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Prelude-Book I. Wordsworth as a poet of Nature. Use
of Nature in Prelude P. 4. Sem. - II. CCB

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man
Of moral evil and good
Than all the sages can.

These are the often quoted lines of William Wordsworth, one of the great poets of English language who is accorded the highest position among the romantic poets of English literature. His poems reveal his poetic genius at its sublimity and his profound love for Nature along with other acknowledged essential elements of Romantic Poetry. His poetic composition is a fine reservoir of the mental and emotional reaction of human beings with their external surroundings. As a poet of Nature, he is really superior to all. He is an earnest worshipper, an ardent devotee and a high priest of Nature. Nature occupies an independent status in his poetry. It is not inanimate. It is a living and organic unity with a life and personality of its own. Under its influence, Wordsworth experiences a mystic mood, a transcendental feeling. Let us see, in a brief, his treatment of Nature in the Prelude, prescribed for our study.

Undoubtedly, the Prelude is the masterpiece of Wordsworth's poetic art. The theme of the poem, as it is obvious from its subtitle, is the growth of a poet's mind. The poet's mind is the hero of this unique autobiographical epic and it is Nature alone that plays vital roles in its proper development. Nature's noble role is that of a benign mother, an indulgent guardian and an affectionate nurse exerting great elevating influence on the mind and soul of the poet from the earliest

dawn of his life. This starts from the time when the poet is just a babe in the arms of his mother. Therefore, when the poet is full of contradiction and conflict and finds himself incapable of undertaking the great task of composing an exalted poem of noble theme, his mind goes back to these infant days which he has passed in the proximity of the river, Derwent. How emotionally he addresses the river.

"O Derwent! winding among grassy holms
Where I was looking on a babe in arms
Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts
To more than infant softness"

The true significance of Nature in moulding Wordsworth's personality becomes clear when he tells how from his very childhood, he has been nursed and brought up by the various ministrations of Mother Nature with her lovely, sublime and awe-inspiring sights and sounds. For example:

"Fair best time had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by fear
Much favoured in my birthplace"

The account of exciting skating game on the ice relates very powerfully the poet's super-conscious experience at the sight of one of the most beautiful visions of Nature, when they were wheeling about and went 'through the darkness and the cold'. Here for an example:

"The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron, while far distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy, not unnoticed"

The incident of bird nesting and that of adventure in the stolen boat illustrate the share of fear on the mental growth of Wordsworth. At a dead night, when his desire

over-powered his reason, the boy Wordsworth stole a woodcock, which was the 'captive of another man's toil'. He says that after the commission of this undesirable act.

"I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod."

Similarly, as the poet narrates, when the stolen boat was moving over the smooth surface of the Lake, a 'huge peak appeared its head.' It appeared like the awful and strange living being, with a will and power of its own, following him with a regular steps with some fixed purpose. Then the frightened poet, through the meadows, home-ward went, in a pensive mood with a troubling heart. See the following lines

"But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams."

In fact, Wordsworth has spiritualised Nature by making her a moral teacher. This is his chief contribution to the Romantic Poetry, and here-in lies his originality. That is wonderfully revealed in his poetry. A critic remarks that Wordsworth aims as a poet has been to seek beauty in meadows, woodland and mountains and to interpret this beauty in spiritual terms. He is ever spiritualising the moods of Nature and winning from them moral consolation. However, this spiritual conception of Nature has developed through various stages. In the first book of the *Prelude* we find the poet.

..... drinking in a pure
organic pleasure from the silver breath

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of curling mist, or from the level plain
of waters coloured by impending clouds.

In short, Wordsworth strongly believe that Nature is the best guide, the best teacher. Those who succeed in establishing close affinity and communion with Nature need not go anywhere else. Nature, furthermore, is also an eternal source of great comfort and strength. Wordsworth's whole life, as a critic says, belonged to Nature and Nature to his poetry was what it was to Lucy, both Law and impulse.