

THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Report
of
Committee on Thesis

The undersigned, acting as a Committee of the Graduate School, have read the accompanying thesis submitted by Norman Edward Nelson for the degree of Master of Arts.

They approve it as a thesis meeting the requirements of the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Norman Edward Nelson.

C. A. Moore

Chairman

Joseph Beach

Norman Wilde

31 May 1918. ²¹

THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Report

of

Committee on Examination

This is to certify that we the undersigned, as a committee of the Graduate School, have given Norman Edward Nelson final oral examination for the degree of Master of Arts . We recommend that the degree of Master of Arts be conferred upon the candidate.

Minneapolis, Minnesota

31 May 1921

C. A. Moore
Chairman

Joseph Beach
Norman Wilde

Anticipation of Wordsworth's
Philosophy of Nature

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of
the Graduate School
of the

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

by

Norman Edward Nelson

in Partial Fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

1921

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I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. Moore for advice and for my free use of his article on the "Return to Nature in English Poetry." I am indebted to Mr. Draper of the Rhetoric department for the material of my paragraph on William Mason. I also wish to acknowledge the advice and aid I received from Mr. Wilde and Mr. Beach.

Note:

Since the terms deism and pantheism are variably defined, it has been thought best to adopt the current definitions of the eighteenth century, which make deism a belief in an immanent deity, and pantheism an identification of God with nature.

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Eighteenth-Century Anticipations
of Wordsworth's Philosophy of Nature.

I

The title of this paper suggests its limitations; there is no attempt to point out specific influences, direct or indirect, on the poetry of Wordsworth. It does not seem necessary to point out even a general influence. If it can be proved that the ideas of nature which Wordsworth is generally supposed to have expressed for the first time were really common stock in the naturalistic poetry of the eighteenth century, then the purpose of this study will be fulfilled.

Of course, the term philosophy as used in the title can not be construed in the formal sense. Wordsworth had a philosophy in the sense that Emerson had one, that is, he had a natural philosophy, a philosophy of life and nature. He had no formal system as Shaftesbury and Akenside had, but he reflects conclusions associated with the systems promulgated by the earlier writers. Wordsworth's own statement is that "Poetry is the most philosophic of all writings,"¹ and he further indicates that all knowledge, as it becomes familiar, can be moulded into poetry.¹ It is with philosophy in this sense that we are dealing in the following study.

¹ Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800).

Miss Myra Reynolds, in a work of larger scope, has pointed out many of the predecessors of Wordsworth scattered thruout the eighteenth century, showing that there was a period of preparation for the greater poet.¹ But she was not aware of the important influence of Shaftesbury on this period, and she ignores several important figures. Henry Brooke she recognizes only as the insipid author of the "Fool of Quality". She has apparently missed some of the most significant lines of Akenside's "Pleasures of the imagination", and of many of the later poems, notably of Mason's "English Garden".

Mr. Moore has supplied this defect in regard to Shaftesbury and Brooke, and the whole rationalistic deism which developed from the writings of the Cambridge Platonists. Both Miss Reynolds and Mr. Moore keep Wordsworth in mind as a sort of touchstone; neither of them had the specific purpose of seeking the Wordsworthian philosophy of nature in writings of the preceding century, and consequently there is much good material untouched or undeveloped.

Before looking into the eighteenth century it is necessary to outline briefly the general ideas of nature held by Wordsworth. This study does not attempt to elucidate Wordsworth's mysticism or to treat the subtler aspects of his philosophy; the aim is, merely, to point out the well known characteristics of his nature-philosophy, which are generally that his original contribution, for the purpose of discovering how far the eighteenth century anticipated him.

¹Nature in English Poetry.

Sneath has an excellent statement, which, for our purpose, requires little elaboration. Wordsworth, he says, believes that "Things themselves are possessed of spirit, and live and move and have their being in an omnipresent Spirit, and their office is to minister unto spirit."¹ Wordsworth's creative imagination endowed natural objects with spiritual life:

"To every natural form, rock, fruit, or flower
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
I gave a moral life: I saw them feel
Or linked them with some feeling."²

It is Nature's law that there should be

"A spirit and a pulse of good,
A life and soul, to every mode of being
Inseparably linked."³

This same creative imagination led him to find a unifying spiritual principle in the universe; he felt

"A sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."⁴

Nature, thus spiritualized, is conceived as ministering to the spirit of man; Wordsworth even speaks of the daisy as having a "function apostolical."⁵ Now, just what are the qualities of the spiritual life of nature, and in what ways do they minister to the spirit of man? These two questions can be answered as one; for the influence of nature on man is not so much thru an objective

¹
²Wordsworth, p.34.
³Prelude, III, 127-30.
⁴Old Cumberland Beggar.
⁵Tintern Abbey.
To a Daisy.

demonstration to his rational and aesthetic faculties, as it is thru a spiritual transfusion from nature to man.

Wordsworth believed that there is a "never failing principle of joy" in nature,¹ and in the presence of nature he felt the "deep power of joy."² Love is of "universal birth," and steals from earth to man, and from man to earth.³ Nature's tranquility comforts, restores and strengthens man's soul against the evil passions and vanities of life.⁴ Thru communion with nature we attain a high supersensual intuition of the spirit "whose dwelling is the light of setting suns";² it is in this Platonic state that we "see into the heart of things."² We derive from nature, which is the "visible quality of right reason,"⁵ wisdom more than the sages can teach us.⁶ Intercourse with nature strengthens and elevates our moral character; Wordsworth was

"well pleased to recognize
In nature, and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being."⁷

Wordsworth has been called a semi-pantheist, I suppose, because he emphasizes a soul in nature, or a spirit in nature, rather than an immanent God. Brandes calls his philosophy a concealed pantheism; but Wordsworth is far from a pantheistic identification of spirit with matter, and no one who has read "Hart Leap Well" (published 1800) can accuse even the younger Wordsworth of impiety.

¹Prelude, Book II, p. 168.

²Tintern Abbey.

³To my Sister.

⁴Prelude IV, 196; XII 365; also Tintern Abbey.

⁵Prelude XII, 367.

⁶Tables Turned.

⁷Tintern Abbey.

The above statement comprises, in brief, the chief characteristics of Wordsworth's nature-philosophy, and the general opinion seems to be that they are original with Wordsworth. John Dennis, writing in 1876, says of the latter half of the eighteenth century, that nature was supposed to form the subject of the poetry, but was, in fact, left entirely out, except in the poetry of Cowper and Burns.¹ Myers, in the "Men of Letters series", mentions Collins, Beattie, Thomson and Cowper, but in his opinion, all these men express an admiring observation rather than a philosophy or intimate worship.² Stopford Brooke says that Wordsworth introduced the idea of intercommunion with nature and the social intercourse of nature.³ Gosse mentions Gray, Collins, Ossian, Cowper and Crabbe, but sees no indication of philosophy back of the interest in nature.⁴

Saintsbury, in considering Wordsworth's predecessors, includes among others Langhorne, Mason and Akenside, but does not tell us in what way they anticipate Wordsworth.⁵ Courthope, taking Thomson and Darwin as representative figures, shows that there was a decline in poetic imagination in regard to nature.⁶ Emile Legouis justly says that Wordsworth's originality is to be sought in his poetry of Nature, and emphasizes the keen and delicate psychology of his spiritual relation with nature; but he does not discuss the general philosophy that underlies that psychology.⁷ Bradley makes

¹ Studies in English Literature.

² Myers, "Wordsworth", p. 126.

³ Theology in English poets.

⁴ Modern English Literature.

⁵ Saintsbury: Short History of English Literature.

⁶ Courthope, W. J.: "Liberal Movement in English Literature, 1885, p. 75.

⁷ Cambridge, Hist. of Eng. Lit., vol. XI, pp. 111-12.

the assertion that "no poet was ever more original than Wordsworth. He saw new things or he saw things in a new way."¹ This statement seems to express the general attitude, and it is just, if too much is not read into it. Wordsworth did see things in a way so keen, so spiritualized, so imaginative that they became new things to his readers; but it must not be assumed that Wordsworth created the general philosophy which includes and embraces these finer perceptions and intuitions.

If we keep this distinction in mind, and proceed to a study of the eighteenth century poets, we shall find that they lacked not so much Wordsworth's philosophy of nature, but rather his emotional richness and his imaginative power, as well as his keener aesthetic sensibility. Even in the age of Queen Anne there is evidence of a new attitude toward nature; and it was in this period, so far removed in spirit from the age of Wordsworth, that Lord Shaftesbury developed the philosophy of the Cambridge Platonists into a system which was to influence many important poems of the early eighteenth century, and which was to leave its mark on English poetry for a much longer period.

One remarkable figure of the Augustan age proves that it was possible to break away from the stifling conventions of neo-classicism, and express a spontaneous love of nature. Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, a friend of Pope and Rowe, wrote usually in the pseudo-classic manner, but she has three poems with nature as the theme.² Of these, the "Nocturnal Reverie" is important here because it shows a spiritualization of nature and a Words-

¹Bradley, A.C.: "Oxford Lectures in English Poetry", p. 100.

²Nature in English Poetry, p. 56.

worthian mood in the presence of nature. The face of heaven is "mysterious" to her, and her spirit feels "a sedate content" in the dark grove. The solitude of nature induces "silent musings" that

"urge the mind to seek
Something too high for syllables to speak."

She has moods when

"the soul joys
In the inferior world and thinks it like her own."

While the wording of this line is confusing, I think Miss Reynolds is justified by the spirit of the poem in interpreting it as a Wordsworthian expression of similarity between man's life and the life of inferior nature.¹ Wordsworth's own words of praise for Lady Winchelsea are too well known to be quoted here.

Of course, neither Lady Winchelsea nor any of the poets discussed in this study give us the rich and sustained interpretation of nature that Wordsworth does. If they had, they would not now be so comparatively obscure, nor Wordsworth, probably so famous. But they do represent a remarkable departure from the pseudo-classic rut, and the direction they take is undoubtedly the direction of Wordsworth.

¹ Cf. Wordsworth's Statement in Preface to 1800 Lyrical Ballads.

II

The major influence in the "return to nature" in poetry of the first half of the eighteenth century is to be found in the writings of Lord Shaftesbury, who was himself indebted to the Cambridge Platonists, More, Cudworth and others. The Cambridge Platonists were concerned to establish the twofold revelation of God, in the Scriptures, and, also, in the beauty, harmony and utility of the Universe. Shaftesbury and other deists of the time took advantage of the second theory of revelation and ignored the Scriptures, thus producing a rationalistic, aesthetic deism. It is now known that "what is regarded as the romantic apotheosis of nature was derived from the rationalism of Shaftesbury and other deists of the Augustan age; that the unorthodox lengths to which the speculative doctrine of the Cambridge Platonists was carried by deists was the main incentive to the apotheosis of nature."¹ This apology for nature was, we have said, both utilitarian and aesthetic. King represents the first phase, both both Cudworth and Shaftesbury, his unorthodox disciple, emphasize the second. It is this aesthetic interpretation of the universe as harmony, with the consequent identification of the good with the beautiful, that is important for this study. The Cambridge Platonists regarded the universe as the embodiment of "right reason" and harmony. The universe viewed as a whole was regarded as perfect, beautiful, harmonious and good.

Shaftesbury, too, considered the universe perfect as a whole, and regarded it as the complete, and only, revelation of God. The perfection of the universe consists in harmony; all its parts

¹C. A. Moore: "The Return to Nature in English Poetry," p.250.

form one complete, harmonious whole. Human virtue consists in an inner harmony which fits our conduct to the purpose of the "all", and which corresponds to the outward harmony of external nature. It is our aesthetic sense, the sense of harmony, that guides our conduct and not the "still small voice" of a moral conscience.

Now, if Shaftesbury had merely identified the aesthetic sensibility with morality; if he had conceived of nature merely as an objective demonstration of the deity, to be grasped by our intellect and aesthetic sensibility, he would be of minor importance here; tho it is to be remembered that Wordsworth spoke of nature as the "visible quality and shape and image of right reason",¹ and, Wordsworth, too, confessed the "power of harmony".² These quotations, however, do not represent Wordsworth's most distinctive ideas. Drawing a moral or a faith from the contemplation of nature as an objective demonstration is different from communicating with the spirit of nature. But the two processes shade into each other imperceptibly as a study of the Cambridge Platonists and Shaftesbury will show.

The biographer of the "learned and pious" Henry More writes that:

"He hath professed soberly to some; that he hath been sometimes almost Mad with Pleasure. And that, walking abroad after his studies, his Sallies towards Nature would be often unexpressibly enravishing, and beyond what he could convey to others. He enjoyed his Maker in all parts of the Universe - Nay he was transported. with Wonder and Pleasure. And he was so enamoured of the wisdom of God in the Contrivance of things; that he hath been heard to say, 'A good Man could be sometimes ready, in his own private reflections, to kiss the very stones of the street.'³

¹ Prelude, Bk. 12, 376; Bk. 13, 19-39.

² Tintern Abbey.

³ Life of Henry More, Richard Ward; quoted by Raleigh "Wordsworth", p. 148.

Careful as he is to cling to pious orthodoxy, we can see that his mind was branching out towards the "Religion of Nature".

Shaftesbury, who felt no such orthodox scruples, furnishes us an even better example of the mingling of the two elements, revelation and intuition. According to him there is an "active mind" in the universe,¹ a Nature in natural things which is conceived as a spiritual quality:

"O mighty genius! sole animating and inspiring power!
.....thy influence is universal, and in all things thou
art inmost."²

Each of the forms of nature expresses the Divinity which created them,³ and divinity is especially present in solitude where man has not altered the original."⁴ He speaks of the "Genius of the Place" and puts into that vitiated phrase the new Wordsworthian meaning, as the lines quoted below will show. He interprets the spirit of nature as love, and in one remarkable passage he asserts that nature reciprocates man's spiritual attitude towards her, thus forming a spiritual communion:

"If you promise to love, I will endeavor to show you that beauty which I count the perfectest, and most deserving of love, and which will not fail of a return. Tomorrow, when the eastern sun (as poets describe) with his first beams adorns the front of yonder hill, there, if you are content to wander with me in the woods you see, we will pursue those loves of ours by favour of the sylvan nymphs; and, invoking first the genius of the place, we will try to obtain at least some faint and distant view of the sovereign genius and first beauty. This if you can come once to contemplate, I will answer for it that all those forbidding features and deformities, whether of Nature of Mankind, will vanish in an instant and leave you that love I could wish."⁵

¹Moralists, p. 100.

²ibid, p. 100, 110; cf Tintern Abbey.

³ibid, p. 123.

⁴ibid, p. 97.

⁵ibid. 39-40.

This quotation certainly transcends Shaftesbury's usual writing, and it may not be consistent with his more rationalized philosophy; but, that a man of his ability and prominence should, in the year seventeen hundred and eleven, have moods in which he could write for publication such thoughts as those quoted above, is of the utmost importance in a study of this kind.

Moreover, the fact that deism was, in the Queen Anne period, generally referred to as the "Religion of Nature" indicates that the general tendency of the movement must have been an apotheosis of nature. It is now known that this phase of deism, thru the influence of Lord Shaftesbury, extended beyond the Queen Anne period, and first attained adequate poetic expression in the poetry of James Thomson. Nor did Shaftesbury's influence cease there, but continued to be felt in the poetry of Mark Akenside, Henry Brooke and John Gilbert Cooper.

Between Shaftesbury and his poetic exponent, Thomson, came two poets whose indebtedness to Shaftesbury cannot be determined. Parnell, the Irish parson, lacking Lady Winchelsea's fine sense of the spirit in nature, had a more philosophical attitude. He found joy and content in his retirement with nature,¹ but it was not the exalted transfusion which Wordsworth felt. In his Hymn to Contentment (written before 1713) he expresses unorthodox views for a parson; he says of the quiet wood where he wanders:

"All the quiet place

Confessed the presence of thy grace."

The seas, woods, fields and birds all "speak their Maker as they can", and he joins in with their inarticulate praise. He is in-

¹Health, an eclogue.

structed, too, in moral duty by his contemplation of nature.

Miss Reynolds paraphrases Parnell's poem in language more poetic than Parnell uses and consequently throws a glamour over the "Hymn" which interferes with a just estimate of its significance.¹

Another minor poet who deserves slight mention here is William Pattison, whose "Morning Contemplation" (written before 1723) expresses a dislike for the vanities of town-life and a longing for solitude with nature. "Nature charms his senses and soothes his soul, and he has a crude prevision of Wordsworth in the following lines:

"Tell me all you mighty wise
Ye governors of colleges;
What deeper wisdom can you know
Than easy nature's works here show."

Miss Reynolds, from whom the above account is taken, does not seem to recognize any anticipation of Rousseau in this young poet's verses.

In the year that Thomson brought out his "Winter", John Dyer, the author of the Fleece, was writing two poems that anticipate, and nearly equal, the atmospheric effect of Collins and Gray which was to contribute to the "return to nature" in the latter half of the century. "Grongar Hill" and "The Country Walk" were written by young Dyer when he was fresh from his native Welsh scenery. A short quotation will indicate how remarkable the poems were for the year 1725.

"Grass and flowers Quiet treads
On the meads and mountain heads.
.
And often by the murmuring rill,
Hears the thrush while all is still,
Within the groves of Grongar Hill."

These men, especially Parnell and Dyer, express a new and more imaginative attitude toward nature, but neither had the wide

¹ Nature in Poetry, p. 64.

"Hymn" and other like passages¹ are enough to prove that he felt the spiritual presence of the deity in the phenomena of nature.

Thomson believed that love is the first principle of nature:

"Love, kind attraction that to central suns
Binds circling earths, and world with world unites."²

In the spring the soul of love is sent abroad and penetrates all life, awakening affection and devotion as well as passion in the animal world. No one will contend that Thomson attained the imaginative fineness of Wordsworth's lines:

"And Love, a universal birth
From heart to heart is stealing;"

neither can anyone deny that Thomson's lines are similar, and differ only in degree of spiritualization.

Another phase of Wordsworth's poetry foreshadowed by Thomson is the sense of joy in nature: a gale of joy

"Breathes thru the sense and takes the ravished soul."³

God is omnipresent:

"And where he vital breathes there must be joy."⁴

The word "joy" occurs on almost every page of the "Seasons", and while Thomson's lines have not the force of Wordsworth's "deep power of joy," yet the idea is present in the same form and is frequently expressed.

Nature too has a Wordsworthian effect on man: he sings

"the infusive force of Spring on man;
When heaven and earth, as if contending, vie

¹See especially Autumn, 1351-6.

²This idea, harking back to Lucretius and Empedocles, and expressed by Spenser and Sydney, seems to me a more Wordsworthian sentiment than is expressed in "The Ode to Duty".

³The Seasons, Sp. 500-502.

⁴ibid, Hymn.

To raise his being and serene his soul,
Can he forbear to join the general smile
Of Nature? Can fierce passions vex his breast
While every gale is peace, and every grove
is melody?"¹

"Contentment walks the glade and feels an inward bliss"; the love of nature warms the bosom till, sublimed to rapture, we feel the present Deity."²

Perhaps one of the most significant of Thomson's lines has been indicated by Miss Reynolds. The admiring poet sees nature in her every shape and:

"Feels all her sweet emotions at his heart."³

This line has a very close relation to the more concrete image of Wordsworth's poem:

"And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils."

Thus, it is evident that Thomson, to some degree, fulfills the threefold formula: things possess a spirit, live in an omnipresent spirit, and minister to spirit. The first of these, the most distinctively Wordsworthian, is given the least expression but even the glimpse quoted above is remarkable for the period of the "Dunciad."

The Shaftesbury tradition was continued by Henry Brooke (1703-1783) in his first work, a philosophical poem which he called "Universal Beauty" (1736). Johnson tells us that Pope encouraged and probably assisted Brooke; but his statement that the poem certainly followed Pope's manner is misleading. It follows in thought the Shaftesburean principles with which Pope's "Essay on Man" is also impregnated. Brooke's lines on nature:

¹Seasons, Sp. 868-875.

²ibid, Sp. 899-304.

³ibid, Autumn, 1309.

"Symphonious echoing the Supreme's design,
Beauty of Love and symmetry divine."¹

echo Shaftesbury too closely to have come thru Pope's influence.

The poem is, like many others of its kind, ostentatiously pious, but the influence of deistic thought is evident from time to time. Nature is the "bright effluence of the One Supreme"² and God is "the filler of his own abyss."³ Ordinary observation merely plays over the surface, and surveys "nature's superficial mien"; but rarely pries

"Where Beauty wrapt, recluse from vulgar eyes,
Essential sits on Truth's eternal throne."⁴

It will be seen that this resembles very much Wordsworth's moods in which "sense is laid asleep", and we see "into the life of things."

Brooke's imagination also approached the conception of an independent life in nature; the Deity is "shrined" in every atom:

"From whence exults the animated clod,
And smiling features speak the Parent God."⁵

A more remarkable illustration is found in the following lines:

"Delight diffusive down the current flows,
And pleasure on the flowery margin grows."⁶

Wordsworth's lines:

"I could not help but feel
That there was pleasure there,"⁷

differ from Brooke's only in being more deeply suggestive.

As the two lines of "Universal Beauty" quoted above indicate, Brooke saw, as Wordsworth did, that the spirit of nature is a joyful

¹ Universal Beauty, Bk. II, 332.

² *ibid*, Bk. II, 261.

³ *ibid*, Bk. V, 401.

⁴ *ibid*, Bk. III, 166-170.

⁵ *ibid*, Bk. III, 5-10.

⁶ *ibid*, Bk. II, 233-234; see also Bk. III 435-439.

⁷ Lines written in Early Spring.

joyful spirit; "each vegetable is set in beds of bliss,"¹ and the scenes of nature, properly viewed, are "climes of ever living joy."²

These sentiments, expressed in 1735, can, I think, be considered as essentially the same as Wordsworth's; though they lack the felicity of expression, and the deep and rich imagination necessary to fill the ideas out and make them live to the reader.

Brooke also felt nature as an influence in man's spiritual and moral life. The thoughtful man gains wisdom from nature:

"The mount aspiring contemplation climbs,
And outward forms to inward truth sublimes."³

Insects, birds and brutes teach us social friendship, patience, and faith and tenderness.⁴ Of course, neither of these statements is very unusual; either might have been made by one who looked upon nature as an objective demonstration. However, in Brooke, too, we find the imperceptible mingling of the objective and the more Wordsworthian interpretation. He tells us that "nature spreads her ample page to render all pretext of error vain;" she is "strict to reform" and "beauteous to engage", and her "mute harangue invades our every sense."⁵

In our study of the Shaftesbury group, it is necessary to remember that, while these poets have exceptional lines which anticipate the characteristic ideas of the later poet, Wordsworth's poetry, on the other hand, furnishes us with less characteristic lines recalling the more formal aspect of the Shaftesburian philosophy.

¹Universal Beauty, Bk.II: 191, 192.

²ibid, Bk.III: 166-174.

³ibid, Bk.III: 437-8.

⁴ibid, Bk. V: 330-40.

⁵ibid, Bk. V: 17-28.

Nature spoke to Wordsworth through the language of the sense,¹ and he, too, felt the "power of harmony".¹ He, too, owed to "beauteous forms" his "little acts of kindness and of love."¹ It is not the purpose of this work to show how much this neo-Platonic idea permeates Wordsworth's poetry; we are here primarily concerned with the more characteristic and better known phases of his interpretation of nature.

Two years after Brooke had finished "Universal Beauty", Mark Akenside, then a boy of seventeen, began writing "Pleasures of the Imagination", a philosophical poem in three books which was published first in 1744. It was remodeled in 1757, and published with the fragment of an additional book. The philosophy of Shaftesbury is clearly reflected in both editions.² The "world's harmonious volume" is a transcript of the "Sire omnipotent",³ and nature attunes our finer organs to external things so that the "soul responds" to the "harmony from without".⁴ Those who are charmed by contemplation of Nature's works hold converse with God himself.⁵ Again in Akenside we find the intermingling of the aesthetic and the spiritual interpretation. He has a mystical sense of spiritual presences in the world of nature:

"Who can tell
Even on the surface of this rolling earth,
How many make abode! The fields, the groves,
The winding rivers and the azure main,
Are rendered solemn by their frequent feet,
Their rites sublime." ⁶

¹Tintern Abbey.

²For Akenside's comment on Shaftesbury see "Akenside; Works, Aldine ed., pp. 76.

³Pleasures of Imagination, 1825 ed. p. 40.

⁴ibid, p. 41.

⁵ibid, p. 149.

⁶ibid (1757) I:670-5.

Here the idea, though cast into a classical mould, is, unquestionably, not mythological but spiritual. Of course, there is a distinction to be made between such mystical "presences" and the spiritualization of nature forces; but the fact that these spirits frequent the groves, the fields and the river is indicative of a strong tendency to spiritualize nature. This same statement can be made of the passage (quoted by Miss Reynolds) in the "Ode against Suspicion",

"Throned in the sun's descending car,
What power unseen diffuseth far
This tenderness of mind?
What Genius smiles in yonder flood?
What God in whispers from the wood
Bids every thought be kind."¹

Both of these quotations strongly prefigure the sense of "presences" in nature which Wordsworth expressed, more imaginatively, in the boat-stealing episode of the "Prelude" and in "Nutting".

Wordsworth, in the preface to the 1800 edition of the Lyrical Ballads, said that a poet is one who is "well pleased with his own passions and volitions, delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them."

In the "Pleasures of the Imagination" we find the following analogue:

"the grateful charm,
That searchless nature, o'er the sense of man
Diffuses, to behold in lifeless things
The inexpressive semblance of himself
Of thought and passion."²

This remarkable statement is overshadowed by one even more remarkable; the poet's prevailing hand, says Akenside,

¹Odes, Bk.I, Ode 5, it 8.

²Pleasures of Imagination, 1825, p. 732.

"Gives to corporal essence, life and sense,
And every stately function of the soul."¹

This truly Wordsworthian statement, previously overlooked, can not be interpreted as meaning personification,² it certainly approximates in thought the lines of Wordsworth:

"To every natural form, rock, fruit, or flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
I gave a moral life: I saw them feel,
Or linked them to some feeling."³

While it is true that Akenside never fulfills his doctrine of creative imagination so richly as Wordsworth does, it is of the utmost significance that he holds that doctrine at all, and that he develops it, however meagerly, in the few passages we have quoted. Beers says that "his doctrine, if not his practice, was in harmony with the fresh impulse that was coming into English poetry," and quotes approvingly Lowell's assertion that "Without it (the "Pleasures of the Imagination") the 'Lines written at Tintern Abbey' might never have been written."⁴

Like Wordsworth, Akenside interprets the spirit of nature in terms of love and joy. When, through contemplation of nature, the poet attains a Wordsworthian mood of super-sensual insight, he feels that "love and joy alone are waking."⁵ Social love draws "the general orb of being" into perfect union;⁶ God is the "source of everflowing love", and in the gales, the streams, and the song of birds the poet feels a "breath divine of nameless joy".⁷

¹ Pleasures of Imagination (1757) Bk.IV: 119-20.

² I have found no instance of literary personification of natural objects in Akenside's poetry.

³ Prelude, III: 127-30;

⁴ Beers, H.A. "Hist. of Eng. Romanticism, 18 cent.", p.140.

⁵ "Pleasures" (1825) pp. 41, 42.

⁶ *ibid* p. 84 and "Hymn to Nais".

⁷ *ibid*, p. 141.

Akenside, too, felt the influence of nature on man's moral and spiritual life; he is grateful to the Northumbrian shades where he wandered in his childhood, led

"In silence by some powerful hand unseen."¹

The wood-nymph "prompts unseen the youth" and places before his view "sincerest forms of good."² The great forces of nature, the waves, the sun and the winds declare the duty of man to love, to be beneficent and kind like their creator.³

Here we must again recognize that Akenside's ordinary attitude is that we are taught, not by nature, but by contemplation of nature. Still, his reference to his childhood in Northumbria, and the silent promptings of the wood-nymph are very similar to Wordsworth's spiritual communion with nature. We must also remember that it was not always an "impulse from a vernal wood" which instructed Wordsworth; he, too, was affected by the philosophic contemplation of the harmonious universe.⁴

It is remarkable that Akenside, though a follower of Shaftesbury, should nowhere in his poetry express any strong deistic tendency. The God of Akenside is always the transcendent creator and personal controller of the universe; there is no intimation of an immanent deity. But we have found that, in his interpretation of nature, the spiritual forces of love and joy permeate the universe, and that spiritual essences inhabit the groves and

¹ "Pleasures" (1770) Bk. IV:38-45. Miss Reynolds interprets the next four lines about his youthful study as meaning a study of nature; but his gratitude for ability to read the poets, expressed in the lines following, shows that the word "study" applied quite literally to book-learning, (See passage quoted and Miss Reynolds, op.cit., p.111)

² Inscription VII, Aldine ed., p.272.

³ Pleasures of Imagination (1825) p.149.

⁴ Prelude VII, 767-71.

rivers, and that spirits whisper admonition to man from the woods and streams. Although he was unable to think, or at least to write down, strictly unorthodox thoughts, yet the impulse of the creative imagination was so strong that he clearly recognized it, and that he emphasized - what the other deists had failed to bring out clearly - the existence of independent spirits and spiritual forces in nature.

With the study of John Gilbert Cooper (1723-69) we come to the last attempt to embody Shaftesbury's philosophy in a formally philosophical poem. Cooper's "Power of Harmony" appeared in 1745, one year after the first version of "The Pleasures of the Imagination." The purpose of this poem, as the title suggests, is to show that a "constant attention to what is perfect and beautiful in nature will by degrees harmonize the soul."¹ We adore the deity "thru each object of proportion fair"; and beauty and good are, as in Akenside's poem, identified. Here, again, we have the problem of distinguishing between the conceptions of nature as containing spiritual forces, and nature as an objective demonstration. Again we find that the two conceptions shade into each other, although in Cooper's poetry, the spiritualization is always weak and often dubious. On the other hand, we must also recall that Wordsworth shared something of the less imaginative conception. He sees into the life of things with an eye

"made quiet by the power of Harmony."

The coincidence of phrase may or may not be significant, but the idea of the two poets is unquestionably much the same.

¹Power of Harmony, Anderson, Vol.X:p.783.
²ibid, p. 784 (1)
³Tintern Abbey.

Cooper's piety was such that no intimation of God's immanence in nature creeps into his poem; his God, like Akenside's, is transcendent and personal. But his piety did not exclude spiritual forces from nature. As with Wordsworth, love and joy permeate the universe; the sage looks on nature with congenial love:

"Where the great social link of mutual aid
Through every being twines,"¹

and in the "sacred silence" of the evening grove, joy smiles on her beauteous offspring, harmony.² The joy and love of the universe flows spontaneously through the passive organs of the sense; for a celestial cause:

"attuned the frame
Of passive organs with internal sense,
To feel an instantaneous flow of joy
When beauty from her native seat of heaven,
Clotted in ethereal mildness, on our plains
Descends, ere reason with her tardy eye
Can view the form divine; and thru the world
The heavenly boon to every being flows."

All the "brute creation" makes spontaneous offerings of unfeigned love in silent praises, and man, too, is exhorted to join in the general chorus.³

The words underlined in the passage quoted above clearly anticipate Wordsworth's belief in a "wise passiveness" as opposed to "years of toiling reason."⁴ The phrases, it will be noted are remarkably similar, and the ideas are practically analogous. The spiritualization has none of the imaginative force of Wordsworth's poetry, but the passage certainly transcends the ordinary view of nature

¹Power of Harmony, And. X: p. 790 (1)

²ibid, And. X: p. 790 (1)

³ibid. And. X: p. 788 (1)

⁴"The Tables Turned".

as an objective demonstration.¹

The influence of nature on the mind, as expressed in the "Power of Harmony", approaches the direct subjectivity of Wordsworth. Moschus wanders in cool silent groves by dimpling brooks, rapt in celestial ecstasy.² Peace, deep in the vale of solitude, breathes o'er the soul "diviner airs" than those "by Grecian fables sung."³ The fields, woods, streams, valleys and rocks, and even the creeping moss are hailed as solitary feasts where wisdom seeks beauty and good.⁴ Nature also has its effect on the moral life of man; to each natural scene "a moral power belongs."⁵

Such statements are to be expected in any exponent of "universal harmony", but at times, as we have seen, he attains an effect of intimate interaction that indicates higher imaginative power; even a wicked soul is soothed and harmonized by the song of the nightingale⁶ and "each moral power" perceives

"Its own resemblance, with fraternal joy,
In every form complete, and smiling, feels
Beauty and good the same."⁷

One should be careful not to make too strong an assertion in regard to the quotations given above, yet there is, in spite of his adherence to the neo-Platonic phraseology, an expression of something more - of a direct influence and a close communion not

¹ It is interesting to note that Cooper expresses Wordsworth's theory of art as the result of emotion recollected in tranquillity. (see And. X p. 786 and Moore Op. cit.)

² Epistle III, And. p. 777 (1).

³ Power of Harmony, p. 786 (1)

⁴ Ibid, p. 787 (2).

⁵ Ibid, p. 787 (2).

⁶ Ibid, p. 785 (2).

⁷ Ibid, p. 790 (2).

found in the purely aesthetic interpretation of nature. Indeed, the "argument" of the first book asserts that moral beauty cannot be fully expressed by outward forms; for that "the muse" is necessary.¹ If he means by "the muse" the creative imagination that perceives the spirit in things, and we are justified in supposing that he does, then he has broken away from the strictly neo-Platonic doctrine and is approaching Wordsworth's.

Cooper, it must be admitted has not the imaginative power of such poets as Thomson and Akenside; his poem is decidedly dull and his style is wretched. Yet even a figure of his quality expresses, and is probably best fitted to express, the prevailing association of the two conceptions, the objective and the spiritualized, which we find in Shaftesbury and his followers, and, with shifted emphasis, in Wordsworth.

¹Power of Harmony, Anderson X: p. 784.

III

The poetry of Thomson and Akenside did much to popularize the seductive philosophy of Lord Shaftesbury. Two minor poets of this period illustrate the effect on the general mind. William Thompson (1712 - 1760), a disciple of Thomson, has many of the modified expressions of nature-worship to be expected in a minor poet. "The sacred solitude" of nature can never cloy. "the wisdom of an uncorrupted mind."¹ In May, the "seeds of joy recover the earth,"² and spring breathes joy, and love and benevolence throughout the world.³

Another minor poet, Lord Lyttelton, was influenced by the Shaftesbury group. In his "Monody" on the death of his wife he spoke of her as one who, choosing to retire with nature

"and nature's God,
The silent paths of wisdom trod
And banished every passion from her breast"

except those

"Whose holy flames with energy divine 4
The virtuous heart enliven and improve."

As these quotations indicate, both Thompson and Lyttelton are unimportant in themselves, but they serve, among others,⁵ to show the wide dissemination of deistic ideas in regard to nature.

The philosophy of Lord Shaftesbury gained such wide curren-

¹Hymn to May, Chalmers, vol. XV: p. 37.

²Ibid: p. 36.

³Ibid, p. 34.

⁴A Monody (1747)

⁵See the poems of Fawkes, and of Mallet.

cy that deistic thought crept, unaware, even into the writings of such pious men as Samuel Boyse (1708-1749), Edward Young, and Richard Savage.¹ Of these men Young is the most conspicuous. Miss Reynolds, in her account of Young, has two interesting notes on Young's anticipations of some of Wordsworth's ideas.²

Sir Leslie Stephen indicates the general movement of the times when he says that "The whole significance of the early controversies of the century may be described by saying that they represent the struggle between a religion of nature and the traditional religion, the doctrine that emerged was thus Deism, or a religion of nature disguised by traditional phraseology."³

Actually the invasion of orthodox circles by deism was chiefly in the field of ethics. There is little nature philosophy even in Young, the most significant of the orthodox group.

¹See Boyse's Deity and Savage's Wanderer.

²Op. cit., p. 107.

³Hist. of Eng. Thought, vol. II, p. 448.

IV

With the publication of Cooper's "Power of Harmony" (1746) the "Universal Harmony" of Lord Shaftesbury passed out of existence as a subject for philosophical poems of a formal nature.¹ Only a master could have put fresh life into the well-worn ideas of the Shaftesbury group. Then, too, the attention of the literary world was turned to other fields. The novel was developing with great rapidity and absorbing public interest. Poets and scholars were opening up new phases of romanticism. The "graveyard school" produced "The Grave" by Blair (1743) and Young's "Night Thoughts", and culminated a decade later in the "Elegy written in a country churchyard" (1751). A more important phase of romanticism, the "return to the past," also developed in this period. The Wartons were transcribing Milton, Thomson was writing "The Castle of Indolence"; and Collins, in 1749, wrote the "Ode on the Superstitions of the Scottish Highlands" (which did not appear till much later). Scholarship and science were turning towards antiquarianism, and, in general, the period was one of deep absorption in the past. We shall find, however, that, though nature was not emphasized, there was even in the most characteristic poets of this movement, a sentiment for nature, which, though not equal to Wordsworth's, is nevertheless Wordsworthian.

From the middle of the century till 1770 the most important of the English poets were Collins and Gray. Neither of them was philosophical, but their treatment of nature is important here be-

¹ This generalization has its exceptions; see Pearch's Miscellany, vol. I, p. 123; Euthemia, or the Power of Harmony.

cause they created a sense of atmosphere in the presence of nature. This is particularly evident in Gray's "Elegy" (1751), and in Collins' "Ode to Evening" and his tribute to Thomson: "In Yonder Grave a Druid Lies". Vaughan says that this atmospheric spiritualization of nature in Collins and Gray was the "first stage of that gradual transfusion of the spirit of man into outward nature, of outward nature into the spirit of man" which was to culminate in the poetry of Wordsworth.¹ This statement requires considerable modification in the light of our study of the Shaftesbury group. But it is true that Gray and Collins did materially contribute to the spiritualization of nature. The "Elegy" and the "Ode to Evening" are too well known to require quotation here, but Gray has two passages which have not been generally recognized.

The first is in his letter from the Alps in 1739. The early date, placing it in the midst of the Shaftesbury movement,² indicates the diffusion of deistic thought. If we remember that even Chateaubriand thought the Alps ugly, Gray's appreciation will be recognized as remarkable:

"Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff but is pregnant with religion and poetry. There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other argument. One need not have a very fantastic imagination to see spirits there at none-day."³

Another passage, which Miss Reynolds calls almost Wordsworthian, is found in one of his later works, the unfinished "Ode to Vicissitudes":

¹Vaughan, C.E. Romantic Revolt: p. 8.

²We know that, later, Gray expressed contempt for Shaftesbury;

³what he thought of him at this date is unknown.

Tovey, Letters of Th. Gray, vol. I: p. 44.

"The meanest floweret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common sun, the air, the skies
To him were opening paradise."¹

These two passages were doubtless unknown to Brooke when he said that "Gray had no religious feeling for nature."²

The publication (1760-65) of Macpherson's "Ossian" added strength to the movement led by Collins and Gray. The Ossianic poems produce powerful atmospheric effects of melancholy and awe: "silence was among the trees of the hill."³ The poetic treatment of nature leads at times to an effect of personality in nature that is at least suggestive of Wordsworth's more solemn faith: "the waves come to behold the beauty of the sun. They lift their trembling heads; they shrink away in fear."⁴ "The sun rejoices in the tree its beams have raised."⁵ Nature, throughout the Ossianic poems, is felt as a presence, with all the atmospheric effect of the "Ode to Evening", though Collins' work is much more delicate.

Such poetry as that of Collins and Gray and the Ossianic fragments, though it contains no philosophical principles explicitly stated, unquestionably contributed to the spiritualization of nature which Wordsworth so completely realized in his earlier poetry.

¹Ode to Vicissitude.

²Brooke, S., Theology in Eng. Poets, p. 40.

³cf. "The sleep that is among the Lonely Hills," Brougham Castle.

⁴Poems of Ossian, vol. I: p. 53.

⁵ibid. vol. I: p. 66.

The doctrine of "universal harmony" virtually disappeared; but the enthusiasm for nature which had grown up within the formal system remained after the outer shell of theory crumbled, and we find not exponents of neo-Platonic deism, but nature-lovers and "enthusiasts". In 1740 Joseph Warton had written a poem called "The Enthusiast" which was Rousseauistic in character, advocating a return to the uncorrupted state of nature. This poem is of little interest to us here, but another of the same title, written by William Whitehead fourteen years later, shows very neatly the struggle between the enthusiasm for nature and the common sense of the pseudo-classic period.

Whitehead, contemplating nature on a beautiful spring day feels

"a kind of visionary zeal
Of Universal Love";¹

but he is reproved by his muse and reminded that life is not to be lived in solitude and that he must return to his work in the world.

However, three years earlier he had written a poem which contains truly Wordsworthian utterances:

"from every genuine scene
Of Nature's varying face his active mind
Takes fire at once and his full soul o'erflows
With heaven's own bounteous joy."²

To nature, also, is ascribed a power over man's moral character; "each rill confesses its tutelary powers,"³ and nature, as

¹Enthusiast, Chalmers XVII;219 (2); For an interesting analogue to this poem see Grainger's "Solitude", Anderson, vol.X:p.932.
²Hymn to Nymph of Bristol Spring, Chalmers XVII, p. 211.
³ibid, p. 211.

a whole, counsels self-control:

"Look forth and be convinced - 'tis Nature pleads,
Her ample volume opens on your view.
The simple minded swain, who running reads,
Feels the glad truth, and is it hid from you?"¹

If we remember that, according to Wordsworth, the power of nature is not merely to impart wild impulses, that Wordsworth's "nature" restrains as well as kindles,² we shall recognize a closer resemblance between the two poets.

John Langhorne (1735-1779) was one who "looked on nature with a lover's eye."³ He had Collins' sense of atmosphere in nature and spoke of the "sequestered vale, where Sanctity and Silence dwell."⁴ But he was much more explicit in his spiritualization of nature than Collins; he addressed the "Genius of Westmoreland" as a "hidden power, wrapt in high cares and thoughts sublime,"⁵ and he is inspired by nature to thoughts "too high to be expressed." He also interprets the spiritual qualities of nature as Wordsworth does: "Serenity with aspect fair, and love, and joy are in (nature's) train."⁶

Langhorne's explanation of the effect of nature on man's moral life is another link in the chain connecting Shaftesbury and Wordsworth:

"Whatever charms the ear or eye,
All beauty and all harmony,
If sweet sensations they produce
I know they have their moral use;
I know that nature's charms can move
The springs that strike to virtues love."⁷

¹Elegy I.

²Three Years she grew in Sun and Shower.

³Hope.

⁴Lines Left with Minister of Riponden.

⁵Ode to Genius of Westmoreland.

⁶Inscription in a Grotto.

⁷Fable X quoted by Miss Reynolds op.cit. p.133.

Even more Wordsworthian is his "Inscription on the Door of a Study;" Philosophy, he tells us, lives in the grove, and religion "fled from books" is there:

"For first from nature's works we drew
Our knowledge, and our virtue too."

Thus, in Langhorne's poetry we are told that there are spirits in nature, that the spiritual forces, serenity, love and joy permeate nature, and that nature ministers to the moral and spiritual life of man.

In the year 1770, Pearch's Miscellany appeared with poems by Collins and many very minor writers. Most of the poems are sentimental and social, but there is a considerable number that deal with nature. Of these, the most conspicuous are the poems of James Marriot, LL.D. Like so many other poets of his century, he had Wordsworthian ideas, but had not Wordsworth's power of imagination to suspend disbelief. Even in his "Sacred Ode" he expresses deistic tendencies; God's mighty voice is heard throughout nature, and nature proclaims "a present deity."¹ The spiritualization of nature is more evident, however, in his "Inscription on a Hermitage." Peace and calm content dwell there, and no tumultuous passions; for not for these is meant

"The sacred silence of the stream."²

Any profane intrusion will be revenged by:

"The thoughtful genius of the lone abode
And guardian spirit of this solemn wood."³

Thus we find a belief in a pervasive spirit in nature, in

¹Vol. II, p. 312.

²ibid, p. 316.

³ibid, p. 316.

spiritual essences in nature, and a sense of spiritual quality (peace) that affects man's moral and spiritual life. The fact that these poems were written by a learned man is evidence of the dissemination of these ideas among the cultured classes.

"Miss Whately," whose poems are included in the same collection, is of the same type. Her poetry, too, shows an attempt at spiritualizing nature. All nature joins to fill her breast with "high sensations."¹ Her "Hymn to Solitude," though orthodox in its conception of God, is impregnated with the spiritualized conception of nature; in the spring, "Beauty, Harmony and Love" return to renew their cheerful reign, and "Joy roves delighted through the world."²

The fact that two of the very minor poets of the time were writing poetry dealing with nature in an idealized and spiritualized manner is of importance only in so far as it indicates that such ideas were in the air, that they were, more or less, the common stock of poetry at that time.³

Of the many "didactic" poems of the eighteenth century, Mason's "English Garden" is of most significance for this study. William Mason (1725-1797) was a sentimentalist of the Rousseauistic type, and was the author of several sentimental dramas. His "English Garden" has, as a didactic poem, one merit; its subject matter is less disgusting than that chosen by Dyer or Grainger. But there is a difference much more important for the purposes of this study. Mason idealizes and, to a certain extent, spiritualizes nature.

¹Pleasures of Contemplation, vol. III, p. 120.

²ibid, pp.126-127.

³See also "The Power of Beauty" (anon.); ibid, vol. I, p.151, and "Five Pastoral Elegies" ibid. vol. II.

Nature is sinless, beauty is the highest good; and rustics are virtuous and innocent. The wise man will

"muse on nature's page
Each mode of being trace and, humbly sage,
Deduce from these the genuine power of man."¹

Nature, too, is a moral teacher; there is "not a rill but reads the soul a generous lecture."² And Mason, like Wordsworth, preferred the instruction of nature to "years of toiling reason":

"Nurtured thus,
In tranquil groves listening to Nature's voice,
That preached from whispering trees and babbling brooks
A lesson seldom learned in Reason's school,
The wise Sidonian lived."³

"The English Garden" is by no means a Wordsworthian poem; the nature which inspires Mason is usually "by art refined." The few bits of Wordsworthian philosophy quoted should not be accepted as typical of the poem as a whole. Mason jumbled all the superficial ideas that came to mind into his poem to "diversify" it; and these ideas, of course, at times conflict with one another. But his inclusion of Wordsworthian ideas is for that very reason a more certain indication that those ideas were current in English poetry at the time of his writing.

In the works of Michael Bruce (1746-1767) we find another connecting link between the Shaftesbury group and the later poets. His "Elegy written in spring" praises "Ashley" (Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury) and the "gentle Thomson," and tells us that they derived their inspiration from nature. He advises all those who love wisdom to "follow Nature up to Nature's God."⁵

¹Elegy II, "In Garden of Friend".

²Works I, 281-2;

³ibid, I, 252.

⁴ibid, I, 285.

⁵Works: p. 150.

He felt that all nature expresses a spiritual presence:

"The vales, the vocal hills,
The woods, the waters, and the heart of man
Send out a general song;"¹

Bruce believed that joy and love pervade nature, especially in the spring.² There is "no sorrow" in the Cuckoo's song.³ Even in the lugubrious "Last Day" we are told that beauty, happiness, mirth and Love are to be found in nature.⁴ These ideas are infrequent and but faintly traced in Bruce's work; still, they are adumbrations of Wordsworth's philosophy. Furthermore, it is of great interest to find that the Shaftesbury influence was still alive at the time of Bruce's writing (1765).

One of the most important figures in this study is James Beattie (1742-1803), the author of "The Minstrel" (1766-1774). This poem traces the development of a young poet under the influence of nature; the conception of the poem is thus exactly that of the Prelude, and we shall see that his treatment of the subject is also very similar. Edwin was nature's child and he wandered in the mountains and along streams,⁵ listening to the concert of waters, woods and winds;⁶ he delighted in watching the sun rise, and his imagination was struck in a Wordsworthian manner by the vast mist he beheld from the cliff.⁷ Edwin's education was also affected

¹Lochleven, Works: p. 175.

²ibid, p. 177.

³Ode to Cuckoo, *ibid*, p.124; authorship of this poem disputed: Grosart gives it to Bruce; Reynolds and Chalmers give it to John Logan.

⁴Works: p.168.

⁵Minstrel, Bk.I, st.16.

⁶ibid. Bk.I, st.19.

⁷ibid. Bk.I, st.21.

through his association with a hermit, a less embittered "Solitary," who had also found consolation in nature far from the sordid "paths of guile." The similarity between Beattie's work and Wordsworth's is enhanced by the fact that Beattie's poem is admittedly autobiographical.¹

Beattie, in his spiritualization of nature, places the same emphasis as Wordsworth does on peace, and love, and joy as the spiritual forces which permeate nature. We are told that the life of luxury lacks the "serene joy" of the life with nature.² And the hermit finds peace from wordly vanities in his sheltered vale. The poet's eyes glow with rapture in the summer morning, when "a thousand notes of joy are borne on every breeze;"³ and the early ray of the sun on the wilderness is the "messenger of joy to men below."⁴

Nature, as has been indicated, has a great influence over the moral and spiritual life of man. It places him above the level of ordinary social life:

"To those whom Nature taught to think and feel
Heroes alas! are things of small concern."⁵

Nature is so necessary to man's moral and spiritual life that anyone who renounces her charms cannot "hope to be forgiven!"⁶ Wordsworth, it will be remembered, renounced nature for his interest in political freedom, and was "saved" only by his sister, who led him back to nature. The remarkable thing about Beattie's poem is that "the charms which nature to her votary yields" affect man, not through their objective demonstration, but by a swift sensory intuition.

¹Letter to Lady Forbes; see Miss Reynolds, op.cit. p. 150.

²Minstrel, Bk.I, st.8.

³ibid. Bk.I, st.37.

⁴Verses written to Mr. Blacklock.

⁵Minstrel, Bk.II, st. 35.

⁶ibid. Bk.I, st.9.

The green hills, the foliage, and the pure rills of spring make even the peasant's heart overflow with "wonder, love and joy;"¹ and again he says of nature:

"These charms shall work thy soul's eternal health,
And love, and gentleness, and joy impart."²

It is unnecessary to seek for parallels to these lines, which are so Wordsworthian in thought, in feeling, and in tone that they might, with the greatest propriety, be ascribed to the later poet.

Another similarity to Wordsworth is brought out in the second book. Here Edwin, more mature, finds that his simple joy in nature is replaced by manhood's care.³ Like Wordsworth he looked on nature

"not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity."⁴

But the hermit, in explaining to the boy the misery and corruption of the world, does not remove his love from nature. He teaches him that nature is "the only source of real grandeur;"⁵ and Edwin still views in nature's frame

"Goodness untainted, wisdom unconfined."⁶

The morning sun is still "a messenger of joy."⁷

"The Minstrel" differs from Wordsworth's poetry in being tinged throughout with "poetic" melancholy, derived no doubt from the much-admired Gray.⁸ It is true also that Beattie, in the second book of "The Minstrel", does not emphasize joy as a quality of nature;

¹Minstrel, Bk.I, st. 59.

²ibid. Bk.I, st. 10.

³ibid. Bk.II, st. 4.

⁴ibid.

⁵ibid. Bk.II, st. 11

⁶ibid. Bk.II, st. 29

⁷Verses written to Mr. Blacklock.

⁸For comment on this phase see Sneath "Wordsworth," p. 42.

but it must be remembered that Wordsworth's use of the word "joy"¹ as describing the moods of his mature life, indicates a rarified rapture of "elevated thought," for which we find the more conventional expression in "The Minstrel."²

William Cowper (1731-1800), the author of "The Task," was an admirer of Beattie, and, like the earlier poet, combined extreme piety with a nature-worship which approaches, and sometimes reaches, deism. His more ordinary attitude is that God is revealed both by nature and by the scriptures; but at times he is less guarded, and in one place he says:

"There lives and breathes
A soul in all things, and that soul is God."³

Cowper also recognizes love and joy as spiritual qualities of nature; and we find, too, an adumbration of the neo-Platonic conception of nature in the following lines:

"Love, Life and Joy return by due degrees
And Harmony once more revisits earth."⁴

The poet finds joy in nature,⁵ and the animals express an ecstasy "too bright to be suppressed."⁶

Nature, thus spiritualized, could not fail to have an effect upon man's spiritual and moral life. Nature in all her manifestations lectures man in "heavenly truth."⁷ Like Wordsworth, Cowper believes that "one moment" with nature can teach us more than "years of toiling reason:"

¹Tintern Abbey.

²Minstrel, Bk. I, st. 37.

³Task, VI:185; see also VI 221-2.

⁴"Thunder-storm, Unpublished Poems;" Th.Wright, ed. p. 37.

⁵ibid, VI, 298.

⁶ibid. VI, 300.

⁷Task, VI, 182; see also "The Shrubbery."

"Wisdom there, and truth
Not shy, as in the world, and to be won
By slow solicitation, seize at once
The roving thought, and fix it on themselves."¹

Here, again, we find "wise passiveness" advocated; one does not need to interpret nature; the "truth" in nature seizes our passive mind, and impresses itself upon it without the intervention of any rational process. The scenes of nature lull and exhilarate the spirit while they fill the mind;² and the poet finds in nature "heart consoling joys."³ Indeed, the phrase "heart consoling joys" expresses just what Cowper did find most in nature, sick as he was of the corruption of the man-made town.

However, Cowper's approach to Wordsworth is much more remarkable in the tone of his nature-poetry than in his philosophical ideas about nature. He had something of the introspective analysis of Wordsworth,⁴ and he had a sense of intimacy not only with animals, but with the trees and bushes along his paths. He felt at home in nature as no other poet before Wordsworth had felt, and he speaks of nature in the same tone of sober rhapsody that Wordsworth does:

"Scenes must be beautiful which, daily viewed,
Please daily, and survive long knowledge,
And the scrutiny of years."⁵

It is useless to conjecture how far Cowper would have gone in the spiritualization of nature if he had not been so confined by his extreme orthodoxy. It is enough for us to see that, even as it is, he anticipates Wordsworth in everything except in ascribing independent spirit to natural objects, and that, in his great love for

¹The Task, VI:114-117; quoted by Miss Reynolds; op.cit.p.168.

²ibid, I:183-4; see also IV:128-9.

³ibid, IV:781.

⁴Courthope, W.J., Hist. of Eng. Poetry, vol. V: p.356.

⁵The Task, Bk.I: 177-179.

animals and his sense of intimacy with natural objects, he approaches even that phase of Wordsworth's philosophy.¹

At first thought it would appear strange to include among forerunners of Wordsworth a poet who said that natural objects always deadened his imagination, but Blake's earlier poetry is, as we shall see, not anti-sensory, but, like Wordsworth's, super-sensuous in spirit. Neither Blake nor Wordsworth desired to be "imprisoned by the senses," but, on the other hand, neither could have written the poetry he did without natural objects and sense impressions.

Blake's interpretation of nature is more symbolistic than Wordsworth's, but we can see in the following passage a very near approach to Wordsworth's spiritualization of nature:

"With trees and fields full of fairy elves,
And little devils who fight for themselves;
With angels planted in hawthorn bowers,
And God himself in the passing hours."²

No one, reading these lines, can fail to recognize in them a more fanciful, less sober expression of the same sense of spiritual life in nature that we find in the "Prelude" and "Tintern Abbey".

Blake also finds in nature the same psychic forces that Wordsworth does. "The narrow bud opens her beauties to the sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins."³ "The green grass springs in joy and the nimble air kisses the leaves."⁴ Joy sits on every bough,⁵ and the spring does not try to hide its joy.⁶ One of his most Wordsworthian poems is a slightly later one, "The Wild Flower's Song":

"I slept in the earth
In the silent night,
I murmured my thoughts,
And I felt delight."⁷

¹See Vaughan, C.E. Romantic Revolt, p.23.

²Quoted by Long, W.J., Hist. of Eng. Lit., p. 329.

³To Autumn, Poetical Sketches (1783).

⁴Contemplation, *ibid.*

⁵Shepherd's Song, Songs of Experience (1794), notes: p.100.

⁶Earth's Answer, Songs of Innocence (1789), p. 73.

⁷Ideas of Good and Evil (1794-1800) p.112.

A comparison of these passages with "Lines Written in Early Spring" will reveal remarkable similarity.

It will be seen from the preceding paragraph that Blake's nature has not the ethical significance that Wordsworth's has; there is no spiritual communion; no inter-penetration of man's and nature's spiritual life. Blake's ethics were founded elsewhere. His nearest approach to a real spiritualization of nature is found in the first passage quoted above; and in the famous quatrain in *Auguries of Innocence*:

"To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour."

The spiritualization of nature, as we have seen, is not so fully developed in Blake as in many earlier poets; but he had the poetical gift of feeling richly and expressing beautifully whatever he did feel, and he supplied in his poetry, what is so frequently lacking in the poetry of his predecessors, the sense of independent psychic life in natural objects.

William Lisle Bowles was a contemporary of Wordsworth, but his most significant poetry was written before the appearance of the "Lyrical Ballads." Bowles was a churchman and his conception of the deity is usually orthodox, but at times, like so many others of his period, he achieves a spiritualization of nature which indicates a deistic influence. In "Coombe-Ellen" he hails "Nature" among the mountains where "rapt in musings high," one would:

"Think that thou holdest converse with some power
Invisible and strange."¹

The fact that "Coombe-Ellen" appeared in 1798 indicates that "Tin-

¹ Poetical Works: p. 115.

tern Abbey" was not entirely outside the stream of nature poetry of that period.

Bowles interprets the spirit of nature as a joyful spirit. God, he says, bade the world roll on in harmony, and filled the earth with joy;¹ God's lone woods bear witness to His "soul's deep joy."² The beautiful scenes of nature "bestow a "heart felt joy" on man,³ and even the boy and his dog feel the joy in a beautiful scene.⁴ Nature solaced Bowles in his melancholy moods;⁵ her charms moved him to tenderness and love,⁶ and a beautiful landscape teaches

"Lessons of peace and love, beyond all speech."

This does not equal in imaginative power the most exalted mood of Wordsworth's poetry, in which there is a mystical transfusion of spiritual qualities from nature to man; but it does approximate Wordsworth's usual interpretation. Bowles certainly had a sense of spirit, and of spiritual qualities, in nature; and there is a sense of close communion between man and nature which certainly approaches Wordsworth's richer conception.

¹Poetical Works: p. 123.

²On a Landscape of Rubens; p. 143.

³ibid, p. 146.

⁴On a Beautiful Landscape, p.

⁵The River Cherwell; p. 15; The Tweed Visited; p.9.

⁶St. Michael's Mount, p. 101.

If the foregoing study has fulfilled its purpose it has shown that Wordsworth's interpretation of nature, which is generally recognized as the most distinctive aspect of his poetry, was anticipated wholly or in part by many poets, minor and major, of the eighteenth century. Summing up the results of this work briefly and categorically, it may be said that the following statements have been substantiated:

1. Shaftesbury and the poets whom he influenced directly had what Wordsworth called "creative imagination": they spiritualized nature, though not with the imaginative power and felicity of expression that made Wordsworth a great poet. They saw in nature the same spiritual qualities that Wordsworth did, love and joy, and the same spiritual communion of man with nature that we find in Wordsworth's poetry is found in the works of Shaftesbury and his poetic disciples. It is admitted that not all of the Shaftesbury group include all of Wordsworth's essential philosophy in their poetry, and that none of them attained the richness of feeling and the power of imagination that Wordsworth had. Above all, it is admitted that the characteristic philosophy of their poems is not at all the characteristic philosophy of Wordsworth's. But it is true that they at times depart from the more objective aesthetic interpretation of nature and attain a more poetic spiritualized conception which distinctly anticipates Wordsworth.
2. The Shaftesbury influence lost its force in the middle of the century and new interests developed that drove the interpretation of nature into the background of minor poetry. Nevertheless there is in the poetry of Collins, Gray and Macpherson

a recognizable approach to the spiritualization of nature.

3. There is a thin but steady stream of Wordsworthian thought in the minor poetry of this period, represented by Whitehead, Langhorne and Bruce.
4. Towards the end of the century this stream grew and gathered force; Beattie, Cowper and Blake developed the spiritual interpretation of nature in various ways: Beattie emphasized the effect of nature on man's spiritual life; Cowper accentuated the spiritual relation of nature to God, and Blake developed the conception of psychic life in natural objects.
5. Even while Wordsworth was writing "Tintern Abbey" another poet prominent in his time, William Lisle Bowles, was writing thoughts very similar to those of Wordsworth.¹

The study does not pretend to determine the influence of the earlier poets on Wordsworth. Curiously enough there has been no attempt to prove definitely any influence upon his nature-philosophy. General statements to the effect that he derived it along with his ethical and political ideas from Rousseau have not been substantiated.² The present study has demonstrated that Rousseau was not the only possible source for Wordsworth's doctrines.

Wordsworth himself is silent on this point. Although he acknowledged, in the notes to his original edition of the "Evening Walk," his indebtedness to Thomson, Beattie, Young and Collins for various poetic images,³ he makes no statement in regard to their interpretation of nature. We know that Coleridge was enthusiastic

1. Coombe-Ellen: see above: p.42.

2. see Harper, G.M. "Rousseau, Godwin & Wordsworth;" also Babbitt, "Rousseau and Romanticism", p.643.

3. Harper, G.M. "Life of William Wordsworth," vol.I, p.190.

over the sonnets of Bowles at the time of his meeting with Wordsworth, but there is no evidence that Wordsworth recognized in those sonnets or in "Coombe-Ellen" his own attitude toward nature. His letters show that he had an extensive acquaintance with English poetry of the eighteenth century, but, unfortunately for us the significant letters are all dated after his first great productive period.¹ He mentions with approval Lady Winchelsea, Thomson, Dyer, Collins and Cowper but stresses their appreciation of nature rather than their philosophical interpretation.

On the basis of internal evidence something might be done to prove that Wordsworth derived his philosophy of nature partly from the Shaftesbury group, but such an undertaking would, necessarily, require time, wide knowledge and careful discrimination.

Whatever may be the outcome of a study of the influences that operated in Wordsworth's poetic career, this study, if it has succeeded, has demonstrated that there was a steady current of Wordsworthian interpretation of nature in the poetry of the eighteenth century.

1. Mr. Lane Cooper has an excellent discussion of Wordsworth's reading in which he demonstrated that Wordsworth read widely in books of travel.

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