

CHAPTER III

BIOGRAPHICAL SCETCH OF THE AUTHOR

III.1. Life of Wordsworth

To understand the life of him, it is well to read first *THE PRELUDE*, which records the impression made upon Wordsworth's mind from his earliest recollection until his full manhood, in 1805, when the poem was completed. Outwardly his long and uneventful life divides itself naturally into four periods : (1) his childhood and youth, in the Cumberland Hills, from 1770 to 1787; (2) a period of uncertainty, of storm and stress, including his university life at Cambridge, his travels abroad, and his revolutionary experience, from 1787 to 1797; (3) a short but significant period of finding himself and his work, from 1797 to 1799; (4) a long period a retirement in the northern lake region, where he was born, and where for a half century lived so close to nature that her influence is reflected in all his poetry. When one has outlined these four periods he has told almost all that can be told a life which is marked, not by events, but largely by spiritual experiences.

He was born on April 7, 1770, at Cockermouth, Cumberland, on the edge of the Lake District, in an old brick house near the "bright blue river" Darwent. As the second son of John Wordsworth, was an attorney, and the

law agent and the manor steward for Sir James Lowther (later created earl of Lonsdale), and Aan Cookson, the daughter of a dry-goods merchant of the town of Penrith, William was born into the upper stratum of the provincial middle class, and he speech never lost a distinctive northern Burr. He was taught by his sensible mother and learned to read early and voraciously; Henry Fielding's novels and *DON QUIXOTE*, *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*, *GIL BLAS*, AND *ABRIDGED ARABIAN NIGHTS* were early favorites, and his father made him learn long passages from Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope by heart. Perhaps his first experience of pain and loss came with the death of his mother, when he was eight years old. The death of his father, five years later completed the break up of his home life. The family was dispersed, Dorothy being sent to live with her grandmother at Penrith; and Richard and William to School at Hawkshead in Lancashire. For eight years lived in Hawkshead at the house of Anne Tyson and attended the village grammar school. His schoolmaster was William Taylor, who taught him a good classical preparation for college. Equally as important was the informal education he received from his natural surrounding in this beautiful region of lakes and mountain. Trapping among the hills, skating on the lake, hanging on the giddy edge of cliffs while bird-nesting --- these are some of the Presence of Nature that wrought

upon him the impressive discipline of pain and fear, of beauty and joy.

The second period of Wordsworth's life begins with his university course at Cambridge, in 1787. Here he took more interest in his independent reading and his imaginative life based on communion with natural surrounding than in the curriculum. The years of 1791 to 1796 constitute Wordsworth's period of storm and stress --- His probable plan to recoup, return, and marry Annete was prevented by the outbreak of war between France and England in 1793 ... His agitation over this passion and its frustration, the shock he received when England went to war with France in 1793, his gradual disillusionment in the revolution ..., his fruitless search for congenial employment, his homeless wanderings, and ... --- All brought him to a spiritual catastrophe in which he "yielded up moral questions in despair".

Of the decisive period of Wordsworth's life, when he was living with his sister (Dorothy) and Coleridge at Alfoxden. Dorothy and Coleridge brought him back to those sweet counsels between head and heart and to that consolation of nature which he had during his period of despair. From July, 1797, to June, 1798, they were "three person and one soul", visiting almost daily and writing most of the poems that were going to go into

Lyrical Ballads.

The last half century of Wordsworth's life, in which he retired to his beloved lake district and lived successively at Grasmere and Rydal Mount, remind one strongly of Browning's long struggle for literary recognition. It was marked by the same steadfast purpose, the same trusted ideal, the same continuous work, and the same tardy recognition by the public. Wordsworth was hailed by critics as the first living poet, and one of the greatest that England had ever produced. He died tranquilly in 1850, at the age of eighty years, and was buried in the churchyard at Grasmere.

Such is the brief outward record of the world's greatest interpreter of nature's message; and only one who is acquainted with both nature and the poet can realize how inadequate is any biography; for the best thing about Wordsworth must always remain unsaid. It is a comfort to know that his life, noble, sincere, "heroically happy", never contradicted his message. Poetry was his life; his soul was in all his work; and only by reading what he has written can we understand the man.

III.2. Poetry of Wordsworth

Wordsworth is the greatest poet of nature that English literature had produced. If we study the poems that impress us, we shall find four remarkable characteristics : (1) he is as sensitive as a barometer to every subtle change in the world about him. In *The Prelude* he compared himself to an aeolian harp, which answers with harmony to every touch of the wind; (2) of all poets who have written of nature there is none that compares with him in the truthfulness of his representation; (3) No other poet ever found such abundant beauty in the common world. He had not only sight, but insight, that is, he not only sees clearly and describes accurately, but penetrates to the heart of things and always finds some exquisite meaning that is not written on the surface; (4) It is the "life" of nature which is everywhere recognized; not mere growth and cell changes, but sentiment, personal life; and the recognition of this personality in nature characterizes all the world's great poetry. In his childhood Wordsworth regarded natural objects, the streams, the hills, the flowers, even the winds, as his companions; and with his mature belief that all nature is the reflection of the living God, it was inevitable that his poetry should thrill with the sense of a spirit that "rolls through all things".

Such is the philosophy of Wordsworth's nature poetry, in his philosophy of human life, we shall find four more doctrines, which rest upon his basal conception that man isn't apart from nature, but is the very "life of her life". (1) In childhood man is sensitive as a wind harp to all natural influences; he is an epitome of the gladness and beauty of the world. In "*INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY FROM RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD*", Wordsworth explained this gladness and this sensitiveness to nature by the doctrine that the child comes straight from the Creator of nature. (2) The natural instincts and pleasure of childhood are the true standards of a man's happiness in this life. (3) The truth of humanity, that is, the common life which labors and loves and shares the general heritage of smiles and tears, is the only subject of permanent literary interest. Burns and the early poets of the Revival began the work of showing the romantic interest of common life; and Wordsworth continued it in "*MICHAEL*", "*THE SOLITARY REAPER*", "*TO A HIGHLAND GIRL*", "*STEPPING WESTWARD*", "*THE EXCURSION*", and a score lesser poems. The hidden purpose of many of his poems is to show that the keynote of all life is happiness. (4) To his natural philosophy of man Wordsworth added mystic element, the result of his own belief that in every natural object there is a reflection of the living of God. In "*TINTERN ABBEY*" the spiritual appeal of nature is

expressed in almost every line; but the mystic conception²⁶
of man is seen oreclearly in "*INTIMATIONS OF*
IMMORTALITY".

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS