

The Two-Book Prelude

William Wordsworth

1798–99

Book 1

1 Was it for this
2 That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
3 To blend his murmurs with my Nurse's song,
4 And from his alder shades, and rocky falls,
5 And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
6 That flowed along my dreams? For this didst thou
7 O Derwent, traveling over the green plains
8 Near my "sweet birth-place," didst thou beauteous Stream
9 Make ceaseless music through the night and day,
10 Which with its steady cadence tempering
11 Our human waywardness, composed my thoughts
12 To more than infant softness, giving me,
13 Among the fretful dwellings of mankind,
14 A knowledge, a dim earnest of the calm
15 Which Nature breathes among the fields and groves?
16 Beloved Derwent! Fairest of all Streams!
17 Was it for this that I, a four year's child,
18 A naked Boy, among thy silent pools
19 Made one long bathing of a summer's day?
20 Basked in the sun, or plunged into thy stream's
21 Alternate, all a summer's day, or coursed
22 Over the sandy fields, and dashed the flowers
23 Of yellow grunsel, or whom crag and hill,
24 The woods and distant Skiddaw's lofty height
25 Were bronzed with a deep radiance, stood alone,
26 A naked Savage in the thunder shower?
27 And afterwards, 'twas in a later day
28 Though early, when upon the mountain-slope
29 The frost and breath of frosty wind had snapped
30 The last autumnal crocus, 'twas my joy
31 To wander half the night among the cliffs
32

1 And the smooth hollows, where the woodcocks ran
2 Along the moonlight turf. In thought and wish,
3 That time, my shoulder all with springes hung,
4 I was a fell destroyer. Gentle Powers!
5 Who give us happiness and call it peace!
6 When scudding on from snare to snare I plied
7 My anxious visitation, hurrying on,
8 Still hurrying hurrying onward, how my heart
9 Panted; among the scattered yew-trees, and the crags
10 The looked upon me, how my bosom beat
11 With expectation. Sometimes strong desire,
12 Resistless, overpowered me, and the bird
13 Which was the captive of another's toils
14 Became my prey; and when the deed was done
15 I heard among the solitary hills
16 Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
17 Of undistinguishable motion, steps
18 Almost as silent as the turf they trod,
19 Nor less, in spring-time, when on southern banks
20 The shining sun had from his knot of leaves
21 Decoyed the primrose-flower, and when the vales
22 And woods were warm, was I a rover then
23 In the high places, on the longsome peaks,
24 Among the mountains and the winds. Though mean
25 And though inglorious were my views, then end
26 Was ignoble. Oh, when I have hung
27 Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass,
28 Or half-inch fissures in the slipp'ry rock,
29 But ill sustained, and almost, as it seemed,
30 Suspended by the blast which blew amain,
31 Shouldering the naked crag, oh at that time,
32 While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
33 With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
34 Blow through my ears! The sky seemed not a sky
35 Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds!
36 The mind of man is fashioned and built up
37 Even as strain of music: I believe
38 That there are spirits, which, when they would form
39 A favored being, from his very dawn
40 Of infancy do open out the clouds
41 As at the touch of lightning, seeking him

1 With gentle visitation; quiet Powers!
2 Retired and seldom recognized, yet kind,
3 And to the very meanest not unknown;
4 With me, though rarely, in my early days
5 They communed: others too there are who use,
6 Yet haply aiming at the self-same end,
7 Severer interventions, ministry
8 More palpable, and of their school was I.
9 They guided me: one evening, led by them,
10 I went alone into a Shepherd's boat,
11 A skiff that to a willow-tree was tied
12 Within a rocky cave, its usual home;
13 The moon was up, the lake was shining clear
14 Among the hoary mountains: from the shore
15 I pushed, and struck the oars, and struck again
16 In cadence, and my little Boat moved on
17 Just like a man who walks with stately step
18 Though bent on speed. It was an act of stealth
19 And troubled pleasure; not without the voice
20 Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on,
21 Leaving behind her still on either side
22 Small circles glittering idly in the moon
23 Until they melted all into one track
24 Of sparkling light. A rocky steep uprose
25 Above the cavern of the willow tree,
26 And now, as suited one who proudly rowed
27 With his best skill, I fixed a steady view
28 Upon the top of that same craggy ridge,
29 The bound of the horizon, for behind
30 Was nothing — but the stars and the grey sky.
31 She was an elfin pinnacle; twenty times
32 I dipped my oars into the silent lake.
33 And, as I rose upon the stroke, my Boat
34 Went heaving through the water, like a swan —
35 When from behind that rocky steep, till then
36 The bound of the horizon, a huge Cliff,
37 As if voluntary power instinct,
38 Upreared its head: I struck, and struck again,
39 And, growing still in statue, the huge cliff
40 Rose up between me and the starts, and still
41 With measured motion, like a living thing,
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1 Strode after me. With trembling hands I turned,
2 And through the silent water stole my way
3 Back to the cavern of the willow-tree.
4 There, in her mooring-place I left my bark,
5 And through the meadows homeward went with grave
6 And serious thoughts; and after I had seen
7 That spectacle, for many days my brain
8 Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
9 Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
10 There was darkness, call it solitude
11 Or blank desertion; no familiar objects
12 Of hourly objects, images of trees,
13 Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
14 But huge and mighty forms that do not live
15 Like living men, moved slowly through my mind
16 By day, and were the trouble of my dreams.
17 Ah! Not in vain ye Beings of the hills!
18 And ye that walk the woods and open heaths
19 By moon or star-light, thus from my first dawn
20 Of childhood did ye love to intertwine
21 The passions that build up our human soul,
22 Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
23 But with high objects, with eternal things,
24 With life and nature, purifying thus
25 The elements of feeling and of thought,
26 And sanctifying by such discipline
27 Both pain and fear, until we recognize
28 A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.
29 Nor was this fellowship vouchsafed to me
30 With stinted kindness. In November days,
31 When vapours, rolling down the valleys, made
32 A lonely scene more lonesome, among woods
33 At noon, and 'mid the calm of summer nights
34 When by the margin of the trembling lake
35 Beneath the gloomy hills I homeward went
36 In solitude, such intercourse was mine.
37 And in the frosty season when the sun
38 Was set, and, visible for many a mile,
39 The cottage windows through the twilight blazed,
40 I heeded not the summons: clear and loud
41 The village clock tolled six; I wheeled about
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1 Proud and exulting like an untired horse
2 That cares not for its home. All shod with steel
3 We hissed along the polished ice, in games
4 Confederate, imitative of the chase
5 And woodland pleasures, the resounding horn,
6 The pack loud bellowing, and the hunted hare.
7 So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
8 And not a voice was idle: with the din,
9 Meanwhile, the precipices rang aloud,
10 The leafless trees and every icy crag
11 Tinkled like iron, while the distant hills
12 Into the tumult sent an alien sound
13 Of melancholy not unnoticed while the stars,
14 Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west
15 The orange sky of evening died away.
16 Not seldom from the uproar I retired
17 Into a silent bay, or sportively
18 Glanced sideway leaving the tumultuous throng
19 To cut across the shadow of a star
20 That gleamed upon the ice: and oftentimes
21 When we had given our bodies to the wind
22 And all the shadowy banks on either side
23 Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
24 The rapid line of motion, then at once
25 Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
26 Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs
27 Wheeled by me, even as if the earth had rolled
28 With visible motion her diurnal round;
29 Behind me did they stretch in solemn train
30 Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
31 Till all was tranquil as a summer sea.
32 Ye Powers of earth! Ye Genii of the springs!
33 And ye that have your voices in the clouds
34 And ye that are Familiars of the lakes
35 And of the standing pools, I may not think
36 A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
37 Such ministry, when ye through many a year
38 Thus by the agency of boyish sports
39 On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
40 Impressed upon all forms the characters
41 Of danger and desire, and thus did make
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1 The surface of the universal earth
2 With meanings of delight, of hope and fear,
3 Work like a sea.
4 Not uselessly employed
5 I might pursue this theme through every change
6 Of exercise and sport to which the year
7 Did summon us in its delightful round.
8 We were a noisy crew: the sun in heaven
9 Beheld not vales more beautiful than ours
10 Nor saw a race in happiness and joy
11 More worthy of the fields where they were sown.
12 I would record with no reluctant voice
13 Our home amusements by the warm peat fire
14 At evening, when with pencil, and with slate
15 In square divisions parcelled out, and all
16 With crosses and with cyphers scribbled o'er,
17 We schemed and puzzled, head opposed to head
18 In strife too humble to be named in verse,
19 Or round the naked table, snow-white deal,
20 Cherry or maple, sat in close array
21 And to the combat — Lu or Whist — led on
22 A thick-ribbed army, not as in the world
23 Discarded and ungratefully thrown by
24 Even for the very service they had wrought,
25 But husbanded through many a long campaign.
26 Oh with what echoes on the board they fell —
27 Ironic diamonds, hearts of sable hue,
28 Queens gleaming through their splendour's last decay,
29 Knaves wrapt in one assimilating gloom,
30 And Kings indignant at the shame incurr'd
31 By royal visages. Meanwhile abroad
32 The heavy rain was falling, or the frost
33 Raged bitterly with keen and silent tooth,
34 And interrupting the impassioned game
35 Oft from the neighbouring lake the splitting ice
36 While it sank down towards the water sent
37 Among the meadows and the hills its long
38 And frequent yellings, imitative some
39 Of wolves that howl along the Bothnic main.
40 Nor with less willing heart would I rehearse
41 The woods of autumn and their hidden bowers

1 With milk-white clusters hung; the rod and line.
2 True symbol of the foolishness of hope,
3 Which with its strong enchantment led me on
4 By rocks and pools where never summer-star
5 Impressed its shadow, to forlorn cascades
6 Among the windings of the mountain-brooks;
7 The kite, in sultry calms from some high hill
8 Sent up, ascending thence till it was lost
9 Among the fleecy clouds, in gusty days
10 Launched from the lower grounds, and suddenly
11 Dash'd headlong" and rejected by the storm.
12 All these and more with rival claims demand
13 Grateful acknowledgment. It were a song
14 Venial, and such as if I rightly judge
15 I might protract unblamed; but I perceive
16 That much is overlooked, and we should ill
17 Attain our object if from delicate fears
18 Of breaking in upon the unity
19 Of this my argument I should omit
20 To speak of such effects as cannot here
21 Be regularly classed, yet tend no less
22 To the same point, the growth of mental power
23 And love of Nature's works.
24 Ere I had seen
25 Eight summers (and 'twas in the very week
26 When I was first transplanted to thy vale,
27 Beloved Hawkshead! when thy paths, thy shores
28 And brooks were like a dream of novelty
29 To my half-infant mind) I chanced to cross
30 One of those open fields which, shaped like ears,
31 Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite's lake,
32 Twilight was coming on, yet through the gloom
33 I saw distinctly on the opposite shore
34 Beneath a tree and close by the lake side
35 A heap of garments, as if left by one
36 Who there was bathing: half an hour I watched
37 And no one owned them: meanwhile the calm lake
38 Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast,
39 And now and then a leaping fish disturbed
40 The breathless stillness. The succeeding day
41 There came a company, and in their boat

1 Sounded with iron hooks, and with long poles.
2 At length the dead man' mid that beautiful scene
3 Of trees, and hills, and water, bolt upright
4 Rose with his ghastly face. I might advert
5 To numerous accidents in flood or field,
6 Quarry or moor, or 'mid the winter snows,
7 Distresses and disasters, tragic facts
8 Of rural history that impressed my mind
9 With images, to which in following years
10 Far other feelings were attached, with forms
11 That yet exist with independent life
12 And, like their archetypes, know no decay.
13 There are in our existence spots of time
14 Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
15 A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
16 By trivial occupations and the round
17 Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
18 (Especially the imaginative power)
19 Are nourished, and invisibly repaired.
20 Such moments chiefly seem to have their date
21 In our first childhood, I remember well
22 ('Tis of an early season that I speak,
23 The twilight of rememberable life)
24 While I was yet an urchin, one who scarce
25 Could hold a bridle, with ambitious hopes
26 I mounted, and we rode towards the hills;
27 We were a pair of horsemen: Honest James
28 Was with me, my encourager and guide.
29 We had not travelled long ere some mischance
30 Disjoined me from my comrade, and through fear
31 Dismounting, down the rough and stony moor
32 I led my horse and, stumbling on, at length
33 Came to a bottom where in former times
34 A man, the murderer of his wife, was hung
35 In irons; mouldered was the gibbet mast,
36 The bones were gone, the iron and the wood,
37 Only a long green ridge of turf remained
38 Whose shape was like a grave. I left the spot,
39 And, reascending the bare slope, I saw
40 A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
41 The beacon on the summit, and more near

1 A girl who bore a pitcher on her head
2 And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
3 Against the blowing wind. It was in truth
4 An ordinary sight but I should need
5 Colours and words that are unknown to man
6 To paint the visionary dreariness
7 Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
8 Did, at that time, invest the naked pool,
9 The beacon on the lonely eminence,
10 The woman and her garments vexed and tossed
11 By the strong wind. Nor less I recollect
12 (Long after, though my childhood had not ceased)
13 Another scene which left a kindred power
14 Implanted in my mind.
15 One Christmas time,
16 The day before the holidays began,
17 Feverish, and tired and restless, I went forth
18 Into the fields, impatient for the sight
19 Of those three horses which should bear us home,
20 My Brothers and myself. There was a crag,
21 An eminence which from the meeting point
22 Of two highways ascending overlooked
23 At least a long half-mile of those two roads,
24 By each of which the expected steeds might come,
25 The choice uncertain. Thither I repaired
26 Up to the highest summit; 'twas a day
27 Stormy, and rough, and wild, and on the grass
28 I sat, half-sheltered by a naked wall;
29 Upon my right hand was a single sheep,
30 A whistling hawthorn on my left, and there,
31 Those two companions at my side, I watched
32 With eyes intensely straining as the mist
33 Gave intermitting prospects of the wood
34 And plain beneath. Ere I to school returned
35 That dreary time, ere I had been ten days
36 A dweller in my Father's house, he died,
37 And I and my two Brothers, orphans then,
38 Followed his body to the grave. The event
39 With all the sorrow which it brought appeared
40 A chastisement, and when I called to mind
41 That day so lately passed when from the crag

1 I looked in such anxiety of hope,
2 With trite reflections of morality
3 Yet with the deepest passion I bowed low
4 To God, who thus corrected my desires;
5 And afterwards the wind, and sleety rain,
6 And all the business of the elements,
7 The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
8 And the bleak music of that old stone wall,
9 The noise of wood and water, and the mist
10 Which on the line of each of those two roads
11 Advanced in such indisputable shapes,
12 All these were spectacles and sounds to which
13 I often would repair, and thence would drink
14 As at a fountain, and I do not doubt
15 That in this later time when storm and rain
16 Beat on my roof at midnight, or by day
17 When I am in the woods, unknown to me
18 The workings of my spirit thence are brought.
19 Nor sedulous to trace diligent
20 How Nature by collateral interest indirect
21 And by extrinsic passion peopled first
22 My mind with forms, or beautiful or grand,
23 And made me love them, may I well forget
24 How other pleasures have been mine, and joys
25 Of subtler origin, how I have felt
26 Not seldom, even in that tempestuous time,
27 Those hallowed and pure motions of the sense
28 Which seem in their simplicity to own
29 An intellectual charm, that calm delight
30 Which, if I err not, surely must belong
31 To those first-born affinities that fit
32 Our new existence to existing things
33 And in our dawn of being constitute
34 The bond of union betwixt life and joy.
35 Yes, I remember when the changeful earth
36 And twice five seasons on my mind had stamped
37 The faces of the moving year, even then,
38 A Child, I held unconscious intercourse
39 With the eternal Beauty, drinking in
40 A pure organic pleasure from the lines
41 Of curling mist or from the level plain
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1 Of waters coloured by the steady clouds.
2 The sands of Westmoreland, the creeks and bays
3 Of Cumbria's 2 rocky limits, they can tell
4 How when the sea threw off his evening shade
5 And to the Shepherd's hutt beneath the crags
6 Did send sweet notice of the rising moon,
7 How I have stood to images like these
8 A stranger, linking with the spectacle
9 No body of associated forms
10 And bringing with me no peculiar sense
11 Of quietness or peace, yet I have stood
12 Even while my eye has moved o'er three long leagues
13 Of shining water, gathering as it seemed,
14 Through the wide surface of that field of light
15 New pleasure, like a bee among the flowers.
16 Thus often in those fits of vulgar joy
17 Which through all seasons on a child's pursuits
18 Are prompt attendants, 'mid that giddy bliss
19 Which like a tempest works along the blood
20 And is forgotten, even then I felt
21 Gleams like the flashing of a shield; the earth
22 And common face of Nature spake to me
23 Rememberable things: sometimes, 'tis true,
24 By quaint associations, yet not vain
25 Nor profitless if haply they impressed
26 Collateral objects and appearances,
27 Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep
28 Until maturer seasons called them forth
29 To impregnate and to elevate the mind.
30 And if the vulgar joy by its own weight
31 Wearied itself out of memory,
32 The scenes which were witness of that joy
33 Remained, in their substantial lineaments
34 Depicted on the brain, and to the eye
35 Were visible, a daily sight: and thus
36 By the impressive agency of fear,
37 By pleasure and repeated happiness,
38 So frequently repeated, and by force
39 Of obscure feelings representative
40 Of joys that were forgotten, these same scenes
41 So beauteous and majestic in themselves,
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1 Though yet the day was distant, did at length
2 Become habitually dear, and all
3 Their hues and forms were by invisible links
4 Allied to the affections.
5 I began
6 My story early, feeling, as I fear,
7 The weakness of a human love for days
8 Disowned by memory, ere the birth of spring
9 Planting my snow-drops among winter snows.
10 Nor will it seem to thee, my Friend, so prompt
11 In sympathy, that I have lengthened out
12 With fond and feeble tongue a tedious tale.
13 Meanwhile my hope has been that I might fetch
14 Reproaches from my former years, whose power
15 May spur me on, in manhood now mature,
16 To honourable toil. Yet, should it be
17 That this is but an impotent desire,
18 That I by such inquiry am not taught
19 To understand myself, nor thou to know
20 With better knowledge how the heart was framed
21 Of him thou lovest, need I dread from thee
22 Harsh judgements if I am so loath to quit
23 Those recollected hours that have the charm
24 Of visionary things, and lovely forms
25 And sweet sensations that throw back our life
26 And make our infancy a visible scene
27 On which that sun is shining?

Book 2

31
32
33 Thus far my Friend, have we retraced the way
34 Through which I traveled when I first began
35 To love the woods and fields: the passion yet
36 Was in its birth, sustained as might befall
37 By nourishment that came unsought, for still
38 From week to week, from month to month, we lived
39 A round of tumult: duly were our games
40 Prolonged in summer till the day-light failed;
41 No chair remained before the doors, the bench
42 And the threshold steps were empty, fast asleep
43 The labourer and the old man who had sat
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1 A later lingerer, yet the revelry
2 Continued and the loud uproar: at last
3 When all the ground was dark, and the huge clouds
4 Were edged with twinkling stars, to bed we went
5 With weary joints and with a beating mind.
6 Ah! is there one who ever has been young
7 And needs a monitory voice to tame
8 The pride of virtue and of intellect,
9 And is there one, the wisest and the best
10 Of all mankind, who does not sometimes wish
11 For things which cannot be, who would not give,
12 If so he might, to duty and to truth
13 The eagerness of infantine desire?
14 A tranquillizing spirit presses now
15 On my corporeal frame, so wide appears
16 The vacancy between me and those days
17 Which yet have such self-presence in my heart
18 That sometimes when I think of them I seem
19 Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
20 And of some other being. A grey stone
21 Of native rock, left midway in the square
22 Of our small market-village, was the home
23 And centre of these joys, and when, returned
24 After long absence, thither I repaired,
25 I found that it was split and gone to build
26 A smart assembly-room that perked and flared
27 With wash and rough-cast, elbowing the ground
28 Which had been ours. But let the fiddle scream
29 And be ye happy! yet I know, my friends,
30 That more than one of you will think with me
31 Of those soft starry nights and that old dame
32 From whom the stone was named, who there had sat
33 And watched her table with its huckster's wares,
34 Assiduous, for the length of sixty years.
35 We ran a boisterous race, the year span round
36 With giddy motion. But the time approached
37 That brought with it a regular desire
38 For calmer pleasures, when the beauteous scenes
39 Of nature were collaterally attached
40 To every scheme of holiday delilght
41 And every boyish sport, less grateful else

1 And languidly pursued.
2 When summer came
3 It was the pastime of our afternoons
4 To beat along the plain of Windermere
5 With rival oars; and the selected bourn
6 Was now an island musical with birds
7 That sang for ever, now a sister isle
8 Beneath the oak's umbrageous covert sown
9 With lilies of the valley like a field,
10 And now a third small island where remained
11 An old stone table and one mouldered cave,
12 A hermit's history. In such a race,
13 So ended, disappointment could be none,
14 Uneasiness, or pain, or jealousy;
15 We rested in the shade all pleased alike,
16 Conquered and conqueror. Thus our selfishness
17 Was mellowed down, and thus the pride of strength
18 And the vain-glory of superior skill
19 Were interfused with objects which subdued
20 And tempered them, and gradually produced
21 A quiet independence of the heart.
22 And to my Friend who knows me I may add,
23 Unapprehensive of reproof that hence
24 Ensued a diffidence and modesty,
25 And I was taught to feel, perhaps too much,
26 The self-sufficing power of solitude.
27 No delicate viands sapped our bodily strength;
28 More than we wished we knew the blessing then
29 Of vigorous hunger, for our daily meals
30 Were frugal, Sabine fare! and then exclude
31 A little weekly stipend, and we lived
32 Through three divisions of the quartered year
33 In penniless poverty. But now to school
34 Returned from the half-yearly holidays,
35 We came with purses more profusely filled,
36 Allowance which abundantly sufficed
37 To gratify the palate with repasts
38 More costly than the Dame of whom I spake,
39 That ancient woman, and her board supplied,
40 Hence inroads into distant vales, and long
41 Excursions far away among the hills;

1 Hence rustic dinners on the cool green ground
2 Or in the woods or by a river-side
3 Or fountain, festive banquets that provoked
4 The languid action of a natural scene
5 By pleasure of corporeal appetite.
6 Nor is my aim neglected if I tell
7 How twice in the long length of those half-years
8 We from our funds perhaps with bolder hand
9 Drew largely, anxious for one day at least
10 To feel the motion of the galloping steed;
11 And with the good old Innkeeper in truth
12 I needs must say that sometimes we have used
13 Sly subterfuge, for the intended bound
14 Of the day's journey was too distant far
15 For any cautious man, a Structure famed
16 Beyond its neighborhood, the antique walls
17 Of a large Abbey with its fractured arch,
18 Belfry, and images, and living trees,
19 A holy scene! Along the smooth green turf
20 Our horses grazed: in more than inland peace
21 Left by the winds that overpass the vale
22 In that sequestered ruin trees and towers
23 Both silent, and both motionless alike,
24 Hear all day long the murmuring sea that beats
25 Incessantly upon a craggy shore.
26 Our steeds remounted, and the summons given,
27 With whip and spur we by the Chantry flew
28 In uncouth race, and left the cross-legged Knight
29 And the stone Abbot, and that single wren
30 Which one day sang so sweetly in the nave
31 Of the old church that, though from recent showers
32 The earth was comfortless, and touched by faint
33 Internal breezes from the roofless walls
34 The shuddering ivy dripped large drops, yet still
35 So sweetly 'mid the gloom the invisible bird
36 Sang to itself that there I could have made
37 My dwelling-place, and lived for ever there
38 To hear such music. Through the walls we flew
39 And down the valley, and, a circuit made
40 In wantonness of heart, through rough and smooth
41 We scampered homeward. O ye rocks and streams

1 And that still spirit of the evening air,
2 Even in this joyous time I sometimes felt
3 Your presence, when with slackened step we breathed
4 Along the sides of the steep hills, or when,
5 Lightened by gleams of moonlight from the sea,
6 We beat the thundering hoofs the level sand.
7 There was a row of ancient trees, since fallen,
8 That on the margin of a jutting land
9 Stood near the lake of Coniston and made
10 With its long boughs above the water stretched
11 A gloom through which a boat might sail along
12 As in a cloister. An old Hall was near,
13 Grotesque and beautiful, its gavel end
14 And huge round chimneys to the top o'ergrown
15 With fields of ivy. Thither we repaired,
16 'Twas even a custom with us, to the shore
17 And to that cool piazza. They who dwelt
18 In the neglected mansion-house supplied
19 Fresh butter, tea-kettle, and earthen-ware,
20 And chafing-dish with smoking coals, and so
21 Beneath the trees we sat in our small boat
22 And in the covert eat our delicate meal
23 Upon the calm smooth lake. It was a joy
24 Worthy the heart of one who is full grown
25 To rest beneath those horizontal boughs
26 And mark the radiance of the setting sun,
27 Himself unseen, reposing on the top
28 Of the high eastern hills. And there I said,
29 That beauteous sight before me, there I said
30 (Then first beginning in my thoughts to mark
31 That sense of dim similitude which links
32 Our moral feelings with external forms)
33 That in whatever region I should close
34 My mortal life I would remember you,
35 Fair scenes! that dying I would think on you,
36 My soul would send a longing look to you:
37 Even as that setting sun while all the vale
38 Could nowhere catch one faint memorial gleam
39 Yet with the last remains of his last light
40 Still lingered, and a farewell luster threw
41 On the dear mountain-tops where first he rose.

1 'Twas then my fourteenth summer, and these words
2 Were uttered in casual access
3 Of sentiment, a momentary trance
4 That far outran the habit of my mind.
5 Upon the east
6 Above the crescent of a pleasant bay,
7 There was an Inn, no homely-featured shed,
8 Brother of the surrounding cottages,
9 But 'twas a splendid place, the door beset
10 With chaises, grooms, and liveries, and within
11 Decanters, glasses, and the blood-red wine.
12 In ancient times, or ere the Hall was built
13 On the large island, had the dwelling been
14 More worthy of a poet's love, a hut
15 Proud of its one bright fire and sycamore shade.
16 But though the rhymes were gone which once inscribed
17 The threshold, and large golden characters
18 On the blue-frosted sign-board had usurped
19 The place of the old Lion in contempt
20 And mockery of the rustic painter's hand,
21 Yet to this hour the spot to me is dear
22 With all its foolish pomp. The garden lay
23 Upon a slope surmounted by the plain
24 Of a small bowling-green; beneath us stood
25 A grove, with gleams of water through the trees
26 And over the tree-tops; nor did we want
27 Refreshment, strawberries and mellow cream,
28 And there through half an afternoon we played
29 On the smooth platform, and the shouts we sent
30 Made all the mountains ring. But ere the fall
31 Of night, when in our pinnace we returned
32 Over the dusky lake, and to the beach
33 Of some small island steered our course with one,
34 The minstrel of our troop, and left him there
35 And rowed off gently while he blew his flute
36 Alone upon the rock "oh then the calm
37 And dead still water lay upon my mind
38 Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
39 Never before so beautiful, sank down
40 Into my heart and held me like a dream.
41 Thus day by day my sympathies increased

1 And thus the common range of visible things
2 Grew dear to me: already I began
3 To love the sun, a Boy I loved the sun
4 Not, as I since have loved him, as a pledge
5 And surety of my earthly life, a light
6 Which while I view I feel I am alive,
7 But for this cause, that I had seen him lay
8 His beauty on the morning hills, had seen
9 The western mountain touch his setting orb
10 In many a thoughtless hour, when from excess
11 Of happiness my blood appeared to flow
12 With its own pleasure and I breathed with joy.
13 And from like feelings, humble though intense,
14 To patriotic and domestic love
15 Analogous, the moon to me was dear,
16 For I would dream away my purposes
17 Standing to look upon her while she hung
18 Midway between the hills as if she knew
19 No other region but belonged to thee,
20 Yea, appertained by a peculiar right
21 To thee and thy grey huts, my native vale.
22 Those incidental which were first attached
23 My heart to rural objects day by day
24 Grew weaker, and I hasten on to tell
25 How nature, intervenient till this time
26 And secondary, now at length was sought
27 For her own sake. But who shall parcel out
28 His intellect by geometric rules,
29 Split like a province into round and square;
30 Who knows the individual hour in which
31 His habits were first sown, even as a seed;
32 Who that shall point as with a wand and say,
33 This portion of the river of my mind
34 Came from yon fountain? Thou, my Friend, art one
35 More deeply read in thy own thoughts, no slave
36 Of that false secondary power by which
37 In weakness we create distinctions, then
38 Believe our puny boundaries are things
39 Which we perceive and not which we have made.
40 To thee, unblended by these outward shows,
41 The unity of all has been revealed

1 And thou wilt doubt with me, less aptly skilled
2 Than many are to class the cabinet
3 Of their sensations and in voluble phrase
4 Run through the history and birth of each
5 As of a single independent thing.
6 Hard task to analyse a soul in which
7 Not only general habits and desires
8 But each most obvious and particular thoughts,
9 Not in a mystical and idle sense
10 But in the words of reason deeply weighed,
11 Hath no beginning,
12 Blessed be the infant Babe
13 (For with my best conjectures I would trace
14 The progress of our being) blest the Babe
15 Nursed in his Mother's arms, the Babe who sleeps
16 Upon his Mother's breast, who when his soul
17 Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul
18 Doth gather passion from his Mother's eye!
19 Such feelings pass into his torpid life
20 Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind
21 Even in the first trial of its powers
22 Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine
23 In one appearance all the elements
24 And parts of the same object, else detached
25 And loath to coalesce. Thus day by day
26 Subjected to the discipline of love
27 His organs and recipient faculties
28 Are quickened, are more vigorous, his mind spreads
29 Tenacious of the forms which it receives.
30 In one beloved presence, nay and more,
31 And those sensations which have been derived
32 From this beloved presence, there exists
33 A virtue which irradiates and exalts
34 All objects through all intercourse of sense.
35 No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:
36 Along his infant veins are interfused
37 The gravitation and the filial bond
38 Of nature that connect him with the world.
39 Emphatically such a being lives
40 An inmate of this active universe;
41 From nature largely he receives, nor so

1 Is satisfied but largely gives again,
2 For feeling has to him imparted strength,
3 And powerful in all sentiments of grief,
4 Of exultation, fear and joy, his mind,
5 Even as an agent of the one great mind,
6 Creates, creator and receiver both,
7 Working but in alliance with the works
8 Which it beholds. Such verily is the first
9 Poetic spirit of our human life,
10 By uniform control of after years
11 In most abated and suppressed, in some
12 Through every change of growth or of decay
13 Preeminent till death.
14 From early days,
15 Beginning not long after that first time
16 In which, a Babe, by intercourse of touch
17 I held mute dialogues with my Mother's heart,
18 I have endeavoured to display the means
19 Whereby this infant sensibility,
20 Great birth-right of our being, was in me
21 Augmented and sustained. Yet is a path
22 More difficult before me, and I fear
23 That in its broken windings we shall need
24 The Chamois sinews and the Eagle's wing:
25 For now a trouble came into my mind
26 From obscure causes. I was left alone
27 Seeking this visible world, nor knowing why:
28 The props of my affections were removed
29 And yet the buildings stood as if sustained
30 By its own spirit. All that I beheld
31 Was dear to me, and from this cause it came
32 That now to Nature's finer influxes
33 My mind lay open, to that more exact
34 And intimate communion which our hearts
35 Maintain with the minuter properties
36 Of objects which already are beloved,
37 And of those only. Many are the joys
38 Of youth, but oh! What happiness to live
39 When every hour brings palpable access
40 Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight,
41 And sorrow is not there. The seasons come

1 And every season brought a countless store
2 Of modes and temporary qualities
3 Which but for this most watchful power of love
4 Had been neglected, left a register
5 Of permanent relations, else unknown:
6 Hence life, and change, and beauty, solitude
7 More active even than "best society,"
8 Society made sweet as solitude
9 By silent inobtrusive sympathies
10 And gentle agitations of the mind
11 From manifold distinctions, difference
12 Perceived in things where to the common eye
13 No difference is: and hence from the same source
14 Sublimer joy; for I would walk alone
15 In storm and tempest or in starlight nights
16 Beneath the quiet heavens, and at that time
17 Would feel whate'er there is of power in sound
18 To breathe an elevated mood by form
19 Or image unprofaned: and I would stand
20 Beneath some rock listening to sounds that are
21 The ghostly language of the ancient earth
22 Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
23 Thence did I drink the visionary power.
24 I deem not profitless these fleeting moods
25 Of shadowy exaltation, not for this,
26 That they are kindred to our purer mind
27 And intellectual life, but that the soul
28 Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
29 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
30 Of possible sublimity to which
31 With growing faculties she doth aspire,
32 With faculties still growing, feeling still
33 That whatsoever point they gain, they still
34 Have something to pursue
35 And not alone
36 In grandeur and in tumult, but no less
37 In tranquil scenes, that universal power
38 And fitness in the latent qualities
39 And essences of things, by which the mind
40 Is moved with feelings of delight, to me
41 Came strengthened with the superadded soul,

1 A virtue not its own. My morning walks
2 Were early; oft before the hours of school
3 I traveled round our little lake, five miles
4 Of pleasant wandering, happy time more dear
5 For this, that one was by my side, a Friend
6 Then passionately loved; with heart how full
7 Will he peruse these lines, this page, perhaps
8 A blank to other men, for many years
9 Have since flowed in between us, and, our minds
10 Both silent to each other, at this time
11 We live as if those hours had never been.
12 Nor seldom did I lift our cottage latch
13 Far earlier, and before the vernal thrust
14 Was audible, among the hills I sat
15 Alone upon some jutting eminence
16 At the first hour of morning when the vale
17 Lay quiet in an utter solitude.
18 How shall I trace the history, where seek
19 The origin of what I then have felt?
20 Oft in those moments such a holy calm
21 Did overspread my soul that I forgot
22 The agency of sight, and what I saw
23 Appeared like something in myself a dream,
24 A prospect in my mind. 'Twere long to tell
25 What spring and autumn, what the winter-snows
26 And what the summer-shade, what day and night,
27 The evening and the morning, what my dreams
28 And what my waking thoughts supplied, to nurse
29 That spirit of religious love in which
30 I walked with nature. But let this at least
31 Be not forgotten, that I still retained
32 My first creative sensibility,
33 That by the regular action of the world
34 My soul was unsubdued. A plastic power
35 Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
36 Rebellious, acting in a devious mood,
37 A local spirit of its own, at war
38 With general tendency, but for the most
39 Subservient strictly to the external things
40 With which it communed. An auxiliary light
41 Came from my mind which on the setting sun
42
43
44

1 Bestowed new splendor, the melodious birds,
2 The gentle breezes, fountains that ran on
3 Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
4 A like dominion, and the midnight storm
5 Grew darker in the presence of my eye.
6 Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
7 And hence my transport.
8 Nor should this perchance
9 Pass unrecorded, that I still had loved
10 The exercise and produce of a toil
11 Than analytic industry to me
12 More pleasing, and whose character, I deem,
13 Is more poetic, as resembling more
14 Creative agency: I mean to speak
15 Of that interminable building reared
16 By observation of affinities
17 In objects where no brotherhood exists
18 To common minds. My seventeenth year was come,
19 And whether from this habit rooted now
20 So deeply in my mind, or from excess
21 Of the great social principle of life
22 Coercing all things into sympathy,
23 To unorganic natures I transferred
24 My own enjoyments, or, the power of truth
25 Coming in revelation, I conversed
26 With things that really are. I at this time
27 Saw Blessings Spread around me like a sea.
28 Thus did my days pass on, and now at length
29 From Nature and her overflowing soul
30 I had received so much that all my thoughts
31 Were steeped in feelings; I was only then
32 Contented when with bliss ineffable
33 I felt the sentiment of being spread
34 O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
35 O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
36 And human knowledge, to the human eye
37 Invisible, yet liveth to the heart,
38 O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts and sings
39 Or beats the gladsome air, o'er all that glides
40 Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself
41 And might depth of waters: wonder not

1 If such my transports were, for in all things
2 I saw one life and felt that it was joy.
3 One song they sang, and it was audible,
4 Most audible ten when the fleshy ear,
5 O'ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,
6 Forgot its functions, and slept undisturbed.
7 If this be error, and another faith
8 Find easier access to the pious mind,
9 Yet were I grossly destitute of all
10 Those human sentiments which make this earth
11 So dear, if I should fail with grateful voice
12 To speak of you, ye mountains! and ye lakes
13 And sounding cataracts! ye mists and winds
14 That dwell among the hills where I was born.
15 If, in my youth, I have been pure in heart,
16 If, mingling with the world, I am content
17 With my own modest pleasures, and have lied
18 With God and Nature communing, removed
19 From little enmities and low desires,
20 The gift is yours: if in these times of fear,
21 This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown,
22 If, 'mid indifference and apathy
23 And wicked exultation, when good men
24 On every side fall off we know not how
25 To selfishness disguised in gentle names
26 Of peace, and quiet, and domestic love,
27 Yet mingled, not unwillingly, with sneers
28 On visionary minds, if in this time
29 Of dereliction and dismay I yet
30 Despair not of our nature, but retain
31 A more than Roman confidence, a faith
32 That fails not, in all sorrow my support,
33 The blessing of my life, the gift is yours
34 Ye Mountains! thine, O Nature! Thou hast fed
35 My lofty speculations, and in thee
36 For this uneasy heart of ours I find
37 A never-failing principle of joy
38 And purest passion.
39 Thou, my Friend, wast reared
40 In the great city mid far other scenes,
41 But we, by different roads, at length have gained

1 The self-same bourne. And from this cause to thee
2 I speak unapprehensive of contempt,
3 The insinuated scoff of coward tongues,
4 And all that silent language which so oft
5 In conversation betwixt man and man
6 Blots from the human countenance all trace
7 Of beauty and of love. For thou hast sought
8 The truth in solitude, and thou art one,
9 The most intense of Nature's worshippers,
10 In many things my brother, chiefly here
11 In this my deep devotion.
12 Fare thee well!
13 Health and the quiet of a healthful mind
14 Attend thee! seeking oft the haunts of men
15 But yet more often living with thyself
16 And for thyself, so haply shall thy days
17 Be many and a blessing to mankind.
18