



THE PRELUDE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEM /
A PHILOSOPHICAL POEM / RECORDS THE GROWTH
OF A POET'S MIND

'The Prelude' composed by William Wordsworth is the greatest poem of the Romantic Period, the spiritual record of a single mind, honestly recording its own intimate experiences and making the record intelligible.

Explaining the origin of the plan T.C. Smith and J.C. Grierson say, "We believe that it was on Coleridge's instigation that he resolved to compose a great philosophical poem, embodying the reflection of a poet on Man, nature and Human Life; reflections of which Tintern Abbey gives us a fore-taste. But when he essayed this magnum opus, he found that he must first render an account of the steps by which he has attained his mount of vision. This was the origin of 'The Recluse' and 'The Prelude'."

Clearly 'The Prelude' is the most ambitious work of Wordsworth. It is a faithful record of the growth of the poet's mind. It is a long autobiographical poem running into fourteen Books. Though not a biography in the visual sense of the term, it is still an autobiographical poem. 'The Prelude', 'Tintern Abbey', 'The Excursion', 'Immortality Ode' and 'Lucy Poems' are strongly personal and autobiographical.



About his intentions in writing this great poem, Wordsworth makes his point clear in his letter to Sir George Beaumont: "It was not self-conceit that has induced me to do this, but real humility. I began the work because I was unprepared to treat any more arduous subject and diffident of my powers. Here at least, I hoped that to a certain degree I should be sure of succeeding, as I had nothing to ^{doubt} describe what I had felt and thought; therefore could not easily be bewildered."

In the Preface to 'The Excursion', Wordsworth explains that when he had retired to his native mountains with the hope of writing a great work 'The Recluse'; he thought it reasonable "to take a review of his own mind" and "record in verse the origin and progress of his own powers." The record is 'The Prelude'.

Clearly 'The Prelude' is Wordsworth's review of his own mind, his record in verse the origin and progress of his own powers. It is a poem about the growth of Wordsworth's own mind. In it Wordsworth recalls his childhood, school days, his life at Cambridge, his first impression of London, his first visit to France, his stay in France during the



revolution and reaction to various experiences.

So, Books I and II deal with the poet's early love of Nature and the gradual growth of his awareness of it. Books III, IV, V and VI deal with his ~~student~~ student life at Cambridge. Book VII reflects his London life. Book VIII shows the relation between man and Nature. Books IX, X and XI reveal the impact of the French revolution on the poet's emotional and intellectual make up. Books XII, XIII and XIV show how the imagination, absorbing all experiences and transcending it links mankind with divine. Needless to add that the poem is conceived on a grand scale, given a unity of design and epic structure.