



William Wordsworth, his life, works, and influence

George McLean Harper

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CHAPTER IX A REVOLUTIONIST IN ENGLAND The poet dismissed the next three years in one sentence of the autobiographical memoranda: "I came home before the execution of the King, and passed the subsequent time among my friends in London and elsewhere, till I settled with my only sister at Racedown in Dorsetshire, in the year 1796." Yet no period of his life was more full of consequence for him. This was his time of storm and stress. It was largely because of what he underwent between 1792 and 1796 that he became one of the voices of his age. Much of the interest and value of his poetry depends upon our knowing its less immediate meaning, its political and philosophical import. If his own account of these critical formative years is provokingly meagre, all other accounts are scanty enough. Our chief dependence is upon a series of letters to his friend Mathews. "The Prelude" itself, hitherto full of significant detail, passes rapidly and vaguely over the time that followed his return from France. Of course, "The Excursion" is an elaborate commentary on his inner life during those years, but our appreciation of "The Excursion" is enhanced by every item of knowledge concerning his goings and comings, his plans and efforts. "The Excursion" is scarcely less autobiographical than "The Prelude." It is the most profound and sensitive comment literature has made upon the most tremendous social upheaval of modern times. And its depth, its truth, its feeling, are due to the fact that it reflects the sympathy and repulsion of a passionate soul who had lived what he wrote. Yet one reason why this great 17931 RETURN TO LONDON 183 poem has failed, as it undoubtedly has failed, to make an impression on many readers who thoroughly enjoy "The Prelude," is that the poet ha...

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