

The Prelude - Autobiography - Record of Wordsworth's soul.  
P.G. Eng. Sem - II CCB

The prefatory poem is biographical, conducts the history of poet's mind to the point when he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured for entering upon the arduous labour which he has proposed to himself...

The 'prefatory poem' is the Prelude, designed by William Wordsworth to be biographical as it is to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers. No doubt, Wordsworth is one of the great poets of English Language and is accorded the highest position among the Romantic poets of English literature. His poems reveal his poetic genius at its sublimity along with his uncommonly deep love for Nature. His poetic composition is a fine reservoir of the mental and emotional reactions of human beings with their natural surroundings. Here, in the given poem, the Prelude, Wordsworth records the gradual growth of his mental, spiritual, emotional and creative powers. It is full of the intense life which he lived through his senses as a child that he tries to recapture. Really, it is the finest fruit of his imaginative power.

As a matter of fact, the Prelude is not an autobiography in the usual sense of the word. Though Wordsworth has said that the prefatory poem is biographical, it is not so in straight forward and chronological way. Here, events do not follow each other with order in which they have happened. In fact, the poet has deliberately rejected the chronological arrangement in favour of one which would just stress on the essential importance of certain experiences and states of mind. To him the subjective aspect is more important than the objective aspect in the poem. So, it

it must be acknowledged that the subject is not 'my life' but the making of a poet, even though the poet has used the words 'the story of my life' at the end of this book. Its purpose is to search out and seize and hold, among the incongruous images of self cast up by reflection, the images of poet: time being of his slowly self-realising individuality.

In the very preamble of Book 1, the shape of the things to come is obvious. Free from the pecuniary troubles and the sufferings of the vast city of London, the poet is on his way to Racedown. With the sweet breath of heaven he feels 'a correspondent breeze' to inspire his soul with poetic zeal. In a very short time he feels himself 'a renovated spirit singled out for holy services. He says:

"..... a higher power  
Than Fancy gave assurance of some work  
of glory, therewith to be begun  
Perhaps too there performed. ...."

The work of glory was never begun or performed there, instead, the Prelude came into <sup>reality</sup> being. In fact, this master piece of Wordsworth's creative genius delineates his childhood experiences amid the lovely surroundings of the soothing elements of the affectionate Nature. Wordsworth himself informs that his poetic life began on the bank of Derwent River when he was just a suckling babe. He acknowledges:

"~~Fair seed time had my soul, and I grew up~~  
" Fostered alike by beauty..... was it for this,  
That one of the fairest of all rivers loved  
To blend his murmurs with my music song."

When the boy Wordsworth was transplanted to that beloved vale of Hawkshead ~~Estimate~~ the benign influence of Nature began to shape and mould his character and poetic personality. He says:

"Fair seed time had my soul, and I grew up  
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear."

At the early stage, the poet is joyfully engaged in childhood recreations of physical activities amid lovely surroundings. He enjoys the pleasures of bathing, basking, bird snaring, birds nesting, boating, skating, kite sailing, naughts-and-crosses or playing cards. There are several impressive incidences that show how Nature effects her discipline on young Wordsworth by evoking the emotions of pleasure and fear. On a hot summer's day, the child relishes the pure physical pleasure by bathing and basking.

"In a small mill-race severed from his stream  
Made one long bathing of a summer's day,  
Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again  
Alternate, all a summer's day....."

Similarly, in the night adventure of the stolen boat, the child is overwhelmed with a deep sense of panic and fright by the awful sight of a towering peak. See these lines:

"Towards up between me and the stars, and still,  
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own  
And measured motions like a living thing  
strode after me."

In this way, the beautiful and sublime objects and images of Nature with their benevolent influences ennobled Wordsworth's emotions and moulded his mind. The poet says:-

".....purifying thus  
The elements of feeling and of thought  
And sanctifying, by such discipline,  
Both pain and fear, until we recognize  
A growl even in the beatings of the heart."

In a nutshell, the Prelude is the study of the origin of Wordsworth's poetic power. It is less a narrative

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than a study of origin, less the history of man than the philosophy of mind. Here, we get the faithful record of Wordsworth's inner life and emotional experiences. We can, unhesitatingly, call it a spiritual or poetical autobiography. To conclude in the words of Herber Read, "The Prelude, undoubtedly places before us Wordsworth - the revolutionary, Wordsworth - the man; Wordsworth - the poet; and finally, Wordsworth - the high priest of Nature."