, Wordsworth's deep feelings would not allow him to be unpoetical.--1
As examples of poetical passages, note the following:

"Long have I loved what I behold

The night that calms, the day that cheers;

The common growth of Mother-earth

Suffices me--her tears, her mirth

Her humblest mirth and tears."(131-5)

"- - - - - a coast

Bespattered with a salt sea foam."(231-3)

"Nature ne'er could find the way

Into the heart of Peter Bell."(244-5)

1. In all of Wordsworth's poems, I recall but one instance in which an absolutely unpoetical statement is made about Nature. That is in the first line of a poem written in very early youth--"Calm is all Nature as a resting wheel", in which the simile jars as only such an anti-climax can.

"Unshaped half-human thoughts
 Which solitary Nature feels
 Mid summer storms or winter's ice." (296-8)

"The soft blue sky did never melt
 Into his heart." (263-4)

"Upon the streams, the moon-beams quiver." (535)

"The white dust sleeps upon the lane." (716)

"The rocks that tower on either side
 Build up a wild fantastic scene." (681-2)

"A little chapel stands alone
 With greenest ivy over-grown
 And tufted with an ivy grove;
 Dying insensibly away
 From human thoughts and purposes,
 It seemed--wall, window, roof, and tower--
 To bow to some transforming power
 And blend with the surrounding trees." (853-60.)

"Man's heart is a holy thing
 And Nature, through a world of death
 Breathes into him a second breath
 More searching than the breath of spring." (1071-4)

In such thoughts as these we surely see the poetic genius
 that is responsible for Tintern Abbey, for The Solitary Reaper,
er, for The Green Linnet--in short, for Wordsworth at his best.

If asked to select a single poem that would give the
 most complete idea of Wordsworth, we should unhesitatingly

choose Michael. In it we have the poet's thoughts on "man, the heart of man, and human life". In it we have examples of "gaudy and inane phraseology"; we have Wordsworth's theory put in practice, and proved a dismal failure, and the same theory put in practice, and proved successful; we find lines of the earth, earthly, side by side with lines "apparelled in celestial light".

The 'unfortunate' passages in Michael are so few, that they are usually unnoticed by a reader who is not looking for them. However, there are a few lines, that bring our minds up with a start. When the poet wishes to say that you must expect a steep climb, he does it in the following very realistic words:

"You will suppose that with an upright path

Your feet must struggle." (3-4)

In order to tell us there is a simple but interesting story in connection with a half-finished sheep-fold, he writes:

"And to that simple object appertains.

A story- unenriched with strange events,

Yet not unfit, I deem, for the fireside,

Or for the summer shade-". (18-21)

The house-wife's lamp is described as--

"An aged utensil, which had performed

Service beyond all other of its kind." (115-16)

Line thirty-five--"I will relate the same", sounds like an extract from a lawyer's brief.

There is a different tone in the words of the narrator and those of the characters. Lines 257-270 might well be spoken, instead of thought, by Isabel. Lines 384-391, beginning, "This was a work for us" is as simple as anyone could wish--but its simplicity is perfectly natural and not forced. Every word, save two--eighty and better--is monosyllabic. From line 391-417, the end of Michael's speech, there is a decided difference in the style. It is not involved, but the words are less usual, and the images more vivid. Instead of the ordinary work, we have the more unusual task; we find, also, words like - resigned, requested, hither, temptation, bestir, covenant, befall, and the imagination at work in such combinations as:

"In among the storms

Will I without thee go again." (393-4)

"A heart beating fast with many hopes." (397)

"Bound by links of love." (400)

Those that contend that Michael is an unimaginative poem, surely have not given a very broad meaning to the word imaginative. Wordsworth's imagination shows itself almost in every line. The poet is particularly happy in his choice of single words, especially in adjectives and verbs. The following is a partial list of noun and adjective combinations found in the poem: tumultuous brook (2), pastoral mountains (5), boister-

ous brook (6), hidden valley (8), straggling heap (17), vigorous step (66), stirring life (81), eager industry (122), forward-looking thoughts (148), winter coppice (180), mountain blast (195), open sunshine (229), cheerful hope (243), melancholy loss (325), living ear (345), seeming peace (424).

The use of verbs is even more suggestive:

"The pastoral mountains front you, face to face." (5)

"The mountains have all opened out themselves,

And made a hidden valley of their own." (7-8)

"A tale that spake to me - " (22)

"A tale that led me on to feel -" (30)

"He heard the South make subterraneous music." (51)

"The winds are devising work for me." (55)

"The storm summoned him to the mountain." (57)

"Hills which had impressed incidents upon his mind-" (67)

"Hills - which preserved the memory -" (70)

"Hills laid strong hold on his affection." (74)

"One wheel had rest." (84)

"A fond spirit that works blindly," (144)

"He armed himself with strength." (221)

"Her mind was busy looking back," (257)

"Sunday came to stop her in her work." (299)

"These fields were burdened." (374)

"His grief broke from him." (421)

"Farewell prayers that followed him." (430)

The expressed or expanded similes in Michael, as is characteristic of Wordsworth's work as a whole are few, but those that are used are worth our attention:

"- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -He heard the South
Make subterraneous music, like the noise
Of bag-pipers on distant Highland hills--"(49-52)

"- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -while far into the night
The housewife plied her own peculiar work
Making the cottage through the silent hours
Murmurs as with the sound of summer flies."(125-8)

"- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -the sun himself
Has scarcely been more diligent than I;"(233-4)
"He shall possess it, free as is the wind
That passes over it." (246-7)

"- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -the house appeared
As cheerful as a grove in Spring--" (305-6)

For further typical images of this poem, see lines 26-33; lines 54-77, noting particularly the words - "He had been alone amid the heart of many thousand mists"; lines 194-203; lines 216-220; lines 448-466. It would seem from this analysis that it would be hard to find lines in Michael that are conversational or are not imaginative.

Daisies have been a favorite theme for poet's song from Chaucer to the present day, and though some of us have never seen the mountain daisy, all of us feel well acquainted with the "wee modest, crimson-tipped flower". Wordsworth

loved it and wrote many poems about it. One of 1844 is quite characteristic of the poet. It shows his accurate power of observation, and his sensitive appreciation of beauty. How otherwise could he have written of

"The beauty of its star-shaped shadow thrown

On the smooth surface of this naked stone."(5-6)

It shows the poet's vital soul that could grasp deeper, though hidden truths, and so could recognize the "sovereign aid" of the sun by which

"These delicate companionships are made;

And how he rules the pomp of light and shade;"(11-12)

It shows his faith in Nature, his pantheism, as many have called it, for we are told, to

"Converse with Nature in pure sympathy." (18)

It shows, as most of Wordsworth's later poems do show, the poet, with a lesson, as in

"All vain desires, all lawless wishes quelled,

Be thou to love and praise alike impelled,

Whatever boon is granted or withheld." (19-21)

Above all, it makes clear, that when Wordsworth had anything he must say, he said it, and said it poetically - that is, in the words that would best convey his meaning, whether these words be little or big, usual or unusual. There is not an ordinary line in the poem--scarcely an ordinary word.

This is even more true of the lines To a Skylark. The following are the most important images of the poem: ethereal

minstrel, pilgrim of the sky, earth where cares abound, wings aspire, heart and eye are with thy nest, thou canst drop into at will, quivering wings composed, shady wood, a privacy of glorious light, thou dost pour upon the world a flood of harmony, the kindred points of Heaven and Home. The poem contains no trace of a theory of conversational diction.

It is hard to find any article that deals with any phase of Wordsworth's life or genius that does not either quote from The Ode to Duty, or eulogize the poem; but no critic, I think, speaks of the simplicity of its diction, though many do stress the universality of its appeal. We have seen, however, that simplicity of diction and universality of appeal do not necessarily go hand in hand. Children, who have a notion of Duty, derived from Sunday-school literature, and grown people to whom Duty never means anything but the doing of something they do not wish to do, something that is unpleasant, will find but little in the poem even though they understand the actual words. A mind, taught by Experience, to realize that Duty is not only obligation to moral but also to physical law, that she is both a "Stern Daughter of the Voice of God," and yet doth "wear the Godhead's most benignant grace"; understands why the poet may say in one line that Duty "is a rod to check the erring", and in another that flowers laugh as Duty passes, and "fragrance in her footing treads". The term duty is an abstraction, but that for which it stands is no less real than something tangible in the material world. We have a sense

of Duty; we cannot define it; we cannot describe it; we can only feel it, and Wordsworth has no way of making us understand this feeling except by giving us words, images, that will arouse something of the same feeling. That he has done this, the universality of its appeal attests.

Does not a study of The Preface of 1800 and the later critical essays, together with an examination of the poems written after 1798, only establish more firmly the conclusions reached by a study of The Lyrical Ballads? These conclusions we may summarize as follows: I. ~~Wordsworth~~ Wordsworth had a theory of diction for certain kinds of poetry. This theory was that incidents in the lives of the people of the lower and middle classes should be described in the language used by these people in their ordinary conversation; in this theory Wordsworth believed as implicitly ~~in 1849 as he did~~ in 1798. The theory, we have seen, at basis was one of simplification, founded on Wordsworth's love of the Truth, and was a direct result, in the form of a revolt, of the artificial language of the eighteenth century. II. Wordsworth has failed to live up to his theory, when the attempt to do so is evident, because in writing on homely subjects, he was led to believe he was using the language of the lower and middle classes. We have found that in a few instances, conversational language has been used, but we have found that these cases were rarely poetical, and often are responsible for poems that are foolish, lines that are flat,

and words that jar the mind, when we stumble over them, as we jar the body when we step down three steps, having expected but one. We have found also that in the poems for which Wordsworth is most criticized, and which are supposed to be the best examples of his theory put into practice, that the individual words, the word combinations, and the word order are not those of the conversation of the lower and middle classes anywhere, if, indeed, they are the words of conversation of any class of society. III. Simple incidents, not necessarily, but very easily, lead to bald treatment. This was Wordsworth's great stumbling block. When describing a simple incident, with some definite purpose in view (and he tells us he always had a purpose--1), so anxious was the poet that his moral be clear, that he used the most literal and matter-of-fact words to convey that moral. If the moral were evident, he considered the lines poetic. In other words, he confused the artistic and moral points of view. Much, if not all, of what we call a failure in Wordsworth's poetry has arisen out of his desire to teach. IV. When, however, Wordsworth wrote on certain subjects, those subjects on which he felt deeply --so deeply that he had to share his feelings; when his poetry was a "spontaneous overflow", and he did not concern himself about moral lessons, he found it practically impossible to use the language of ordinary conversation. His thoughts and feelings were not ordinary, and could not be expressed in ordinary words. It is in these poems - chiefly those of Nature, and of Sentiment, and Reflection. Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, 51.

tion, that Wordsworth is the poet and has forgotten Wordsworth, the theorist.

Do we mean, then, that it is impossible for Wordsworth to be Wordsworth at his best and a follower of his own theory? Yes--since his theory is fundamentally wrong. We have seen that there can be no real poetic diction that is not imaginative, and have found that conversational language in general, particularly that of the lower classes, is not only not imaginative, but literal and bald. Simple language may be imaginative, and when Wordsworth fought against fine phrases hiding trivial nothings or glittering generalities, he fought a good fight -- and won. He brought about a reformation in the right direction. But it is dangerous to be a reformer. "Zeal may make of a reformer a fanatic", and so, at times, it did of Wordsworth. Bombast is bad; but affected simplicity is no better, and our poet, in the seriousness of his purpose, seems not to have recognized this. This accounts for the great irregularity in his verse. He knew that he was not always inspired. He tells us

"Nor is it I who play the part,
But a shy spirit in my heart,
That comes and goes --" --1.

But he does not seem to have known when the "shy spirit" had left him. The poems written under the guidance of this spirit--his great Odes, Tintern Abbey, The Solitary Reaper, The Green Linnet, Michael, many of the Sonnets, more than atone for any

1. The Waggoner (209-11).

number written when the spirit was absent, though they bid defiance to all of his theories of diction.

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