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THE MYSTICISM OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

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THE MYSTICISM OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

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Chapter 1.

MYSTICISM AND ITS EXPRESSION.

"Ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hid battlements of Eternity
Whose shaken mists a space unsettle, then
Round the half-glimpsed turrets slowly wash again."

Few words have been so abused by loose usage as "mysticism". In the mental furniture of many people otherwise well informed it serves as a convenient receptacle to which is relegated everything which seems mysterious or magical. Their idea of mysticism is like the idea of the Deity entertained by an old gentleman who described it as a "vague oblong blur".

In spite of its frequent misuse, this term denotes an experience which is by no means vague to many persons. There are five characteristics by which we can distinguish mystic consciousness .

(1) In the first place mystic consciousness is awareness of the transcendent. The mystic feels as present something which to ordinary consciousness is an illusive unattainable, a beyond. He feels that he has come upon something which in its fulness is never known to non-mystics. He has an exalted sense of having found that for which he has always sought. This is the reason that Evelyn Underhill and other writers refer to the mystic experience as the "transcendental consciousness".

Though these assertions may seem indefinite to those who have not shared the experience they describe, we must accept and seek to understand them, for they have been made in good faith by all writers who have left us accounts of their mystical adventures. These ever speak of their lives becoming aware of the larger life in which they are immersed, or of a "more real world of essential life". They have many names .

for this beyondness which they discover; it is variously ^{termed} ~~named~~ the "Transcendental world, the All, the Absolute, the Uncreated Light, ~~which bathes the universe,~~ the Divine Dark, the Life Movement of the universe, or the Abyss of the God-head". Violet I Kemp calls it "a reality which is known and felt which the intelligence cannot comprehend"¹. And each of the mystics declare that these are but the best symbols they can devise for a Reality which defies their powers of expression. Each of them speaks of a beyond, at times dim, at times most clear, which ever haunts their consciousness, and of whose presence in their hours of exaltation they become acutely aware. Every person is touched at times by what some persons call the "homesickness of the soul", the lure of something beyond, the call of the Deep unto our depths.

Ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hid battlements of eternity.²

Rufus Jones says, "If there are self-conscious beings who do not transcend themselves, who are not haunted by eternity, who live in what is already won, and have no dreams of the unwon, they do not belong to my species. They range under a different class order. I know only that my kind of men have

Hints of occasion infinite
To keep the soul alert with noble discontent
And onward yearnings of unstilled desire."

The mystic is one who becomes at times piquantly aware of the presence, the nearness or the intimacy of this elusive Somewhat which we ordinarily feel to be beyond. In some

¹ "Mystic Utterance in Certain English Poets" Hibbert Journal
² The Hound of Heaven, Francis Thompson.

trance, vision, or exalted moment he becomes conscious of a presence which Professor Whitehead has ably described in his definition of religion. "Religion", he says, "is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind and within the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something which gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal and the hopeless quest". This description of the beyondness which in the mystic's consciousness becomes the present might be illustrated by many passages from mystic literature. ~~Let us confine ourselves to~~ Such sentiments recur as that expressed in this verse from

Whittier:

So sometimes comes to soul and sense
The feeling that is evidence
That near about us lies
The realm of spiritual mysteries.
The sphere of the supernal powers
Impinges on this world of ours.

(2) Again, the mystic in his most exalted hours becomes aware of a sense of unity, of a oneness which unites subject and object, fusing them into an undivided whole in which is dissolved for the time the usual distinctions and divisions of ordinary experience. The mystic feels that his particular life is being merged into an enfolding presence, into the unified environment which he calls the All. The sense of oneness of which he becomes conscious includes himself and unites him with his surroundings. A clergyman, the account of

whose experience James quotes from Starbuck's manuscript collection, says: "It is impossible fully to describe the experience. It was like the effect of some great orchestra when all the separate notes have melted into one swelling harmony."¹ Tennyson describes what he calls a "waking trance" which came upon him quite often, usually after he had repeated his own name to himself several times. He says, "Out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality the individual itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being. And this is not a confused state, but the clearest, of ~~the clear,~~ the surest of the surest, ~~the weirdest of the weird,~~ utterly beyond words, where death was almost laughably impossible, and the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life"². Malwida von Meysenbug, a German idealist, is quoted by James in a passage in which she describes her mystic experience as a "return from the solitude of individuation into the consciousness of unity with all that is". "Heaven, earth, and sea," she says, "resounded in one vast world-encircling harmony."³ Or to quote from another experience recorded in Starbuck's manuscript collection: "The moments of which I speak did not hold the consciousness of a personality, but something in myself made me feel myself a part of something bigger than I that was controlling. I felt myself one with the grass, the trees, the birds, insects, everything in Nature. I exulted in the mere fact of existence, of being a part of it all---the drizzling rain, the shadows of the clouds, the tree trunks, and so on."

1. *Varieties of Religious Experience* pgs 66.

2. Letter to B.P. Blood. quoted by James in *ibid* page 384

3. *ibid.* pg. 395

4. *ibid.* pg. 394

James not only quotes, but gives his own witness. "Looking back on my own experiences", he says, "they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity." While he confesses that this is a dark saying when translated into logical language, he declares that he cannot wholly escape from its authority. "I feel as if it must mean something," he says, "something like the Hegelian philosophy means, if one could only lay hold of it more clearly." Rufus Jones too is inclined to give this mystical feeling of unity a metaphysical significance^c. "Objects", he says, "are certainly not 'presented' to subjects across unbridged chasms. Subject and object are intelligible only as aspects within one deeper unified consciousness. There is a fundamental spiritual reality within us that underspans, overarches, the differentiation of subject and object."²

So prominent in mystic consciousness is this feeling of unity that Everyman's Encyclopedia defines mysticism on the basis of this one characteristic, describing it as "an attitude of mind founded upon an experienced or intuitive sense of unity, of oneness, of likeness of all things."

(3) The mystic experience is also marked by a conscious^{-ness} of being energized by powers beyond the self. The mystic is

1. Varieties of Religious Experience. James. Pg. 388.

2. New Studies in Mystical Religion Page 183.

overtaken by a feeling that his individual self is being "invaded" by an environing power, consciousness, or presence. During his mystic experiences he has the sense of living a more intense and highly vitalized life. He becomes aware of a heightening of consciousness, of experience on a new level which enhances his personality.^{2.} Rufus Jones tells us that the typical mystic is a radiant, dynamic person whose life is contagiously joyous with quiet power.^{1.} Evelyn Underhill goes so far as to describe mystic adventures as "the only known methods by which we can come into conscious possession of all our powers."^{1.} She emphatically denies that mystic experience is characteristically passive. While a certain passivity is necessary as a means of arriving at the mystic state, and while during it we are conscious of being receivers, this reception is a most active one on our part.^(See ch. ten) She declares that excursions into mysticism, far from being forms of "higher laziness" are the "most arduous labours which humanity is called upon to perform."^{4.} "It remains a paradox of the mystics," she says, "that the passivity at which they appear to aim is really a state of the most intense activity; more, that where it is wholly absent no great creative action can take place."^{3.} Now this activity is not something which seems to the mystic to take place in himself independently of environment. It appears to him to be an active reception from sources which are external. This active appropriation of power from beyond is vividly described by J. Trevor in

1. *Mysticism*--E. Underhill. Pg. 60.

2. The close connection between art and mysticism is seen in the origin of the term "auses". Its use indicates the consciousness artists have of influences from beyond.

3. *Mysticism*. Page 60.

4. *Mysticism*. Page 60

his biography. "I felt," he says, "an inward state of peace and joy and assurance incredibly intense, accompanied by a sense of being bathed in a warm glow of light, as though the external condition had brought about the internal effect---a feeling of having passed beyond the body, though the scene around me stood out more clearly and as if nearer to me than before, by reason of the illumination in the midst of which I seemed to be placed."^{1.}

In these hours of heightened consciousness the world seems ~~transformed~~, transfigured in a peculiar way which can be suggested to others who have had the experience, but which cannot fully be described. As Evelyn Underhill says, "It (the world) seems charged with a new vitality; with a splendour which does not belong to it but is poured through it, as light through a coloured window, grace through a sacrament * * * each blade of grass seems fierce with meaning, and becomes a well of wondrous light: a little emerald set in the City of God."^{2.}

Though the mystics are unanimous in describing their hallowed hours as times of peculiar sensitivity they differ widely when they come to qualify this sensitivity. With some, as we have seen from Mr. Trevor's account of his experience, it brings a more acute awareness of surrounding scenes. This is characteristic of nature mysticism. The very opposite is true of religious mysticism. With this type mystic emotion seems to ~~palliate~~ ^{efface} rather than intensify the sensations of colour, sound, hardness, location, and the increased sensitivity

1. Varieties of Religious Experience---James. Pg. 379.

2. *Mysticism* - E. Underhill Page 26.

is directed toward an inner intuition independent of these. J.A.Symonds describes a mood which illustrates this second type:

"I cannot even now find words to render it intelligible. It consisted in a gradual but swiftly progressive obliteration of space, time, sensation, and the multitudinous factors of experience which seem to qualify what we are pleased to call our Self. In proportion as these conditions of ordinary consciousness were subtracted, the sense of an underlying or essential consciousness gained intensity. At last nothing remained but a pure, absolute, abstract, Self. The universe became without form and void of content. But the self persisted, formidable in its vivid keenness" ¹.

Or we might quote a more concise statement of a parallel experience which has been preserved for us by James.

"The ordinary sense of things around me faded. For the moment nothing but an ineffable joy and exaltation remained."

(4) Another mark of mysticism is the sense of present revelation, the feeling that there is being disclosed to us some truth or some aspect of truth which in its fulness is not given in non-mystical experience. The disclosure is such that we cannot completely put it into words. Although it defies our powers of expression, it comes with a peculiar sense of authority from which one cannot escape. To the person who experiences them, times of mystic experiences are not simply periods of intense emotion, but hours of insight, illumination, intuition, glimpses into the secrets of life hardly to be attained by ratiocination. Bertrand Russell, in his essay on Mysticism and Logic says, "The mystic insight begins with the sense of mystery unveiled, of a hidden

wisdom suddenly become certain beyond the possibility of a doubt. The sense of certainty and revelation comes earlier than any definite belief." The first of the characteristic doctrines of mystic philosophy which he discusses is "belief in insight as against discursive analytic knowledge, the belief in a way of wisdom, sudden, penetrating, coercive, which is contrasted with slow and fallible study of outward appearance by a science relying wholly upon the senses."

However we explain it, we have all at times felt surprised at some thought apparently quite new arising in the mind, thoughts which startle us with their freshness and the suddenness of their appearance. Often, for instance, we are struck by some new depth of meaning in a familiar phrase. This account of an experience which comes from Luther's writings will bring back similar ones to most minds. "When a fellow monk," he says, "one day repeated the words of the creed, 'I believe in the forgiveness of sins' I saw the scripture in an entirely new light; and suddenly I felt as if I were born anew."¹ This sense of revelation becomes very intense in mystical experience. In describing one of his experiences, Dr. R. M. Bucke, a Canadian Psychiatrist, says, "There came upon me a sense of exaltation, of immense joyousness accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination impossible to describe."² J. Trevor in his biography speaks of flashes of consciousness "that have compelled me to exclaim with surprise---God is here!---or condit-

1. Varieties of Religious Experience.---James. Page 382.

2. *Ibid* page 399.

ions of exaltation and insight, less intense, only gradually passing away. I have severely questioned the worth of these moments. To no soul have I mentioned them, lest I should be building my life and work on mere phantasies of the brain. But I find that after every questioning and test, they stand out today as the most real experiences of my life, and experiences which have explained, and justified and unified all past experiences and all past growth."¹

This gift of insight is not unique with mystics, but is one which to some extent they share with artists, musicians and inventors, creative writers. The closer these men approach genius the more often and more intensely do they feel that they are not the source of creative effort, but merely its medium. Inspirations seem to them to be to a large extent beyond their voluntary control; they seem to come from powers below or beyond personal consciousness, and to arrive ready-formed. "Sometimes", writes the Jewish philosopher, Philo, "when I have come to my work empty I have become suddenly full, ideas being in an invisible manner showered upon me, and implanted in me from on high so that through the influence of Divine inspiration I have become greatly excited, and have known neither the place in which I was, nor those who were present, nor myself, nor what I was saying, nor what I was writing; for then I have been conscious of a richness of interpretation, an enjoyment of light, a most penetrating insight, a most manifest energy in all that was being done;

having such an effect upon my mind as the clearest ocular demonstration would have upon the eyes."^{3.}

(b) The mystic experience is always marked by high emotion, emotion which is ever pleasant even though it may have within it an element of strangeness and terror. (See *Mysticism*, Evelyn Underhill, Page 26.) In defining her conception of a mystic Evelyn Underhill states, "He must feel a strong emotional attraction toward the supersensual Object. Possessed like other men of powers of feeling, thought, and will, it is essential that his love and his determination, even more than his thought, should be set upon Transcendental Reality."^{1.} James translates from Swiss an account of a traveler who had a striking mystical experience while journeying on foot through the Alps. "The throb of the emotion", he says, "was so violent that I could barely tell the boys to pass on and not wait for me. I then sat down on a stone, unable to stand any longer, and my eyes overflowed with tears." He then goes on to describe a fervent prayer of gratitude to God and of humble submission to His will. "Then, slowly," he says, "the ecstasy left my heart, that is, I felt that God had withdrawn the communion which He had granted, and I was able to walk on, but very slowly, so strongly was I still possessed by the interior emotion. Besides, I had wept unintermittently for several minutes, my eyes were swollen, and I did not wish my companions to see me."^{2.}

1. *Mysticism*, Evelyn Underhill. Pg. 58.

2. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. James. Pg. 68.

3. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* 481.

The most characteristic emotion of mysticism is that of love and reverence. "Mysticism believes," writes Recejac, "that by the way of love and will, it reaches a point to which thought alone is unable to reach." "The mystic's outlook is indeed the lover's outlook," declares Evelyn Underhill. "It has the same element of wildness, the same quality of selfless and quixotic devotion, the same combination of rapture and humility. Mystic and lover, upon different planes, are alike responding to the call of the Spirit of Life. The language of human passion is tepid and insignificant beside the language in which the mystics tell the splendours of their love."¹

By these five marks we can recognize mystic consciousness---by the sense of the transcendent, of unity, of energization, of revelation, and of loving emotion. Its exponents have always declared that the experience in its completeness was ineffable. The mystic regards language, even the most metaphorical, poetic, and suggestive language, as an inefficient tool for imparting what he has received and describing how he has felt. It is at best a matter of hint and suggestion, not of explicit statement. Bergson defines mystic intuition as the power by which we identify ourselves with what is unique in an object "and hence inexpressible." When mystics speak of the "ineffable" it is of course to be understood in a relative sense. Thus Evelyn Underhill does not blush at writing a six-hundred page volume on an experience which is

1. Mysticism--Evelyn Underhill. Pg. 106. 107.

"ineffable". In it she says of the mystic, "Try as he will, his stammering and awestruck reports can hardly be understood but by those who are on the way."¹ Yet she goes on to declare that his experience is such that he must share it.

"In his worship of perfect Beauty faith must be balanced by works. By means of veils and symbols he must interpret his free vision, his glimpses of the burning bush, to other men."

This, as I shall try to show in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, is what Wordsworth has accomplished in that portion of his poetry in which he is at his best. Yet, like other great mystics, he was aware of the supreme difficulty of the task, and felt unequal to it. In the words of another great prophet of his century "his reach exceeded his grasp." He had a magnificent ideal for his work. "My theme", he declared, is "no other than the very heart of man"². It is his hope that some work of his

"Proceeding from a source of untaught things,
Creative and enduring, may become
A power like nature's." (Prelude 13:311-313).

By the very social nature of life one who is endowed with insight becomes an imparter of the new light. He feels impelled to share what he has received. Only an unnatural inhibition prevents expression from following impression. Wordsworth felt the urge to impart. But like other mystic spirits he found it impossible to give adequate expression. In this he was at one with the Cumberland shepherds whom he describes.

1. Mysticism. Evelyn Underhill. Page 89.

2. The Prelude Book 13. Line 241.

"Theirs is the language of the heavens, the power
The thought, the image, and the silent joy:
Words are but the under-agents of their souls." (Prelude 13:
271-274)

Yet he seeks to fulfill his calling as one in the long series of prophets and teachers of mankind by putting into word and metaphor as best he may "the visionary gleam, the glory and the dream" in order that we may through his poems find the power that has enriched his life. Although he felt that the mystical experience was in its fulness ineffable, lay, as he says "far hidden from the reach of words", he knew that it could in some measure be expressed. It could be expressed because others were, as Evelyn Underhill says, "upon the way." Wordsworth tells us that he is encouraged in his effort to impart his mystical experience because all men have known their "godlike hours" and all "feel what an empire we inherit as natural beings in the strength of Nature." (Prelude 3:192) He feels it is his task to share his insight with us.

"We men * * * must perish, be it so!
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live and act and serve the future hour." (River Duddon 34)

Wordsworth wished to teach what his most unmythical character, Peter Bell, in the end learned, that "man's heart is a holy thing."¹ He wants us to feel, as he did by the river Duddon, "that we are greater than we know."²

Because of the difficulty which he found in expressing his experiences clearly Wordsworth devoted a great deal of

1. Peter Bell. Line 332 Part 3.

2. River Duddon Sonnets. No. 24. "After Thought."

effort ^{to} ~~upon~~ the perfecting of his diction---more than most Poets. His early experiments in diction reveal this search for fuller powers of expression. Many passages might be quoted which show his consciousness of the difficulty of expressing clearly his mystical experiences, especially when they were ones which took place in the distant past, and were liable to be coloured by later developments of his mystical thought. (See Prelude 4:256-268)

For instance, while he attended the Hawkshead Grammar School a change came over his inner life. His mystic communion with nature grew so strong that although she had been as yet but a secondary source of joy, Nature became loved and sought for her own sake. But Wordsworth is unable to give us the day or the month when this important change took place .

"Who knows the individual hour in which
His habits were first sown, even as a seed!
Who shall point as with a wand and say
This portion of the river of my mind
Came from yon fountain?" (Prelude 2:202-205)

He often describes a mystical experience, and then breaks out into an emotional address to Nature, to her Spiritual Presence or Powers. In many such passages it is difficult to discover whether the poet is describing his experience as it took place, or whether the apostrophe reflects his thought of Nature and feelings toward her at the time of writing. He declares himself that in his account of his college days and "other kindred notices" he cannot separate the "naked recollection" and the "after-meditation"¹. Yet in 1. Prelude 3:610-615).

spite of these difficulties, in spite of the fact that

"Points we have all of us within our souls
Where all stand single" (Prelude 3:185) ,

and in spite of the fact that the "visionary gleam" is something that must be caught rather than taught, Wordsworth did feel that in mystic communion he enjoyed an experience which was possible for all men, and that to a large extent he could impart it. He lost his insight and found it again. Of its re-discovery he declared:

"I remember well
That in life's every-day appearances
I seemed about this time to gain clear sight
Of a new world---a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted, and to other eyes
Made visible; as ruled by those fixed laws
Whence spiritual dignity originates." (Prelude 13:366-373)

chapter 2.

A MYSTIC PROPHET TO A MATERIALISTIC AGE.

"Man is the meeting place of various stages of reality."

(Rudolph Eucken.)

The rounded world is fair to see,
Nine times folded in mystery:
Though baffled seers cannot impart
The secret of its labouring heart,
Throb thine with Nature's throbbing breast,
And all is clear from east to west.
Spirit that lurks each form within
Beckons to spirit of its kin;
Self-kindled every atom glows,
And hints the future which it owes.

(Emerson.)

Chapter 2. A Mystic Prophet to a Materialistic Age.

Professor Whitehead in Science and the Modern World points out to what a large extent the thought of the nineteenth century was dominated by the dogmatic assertions of materialism which the new science of the ^{17th century} ~~period~~ had introduced. He tells how this tendency was overcome, not by the arguments of theologians or philosophers who all sought some easy compromise, but by the opposition of the poets. These poets did not defend their position by argument, but upon the basis of their own intuitive convictions asserted that the scientific account of the universe was inadequate. They accused science of its absorption in abstractions. They appealed to "naive experience"---not to childish experience, but to the concrete facts of life in all of their fulness and variety. They refuse to accept as the whole truth an abstraction from experience. He describes the period as one of a thought war between the materialistic outlook of science and the moral intuitions which are presupposed in the concrete affairs of life.

Whitehead is especially emphatic in his praise of Wordsworth:

"In the nineteenth century, some of the deeper thinkers among the theologians and philosophers were muddled thinkers. Their assent was claimed by incompatible doctrines; and the efforts at reconciliation produced inevitable confusion---

* * *

"Wordsworth in his whole being expresses a conscious reaction against the mentality of the eighteenth century. This mentality means nothing less than the acceptance of the scientific ideas at their full value. Wordsworth was not bothered by any intellectual antagonism. What moved him was moral repulsion. He felt that something had been left

out, and that what had been left out comprised everything that was most important--- * * *

"Wordsworth alleges against science its absorption in abstractions. His consistent theme is that the important facts of nature elude the scientific method. Berkeley, Wordsworth, Shelly, are representative of the intuitive refusal seriously to accept the materialism of science. * * * The romantic reaction was a protest on behalf of value--- * *

"I hold that the ultimate appeal is to naive experience, and that is why I lay such stress on the evidence of poetry." (1)

Whitehead here means by "intuition" the insight received in the experience which we have defined as mystical. Throughout this essay we shall use it in that sense. His testimony as to the importance in the history of thought of the contribution of Wordsworth is impressive because it comes from one whose main interests are not literary but scientific and philosophical, and from whom we might expect adverse criticism. It is noteworthy that he regards Wordsworth's mystical insight as the source of what is characteristic and most valuable in his thought. I agree with this opinion, and in its support would place beside his the authoritative words of Professor Bradley:

"He (Wordsworth) saw everything in the light of the "visionary Power". * * * He apprehended all things, natural or human, as an expression of something which, while manifested in them, immeasurably transcended them. And nothing can be more intensely Wordsworthian than poems and passages most marked by this visionary power and most directly issuing from this apprehension." (2)

One of the most striking features of Wordsworth's genius is the directness, ^{the} unqualifiedness, the simplicity, the faithfulness, the utter confidence with which he sets down in his poetry his intuitive convictions. He was one

1. Science and the Modern World. Whitehead. Pages 112, 121, 125, 129, 130.
2. The Oxford Lectures on Poetry. Bradley. Pp. 126-127.

who escapes the sweeping denunciation of Emerson, "We but half express ourselves, and are ashamed of that divine idea which each of us represents."¹ He spoke his innermost intuition without fear of being misunderstood, implicitly trusting that it would in due time meet its recognition. He spoke out to all the world what was true for his private heart with a settled conviction that those whose minds were prepared for his truth would receive it. As he himself declared, his calling is one which requires not only sensitiveness, but courage.

"High is our calling, Friend!---creative art * *
 Demands the service of a mind and heart
 Heroically fashioned---to infuse
 Faith in the whispers of the lonely muse,
 While the whole world seems adverse to desert."
 (Miscellaneous sonnets. To B.R. Haydon.)

"Still to be strenuous for the bright reward,
 And in the soul admit of no decay,
 Brook no continuance of weakmindedness---
 Great is the glory, for the strife is hard!
 (The same.)

There is always something lonely about being the bearer of a mystic revelation. Pronounced mysticism is not a common thing, and society ever exerts its tremendous pull toward conformity: it is ever ready to look askance at the innovator in thought or action as at a pitiable oddity. So the bard who is true to his calling as a teacher of mankind must at times be a lonesome individual. As Emerson put it, "God will not have His work made manifest by cowards."² Wordsworth was no coward, but one who spoke his "latent conviction" trusting that in time it would be the "universal sense".

1. Essay on Self-Reliance. Emerson.

2. Essay on Self-Reliance. Emerson.

Wordsworth shows a thoroughly scientific temper in the accuracy with which he reports his mystic experience, and he shows the strength of his intuition in this confidence, that, though most unconventional, it will be found to ring true to the experience of other men. Perhaps no passage will better illustrate this than the so frequently quoted lines from Tintern Abby:

"I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

This is an example of Wordsworth's faithful adherence to his own ideal of accurate diction in a subject in which it is unusually hard to apply. ~~The difficulty of imparting his mystical experiences led Wordsworth to concentrate upon~~ ^{his} ~~diction.~~ In these familiar words we have the result of ^{such} concentration. ^{on diction.} In this one sentence he reports to us some very definite things about his experience and his interpretation of it. We could enumerate them. (1) The sense of a beyondness about nature. Its outward aspect doesn't exhaust it. Each natural object is the expression of a Spiritual Principle which, to use Professor Bradley's phrase, "Immeasurably transcends" the particular object. It is a Presence which is common to all natural objects. It is something "deeply interfused". (2) Its effect upon the mind is to give a sense

of joy, to elevate the thoughts, and to impart a feeling of reverence. It is "sublime". (3) It is intensely active; it is an energy rolling through all things and constituting the vital power of the human mind.

This magnificent expression of the central conviction of his mystical insight was written during the summer of 1798, during the early part of Wordsworth's short period of mystical production. For although Wordsworth had a long career as a poet, the period during which his mystical poems were written is quite a short one, extending from 1796 to 1807. His period of mystical experience is much longer than that of his mystical writing. In the *Prelude*, which tells the story of the development of his mystical impulse, he traces it back to early babyhood. The years from the birth of memory until he was lured away from his native land by the excitement of the French Revolution saw a steady development of his mystical life, fostered by Nature, whom he learned to look upon as the garment of the Divine. In his vigorous out-of-door sports, along with the merely physical rapture, came impulses, "glimpses like the flashing of a shield", which, awakening and developing his spiritual life, became the basis of his moral character. He found in Nature a Spiritual Principle with which he could hold communion, and which supported his sense of what was right. Nature moulded his sentiments by mystical impulses which came, sometimes with the feeling of awe and of fear, sometimes with joyous appreciation of her beauty.

About the age of twelve Nature's mystical influence became so strong upon Wordsworth that he felt a desire for calmer joys, ^{than those found in boistrous out-door sports.} He began to appreciate the "self-sufficing power of solitude." (Prelude 2:75) During these school days, he cannot tell just when the change took place, Nature, who had yielded an added pleasure to all of his out-of-door games, through the deeper joys of mystical communion, became loved and sought for her own sake. (Prelude 2:200) Through the physical things of nature he found satisfaction for his spiritual life, though he did not as yet understand just what made him love Nature so much. "I was left seeking the visible world, not knowing why." (Prelude 2:274) He learned to love all that he saw in Nature, hence was able to receive mystic impulses from her. "To finer influxes the mind lay open, to a more exact and close communion." (Prelude 2:280).

In 1787, during Wordsworth's seventeenth year, his love of Nature became so strong that it displaced persons as the chief source of his enjoyments. He loved Nature because in her presence he felt mystical impulses which he had learned to prize above all other pleasures. They showed him that there was one life in all things, and that that life was joy.

In the fall of that year he went to Cambridge^s, where his mystical impulse found satisfaction during long walks out into the fields and in the college grove.

During his first college vacation, when he was eighteen years of age, came a crisis in his mystical life. Return-

returning home after a night of merry-making at a country dance, he was transported by the sight of a magnificent sunrise. His eyes were opened, and his mind illuminated by a spiritual Presence

"My heart was full: I made no vows, but vows
Were made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit." (Prelude 4:322-326).

His mystical impulse was fed during the summer by the natural beauty of the North of England through which he wandered with his sister, Dorothy, and during the following summer by a pedestrian tour through the Alps with his friend Jones.

After he took his degree from the university in January, 1791, he lived for four months in London. Even here the spirit of Nature was with him. His imagination was exalted by a sense of power and of passion, and he ever found this creative activity of the mind to be closely connected with his mystical powers. During the following summer he went on foot through the Welsh mountains with Jones, and climbing Snowdon to view the sunrise experienced a remarkable vision of Nature as the expression of the cosmic mind.

In November, 1791, he made his way to France, attracted by the excitement of the French Revolution. Here he remained until December 1792. During his stay there he became passionately interested in social and economic reform, an interest which left no room in his thoughts for mystical communion. He became during his stay an enthusiastic republican. Hence when he returned to England his interests were entirely out of harmony with those of his fellow-

countrymen, and his sentiments became so soured that he was cast out of the pale of love, and hence out of the possibility of mystical communion with nature. This period of alienation was prolonged by a study of the ~~barren~~ rationalism of Godwin's Political Justice, which was published in 1793.

He recovered from it by the efforts of his sister during his stay at Racedown, which was his home from September 1795 to July 1797. Now came the period in which he wrote his great mystical poems. It continued until 1807, after which his mystical power quickly declined. Before this period we have flashes of mystic insight in his poems, later there are remarkable recrudescences of it, notably that in 1818 when he wrote Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour, but for our study the great years are 1796 to 1807.

Chapter 3.

MYSTIC TRAITS IN WORDSWORTH'S NATURE POEMS.

He beheld
A vision, and adored the thing he saw.

* * *

Life turned the meanest of her instruments,
Before his eyes, to price above all gold."

In his introduction to the Prelude Wordsworth tells us that he had long thought of writing "a literary work that would live". He felt it fitting to write, as an introduction to it, and ^{as} a preparation of his mind for its composition, an autobiographical poem describing his own mental and spiritual development. In this way the Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind, came to be written. Wordsworth described it as a "record of the origin and progress" of his own powers, a review of his life to examine "how far Nature and Education had qualified him" for the literary undertaking which he had in mind.

As we read the Prelude after this introduction we are surprised to find how little he has to tell us of the contribution of formal education to the development of his mind for his poetic task, and how largely this development was a result of Nature's influence. Nature moulded his mind by influences which his unusual sensitiveness enabled him to appropriate. This is plain to every reader. But were these influences of such a nature that we are justified in applying the term "mystical" to them? It appears from their words already quoted that such authorities as Whitehead and Bradley would raise no objection. But we must test even their judgment by an examination of ~~of~~ the poems themselves. Is their interpretation of Nature mystical when tried by the five criteria which we have noted? Is it marked by a sense of beyondness, of unity, of revelation, of being energized from

1. "Advertisement" to the Prelude.

beyond, and of high pleasant emotion?

Regarding the first, the familiar quotation from Tintern Abby^e has already shown how deeply Wordsworth's interpretation is imbued by a sense of some widely suffused and deeply infused spiritual Reality which makes Nature more ^{meaningful} than she seems to a casual observer. Her forms reveal a Mind which is never completely disclosed because it goes deeper than we can penetrate, and spreads wider than we can scan. This fact Bradley has sought to express by using the philosophical term "transcendent". We have attempted to render it by the word "beyondness", one which is not entirely satisfactory because it suggests a separateness between the Spiritual Reality and its expression which is not present in Wordsworth's thought. Little wonder that we grasp in vain for an adequate word! Wordsworth's own well-chosen phrases groan beneath the weight of meaning which they bear as he seeks to impart the fulness of the overflowing Presence which his vision reveals. For in his most characteristic moments under Nature's spell he became like the lover whom he describes in Vaudracour and Julia:

"His present mind
Was under fascination;---he beheld
A vision, and adored the thing he saw.
Arabian fiction never filled the world
With half the wonders that were wrought for him.
Earth breathed in one great Presence of the spring;
Life turned the meanest of her instruments,
Before his eyes, to price above all gold."

When his mystic intuition of Nature was at its height she always became to him "one great presence". At such times her beauty became a thing sublime. His love of her then

became a religious worship. The light of sunset was then the garment of an indefinable Spiritual Principle.

For Wordsworth, ^{to define} this Principle would be ~~for him~~ to limit it, and to limit it would be to do less than justice to the intuition he had received of its overflowing presence. In his experience it refused to be limited. There was ever a plus about it, an baffling "X" which went beyond, an unknown quantity, ---or, rather, an unknown quality. The sunset splendour both revealed it and concealed it. Its presence was there revealed. He "felt" it. He was subdued by the sense of its sublimity---it was a spirit, a motion. Nevertheless the sunset concealed it, for it was far more than the gorgeous colours. It was Something which went beyond this sensible indication of its presence. It was "far more deeply interfused". The intuition of its presence was an experience so rich that its meaning could not be pressed into a word or symbol, or caught in a phrase. We often say in glib speech "to put it into a nutshell". This is precisely what Wordsworth found it impossible to do, either in thought or in expression. It was Something without definable limits. It went beyond.

But, as we have seen, the mystic experience is more than a sense of a sublime "Deeper-Reality": it is a feeling of the higher unity which includes both Nature and the mystical observer. Without moving farther afield than our pregnantly meaningful quotation from Tintern Abby we can see how true this was of Wordsworth's contact with Nature.

His experience of Nature centered about an intuitive sense of a unity which joined him with the object of his thought. The Spiritual Reality of Nature was present to him, but it was also present to the sunset, to the round ocean, and to the blue sky. It was the bond of union between all of these various objects, and between them and himself. It was in them and in him: it was in the mind of man as well as in the glowing west.

And because the Spirit of Nature is thus interfused, because it is a principle of unity which comprehends all of her forms as well as our own minds, communion with them is made possible to us. Whether or not such communion becomes an actual fact of our experience will depend upon our willingness to allow ourselves to become fully and consciously members of Nature's all-inclusive organism. So completely did Wordsworth fulfill this condition that the resulting communion became the paramount fact of his life and genius, enabling him to describe his whole poetic work as a voice devoted to "intercourse with wood and field".^{1.}

In the opening paragraphs of the Prelude Wordsworth assumes that such a communion is possible. To us it seems an assumption: to him it was the ^{knowledge derived from} ~~fruit~~ of at least twenty years of mystical experience. This opening section was written in 1795 when the poet was twenty-five years of age. His experience since memory began had led him to the ^{step by step} ~~now settled~~ [^] conviction that there is such a close relationship

1. Prelude to Poems Chiefly of Early and Late Years.

between the mind and the Spiritual Principle of Nature that the latter may definitely influence his consciousness through its outward forms and aspects. The world without and the world within were strangely akin; there was such a close correspondence between them that Nature by her autumn landscape could send ^{vitalizing and elevating} thoughts into his mind, ~~which would inspire~~. Hence there was a "blessing" in the gentle breeze, in the green fields and in the azure sky. He looks to them all with hope that the long looked-for quickening of his poetic powers will come at last. Former experience was an assurance that the contagious spirit of the season would burst in upon his mind with the desired inspiration. And he found his former experience corroborated. The renewal came.

Trances of thought and mountings of the mind
 Come fast upon me: it is shaken off,
 That burden of my own unnatural self,
 The heavy weight of many a weary day
 Not mine, and such as were not made for me". (Prelude 1:18-23.)

* * * * *
 For I, methought, while the sweet breath of heaven
 Was blowing on my body, felt within
 A correspondent breeze, that gently moved
 With quickening virtue, but is now become
 A tempest, a redundant energy,
 vexing its own creation. Thanks to both
 And their congenial powers, that, while they join
 in breaking up a long-continued frost,
 Bring with them vernal promises, the hope
 Of active days urged on by flying hours--- (Prelude 1:32-42)

This passage reveals how close Wordsworth conceived the relationship to be between nature and his mind. As he feels the outer breeze blowing upon his body he feels in his mind a "correspondent" breeze, a new quickening of mental

energy. This might happen to persons who do ~~not~~ consider themselves mystics, but such persons would not be likely to describe these two breezes as "congenial powers". It is this intuition of unity between himself and the object of his thought which makes us sure that his experience was mystical.

Wordsworth would agree with the statement quoted by Evelyn Underhill from the pen of the French mystic Recejac in which he declares that the pleasure we receive from the presence of beautiful objects is "based upon an ideal identity between the mind itself and things." "At a certain point", he says, "the harmony becomes so complete, and the finality so close that it gives us actual emotion."¹ Under the influence of Dorothy's ~~kindly~~ guidance the harmony had attained that certain point on the autumn day of 1795 in which Wordsworth was moved to compose the poems which he later used as a prelude to the Prelude. The "actual emotion" was so possessing that it prompted him to immediately record it in the poem contrary to his usual habit of writing from the inspiration of "emotion recalled in tranquilly".

Thus far, O Friend! did I, not used to make
 A present joy the matter of a song,
 Pour forth that day my soul in measured strains
 That could not be forgotten, and are here
 Recorded. (Prelude 1: 46-50)

(3) From this same passage we can see that Wordsworth's experience of Nature was also one of being energized by powers from beyond the self. The result of this emotional sense of unity was a quickening of the poet's imaginative

energy by which he found strength within himself to do creative mental work.

"To the open fields I told
A prophecy: Poetic numbers came
Spontaneously to clothe in priestly robe
A renovated spirit singled out,
Such hope was mine, for holy services." (Prelude 1:50-55).

The spontaneity with which poetic numbers came was a result of Nature's initiative. Inspiration which demanded expression came in a "quickening virtue" from Nature's self. From her had come the "renovated spirit", which lifted him above his old self and made him stronger than he knew. It meant to him not merely a new warmth of emotion, but a new glow of thought and strength of hope. The "long-continued frost" which had held him for over three years^{2.} was broken by this new influx of life which was the earnest of many such renewals during the years that were to follow this restoration. Before, his life had been a wearisome, unnatural thing, a burden to himself, because he had divorced himself from the resources of Nature. But now, actively receptive to her^{influence,} he finds among his qualifications for undertaking a great theme that fundamental requisite, the vital soul. His was the living spirit which no longer strangled itself by segregating its life from the whole of Nature, but now was responsive to the inflooding influences which come from the greater world beyond to which it was akin. No longer was he self-marooned.

Because of Nature's initiative Wordsworth felt that it was man's place to fare forth in life with "a heart that watches and receives". If he is wise enough to do so

1. Prelude 1: 40

2. From Nov. 1791 to the spring of 1795.

vital impulses ^{will} ~~would~~ come from wood and field and stream. The powers of Nature would "of themselves" make their impression upon his mind. ^(See chapter 10) We have already seen that Wordsworth regarded the Spirit of Nature as an active Power, which energized the human mind as well as natural objects. How could he think otherwise when he found from experience that she enhanced his whole personality? Her power was one which invaded the poet's life: it swept in upon him and overcame him with thoughts which were of her own high quality. He was sure that they were her thoughts and not his because they "disturbed" him, as he says in Tintern Abby. This disturbing quality made him sure that they came from a source outside of his own person. He could not but think of them as a part of Nature's various wealth, which she delights to bestow. Hence his belief that Nature was a trustworthy helper who never disappoints or betrays.

(4) To mention the disturbing effect of Nature's impartations, ^{to Wordsworth} is to be reminded that his experience of her also fulfilled our fourth test for mysticism. They came with a sense of commanding authority, with a feeling of revelation. While the thoughts that came from Nature were joyous, they were not frivolous, for they brought with them a sense of the sublime, a feeling of awe. They imparted truth to which mere logic could not attain.

"One impulse from the vernal wood,
Can teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can." (The Tables Turned.)

