

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

[1770 - 1850]

William Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth in the Lake District of Cumberland on April 7, 1770. He was the second son of five children of John and Ann Wordsworth. The only daughter, Dorothy followed on Christmas Day 1771; John in 1772; Christopher in 1774; all these, and even the eldest, Richard, born in 1768, are of importance in William's biography. Never was a poet so knit with his family. He was a man of deep and lasting affections (Foreman, 1959: 13). John Wordsworth was an attorney agent of Sir James Lowther, for whom he acted on legal and political matters. The Wordsworth children were born in a substantial house in Cockermouth, where the family lived until 1778; but in March of that year Ann Wordsworth died, and the family was split up. Dorothy was sent to live at Halifax with her mother's cousin, and the boys were sent to school at Hawkshead. Five years later, the children lost their father (Scott-Kilvert: 1).

In March 1787 his first published poem, a sonnet "On Seeing Miss Helen Maria William Weep at a Tale of Distress", and signed "Axiologus", appeared in The

European Magazine (Ousby: 1094). In that year also his uncles fortunately were willing to see him through St. John's College, Cambridge. In 1790 he made a summer tour on foot with a college friend, Robert Jones, through France, the Rhine valley, Switzerland, and northern Italy—a vacation that proved important to his career as a poet. In January 1791 he took his B.A., and left to spend some months in London (Grebanier, 1950: 729).

In November 1791 Wordsworth made a visit to France to learn its language. The excitement in Paris affected him little, and he went on to Orleans, in the neighborhood of which he remained until October 1792. It was here that his soul was at last awakened as a result of his intimacy with Michel Beaupuy and Annette Vallon. Annette Vallon, a girl of good family, with whom he fell in love. The two met frequently in secret, and soon she was with child by him. It will never be known why he did not marry her. She gave Wordsworth a daughter, Caroline (Grebanier, 1950: 729).

His early poem had won the admiration of Coleridge was "Tintern Abbey" and "Lyrical Ballads" of 1798. His activities and occupation are not clear until January 1795, when he was left a legacy of nine hundred pounds, which enabled him to satisfy his wish

of devoting his life in poetry. When he was offered by a friend a house at Racedown, he gladly accepted. At last his sister stayed with him, and could also gratify her one desire. It was her greatest happiness to feed the flame of his poetic inspiration; if she could do that, she asked no more of life. It was she who now, at Racedown, turned aside the bitterness in his heart by aiding him in finding peace and comfort in Nature all about him (Grebanier, 1950: 730).

In December 1799, they finally came to rest in the lake District, in the cottage at Grasmere that is now called Dove Cottage. In October 1802 he married Mary Hutchinson, his childhood friend (Scott-Kilvert: 3). With her he got five children (Drabble; 624). Apart from some Scottish and Continental tours, Wordsworth remained at Rydal Mount from 1813 to his death on April 23, 1850. In his later years, he was revered and honored: the University of Durham gave him an honorary degree in 1838, and Oxford followed in 1839; in 1843, on the death of Southey, he became poet laureate (Scott-Kilvert: 3-4).



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GIPSIES

[Composed 1807 - Published 1807]

Yet are they here the same unbroken knot
Of human Beings, in the self-same spot !
Men, women, children, yea the frame
Of the whole spectacle the same !
Only their fire seems bolder, yielding light, 5
Now deep and red, the colouring of night;
That on their Gipsy-faces falls,
Their bed of straw and blanket-walls.
-Twelve hours, twelve bounteous hours are gone, while I
Have been a traveller under open sky, 10
Much witnessing of change and cheer,
Yet as I left I find them here !
The weary Sun betook himself to rest;-
Then issued Vesper from the fulgent west,
Outshining like a visible God 15
The glorious path in which he trod.
And now, ascending, after one dark hour
And one night's diminution of her power,
Behold the mighty Moon ! this way
She looks as if at them-but they 20
Regard not her:-oh, better wrong and strife
(By nature transient) than this torpid life;
Life which the very stars reprove
As on their silent tasks they move !
Yet, witness all that stirs in heaven or earth ! 25
In scorn I speak not;-they are what their birth
And breeding suffer them to be;
Wild outcasts of society !

I WANDERED LONELY AS A CLOUD

[Composed 1804 - Published 1807]

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees, 5
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay: 10
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay, 15
In such a jocund company:
I gazed-and gazed-but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood, 20
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

MY HEART LEAPS UP WHEN I BEHOLD

[Composed 1802 - Published 1807]

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky:

So was it when my life began;

So is it now I am a man;

So be it when I shall grow old,

5

Or let me die !

The Child is father of the Man;

And I could wish my days to be

Bound each to each by natural piety.

THERE WAS A BOY

[Composed 1802 - Published 1807]

There was a Boy; ye knew him well, ye cliffs
And islands of Winander !-many a time,
At evening, when the earliest stars began
To move along the edges of the hills,
Rising or setting, would he stand alone, 5
Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering lake;
And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls, 10
That they might answer him.-And they would shout
Across the watery vale, and shout again,
Responsive to his call,-with quivering peals,
And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud
Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild 15
Of jocund din ! And, when there came a pause
Of silence such as baffled his best skill:
Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice 20
Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven received
Into the bosom of the steady lake. 25
This boy was taken from his mates, and died
In childhood, ere he was full twelve years old.
Pre-eminent in beauty is the vale
Where he was born and bred: the church-yard hangs
Upon a slope above the village-school; 30
And through that church-yard when my way has led
On summer-evenings, I believe that there
A long half-hour together I have stood
Mute-looking at the grave in which he lies !

TO THE CUCKOO

[Composed 1802 - Published 1807]

O BLITHE New-comer ! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice.
O Cuckoo ! shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering Voice ?

While I am lying on the grass 5
Thy twofold should I hear;
From hill to hill it seems to pass
At once far off, and near.

Though babbling only to the Vale,
Of sunshine and of flowers, 10
Thou bringest unto me a tale
Of visionary hours.

Thrice welcome, darling of the Spring !
Even yet thou art to me
No bird, but an invisible thing, 15
A voice, a mystery;

The same whom in my schoolboy days
I listened to; that Cry
Which made me look a thousand ways
In bush, and tree, and sky: 20

To seek thee did I often rove
Through woods and on the green;
And thou wert still a hope, a love;
Still longed for, never seen.

And I can listen to thee yet; 25
Can lie upon the plain
And listen, till I do beget
That golden time again.

O blessed Bird ! the earth we pace
Again appears to be 30
An unsubstantial, faery place;
That is fit home for Thee !