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goes beyond it, neither does he disdain minuteness. He also loved Nature for her own sake, and if Crabbe rode, as we are told, sixty miles in twenty-four hours for the sake of catching one glimpse of the sea, Cowper speaks of the love of Nature as an inextinguishable thirst in Man, and bringing his religion to bear on it, declares that this love was infused by God into Man at the creation.

Therefore now, for the first time in English poetry, we have got three things—Nature studied as a whole, Nature loved for her own sake, and therefore Nature conceived as a distinct subject for poetical treatment.

And when this was done, a distinct theology of Nature, in our sense of the word, became for the first time possible. Pope had, as we have seen, his own natural theology. It was of God's relation to the great whole conceived of as a system which appealed to the intellect and its admiration: and this great whole involved Man and Nature together. When the poets who came after him little by little divided Nature from Man for separate consideration, and described and dwelt on separate portions of her beauty, they lost the idea of Nature as a whole, and that had to be recovered before a theology of Nature was possible. When it was recovered, as it was by Wordsworth, it was a different conception from that of Pope. Man had been taken out of it. It is plain that as long as Nature was only loved for the feelings it awoke in Man, or for the lessons it gave him, he could not help mingling it up with himself, and there could be no theology of it which was not also a theology of Man. But when it began to be loved for its own sake as separate from us, the poets began to ask, how is God related to it? what is it in Nature which we love? what is the One Spirit in this mighty whole which speaks to us in another voice than that which we hear in our heart?

Again, as long as isolated landscapes and things in Nature were alone described, no conception of the whole was formed. When it was, the poet naturally asked, what is the source of this Oneness of life, in whom is this whole contained? And out of the effort to reply to these

questions the distinct theology of Nature in our poetry took its rise.

Moreover, the new attitude of man towards the whole of Nature tended in the poets to make the new theology religious. It was not the attitude of those who reasoned, like Pope, on what they saw, it was the attitude of those who loved, and were content alone to love. And the love ended in worship. Some, like Shelley, not believing in revealed religion, not even being Deists, created an all-pervading Spirit in the world, and would not call it God, nor give it personality, but called it Love and Life, and in the love and worship that they gave it found their religion, and had the emotions of religion. It was not the great Order of Pope which awoke their intellectual admiration, it was the animating Love in Nature which stirred their heart. Others, like Wordsworth, believing in God, saw Him in the loveliness and tenderness and quiet that they loved, and worshipped not the author of a great system whom they dared not scan, but a Divine Spirit in the Universe—not necessarily personal there, though personal in them—and said, “This Presence which disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts, this Wisdom and Beauty, is revealing itself to me. I can listen, I can understand its voice. It is in Nature the same voice, though in a different language, which belongs to God my Father in my heart, and the work it is doing on me is a work of education. Not by reason but by feeling, not by admiration but by love, I make its lessons mine. Therefore I shall give myself wholly, when I am with Nature, to absolute self-forgetful love of her.” In that way the theology of Nature became religious, and that reacted in turn on the poetical contemplation of Nature, and made it more loving and more intense.

We shall find all this in Wordsworth, but we only find its beginning in Crabbe and Cowper. They had lost, in dividing Man from Nature, Pope’s thought of a life immanent in the whole order of things. And in their theology of Nature they were driven to think of it as only “dull matter” in Cowper’s phrase, but matter subject to laws which God had ordained. When they looked then at

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natural things from the poet's point of feeling, they saw their beauty as the result of this order, and referred the whole to God who directed it from without. Nature was a machine which God had set in motion, but it moved without any living consciousness of its own motion.

The last step, therefore, in the poetic theology of Nature had not then been made. The poets had not reached the stage in which they were forced, not only by their own feelings, but also by the needs of their art, to conceive of the universe beyond themselves as living. Crabbe made no advance towards it; his was the mechanical theory alone of God and the universe. But Cowper, though he held the same theory for the most part, made one step towards the higher view, and he made it through his religion. His intense personality forced him, when under poetic emotion, to lay aside the mechanical theory, and we find passages where he ceases to interpose laws between Nature and God. He transferred from his theological creed the doctrine of the personal superintendence of God over every human life to the realm of Nature, and bringing God directly into contact with it, declared that He maintained its course by an unremitting act. How else could matter seem as if it were alive,—

unless impelled
To ceaseless service by a ceaseless force,
And under pressure of some conscious cause.
The Lord of all, Himself through all diffused,
Sustains and is the Life of all that lives.
Nature is but the name of an effect
Whose cause is God.

But his special personal theology which abode in worship of Christ, carried him still further; and he makes Christ Himself as the Eternal Word, as the acting Thought of God—the ruler of the universe, and the author of its forms.

One spirit, His
Who wore the plaited thorns with bleeding brows,
Rules universal Nature. Not a flower
But shows some touch in freckle, streak, or stain,

Of His unrivalled pencil. He inspires
 Their balmy odours, and imparts their hues,
 And bathes their eyes with nectar, and includes
 In grains as countless as the seaside sands
 The forms with which he sprinkles all the earth.

We have now made, you observe, a step further. Nature, it is true, is not yet alive, but a spirit of life is now in it, separate from it, but working in it. So near, in fact, have we got to the conception of Nature as alive, that Cowper is betrayed unconsciously into phrases which mingle God up with the universe and make it living. The lines above, which speak of the diffusion of God through all, are repeated in idea in this other phrase:

There lives and works
 A soul in all things, and that soul is God.

This is a contradiction of his position of a God wholly distinct from the universe, but it marks the transition to the last step in the poetic idea of Nature. It is the conception of Nature as a living Being to whom affection was due, who could of herself awake feeling and thought in Man, whom we could love as we love our fellow-men, who lived her own life and had conscious pleasure in it—it is this conception which unconsciously in Cowper began to tremble into being. It sprang into full being in Wordsworth, and then, when Nature was conceived of as alive, its theology took a new form, or rather several forms—each modified by the personal theology of philosophy of the poet—in the poetry of England.

I shall trace that through Wordsworth and Shelley; we shall see how it influenced or did not influence the poetry of Byron and Keats; I shall mark the transitional position of Coleridge with regard to it; but before I enter upon it, I must discuss, not only how far Cowper carried the poetry of Man and how he made it theological, but also how far his theology influenced his personal poetry. That will form the subject of my next lecture.

LECTURE III

COWPER

I TRACED in my first lecture the growth of the poetry of Man from the Critical School to Cowper. In Cowper's hands, it took a much wider development. I only laid down the larger lines of its growth, omitting for the sake of clearness a number of branch lines, such as that of the new interest taken in the romantic past, which, touched by Macpherson in his *Ossian*, and by Chatterton in his forgeries, was afterwards fully worked out in narrative poetry by Sir Walter Scott: such as the ballad, which chose a short narrative of human passion and related it with simplicity and intensity—or the shorter lyric, which in its treatment of a passing phase of meditative or violent passion of the heart, and in its strict limitation of itself within that phase, so as to preserve what is called lyrical unity, is strictly analogous to the hymn in its treatment of a sudden and transient phase of the life of spiritual feeling.

These and others I pass by—though one sees how largely they entered the work of the poets on Man—because theology of any kind would not be likely to intrude into them.

I remain close then to the large lines I have spoken of; and my object in the first part of this lecture is, to show how largely Cowper extended the poetry of Man, and how it was influenced, and in him indeed drenched with theology.

I approach the subject by asking where we find him writing, and the question has its meaning. We find him retired in the heart of a very quiet country. The slow eddying Ouse flowed close to his dwelling through its willow-haunted meadows; it accompanied his walks, and its quiet movement seems to flow through his poetry.

Day after day, Yardley Wood and the park of the Throckmortons saw the silent poet-face moving amidst their trees. But little society disturbed that sequestered life; few were the men and fewer the women whom he met; he companied with sheep and birds, with his hares and his spaniel, till he grew to know them as his friends; and one would say that in such a life the poetry of Man was not likely to flourish, nor was a wide view of mankind possible. Was it probable that this lawyer's clerk, who had made a hopeless failure of his public life, should say more of human nature and strike deeper into the world of men than the brilliant Londoner, Pope, or the courtly scholar, Gray—that the voice which spoke of Man from the solitude of the country should say more than the voice which spoke of him from the crowded society of the city?

In one point certainly this rural retirement spoiled the largeness of Cowper's view. He saw cities and their evils through the exaggeration of distance, and in that glare of morality in which sin is so magnified that the good which balances it is lost. His doctrinal views had also power over him, and he saw the curse which rested on man and nothing else, when he looked upon the city. It was different when he turned his eyes upon the village and the country poor. Seeing clearly their evil he also saw their good, and it is with some naïveté that he imputes more than half the evil in the country to the influence of those who drift thither from the town. But whether in the country or the town, Cowper's religion led him to trace all moral guilt and folly to the world's rejection of Christ.

But the point I wish to draw your attention to is, that unlike the town poet of the past to whom the dwellers in the country are nothing, we have now the country poet deeply interested in the life of towns as well as in the life around him. It is no longer classes of men which awake sympathy, nor special societies; it is no longer the passionate or the moral or the intellectual side of human nature, each alone, on which the poet dwells—it is the whole of mankind, it is the whole of human nature.

The truth is, the first swell of the great wave which put

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Man in the foremost place and interest, Man independent of rank and caste and convention and education, Man in his simple elements, was now flowing over Europe. Poets are quick to feel, and it reached the quiet Cowper in his hermitage, as it reached the lowland lad who,

in his glory and his joy,
Followed his plough along the mountain side,

and for the first time, as one smells the brine before one sees the ocean, we scent in English poetry, too distinctly to be explained away, the air of those ideas of which the French Revolution was the most local and the most violent outburst. For the first time an attempt is made in poetry to cover the whole range of Man, to think of Man as one people; to spread poetical interest over all who wear a human face. And it was done, as is commonly the case when the impulse is received from an idea which has not yet taken any political form, quite unconsciously. Cowper talked as naturally of *all men* as Pope did of one of two classes of men: he asks how he and any man that lives could be strangers to each other; he conceives of his poetic work as for the service of mankind; and such an aim was now for the first time possible. A universal idea of Man had passed from political philosophers to the people, and the undefined emotion it stirred in the people was felt and thrown into form by the poets.

But the revolutionary idea of the unity of Man was in Cowper's mind grounded on a theological one, on God as the common Maker of Man. He speaks of "the link of brotherhood, by which one common Maker bound him to the Kind." And his work for men was to make them out of sin and death into life with God, for they are

Bone of my bone, and kindred souls to mine.

To this religious element of a universal brotherhood in God is to be traced the large range of his human view. He looked abroad and saw all men related to God, it mattered not of what nation, caste, or colour. As such they had equal rights and equal duties in a spiritual country of which all were citizens; for, as he writes, the limiting power

of his doctrinal theology departs and the individual theology of the poet who sympathises with all men, takes the upper hand. East, west, north, and south, his interest flew. In his satires he touches, not with savage bitterness, but with a gentleness which healed while it lashed, on nearly every phase of human life in England; on the universities and the schools, the hospitals and the prisons; on cities and villages; on the statesman, the clergyman, the lawyer, the soldier, the man of science, the critic, the writer for the press, the pleasure-seeker, the hunter, the musician, the epicure, the card-player, the ploughman, the cottager, and fifty others. Their good side, their follies, their vices, are sketched and ridiculed and praised. The range of his interest was as wide as human life, and as he sketched, he saw as the one ideal and the one remedy for all—the Cross of Christ. Whatever we may think of his religion or the manner of it, there is no doubt but that it indefinitely extended his poetic sympathy, and that in this extension of sympathy we find ourselves in another world altogether than that of Dryden, Pope, or Gray. It is no longer intellectual interest in man, or sentimental interest; it is vivid, personal, passionate.

It went beyond classes of men, it was an interest in his nation; but he derived his patriotism and drew the passion with which he informed it from the connection of his country with God. It was God who was the King of England, and was educating the nation; and this conception bound all citizens together into mutual love of one another and the whole. On this ground he made his impassioned appeal to his countrymen to throw off their vices and follies and to be worthy of their high vocation; would they not, he asked, be true to Him who had wrought so gloriously among them? This is the note of many a passage in the *Task*, of the whole of his poem of *Expostulation*; and it is not a note of merely lyric interest in England's glory on the seas, like Thomson's *Rule Britannia*, nor one of intellectual passion, like the references to her noble periods of history in the *Bard*—it is a note that thrills with emotion for England as

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God's nation, and having a work to do for Man. We already breathe the air of the patriotic poetry of Wordsworth.

Nor does this interest in Man remain fixed in England. God had children, bone of the poet's bone, and flesh of his flesh, in other lands. From the banks of the Ouse his heart carried him to Greenland, to Italy, to France, to the islands of the Pacific, to the shores of Africa and South America. In these distant lands were his brothers, and he transferred the inalienable rights of Man from the free and civilised European to the slave and the savage; there was no man, he thought, who ought not to feel himself allied to all the race.

The noblest right of Man was liberty, and this in Cowper's thought was the gift of God to Man. Whoever took it away did the most accursed of all sins. His poetical theology saw God as the deliverer and avenger of the oppressed. He traces the ruin of Spain to the wrath of God for its crimes against its subject races. He places the cause of the slave in the hands of God.

In Cowper the poetry of human wrong begins, that long, long cry against oppression and evil done by man to man, against the political, moral, or priestly tyrant, which rings louder and louder through Burns, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron, ever impassioned, ever longing, ever prophetic—never, in the darkest time, quite despairing.

The wide range given to it by Cowper, the personal passion in it, the glance it took forward to a brighter time, its theological element of God as the source of freedom and the avenger of tyranny, are all elements distinctly new to our poetry, above all new in their tremendous power of awakening and maintaining the humane emotions which must create a human poetry. Cowper carried this poetry of human wrong into the prisons with Howard, and into the cottages and lives of the poor; he denounced the landowners who abandoned them, and the merchants who "built factories with blood." Passing on, inspired by this cause, he poured out his indignation and his scorn on kings and nobles who used

the common-weal for their own purposes. "Patience itself," he cries, "is meanness in a slave." That there should be men base enough to bear the caprice of despots, and to have freedom only on sufferance was the very folly of infamy in his mind. Then he turns to sketch the English King, and his sketch makes the preceding still more forcible.

We love

The King who loves the law, respects his bounds,
And reigns content within them: him we serve
Freely and with delight, who leaves us free:
But recollecting still that he is man,
We trust him not too far. King though he be,
And King in England too, he may be weak
And vain enough to be ambitious still,
May exercise amiss his proper powers,
Or covet more than freemen choose to grant:
Beyond that mark is treason.

We may hear in all this nothing more than the old Whig doctrines in which the Cowpers had been brought up; but there is a newer element in it which insensibly entered into Cowper, the cry of the coming revolution. We feel that plainly when he suddenly places us in front of the Bastile,—

Ye horrid towers, the abode of broken hearts,
Ye dungeons and ye caverns of despair,
That monarchs have supplied from age to age
With music such as suits their sovereign ears,
The sighs and groans of miserable men!
There's not an English heart that would not leap
To hear that ye were fallen at last.

And high an English heart did leap when, a few years afterwards, Wordsworth heard that they were fallen, and recorded his triumphant joy by the voice of the Solitary in the *Excursion*. Nor is it less new in English poetry to find a poet putting aside blind patriotism and rejoicing

to know

That even our enemies, so oft employed
In forging chains for us, themselves were free.

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For he who loves freedom does not limit his zeal for it to his own country—its cause, he says, is the cause of Man, for it is the cause of God.

But here Cowper could not stop. He saw a higher liberty than any on earth, a liberty without which political liberty was in vain, with which even the slave felt free, the liberty of heart derived from Heaven:

Bought with His blood who gave it to mankind.

The whole passage is a noble one, and as emotional as that which precedes it: in both together, the passion of religion and the passion of political freedom are fused into one, and they run up into the highest expression then given in the English language of the poetry of human liberty. It had been touched before: Glover, in his *Leonidas*; Akenside, in a now forgotten poem; Burke, in prose which we may almost call poetic, and which itself went forth to influence the poets; Darwin, in *The Botanic Garden*, had condemned slavery on the ground more or less of the unity of Man; but by none was so bold, so impassioned, so complete an expression given of the rights of Man as Man as by the retired lawyer's-clerk at Olney. He struck the first note of the revolutionary poetry. He struck it in connection with God, and with us it has never lost that connection.

But even further Cowper carried the poetry of Man. International union rose before him like a dream; he thought of a higher earth in which wars and hatreds should cease and each nation enjoy the other's good. It was a dream, partly caused by the results of the peaceful and commercial administration of Walpole, but it was like many other dreams, in the air. Cowper grounded it on the natural bond of brotherhood among men, a bond which their common fellowship in sorrow ought to draw closer. Social intercourse, "benevolence and peace and mutual aid," commerce and art were designed, he thought, "To associate all the branches of mankind."

Nor did Cowper forget the work of the natural philosopher, and though driven by his notion of the evil of pride of intellect he set philosophy too much in opposition to

religion, yet even here his predominant idea of the union of all men into one mankind comes in to unite the work of science with that of art and commerce. "He too," speaking of the natural philosopher,

has a connecting power, and draws
Man to the centre of the common cause.

All these passages of which I speak were written in 1782, and no one can deny the novelty of their idea in English poetry nor the great expansion which that idea gave to its subjects. For, treated from Cowper's point of view, from the emotional conception of Man as a great whole, this thought of an international union, and of its means, free trade and the rest, becomes a subject capable of poetical treatment, and it remains such to the present day. Wordsworth took it up, Shelley idealised it in his aerial sketches of a world of Love; and Tennyson in well-known lines embodies the same idea.

Then comes to close this long poetry of Man, Cowper's vision of the restoration of all things, in which he brings for the last time God into Man, not now as the Judge, but as the Redeemer of the race, "to visit earth in mercy, to descend, propitious in his chariot paved with love." All climes are made beautiful in an eternal spring, "all creatures worship man, and all mankind one Lord, one Father." Error has no place, nor evil; "all is harmony and love; for heavenward all things tend;" and all nations bound together have their centre in Zion where God reigns.

It was a vision which now for the first time came into English poetry. Here and there it may be found before this time, but it was limited by the want of a universal idea of Man. But, now, when the great conception of mankind as One, one in rights and powers and destiny—of mankind as one universal brotherhood, was to be proclaimed in the political and social realms, and to bring with it the slow overthrow of all exclusive systems of society—the idea of a universal regeneration of the race became for the first time possible. In Cowper's mind it was limited by his exclusive theology, but that does

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not appear in this poetical passage where he rises on the wings of emotion above his theology. In the after poets it becomes a noble element in their song. For whenever it arose, the poet, filled with faith and hope in the fortunes of mankind, rushed into noble verse. We see how it told upon our poetry and told religiously, in the finest expression of it, in the *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley: but the note here struck by Cowper in connection with the idea of a universal mankind has never ceased to echo in our poetry.

I turn, in conclusion, to that personal element in Cowper's poetry, in which theology plays so sad a part. But first let me say two things. In connection with the poetry of Man as seen from the personal point of view, no English poet has ever excelled Cowper when he writes of the daily human affections. In him, one might almost say, began in English poetry that direct, close, impassioned representation, in the least sensational manner, of such common relations as motherhood, filial piety, friendship, married love, the relation of man to animals—and in him they are made religious. There is nothing more pathetic yet more simple in English poetry than the lines on his mother's picture, or the sonnet and lines addressed to Mary Unwin. In the lines on the picture and in the sonnet, the natural piety of the relations of a son to a mother, and of a friend to a friend, are bound up with religion; and the infinite pitifulness of both are somewhat relieved by hope in God. In the later lines to Mrs. Unwin, when she was nearly as insane as he, there is no religion. It is "passionless despair, but the despair which loves to the last."

The second thing I remark leads me to the personal poetry of Cowper in its theological aspect. Much of it is a terrible record, stained with insanity, wretched with horror and despair. It has also, as we have seen, its gentler, sweeter, nobler aspect when he was happy with God; but even here it is often morbid with overwrought feeling. But we must not think that this personal misery or the morbid element in his religion extended over his whole moral life, so as to make him or his

poetry unmanly. He was partly saved from that by his humour—humour which is the guard of intellectual and moral sanity. But however saved, Cowper's treatment of all moral subjects is distinguished from his treatment of his personal religion by an essential manliness of tone. Nowhere in our poetry is there heard a finer scorn of vanity, ambition, meanness; nowhere is truth more nobly exalted, or justice more sternly glorified. And his tenderness for the weak and poor and wronged is as sweet as his hatred of oppression is strong. We breathe throughout an invigorating air.

It is different when we return to his relation to God. That is almost darkness throughout. His Calvinism, which he seems to have had before meeting with Newton, combined with the tendency to madness in him, had produced a religious insanity, which, occurring at intervals through his life, finally fixed its talons on his heart, and never let him go, even in the hour of death. He believed himself irrevocably doomed by God. We can trace the first hints of it in some of his earlier poems. At last an outward event hurried the evil to a head, and he attempted suicide. During the madness which followed we have one poem written which is almost too terrible to read, lit with a lurid light and full of ghastly power.

Hatred and vengeance—my eternal portion
Scarce can endure delay of execution—
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my
Soul in a moment.

Damned below Judas; more abhorred than he was,
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master!
Twice-betrayed Jesus me, the last delinquent,
Deems the profanest.

Man disavows, and Deity disowns me,
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;
Therefore, Hell keeps her ever-hungry mouths all
Bolted against me.

Hard lot! encompassed with a thousand dangers;
Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors,
I'm called, if vanquished! to receive a sentence
Worse than Abiram's.

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Him the vindictive rod of angry Justice
Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong;
I, fed with judgment, in a fleshly tomb, am
Buried above ground.

Whether his madness would have passed away under the influence of a higher theology than that which Newton presented to him, it is fruitless to inquire. Again and again it settled down on his life in profound gloom; it always threatened him, and days when he was happiest and best were often followed, even interspersed, by hours of misery. It is a dreadful thing to have the spirit mad and the intellect sound, and this was not rarely the case of Cowper. Some of his finest work was done when his soul trembled with the horror of coming hell, and it is possible here and there, in the midst of poems which breathe peace and simple gladness, to catch far off the note of that terror and pity which gives to the sequestered life of this lawyer's clerk the interest and power of tragedy. No pity is more touching than that he bestows on suffering, none more childlike and pathetic than that which he lavishes upon himself. He speaks of his fate as if it belonged to another man, caressing, as the case is with many of the insane, his own misery with the gentlest words. I have quoted the passage before, but in a different connection:—

I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since; with many an arrow deep infix'd
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by one who had Himself
Been hurt by the archers. In His side he bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.

What an infinite, long-continued self-compassion in the words! The note heard in them is low and sorrowful, and does not rise into passion; but the whole passage is exalted not into, but towards the region of great poetry, partly by its pictorial quality, but chiefly by the sudden yet natural introduction of Christ coming through the woods to heal him, and the association of his fate with that of the

Saviour. In the "Lines on receipt of my Mother's Picture," where he uses one of his favourite sea similes, the same self-pity takes to itself the element of passion, but it does not touch its deepest depth, for a shadow of hope remains.

But me scarce hoping to attain that rest,
Always from port withheld, always distressed—
Me howling blasts drive devious, tempest tost,
Sails ripped, seams opening wide, and compass lost,
And day by day some current's thwarting force
Sets me more distant from a prosperous course.
Yet oh! the thought that thou art safe—and he!
That thought is joy, arrive what may to me.

One sees that most of the intensity in that arises from the conviction that there is an irreversible fate against him. Continually, by hard striving, bringing himself near to port, continually driven away by a superior power; contending, weak as he was, with destiny till the last, yet knowing the contest to be in vain; he has unconsciously put himself into the position in which Greek Tragedy placed its heroes, but in the midst of an unheroic time and scenery, and with a heart not fitted to wage the battle of *Œdipus*; so that, though the mental position is tragic, the poetry wants the sublimity and the force of tragedy. Still there is profound passion in it, working especially in the complete transference of himself into the soul of the tormented ship, and in the splendid use of the word "devious" in the third line. Unpretentious as the verses are, the stamp of passion is far deeper set upon them than in similar lines in Byron, where even his colossal power could not overcome the unreality of his self-pity.

But it is in the last poem which Cowper wrote, in the midst of the three last years of his madness and his life, that this self-compassion does reach the centre of intensity. In the *Castaway*, a poem in its sphere of the very highest class, where simplicity of pitiful narration is set in melodious verse by an art which had now become Nature—Cowper mingles up his fate with that of the drowned sailor of Anson's ship. He cannot help

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beginning in the first person; realising the terrible night and the swift ruin as his own. He makes himself the sailor:—

Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,
Washed headlong from on board,
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left.

He changes then to description in the third person, but we feel as we read of the long struggle of the swimmer, “supported by despair of life;” as he describes the pitiless blast which forbade his friends to rescue him, the useless succour of the cask and cord which served only to prolong his agony, the bitter thought that they were right to leave him—that we are looking into the heart of Cowper’s life. With what exquisite simplicity of words, and yet with what a grasp of misery, is the next verse conceived—

He long survives, who lives an hour
In Ocean, self-upheld;
And so long he, with unspent power,
His destiny repelled;
And ever as the minutes flew
Entreated help, or cried Adieu.

We are now relieved by a change from the doom of the sailor to the grief of Anson for his fate, and then, in a sudden rushing of misery, in which the impassioned imagination rises almost into a wild cry, and the verse in the last two lines becomes abrupt, and the voice choked, he again dashes himself into the fate of the sailor, and both perish in the seas:—

No voice divine the storm allayed,
No light propitious shone,
When, snatched from all effectual aid,
We perished, each alone;
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.

The poetic life of Cowper lies between this poem at the end, and those terrible Sapphics at the beginning. He entered it in despair, he left it in despair. For a time, during which he wrote most of the *Olney Hymns*, he enjoyed the sense of that "assurance" of salvation on which his friend Newton dwelt so much, and the humble ecstasy of some of the hymns is wonderfully touching. But the lines which have found a place in every hymn book—

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform," etc.

mark the close of this period, and prophesy the relapse which followed. When the attack was over, he never recovered his sense of acceptance with God. He even learned to acquiesce, at times, in God's condemnation of him to eternal misery. But the weight of this dreadful belief did not always oppress him. It came and went like dark clouds upon an April day of sunshine, and till the last three years, his life had many intervals of happiness. Many lovely landscapes lay between these three valleys of the Shadow of Death, where he rested and was at peace; sweet idleness and fruitful contemplation—tender friendships and simple pleasures—hours where charming humour and simple pathos ran through one another, and interchanged their essence like the colours on a sunset sea—days of sweet fidelity to Nature in her quietest and most restoring moods—times when the peace that passeth all understanding made him as a child with God; but in the end the darkness settled down, deep and impenetrable: and the poet, who, of all English artists, has written, to my mind, the noblest hymns for depth of religious feeling and for loveliness of quiet style; whose life was blameless as the water-lilies which he loved, and the way of life of which on silent streams he made his own; whose heart breathed the sweetest air of natural piety, and yet could sympathise with the supersensuous world in which Guyon lived—died in ghastly hopelessness, refusing comfort

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to the last. On the physician asking how he felt, he answered, "I feel unutterable despair."—It is a strange commentary on the demand which the school of his friend Newton make, that on the death-bed there should be, or else one may scarcely dare to hope, a triumphant confession of faith.

COWPER'S LAST MOMENTS

"Dr. Moule, the Bishop of Durham, vouches for the following incident:

'When Cowper lay dying there did not come to him one gleam of hope. John Johnson, his nephew, was watching by him, and in thought was strongly tempted towards a blank infidelity by the sight of such goodness seemingly so deserted. Then, on a sudden, there came a change. The dying face was irradiated as with a surprise of joy "unspeakable and full of glory." Cowper lay speechless, motionless, but visibly enraptured for the last half-hour before the ceasing of his breath. Then his nephew clasped the dead man's Bible to his heart, and said, "His God shall be my God, and his faith my faith!"'

"Cowper's nephew, John Johnson, told the story to William Marsh, afterwards Dr. Marsh of Beckenham. Dr. Marsh told the story to his daughter, Miss Catharine Marsh, who, at the age of 88, still (in 1906) lives at Brandon. This lady related it to Dr. Moule."

LECTURE IV

COLERIDGE

COLERIDGE has not written much poetry, but he has written a great deal of theology. We know him as a theologian and his views, and the difficulty, of course, in such a lecture as this, which keeps strictly to the theology in his poetry, is to prevent oneself from slipping into discussion of his philosophic prose, and to think and speak of him only as a poet. I shall try to get what I have to say about his poetic view of Nature, Man, and God, into one lecture.

First, he, too, with the rest of the God-fearing English poets, saw in the proclamation of the revolutionary ideas the revelation of God; saw that the truth of universal brotherhood, and of the right of the meanest man to equal liberty, followed on and ought to be founded on the truth of God's universal Fatherhood. And when the first bright outburst of the Revolution took place, Coleridge was the poet who sang it with the stormiest glee and passion; something of the "storm and stress" (*Sturm und Drang*) period in Germany marks his verses, a violence of words and ideas, as if the more noise the more expression. Such lines as these show what I mean,—

Thus to sad sympathies I soothed my breast,
Calm as the rainbow in the weeping West:
When slumbering Freedom roused by high Disdain
With giant fury burst her triple chain!
Fierce on her front the blasting Dog-star glowed;
Her banners, like a midnight meteor, flowed;
Amid the yelling of the storm-rent skies
She came, and scattered battles from her eyes!

They are poor, but still they have a certain strength which will mellow—it is a shout of triumph, it is not the

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sensational shriek which exhausts itself. And they had a real enthusiasm at their root, that enthusiasm which delights to challenge established beliefs, as when Coleridge claimed heaven as the right of Chatterton the suicide; which is full of wild projects, as when, with Southey and some others, he planned their communistic expedition, and society on the banks of the Susquehanna, where he hoped to realise his new dreams of human peace and equality,—

O'er the ocean swell
Sublime of Hope I seek the cottage dell,
Where Virtue calm with careless step may stray;
And dancing to the moonlight roundelay,
The wizard Passions weave a holy spell.
O, Chatterton, that thou wert yet alive
Sure thou would'st spread the canvas to the gale
And love with us the tinkling team to drive,
O'er peaceful Freedom's undivided dale.

And it was an enthusiasm which, taking fire from the fire of the world, made him think, in the hope and joy which filled his heart, that all things were possible to faith so strong, and aspiration so intense; but which failed in expressing itself, at least at first, with any of the poetic force that is the child of temperance.

Later on, in 1796, when the early excitement had lessened, and he had had time to learn his art, Coleridge put into two odes his past and present feelings about the Revolution. They form the transition between his first wild hopes and his later conservative despair.

The *Ode to the Departing Year* is the first of these, and it has its historical interest as well as its theological. It begins with the statement of his belief in God who regulates into one vast harmony all the events of time, however calamitous some of them may seem. It calls on God by the voice of the *Spirit of the Earth* to avenge the wrongs of the poor and the slave, to speak in thunder to England who has been the oppressor, and who now seeks to league herself against liberty. And its revolutionary character is strongly marked in this, that it dissolves the tie of patriotism in behalf of the interests of mankind. It

makes the nations rise to curse England, abandoned of heaven, standing aloof at cowardly distance from the interest of mankind.

Nor is the same character less forcibly seen in the *Ode to France*, where he looks back in 1797 on what he had felt some years before.

When France in wrath her giant limbs upreared,
 And with that oath, which smote air, earth, and sea,
 Stamped her strong foot and said she would be free,
 Bear witness for me, how I hoped and feared!
 With what a joy my lofty gratulation
 Unawed I sang, amid a slavish band:
 And when to whelm the disenchanting nation,
 Like fiends embattled by a wizard's wand,
 The monarchs marched in evil day,
 And Britain joined the dire array;
 Though dear her shores and circling ocean,
 Though many friendships, many youthful loves
 Had swoll'n the patriot emotion,
 And flung a magic light o'er all her hills and groves;
 Yet still my voice unaltered sang defeat
 To all that braved the tyrant-quelling lance,
 And shame too long delayed and vain retreat!
 For ne'er, O Liberty! with partial aim
 I dimmed thy light or damped thy holy flame;
 But blessed the pæans of delivered France,
 And hung my head and wept at Britain's name.

Like Wordsworth, he divided himself, for the sake of Man, from an attack on liberty, even when made by his own country, for it was an attack on God; and unpartaking of the evil thing, bewailed the vileness of his nation; nor did he remain in solitude, pampering his heart with feelings about human wrongs and liberty too delicate for use, but, made active by his fervour, went among men, doing what practical work he could. Nor, at first, did the blasphemy, and Terror, and blood of the Revolution in Paris daunt his hopes any more than they did Wordsworth's. These evils, he thought, could not be helped; they were the necessary storms that precede the fulfilment of a vast change for the better in human things, and behind them, though they hid its light, the sun was rising.

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And soon, when France had quelled domestic treason, and the terror ceased, and her armies went forth, "insupportably advancing" to overthrow the enemies of freedom, his heart recovered, his hopes seemed fulfilled.

And soon, I said, shall Wisdom teach her love
In the low huts of them that toil and groan!
And conquering by her happiness alone,
Shall France compel the nations to be free,
Till love and joy look round, and call the earth their own.

It was not, then, the horrors of the Revolution that shook his faith in it. But it was this—it was the attack of France, the champion of freedom, upon the freest spot in Europe, upon the "stormy wilds" of Switzerland and on her bloodless liberty. It was when she "mixed with kings in the low lust of sway," and insulted

the shrine of liberty with spoils
From freemen torn,

that Coleridge fell back in hopelessness of the world, in hatred of the Revolution, upon the sense of Liberty in his own heart, and taking refuge in the solitudes of nature, declared, with a certain impatient petulance, that he could only truly feel the spirit of freedom when he sent his being out of himself through earth and sea and air, and possessed

All things with intensest love.

And the reaction was deepened when England herself was threatened with invasion, and when France that threatened her was no longer the apostle of liberty but the apostle of despotism. It seemed a duty then to lay aside wild hopes of universal love of Man, and to fall back on the old idea of patriotism; and doing so, the last large idea of the Revolution passed away from men like Coleridge.

They might have been able to be true to their first love, even when England was menaced, if France had been without Napoleon. But the Empire was more than human nature could bear. The hope had been so high, and the disappointment so deep, that it produced anger

towards the ideas that had given birth to the hope, and men felt towards them as one does to a treacherous friend whose love has promised much and ended in deceit. Mingled with this was anger at the attack on England, a natural feeling, and now justified as against a tyrant who, under the name of liberty, was enslaving Europe; and both these, combined with a backward look to the horrors of the Terror for which there seemed now no excuse, forced these men back at last, step by step, into a blank conservatism for which they have been bitterly blamed as traitors to the cause of liberty. But they had something to say for themselves. After all, they said, England has been bad and is bad enough. But she is better than this; in her we find the bulwark of freedom, the true defence against the despot. We will, then, support her institutions through thick and thin, give up hysterical efforts after liberty and put them down. We have dreamt a dream; but we have awaked and will keep ourselves awake by keeping things as they are. And now, we turn and look at our own dear land, and all our patriotism returns; of all our fears and abuse of her we are ashamed. With her, and round her altars and homes, we are content to live and die.

“O, native Britain,” cries Coleridge,

O, my mother Isle,
How should'st thou prove aught else but dear and holy
To me, who, from thy lakes and mountain hills,
Thy clouds, thy quiet dales, thy rocks and seas,
Have drunk in all my intellectual life,
All sweet sensations, all ennobling thoughts,
All adoration of the God in Nature,
All lovely and all honourable things,
Whatever makes this mortal spirit feel
The joy and greatness of its future being?
There lives nor form nor feeling in my soul
Unborrowed from my country.

This, taken with the rest, is the poetical cry of an approaching conservatism, but of one which in men who had once held a higher view than that of mere patriotism, who had loved Man more than England, was likely as they

grew older to sink into a blind opposition to all change a blind hatred of all new ideas as dangerous. Neither in Wordsworth nor Coleridge did it quite become that. Coleridge was saved by his philosophy, Wordsworth by his poetry, and both by their Christianity, but still in both the change was great and sad. Yet we should be merciful when we speak of it. We should remember the bitterness of the disappointment, the heart-crushing sorrow that went with it, and not join in the outcry of Shelley and others, who, born later, had never been raised so high in hope and never experienced so fatal a reaction.

It was a rapid change, however, in the case of Coleridge, much more rapid than Wordsworth's. For Coleridge had been less firm, less quiet, less resolute, less clear-sighted, less temperate than Wordsworth. His hopes and their expression were like those of a wild boy; and their strength was the strength of violence. And when the shock came, he chilled quicker, his force was quicker drained. For Coleridge wanted will, and with will, perseverance and continuance. Nothing gave his will force but high-pitched enthusiasm, and with its death within him, with the perishing of his youthful dream, the enduring energy of life visited him no more. And this is specially true of him as poet. Almost all his best poetic work is coincident with the Revolution; afterwards everything is incomplete. The weakness of will was doubled by disease, and trebled by opium, and his poetic life, even his philosophic work, was splendid failure. That which, in self-reproachful pity, he says of one of his unfinished poems was true of his whole life, and it has its deep pathos, "To-morrow I will sing the rest of this song, but the to-morrow has yet to come." Slowly, surely, premature age crept upon him, the light faded, and the only fine thing of his manhood's time is the *Ode to Dejection*, one verse of which too well represents the ruin of his life.

There was a time when, though my path was rough,
 This joy within me dallied with distress,
 And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
 Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:
 For Hope grew round me, like the twining vine,

And fruits, and foliage, not mine own, seemed mine.
 But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
 Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth.

But, oh! each visitation,
 Suspends what Nature gave me at my birth,
 My shaping spirit of Imagination.
 For not to think of what I needs must feel,
 But to be still and patient all I can;
 And haply by abstruse research to steal
 From my own nature all the natural man—
 This was my sole resource, my only plan:
 Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
 And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.

And the only beautiful thing of his later years is the deep regret which is sung in *Youth and Age*.

Still more pitiful is the poem addressed to Wordsworth on reading the *Prelude*. He reads this "orphanic song," chanted to its own passionate music, and he is moved to the depth of his heart; his youthful passion comes again: but he has no strength, he falls back, bleeding and worn; and his misery is deepened when he contrasts his now broken work with the finished flower of Wordsworth's mind.

Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn,
 The pulses of my being beat anew:
 And even as life returns upon the drowned,
 Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains—
 Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe
 Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart;
 And fears self-willed, that shunned the eye of hope;
 And hope that scarce would know itself from fear;
 Sense of past youth, and manhood come in vain,
 And genius given, and knowledge won in vain;
 And all which I had culled in woodwalks wild,
 And all which patient toil had reared, and all,
 Commune with thee had opened out—but flowers
 Strewed on my corse, and borne upon my bier,
 In the same coffin, for the selfsame grave!

No dirge can be sadder than these lines; they are the cry of one who once had a mighty idea, and who, in the shock of its overthrow, was struck with paralysis. He

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sees that Wordsworth after the same shock remained calm and sure, and saw beyond the lost idea a nobler vision that his very loss had led him to; but it was not for him—nothing remained for him but prayer. The poetry-creating thought of a universal mankind, and of God as its king and guide, the theological idea of the poetry of Man had died in him; and with its death his true life as poet ceased. It is a woeful thing to have known a high conception and to fall short of it. It is still more woeful when we have linked it to God and love it, for with its loss our idea of God is lowered from that it might have been. There is no lesson so solemn in the whole range of modern poetry as that given by Coleridge's poetry—genius without will—religion without strength—hope without perseverance—art without the power of finish. What he did well was unique, but it was very little; and the volume we have from him influences us with all the sadness that a garden does in which two or three beautiful flowers rise and flower perfectly, but in which the rest are choked with weeds or run to seed. And to those who can compare the things of Art with the things of the soul and heart, the analogy has its own profound moral lesson.

And now I turn to him as the poet of Nature. What was his poetic conception of the relation of Nature to God and Man? His theology in Nature went through two phases. The first, in his wild young period, is very fantastic. There were multitudes of spirits, he conceived, belonging to the service of God; some contemplating spirits who gazed for ever on the fount of Deity; some in whose hands lay the guidance and the fate of nations, but others who were the forming spirits of creation, by whose operation all nature grew, and made itself, and died, and was born again.

Ye of plastic power, that interfused
Roll through the grosser and material mass
In organising surge—Holies of God!

He conceives, that is, that the one all-conscious Spirit

has within Himself, and sends forth from Himself, infinite myriads of self-conscious minds; some to weave the fates of Man and live in Man, others to live in and inform all the organic and inorganic forms of Nature. All these God informs

With absolute ubiquity of thought
(His one eternal self-affirming act).

So that the whole universe—through God's thought being always affirmed in all these spirits who make all things live—is always in God at every moment, and consists by Him. Nature, therefore, in all its myriad forms is ever alive in God; and each form, nevertheless, having a distinct spirit connected with it, seems to have its own peculiar life, and a self-centred end. Some, he says, speaking of those monads,

Some nurse the infant diamond in the mine,
Some roll the genial juices through the oak,
Some drive the mutinous clouds to clash in air.

The theory has some relation to Shelley's, only that Shelley makes Nature self-existent, Coleridge an effluence from God.

“Glory to Thee,” he cries,

Father of Earth and Heaven,
All-conscious Presence of the Universe,
Nature's vast ever-acting energy,
In Will, in Deed, impulse of All in All.

This is Coleridge's first idea.

He changes afterwards to the idea that it is the Thought of God in us which makes Nature to us. The existence of the outward world is only phenomenal, not actual. We have given us the forms of things in thought; and thinking these—we see, hear, and feel them, and build up the world of Nature from ourselves. Thus that which we call Nature only lives in us, it is we who make it; it can only be called alive because we are alive, and when we receive from it impressions, we receive, not something distinct from us, but our own thoughts. So that when we think and feel—Nature is.

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In a remarkable poem, the *Æolian Harp*, we have the first touch of this theory. The music of the wind-lute makes him think, as the wind touches it, of the whole of Nature breaking into harmony under the Thought of Man.

O, the one life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion, and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere.

And carried further, he states the same idea more distinctly—

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps,
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all.

In the last two lines the idea is made distinctly theological. We, each in our thinking, make the outward world for ourselves; but our thinking in this sphere is in its source the one Thought of God in which, infinitely varied through a myriad secondary forms of thought, the universe consists.

In this poem the thought is philosophically stated; afterwards, in a poem of human feeling, the *Ode to Dejection*, the same theory is stated from the side of melancholy sentiment. They are lines which every one has read:

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live;
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor, loveless, ever-anxious crowd—
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth,
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the earth—
And from the soul itself there must be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

There may be matter, that is, but matter only lives

when we think it and feel it. But our thinking and feeling of it are God's thinking and feeling of it through us. When we think, then, those thoughts of God that projected from us make the universe, we are thinking so much of God. Whosoever, then, thinks of the universe thinks of it as divine life: whosoever knows this as the truth rejoices in it, and from him goes forth over the whole appearance which the world takes to him, "a light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud," that makes glorious all things,—a sweet and potent voice, the echo of God in his own soul that turns the universe into music. Hence, when we have given life to Nature from ourselves—its "life the eddy of our living soul"—and our life is itself one that feels its source in God, and has conscious communion with Him—then there is nothing in Nature which to our thoughts is not God's life, which to our senses does not seem to speak or sing of Him. And we, finding Him everywhere, transfer our own feeling of thanksgiving and delight in His beauty and power to the world itself, and say, with the Psalmist, "That the Heavens declare His glory and the firmament sheweth His handiwork," that all things praise and bless Him. And Coleridge has written one noble psalm of Nature in his hymn at sunrise in the Valley of Chamouni, in which ice plains, and meadow streams, and pine groves, and flowers, and snow, "utter forth God and fill the hills with praise;" in which, with an image almost too daring, he pictures the great mountain rising and ever rising, like a cloud of incense from the earth, and telling to all the stars and to the rising sun that

Earth, with her thousand voices, praises God.

Secondly. The question arises, How, if Nature live only in our life, can she be said to have any influence over us? and yet it is plain that she does affect us. Coleridge, as a poet, replies in this way. The worldly man, who has lost his true self in devotion to the transient and the visible, does not of course recognise that Nature is the God within him speaking. It seems to him to be wholly different from himself or anything in himself. But being

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conceived of as different, he flies to it when wearied of self-seeking and of the busy human heart whose passions and follies have exhausted him; and he hears in it a voice strange to him, but beautiful, but which ought not to be so strange. For it is in truth the voice of God in his own soul that he hears; it is, in truth, his diviner self he hears, only he does not know that. But when heard, it recalls him to himself; it puts him in mind of higher things, and without his will he worships. At first it only seems to him that there is a spirit of unconscious life in trees and wild flowers, in which life he longs to share:

To be something that he knows not of,
In winds or waters or among the rocks,—

for in such sharing he will lose something of the importunate, craving, lower self in another life than his own. But as this longing passes into a real communion with Nature, and he forgets his lower being, new hopes, new pleasures come upon him, thoughts sublime, dreams in which his soul forsakes itself, tearful raptures, boyish mirth,

Silent adorations making
A blessed shadow of this earth;

and at last—though at first, as I said, he knows not what it is that has lifted him above himself—a light breaks upon him, he recognises that it is God within him who has spoken through Nature's images of beauty or peace or sublimity;¹ that the real lesson he has received did

¹ As illustrating all that is said here, I quote a passage from one of the few poems that rise above third-rate importance. It is from *Frost at Midnight* :

For I was reared
In the great city, pent mid cloisters dim,
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
But thou, my babe, shalt wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores; beneath the crags
Of ancient mountains, and beneath the clouds,
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags: So shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself.

not come to him from a dead Nature, but from his own awakening soul, using the apparent world as the means of teaching him that which his true self is. And when he has once learnt that lesson, then—this is the peculiarity of his relation towards apparent Nature—ever afterwards the impressions made on his senses by any beautiful object, or landscape, do not remain as sense-impressions. The image of the thing begins to be supplanted by the thoughts it awakens, and of which it is in reality the appearance; and ever growing less and less real, as it is replaced by the growing thoughts, becomes at last a vision in the mind, into which the whole soul for the time dilates, and in which if the soul be religious, it is swept upwards towards God, in whom thought and image had their source. For example, he is thinking of Mont Blanc, and says

O dread and silent Mount! I gazed upon thee
 Till thou, still present to my bodily sense,
 Didst vanish from my thought: entranced in prayer
 I worshipped the Invisible alone.
 Yet, like some sweet beguiling melody,
 So sweet, we know not we are listening to it,
 Thou, the meanwhile, wast blending with my thought,
 Yea, with my life and life's own secret joy:
 Till the dilating soul, enrapt, transfused
 Into the mighty vision passing—there
 As in her natural form, swelled vast to Heaven.

Or at other times, when the image seen is more homely, instead of a lofty mountain, a pastoral valley, or a pleasant glade where the thoughts and associations stirred are human; the visible image is gradually replaced by thoughts of real human love and joy and sorrow, by the vision of friendships gone and living, by hopes for man, by faith in his lofty destiny, by love of the whole race.

In both cases, we lose the sensuous impressions through the thoughts they awaken, and these thoughts are themselves the causes of the sensuous impressions, though that is at first unknown to us.

Our best enjoyment of Nature, then (if we take both

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these cases as those which include the greater number of smaller impressions and thoughts within them), is bound up with two things, with the ineffable, invisible life of God, and with the image of a perfect human society. So that we shall, first, gazing round

On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
Spirits perceive His presence.

So that, secondly, life with Nature will seem like conversation with noble men and women, and we receive from her human impulse and blessing, tenderer and kinder feelings,

A livelier impulse and a dance of thought,

“grateful,” as Coleridge says:

That by Nature's quietness,
And solitary musings, all my heart
Is softened, and made worthy to indulge
Love, and the thoughts that yearn for human kind.

But the whole of this view, which makes Nature the reflex of Man, has two special evils. Its first evil is that it fixes the mind when among natural beauty on self, till even in its highest expression, when it tells of joy and life, the poet closes by saying, that all the rapture we have in Nature is but this:

We in ourselves rejoice.

Nothing can be further than that from Wordsworth's healthier view, which is the direct opposite.

Its second evil is, that always troubled with self-thought in the midst of Nature, philosophising about himself and her, moving off to visit other things than her, the poet can never see Nature exactly as she is, and consequently never describes accurately, or vividly, or closely. Wordsworth, on the contrary, gave himself up to what Nature was saying to him, and rarely thought of what he had to say about himself in connection with her till he had received all the impressions she chose to

give him. He could look at a tree, a cloud, a flower, and see each as they were, unmixed with human feeling. Therefore we have from him close, direct description.

There are few passages in Coleridge of direct description; one, however, of special excellence, shows how he could have described if he could have got rid of the worry of self-thought, if he could have said, "I receive from Nature what I do not give; she has her own life, and that is *not* mine!" It is this description of the wayside spring that reads as if the mantle of Wordsworth had fallen on him as he wrote it:

This sycamore, oft musical with bees,—
Such tents the Patriarchs loved! O long unharmed
May all its aged boughs o'er canopy
The small round basin, which this jutting stone
Keeps pure from fallen leaves. Long may the Spring
Quietly, as a sleeping infant's breath,
Send up cold waters to the traveller
With soft and even pulse! Nor ever cease
Yon tiny cone of sand its soundless dance,
Which at the bottom, like a Fairy's page
As merry, and no taller, dances still
Nor wrinkles the smooth surface of the fount.

Now and then even he seems to feel that the true poetic position towards Nature was that which Wordsworth took up—that of one spirit, looking at and listening to another different from himself—and he expresses this in a few lines in his poem of the *Nightingale*, when he speaks of the poet, who, echoing the thought of the sorrow-stricken man, calls the nightingale a melancholy bird. He is one

Who hath been building up the rhyme
When he had better far have stretched his limbs
Beside a brook in mossy forest dell;
By sun or moonlight to the influxes
Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements
Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song
And of his fame forgetful! so his fame
Should share in Nature's immortality,
A venerable thing; and so his song
Should make all Nature lovelier, and itself
Be loved like Nature.

It is curious that the poem in which Coleridge is truest to Nature is the *Ancient Mariner*, written directly under Wordsworth's influence. It, too, shows us how much might have been done had he worked on a right path, had he not been led away by a philosophy which mingled up Man and Nature, not to look at Nature but at himself. Let me recall to you, in conclusion, the natural description of that poem, and mark how it is at once accurate, imaginative, and of wide range.

Its range extends from the quiet scenery of a country wood to the fierce scenery of the tropics, and to that of the polar zone. Few poems embrace so much, and the work is all of the best class. There are just incidentally touched, but touched with perfect pictorial skill and truth, at least a dozen aspects of the sea: the ship scudding before the stormy wind towards the south, with sloping masts and dipping prow; the iceberg-covered sea; the great snow fog over the sea, dark by day, glimmering white by night in the moonshine; the belt of calms, with its dreadful rolling swell and water "that like a witch's oils, burnt green, and blue, and white;" the sea in the tornado; the gentle weather of the temperate seas and the quiet English harbour. Looking at the shortness of the poem, the range is very great; while its accuracy of description—not the dull accuracy of mere portraiture, but poetical accuracy, the thing itself described but lit up with a glory of feeling or of association with other things—is very remarkable.

I read this description of the ship in moonlight at sea, in a tropic calm. The beauty of the illustration of the frost is equalled by its truth, the motion of the moon is almost heard in the verse, and yet the whole is a finished picture:

The moving moon went up the sky,
 And nowhere did abide:
 Softly she was going up,
 And a star or two beside—
 Her beams bemoaned the sultry main,
 Like April hoar-frost spread;
 But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
 The charmed water burnt away
 A still and awful red.

But Coleridge is discontent to leave the description of the sky without throwing round it the light of the higher imagination, and it is characteristic of the quaint phantasy which belonged to his nature that he puts the thoughts which lift the whole scene into the realm of the imagination into the prose gloss at the side—and it is perhaps the loveliest little thought in all his writings:

“ In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth toward the journeying moon, and the stars that still sojourn yet still move onward; and everywhere the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected, and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival.”

Nor in contrast with this tropic scene and the fierce character of its landscape is the quiet harbour in the temperate zone less truly felt or less clearly expressed. Though some of the lines are weak, the whole impression is vivid:

The harbour-bay was clear as glass
 So smoothly it was strewn!
 And on the bay the moonlight lay
 And the shadow of the moon.
 The rock shone bright, the kirk no less
 That stands above the rock:
 The moonlight steeped in silentness
 The steady weather-cock.

Then there are two other descriptions, one of the ship in a swift tropical squall in which the smallest details are true to fact, the other of the ship sailing quietly, which I throw together:

And the coming wind did roar more loud,
 And the sails did sigh like sedge,
 And the rain poured down from one black cloud,
 The moon was at its edge.
 The thick black cloud was cleft, and still
 The moon was at its side,
 Like waters shot from some high crag
 The lightning fell with never a jag,
 A river steep and wide.

And the other:

It ceased; yet still the sails made on
A pleasant noise till noon,
A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
That to the sleeping woods all night
Singeth a quiet tune.

In both these descriptions, one of the terror, the other of the softness, of Nature, a certain charm, of the source of which we are not at once conscious, is given by the introduction into the lonely sea of images borrowed from the land, but which exactly fit the sounds to be described at sea; such as the noise of the brook and the sighing of the sedge. We are brought into closer sympathy with the mariner by this subtle suggestion of his longing for the land and its peace. And we ourselves enjoy the travel of thought, swept to and fro without any shock—on account of the fitness of illustration and thing—from sea to land, from land to sea.

Much more might be said on this, but it tells its own tale. The poem illustrates still further—and this gives it its special interest to us—the personal, simple religion of Coleridge. We see in it how childlike the philosophic man could be in his faith, how little was enough for him. Its religion is all contained in the phrase—

He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

On this the changes are rung throughout; the motiveless slaughter of the bird is a crime; the other mariners who justify the killing of the bird because of the good it seems to bring them are even worse sinners than the Ancient Mariner. He did the ill deed on a hasty impulse; they deliberately agree to it for selfish reasons. They sin a second time against love by throwing the whole guilt on him, and again for selfish reasons. They are fatally punished, he lives to feel and expiate his wrong. And the turning point of his repentance is in the re-awakening of love, and is clearly marked. Left all alone on the

sea, "he despiseth the creatures of the calm, and envieth that so many should live and so many lie dead," and in that temper of contempt and envy Coleridge suggests that no prayer can live. But when seven days had passed, he looked again on God's creatures of the great calm, and seeing their beauty and their happiness, forgot his own misery, and the curse, and himself in them, and blessed and loved them; and in that temper of spirit prayer became possible:

O happy living things! no tongue
 Their beauty might declare:
 A spring of love gushed in my heart
 And I blessed them unaware.
 The self-same moment I could pray.

The main thought and its details have their own beauty, and they illustrate the new love of animals in English poetry, but there is an often-noticed absurdity which injures the sense of art in the mass of machinery which is used to impress so simple a thought. It is like making use of a calculating machine to add two and two together.

I have closed this lecture with the Ancient Mariner, for in some sort he resembles his creator. Like him, Coleridge's soul had been

Alone on a wide wide sea,
 So lone it was, that God himself
 Scarce seemed there to be.

Like him, though not as poet, Coleridge might say now:

I pass, like night, from land to land;
 I have strange power of speech;
 That moment that his face I see
 I know the man that must hear me,
 To him my tale I teach.

And like him, finally, the much adventuring man, the poet who had adventured so far into wild seas of mental and religious thought, came home at last and found peace in simple faith in God, in childlike humility, in

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mercy and love of man, and in reverence for all things:

O sweeter than the marriage feast
'Tis sweeter far to me
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company!
To walk together to the kirk
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men and babes and loving friends,
And youths and maidens gay.
He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small,
For the dear God who loveth us
He made and loveth all.

It would be no unpleasant thought to compare that close with that of Tennyson's *Two Voices*.

LECTURE V

WORDSWORTH

IN speaking of the poetry of Nature, we have at length arrived at Wordsworth, and in coming to him we come to the greatest of the English poets of this century; greatest not only as a poet, but as a philosopher. It is the mingling of profound thought, and of ordered thought, with poetic sensibility and power (the power always the master of the sensibility), which places him in this high position. He does possess a philosophy, and its range is wide as the universe. He sings of God, of Man, of Nature, and, as the result of these three, of Human Life, and they are all linked by thought, and through feeling, one to another; so that the result is a complete whole which one can study as if it were a world of its own. As such, the whole of his poetry is full, not of systematic theology, but of his own theology; and to bring this out, while at the same time analysing his work as a poet, is the object of the lectures I shall deliver upon him. My first subject will be the mode in which he conceives God in His relation to Nature, and necessarily what he means by Nature; the next will be the relation which Nature bears to Man, and the work of God on Man through that relation. Afterwards I shall speak fully of Wordsworth's poetry of Man and its theology. It may seem too much to those who know Wordsworth but little, to devote so many lectures to him alone, but the only feeling that one who loves this poet can have is, that too much time can scarcely be spent upon him; and that if only a few are induced not to glance over but to study his work, more good may be done than by a hundred sermons. For in truth his poetry is, as Coleridge said of the *Prelude*,

an Orphic song indeed,
A song divine of high and passionate thoughts
To their own music chanted.

The term Nature, in Wordsworth's use of it, means,

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sometimes, the Nature of Man, those inherent and indestructible qualities which are common to the whole race, and which form together that which we call Human Nature. In the realm of the imagination Wordsworth frequently conceives of this Human Nature as one person, acting as if directly from himself; the male being of the universe to whom Nature, that is, the spirit who informs the outward world, is as the female being of the universe wedded in love and holy marriage.

But the term he more commonly uses when speaking of Human Nature is the *Mind of Man*. For all the practical purposes of my lectures I may take the meaning of the term Nature to be concerned in Wordsworth's poetry with the world outside of us. In most of the previous poets, as in ordinary talk, it means the outward universe with its motions and laws, all that we know and feel beyond ourselves, organic and inorganic; and in this sense Wordsworth sometimes uses it. But that would not define his use of the term accurately, for then Nature might be conceived of as dead, or as the image of our own thought. Wordsworth added Life to the outward world, and separated it from our thought.

I traced in a previous lecture the growth of the conception of Nature as alive, and said that this conception which had only been in germ in others, reached its full growth in Wordsworth's poetry. In what way? The outward universe lay before the poet's eye and ear. He felt it speak to him, through his senses to his soul, and feeling this, he asked, What is it? Who is it that speaks? Is it only the matter of the universe, which by itself is dead? No, he answered; Matter is animated by a soul, and it is this soul which thrills to meet me. "An *active principle*" subsists

In all things, in all natures, in the stars
Of azure heaven, and unenduring clouds,
In flower and tree, in every pebbly stone
That paves the brooks; the stationary rocks,
The moving waters and the invisible air,

from link to link

It circulates, the soul of all the worlds.

Now that which acts, lives; and the universe lives as much by its soul as we do by ours.

To this active principle, Wordsworth gave personality; that which all shared in was in fact one. It was one life, one will, one character, one person. And this personality he called Nature.

To Wordsworth as he wrote, she took a living form, and became the life-giving spirit of the world. Day by day she built up the universe; it was she who, from her own vast life, gave to everything its special life, a separate soul to each:

Yet whate'er enjoyments dwell,
In the impenetrable cell
Of the silent heart, which Nature
Furnishes to every creature.

Each had from Nature not only its own distinct soul and character, but also its own distinct work to do; the elements had their business, "the stars have tasks, the silent heavens their goings on."

And not only had each separate thing the gift of a soul from Nature, but whenever a place, such as a lonely dell among the hills, had a special beauty and character of its own, it was it by reason of a special soul within it, of a more manifold soul than that which dwelt in a single flower or stone.¹

The thought was still further varied; and the larger divisions of the world of Nature, the whole of the sky, the whole of the earth and of the sea, were gifted with distinct and more complex being:

The gentleness of Heaven is on the sea:
Listen! the mighty Being is awake
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder everlastingly. .

And further still, the moving powers of Nature, the wind, when it dances over wood and hill, tossing trees and grass, bearing on its bosom the seeds of earth, becomes the

¹ "A spirit and pulse of good,
A life and soul to every mode of being
Inseparably linked."

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“over-soul” of the things it touches, adds to them a new pleasure and a new life, a life of reckless sport and jollity.

Describing the dandelion seed, or the thistle beard in their game upon the lake, Wordsworth writes—

Suddenly halting now, a lifeless stand!
And starting off again with freak as sudden;
In all its sportive wanderings, all the while
Making report of an invisible breeze,
That was its wings, its chariot, and its horse,
Its very playmate and its moving soul.

Nor is this all; Nature has her own personal pleasures, emotions, thoughts, plans, such as we might have. She chooses places, as we might do, for her special delight in the universe which is her kingdom, quiet places such as that “glade of water,” and one green field hidden far among the trees, of which the poet says—

The spot was made by Nature for herself,

giving vivid personality by this touch of selectiveness to the being he has created. She exercises watchful care over the life of all things; she loves, with passion pure and calm, all her children.

And her love passes from her own works to Man. She pours herself into the poets, whom she chooses for her special friends, and through whom she speaks to Man; and Wordsworth felt that he was chosen by her from his birth. Others there were whose souls, though unable to express themselves, were yet a favoured haunt of hers. Such was his brother, who had early gone to sea:

Nature there
Was with thee: she who loved us both, she still
Was with thee; and even so didst thou become
A silent Poet; from the solitude
Of the vast sea didst bring a watchful heart
Still couchant, an inevitable ear,
And an eye practised like a blind man's touch.

There were others also, whom she chose not as persons to

express her, but as children on whom she could lavish all her love without asking from them a return. And no lovelier poem exists than that in which Nature makes her whole world unite to educate and make beautiful one little maiden:

Three years she grew in sun and shower
Then Nature said—"A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown;
This Child I to myself will take,
She shall be mine, and I will make
A Lady of my own.
Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse; and with me
The Girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall feel an over-seeing power
To kindle and restrain."

There is no need to quote the rest, it is well-known; but nothing can be more living than the personality with which this poem invests Nature, nothing greater than the difference in feeling and thought between this conception and the mechanical Nature of Pope, or the dead universe of Cowper. We are in contact with a person, not with a thought. But who is this person? Is she only the creation of imagination, having no substantive reality beyond the mind of Wordsworth. No, she is the poetic impersonation of an actual Being, the form which the poet gives to the living Spirit of God in the outward world, in order that he may possess a metaphysical thought as a subject for his work as an artist. We know that this theological idea is at the basis of Wordsworth's representation of Nature from many passages. Here is one:

Wisdom and spirit of the Universe:
Thou Soul that art the Eternity of thought;
And giv'st to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion; not in vain,
By day or starlight, thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions which build up our human soul.

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This is God, living, moving, and rejoicing in all his works; not God in Man, but God in Nature, a wholly distinct manifestation of His life. Again, he speaks of

The Being that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves.

And to this Being he allots the care also of the creatures whom He loves. Moreover, His

Dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All things thinking, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

It is more, you observe, than a mere influence; it is a conscious life which realises itself as a personality, in realising itself within the sum of things. In fact, this Being, who is the life of the universe, is the all-moving Spirit of God, the soul which is the eternity of Thought in Nature.¹ It may be the fashion to call this pantheistic, but it is the true and necessary pantheism which affirms God in all, and all by Him, but which does not affirm that the All includes the whole of God. It is true a certain amount of what is called the personality of God seems to slip away from Wordsworth when he speaks of God being in Nature; but we must separate, in speaking of his theology, his idea of God in relation to man, which he conceived of as distinctly a personal relation, from his idea of God in relation to Nature, which he could not conceive of as an absolutely personal relation. In the case of man, God entering into what we call personality

¹ A few lines in the *Prelude* express this clearly:

Hitherto,
In progress through this Verse, my mind hath looked
Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven
As her prime teacher, intercourse with man
Established by the Sovereign Intellect,
Who through that bodily image hath diffused,
As might appear to the eye of fleeting time,
A deathless spirit.

Bk. v.

is thought of as personal—in the case of Nature, God entering into that which is impersonal is thought of as impersonal; or rather we are forced by our ignorance to use terms which imply impersonality, such as a motion, a Presence, and others.

Nevertheless Wordsworth's feeling of personality, that is, of distinct self-consciousness of Being in God, was so strong, that he uses also such terms as the "Being who is in the clouds and air," and he would probably have said that the personality of God in reference to Nature consisted in God's consciousness of Himself at every moment of time in every part, as well as in the whole of the universe.

But as this is a metaphysical and not a poetic thought, and as Wordsworth wanted a thought which he could use poetically,¹ he transferred this idea of God, realising His personality in the whole of the universe, to an actual person whom he creates, to a Being whom he terms Nature.

And hence there grew up in his mind the thought of one personal spiritual life, which had infinitely subdivided itself through all the forms of the outward world, which could realise an undivided life at any moment, but which also lived a distinct life in every part. It became possible then for him to have communication with any one manifestation of that life, in a tree, or a rock, or a cloud; to separate in thought the characteristics of any one form of it from another—or omitting the consideration of the parts—to think of or communicate with the whole, to realise the one spiritual life that conditioned itself in all,

¹ The closing lines of the sonnet written at sea off the Isle of Man show how keenly Wordsworth felt the necessity of conceiving of Nature and of all her forms as living, if any intense poetry of Nature was to be written, and how, as a poet of Nature, he resented the mechanical theory of the universe.

O Fancy, what an age was *that* for song!
That age when not by laws inanimate,
As men believed, the waters were impelled,
The air controlled, the stars their courses held;
But element and orb on *acts* did wait,
Of *Powers* endued with visible form, instinct
With will, and to their work by passion linked.

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as a Person with whom he could speak and from whom he could receive impulse, or warning, or affection.

And when this was done, when Nature seemed one Life, then the necessary spirituality of the thought made him lose consciousness of the material forms under which this life appeared; and that condition of mind arose in which Nature was unsubstantialised in thought. And we find Wordsworth in many passages representing this as his experience, nor is it at all an uncommon one. For there are times when the sense of this spiritual life in Nature becomes so dominant that the material world fades away, and we feel as if we ourselves were pure spirit, and all the objects of sense were not real things we could touch, but unsubstantial appearances. In certain physical states—when they are accompanied with that upper meditation, if I may so call it, in which one seems to float apart from the body—the outward world is not felt, but only the life which inspires it. We are forced to go to a tree to touch it, in order to realise that it is tangible. We receive, that is, images through the senses, and the senses give them to the imagination and the intellect to deal with. These powers turn the sensible images into ideas and emotions, and so vivid do these ideas and emotions become, that they push the sensible things which awaked them out of the field of our consciousness. Through the sense we lose the sense, through the visible we enter the world of the invisible. It is an experience many of us have gone through. It comes chiefly when the incessant small noises of Nature make less attack upon the ear, when we are high up on a mountain side, or when we sit at night by the sea when the low mist seems to hush the water into silence, or when in deep noon one sound alone, like the wandering voice of the cuckoo, smites on the ear. One knows how Wordsworth felt this last—how the invisible bird became to him only a voice, a mystery; till the whole world was taken out of the region of sense and made as visionary as this herald of the spring.

O blessed bird; the earth we pace
Again appears to be
An unsubstantial faery place:
That is fit home for thee.

It is an experience which often came to this poet as boy and man. It marked his youth, as he tells us in one of his letters; it marked his manhood, and then he knew better what it meant: then he felt that when the earth grew unsubstantial in this hour of ecstasy, it was to reveal the spiritual substance which lay within it, the life of the living God—the ineffable act and thought of God by which the universe consisted. He speaks of times when

The gross and visible frame of things
Relinquishes its hold upon the sense,
Yea, almost on the mind itself, and seems
All unsubstantialised.

And the living soul communes directly with the living soul of Nature, “spirit to spirit, ghost to ghost.”

What is it then, to which we speak, with whom we have communion? Not with Nature the poetic creation of the imagination, but with the spirit of the God who abides as Life in all. Here are some lines from the *Excursion* which express it, which embody the grandeur of Wordsworth's theology of Nature in words as grand as the thought:

Such was the Boy—but for the growing Youth
What soul was his, when, from the naked top
Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
Rise up, and bathe the world in light! He looked—
Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth
And ocean's liquid mass, in gladness lay
Beneath him:—Far and wide the clouds were touched
And in their silent faces could be read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him: they swallowed up
His animal being; in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;

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Rapt into still communion that transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him; it was blessedness and love!

I have now to ask, what are the special characteristics of this life of Nature, and how are they connected with the thought of a divine life?

The first characteristic of this life of Nature is, that it is a life of enjoyment. No instance of Wordsworth's belief in this is finer than the first poem upon the naming of places. I give it as one example, though the thought runs through the whole of Wordsworth:

It was an April morning: fresh and clear
The Rivulet, delighting in its strength,
Ran with a young man's speed; and yet the voice
Of waters which the winter had supplied
Was softened down into a vernal tone.
The spirit of enjoyment and desire,
And hopes and wishes, from all living things
Went circling, like a multitude of sounds.
The budding groves seemed eager to urge on
The steps of June: as if their various hues
Were only hindrances that stood between
Them and their object: but, meanwhile, prevailed
Such an entire contentment in the air
That every naked ash, and tardy tree
Yet leafless, showed as if the countenance
With which it looked on this delightful day
Were native to the summer.—Up the brook
I roamed in the confusion of my heart,
Alive to all things and forgetting all.
At length I to a sudden turning came
In this continuous glen, where down a rock
The Stream, so ardent in its course before,
Sent forth such sallies of glad sound that all
Which I till then had heard appeared the voice
Of common pleasure; beast and bird, the lamb,
The shepherd's dog, the linnnet and the thrush
Vied with this waterfall, and made a song
Which, while I listened, seemed like the wild growth
Or like some natural produce of the air,
That could not cease to be.