

Oxford Scholarly Editions Online

William Wordsworth, *The Excursion* (1814): PREFACE TO THE EDITION OF 1814

Ernest De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (eds), *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, Vol. 5: *The Excursion; The Recluse* (Second Edition)

Published in print: 1959

Published online: May 2015

PREFACE TO THE EDITION OF 1814

THE Title-page announces that this is only a portion of a poem; and the Reader must be here apprised that it belongs to the second part of a long and laborious Work, which is to consist of three parts.— The Author will candidly acknowledge that, if the first of these had been completed, and in such a manner as to satisfy his own mind, he should have preferred the natural order of publication, and have given that to the world first; but, as the second division of the Work was designed to refer more to passing events, and to an existing state of things, than the others were meant to do, more continuous exertion was naturally bestowed upon it, and greater progress made here than in the rest of the poem; and as this part does not depend upon the preceding, to a degree which will materially injure its own peculiar interest, the Author, complying with the earnest entreaties of some valued Friends, presents the following pages to the Public.

It may be proper to state whence the poem, of which *The Excursion* is a part, derives its Title of *THE RECLUSE*.—Several years ago, when the Author retired to his native mountains, with the hope of being

.....
pg 2

enabled to construct a literary Work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them. That Work, addressed to a dear Friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, and to whom the Author's Intellect is deeply indebted, has been long finished; and the result of the investigation which gave rise to it was a determination to compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society; and to be entitled, *The Recluse*; as having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement.—The preparatory poem is biographical, and conducts the history of the Author'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 had proposed to himself; and the two Works have the

same kind of relation to each other, if he may so express himself, as the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add, that his minor Pieces, which have been long before the Public, when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices.

The Author would not have deemed himself justified in saying, upon this occasion, so much of performances either unfinished, or unpublished, if he had not thought that the labour bestowed by him upon what he has heretofore and now laid before the Public, entitled him to candid attention for such a statement as he thinks necessary to throw light upon his endeavours to please and, he would hope, to benefit his countrymen.—Nothing further need be added, than that the first and third parts of *The Recluse* will consist chiefly of meditations in the Author's own person; and that in the intermediate part (*The Excursion*) the intervention of characters speaking is employed, and something of a dramatic form adopted.

It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system: it was more animating to him to proceed in a different course; and if he shall succeed in conveying to the mind clear thoughts, lively images, and strong feelings, the Reader will have no difficulty in extracting the system for himself. And in the meantime the following passage, taken from the conclusion of the first book of *The Recluse*, may be acceptable as a kind of *Prospectus* of the design and scope of the whole Poem.

.....
pg 3

"On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life,
Musing in solitude, I oft perceive
Fair trains of imagery before me rise,
Accompanied by feelings of delight
5 Pure, or with no unpleasing sadness mixed;
And I am conscious of affecting thoughts
And dear remembrances, whose presence soothes
Or elevates the Mind, intent to weigh
The good and evil of our mortal state.
10 —To these emotions, whencesoe'er they come,
Whether from breath of outward circumstance,
Or from the Soul—an impulse to herself—
I would give utterance in numerous verse.
Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,
15 And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;
Of blessed consolations in distress;

Of moral strength, and intellectual Power;
Of joy in widest commonalty spread;
Of the individual Mind that keeps her own
20 Inviolate retirement, subject there
To Conscience only, and the law supreme
Of that Intelligence which governs all—
I sing:—'fit audience let me find though few!'

"So prayed, more gaining than he asked, the Bard—
25 In holiest mood. Urania, I shall need
Thy guidance, or a greater Muse, if such
Descend to earth or dwell in highest heaven!
For I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink
Deep—and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds
30 To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.
All strength—all terror, single or in bands,
That ever was put forth in personal form—

.....
pg 4

Jehovah—with his thunder, and the choir
Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones—
35 I pass them unalarmed. Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
40 Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—
My haunt, and the main region of my song.
—Beauty—a living Presence of the earth,
Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed
45 From earth's materials—waits upon my steps;
Pitches her tents before me as I move,
An hourly neighbour. Paradise, and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields—like those of old
Sought in the Atlantic Main—why should they be
50 A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these

55 A simple produce of the common day.
—I, long before the blissful hour arrives,
Would chant, in lonely peace, the spousal verse

.....
pg 5

Of this great consummation:—and, by words
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
60 Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
65 Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:—and how exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
70 Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish:—this is our high argument.
—Such grateful haunts foregoing, if I oft
Must turn elsewhere—to travel near the tribes
And fellowships of men, and see ill sights
75 Of madding passions mutually inflamed;
Must hear Humanity in fields and groves
Pipe solitary anguish; or must hang
Brooding above the fierce confederate storm
Of sorrow, barricadoed evermore
80 Within the walls of cities—may these sounds
Have their authentic comment; that even these
Hearing, I be not downcast or forlorn!—
Descend, prophetic Spirit! that inspir'st
The human Soul of universal earth,
85 Dreaming on things to come; and dost possess
A metropolitan temple in the hearts
Of mighty Poets: upon me bestow

.....
pg 6

A gift of genuine insight; that my Song
With star-like virtue in its place may shine,
90 Shedding benignant influence, and secure,
Itself, from all malevolent effect

Of those mutations that extend their sway
Throughout the nether sphere!—And if with this
I mix more lowly matter; with the thing
95 Contemplated, describe the Mind and Man
Contemplating; and who, and what he was—
The transitory Being that beheld
This Vision; when and where, and how he lived;—
Be not this labour useless. If such theme
100 May sort with highest objects, then—dread Power!
Whose gracious favour is the primal source
Of all illumination,—may my Life
Express the image of a better time,
More wise desires, and simpler manners;—nurse
105 My Heart in genuine freedom:—all pure thoughts
Be with me;—so shall thy unfailing love
Guide, and support, and cheer me to the end!"

Notes

* *Nov. 10, 1806.* I am going to Press with a volume ... it will consist entirely of small pieces, and I publish with great reluctance; but the day when my long work will be finished seems farther and farther off. (W. W. to Walter Scott.)

Feb. 18, 1815. W. has had one of his weeks of rest and we now begin to wish that he was at work again, but as he intends completely to plan the first part of *The Recluse* before he begins the composition, he must read many Books before he will fairly set to labour again. (D. W. to S. H.)

Oct. 16, 1817. ... he intends to work hard at *The Recluse* in Winter. (D. W. to C. Clarkson.)

June 7, 1819. If, as you say, The Waggoner in some sort came at my call, Oh for a potent voice to call forth *The Recluse* from his profound dormitory, where he sleeps forgetful of his foolish charge—the world! (C. Lamb to W. W.)

March 27, 1821. W. is quite well, and very busy, though he has not looked at *The Recluse* or the poem on his own life; and this disturbs us. After 50 years of age there is no time to spare, and unfinished works should not if possible be left behind. This he feels, but the will never governs *his* labours. (D. W. to C. Clarkson.)

April 20, 1822. *The Recluse* has had a long sleep, save in my thoughts; my MSS. are so ill-penned and blurred that they are useless to all but myself; and at present I cannot face them. (W. W. to W. S. Landor.)

Dec. 13, 1824. My Brother has not yet looked at *The Recluse*; he seems to feel the task so weighty that he shrinks from beginning with it ... yet knows that he has now no time to loiter if another great work is to be accomplished by him—I say another—for I consider *The Excursion* as one work though the Title-page tells that it is but a *part* of one that has another Title. (D. W. to H. C. R.)

1826. I hope we shall have the remainder of *The Recluse* ere long. (Hartley Coleridge to Derwent.)

Dec. 18, 1826. He has lately written some very good sonnets. I wish I could add that *The Recluse* was brought from his hiding-place. (D. W. to H. C. R.)

Jan. 22, 1830. For your head (I do not flatter) is not a nob or the end of a ninepin—unless a Vulcanian hammer could fairly batter a Recluse out of it, then would I bid the smirch'd God knock and knock lustily, the two-handed skinker. (Lamb to W. W.)

Aug. 1830. I am afraid there is little hope at present of another portion of *The Recluse*. (Hartley Coleridge to Derwent.)

Sept. 28, 1836. We hope ... that the Poet may leave home with a perfect holiday before him—and, but I dare not say so—return to *The Recluse*; and let me charge you, not to encourage the Muse to *vagrant* subjects. (M. W. to H. C. R.)

Dec. 17, 1836. Oh! continue *The Recluse*. I wish I was Moxon. I would make you such an offer for it as could ruin me and enrich my children. ... I really think from what Murray said to me, two or three years ago, he would give you £1,000 for the rest of *The Recluse*. (Barron Field to W. W., *unpublished letter*.)

[It is noteworthy that in correcting his last fair copy of *The Prelude* (MS. E) in 1839 (or possibly a little later), he omitted the line which concludes a tentative passage on the senses counteracting each other: *But this is matter for another Song* (*Prel.* 1805, xi. 185). Clearly he had still contemplated up to that time working out some of these ideas in *The Recluse*.]

June 25, 1841. He [Wordsworth] says that the "Recluse" has never been written except a few passages—and probably never will. (Aubrey de Vere to his sister.)

Jan. 12, 1843. ... if I could hope to see the conclusion of *The Excursion* it would be worth living for—I am sure I should live longer if I could only have the hope of seeing a portion of it. ... (C. Clarkson to H. C. R.)

Feb. 16, 1845. I am sorry to see him [the poet] entering into politics or political economy. ... He does not shine in such subjects. ... I wish he would either complete *The Recluse* or lock up his desk. (Barron Field to H. C. R.)

NOTES

p. 1. *Preface to the Edition of 1814*:

The Recluse *and the genesis of The Excursion*

"Several years ago, when the Author retired to his native mountains, with the hope of being enabled to construct a literary Work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment. As subsidiary to this preparation he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers. That Work, addressed to a dear Friend, most distinguished for his knowledge and genius, ... has been long finished;¹ and the result of the investigation which gave rise to it was a determination to compose a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society; and to be entitled *The Recluse*. ..."

This paragraph gives an account of the genesis of *The Recluse*, *The Excursion* "being a portion of *The Recluse*",² and of *The Prelude*, which is not strictly accurate. Wordsworth did not retire to Grasmere till December 1799. The scheme for the great philosophical poem to be called "The Recluse" was embraced early in 1798 at Alfoxden, Somerset (v. Letters of Wordsworth written March 1798, *E.L.*, pp. 188-90). The relation between *The Prelude*, *The Excursion*, and *The Recluse* is somewhat obscured by the fact that W. first used *The Recluse* as a covering title for all the blank verse which he was writing in the early years with a view to the great philosophical poem. Some of this verse was incorporated in *The Prelude*, his poetical autobiography (completed in its first form in 1805) some in *The Excursion*. As this preface shows, he conceived *The Prelude* as subsidiary and preparatory to *The Recluse*; and he now, in 1814, planned *The Recluse* as a tripartite poem, of which he had written Book I of Part I (v. Appendix A) and of which *The Excursion* was to form Part II.

From his letters and MS. note-books, and from Dorothy Wordsworth's journals and letters, the emergence of *The Excursion* from the original plan of *The Recluse* can be traced.

March 6, 1798. "I have written 1300 lines of a poem in which I contrive to convey most of the knowledge of which I am possessed. My object is to give pictures of Nature, Man and Society. Indeed I know not anything which will not come within the scope of my plan" (W. W. to James Tobin: *E.L.*, p. 188).

March 11. "I have written 1300 lines of a poem which I hope to make of considerable utility. Its title will be *The Recluse; or, views of Nature, Man, and Society*" (W. W. to James Losh: *E.L.*, p. 190).

A first draft of the lines "On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life" afterwards printed as Prospectus to *The Recluse* was probably written at this time. The resolve to compose his autobiography rather than embark straightway upon the great poem was perhaps formed in the winter of 1798–9.

Coleridge was the prime mover in the scheme for the great philosophic poem. "I looked forward to 'The Recluse' as the first and only true philosophical poem in existence" (letter of S. T. C. to W. W., May 30, 1815). Wordsworth kept the task before him for many years, finding himself increasingly reluctant for it, and at first turning to Coleridge for stimulus and assistance.

March 6, 1804. "I am very anxious to have your notes for *The Recluse*. I cannot say how much importance I attach to this: if it should please God that I survive you, I should reproach myself for ever in writing the work if I had neglected to procure this help" (W. W. to S. T. C.¹ *E.L.*, p. 368).

Coleridge's comment on *The Excursion*, recorded in his *Table Talk*, July 31, 1832, reveals the original design of *The Recluse*:

"I cannot help regretting that Wordsworth did not first publish his thirteen books on the growth of an individual mind—superior, as I used to think, upon the whole, to *The Excursion*. You may judge how I felt about them by my own poem upon the occasion. Then the plan laid out, and, I believe, partly suggested by me, was, that Wordsworth should assume the station of a man in mental repose, one whose principles were made up, and so prepared to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy. He was to treat man as man—a subject of eye, ear, touch, and taste, in contact with external nature, and informing the senses from the mind, and not compounding a mind out of the senses; then he was to describe the pastoral and other states of society, assuming something of the Juvenalian spirit as he approached the high civilization of cities and towns, and opening a melancholy picture of the present state of degeneracy and vice; thence he was to infer and reveal the proof of, and necessity for, the whole state of man and society being subject to, and illustrative of, a redemptive process in operation, showing how this idea reconciled all the anomalies, and promised future glory and restoration. Something of this sort was, I think, agreed on. It is, in substance, what I have been all my life doing in my system of philosophy.

"I think Wordsworth possessed more of the genius of a great philosophic poet than any man I ever knew, or, as I believe, has existed in England since Milton; but it seems to me that he ought never to have abandoned the contemplative position, which is peculiarly—perhaps I might say exclusively—fitted for him. His proper title is *Spectator ab extra*."

March 6, 1804. "I am now writing a poem on my own earlier life. This Poem will not be published ... till I have finished a larger and more important work to which it is tributary. Of

this larger work I have written one Book and several scattered fragments, it is a moral and philosophical Poem; the subject whatever I find most interesting in Nature, Man and Society. ... To this work I mean to devote the prime of *my* life and the chief force of my mind. I have also arranged the plan of a narrative Poem; and if I live to finish these three principal works I shall be content. ... They are all to be in blank verse." (W. W. to De Quincey: *E.L.*, p. 370.)

But to take up his station "as a man in mental repose", and "deliver upon authority a system of philosophy" according to Coleridge's plan, was what Wordsworth found he could not do. The "one book" which he told De Quincey he had written was entitled *The Recluse*, Part First, Book First, *Home at Grasmere*.¹ Composed early in 1800 it ends with the eloquent passage already referred to, "On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life", which he was to quote in his Preface to *The Excursion* as "a kind of Prospectus of the design and scope of the whole Poem" (*The Recluse*), but the substance of the Book, well described in its title *Home at Grasmere*, is an intimate record of his impressions of the Vale and its inhabitants during his first months of residence at Dove Cottage: it is in fact a continuation of his poetical autobiography from the place where *The Prelude* leaves off. *The Excursion*, which he published with the sub-title "a *Portion of The Recluse*", took the poetic form of philosophic dialogue on a slender dramatic basis, interlarded with narrative: it had its starting-point not in Coleridge's conception of the philosophical poem but in a tale in blank verse, *The Ruined Cottage*, written at Racedown before Wordsworth's intimacy with Coleridge began.

June 1797. "The first thing that was read after he (Coleridge) came was W.'s new poem *The Ruined Cottage*, with which he was much delighted" (D. W. to M. H. (?): *E.L.*, p. 169).

Though no complete MS. survives of the earliest draft of *The Ruined Cottage*, it must have contained a short bare narrative of unrelieved distress. The earliest MS. of portions of it (MS. A) seems to have been written in 1795 (*v. infra*). In a letter to J. P. Estlin in June 1797² Coleridge quotes the last lines of it, ending "Last human tenant of these ruined walls"³ (corresponding with MS. B *infra*, ll. 705-42, and *Exc.* i. 871-916). Its theme was expressly the Ruined Cottage, found by the poet in his wanderings and haunting him by the human appeal of its abandoned walls and garden, and its disused well:¹ and the poem must have told how on one of his visits to the place he met by chance a Pedlar, who, when questioned, told him the story of the "last human tenant of the ruined walls". In the following March D. W. writes to Mary Hutchinson:

March 5, 1798. "You desire me to send you a copy of *The Ruined Cottage*. This is impossible for it has grown to the length of 900 lines.² I will however send you a copy of that part which is immediately and solely connected with the Cottage. The Pedlar's character now makes a very, certainly the *most*, considerable part of the Poem."

By March 1798, as we know from a letter of Coleridge written in that month³ the philosophical tail-piece had been added (v. Addendum to MS. B *infra*). The character of the philosophic Pedlar and his relation with the young Poet, his interlocutor, were evidently a new feature: in the version of the closing lines quoted by Coleridge in June 1797 the interlocutor had been addressed by the narrator of the tale as "Stranger"; he has become "my friend" in the later version (MS. B 740 (v. *infra*, p. 399); *Exc*, i. 914).

From Dec. 1801 to March 1802 there are many references in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal to *The Pedlar* as the expanded story is now entitled, and she speaks of it as a poem in three parts. It covered roughly the ground of *Exc*. Book I, divided, as it still is, into three parts at l. 433 and l. 604.

On Oct. 9, 1800, Coleridge had written to Sir H. Davy: "We mean to publish *Christabel* with a long blank verse poem of W's entitled *The Pedlar*"; and on March 10, 1802, Dorothy Wordsworth writes in her journal: "W. has been talking about publishing the Yorkshire Wolds poem (i.e. *Peter Bell*) with *The Pedlar*."⁴ At what date precisely Wordsworth ceased to regard *The Pedlar* as a separate poem and began to plan *The Excursion* as a development of it is not revealed; but it is evident that he found in the philosophic pedlar, later to be called the Wanderer, whose character took on a special significance for him, an effective starting-point for this portion of his great philosophical poem, and by the end of 1804 he is writing of *The Pedlar* as a part of *The Recluse*.

Dec. 25, 1804. "I do not know if you are exactly acquainted with the plan of my poetical labour: it is twofold; first, a Poem, to be called *The Recluse*, in which it will be my object to express in verse my most interesting feelings concerning Man, Nature, and society; and next, a Poem (in which I am at present principally engaged) on my earlier life. ... This latter work I expect to have finished before the month of May; and then I purpose to fall with all my might on the former, which is the chief object upon which my thoughts have been fixed these many years. Of this poem, that of "The Pedlar", which Coleridge read you, is part, and I may have written of it altogether about 2,000 lines. It will consist I hope of almost 10, or 12 thousand." (W. to Sir G. Beaumont.)

June 3, 1805. "I have the pleasure to say that I finished my poem [The Prelude] about a fortnight ago. ... This work may be considered as a sort of *portico* to *The Recluse*, part of the same building, which I hope to be able, ere long, to begin with in earnest." (W. to Sir G. B.)

He was to make the composition of *The Excursion* his principal work for the next nine years: it was published under the title of *The Excursion, Being a Portion of The Recluse* in 1814. His unfulfilled promise of *The Recluse* lay on his conscience and engaged the hopes of his friends for the rest of his life.* Twice he had turned aside from his central task. Of the great philosophical poem on Coleridge's plan, to which he still endeavoured to be faithful (he says

in the Preface to *The Excursion* that "the first and third parts of *The Recluse* will consist chiefly of meditations in the Author's own person"), all that finally survived, apart from one Book, was a Prelude to the main theme and an Excursion from it. It is clear from the letters and the MSS. that there was from the start a divergence between Wordsworth's own idea of *The Recluse* and Coleridge's plan. Coleridge intended a philosophical discourse delivered authoritatively from the mouth of the poet. Wordsworth early defined his object as "to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society", and the early note-books of the Alfoxden period, 1797-8, show that the "scattered fragments" of which he speaks later were jottings in blank verse falling into three categories: (1) descriptions of natural scenes and images that impressed him, (2) human tales and character sketches, and (3) philosophical reflections rising out of both. Wordsworth was right to follow his own bent: his poetic thought sprang out of the living body of his experience, and could only be delivered through images and incidents and characters which belonged to the life of Man and Nature as he knew it; the autobiographic form of *The Prelude* and, in a less degree, the dramatic and narrative form of *The Excursion* fitted his genius.

Chronology of the Composition of The Excursion

The chronology of the composition of *The Excursion* can be traced in outline from a study of the MSS. and letters and other evidence. It is clear that W.'s habit was to compose in detached passages, which he afterwards worked into the fabric of his poem. Certain passages of *The Excursion* were written in the early years when he was contemplating *The Recluse*, and had started upon *The Prelude*, and before he had set to work upon *The Excursion* as a separate publication. I append a list with approximate dates:

1795. W. says that the lines first written were "those beginning 'Nine tedious years' and ending 'Last human tenant of these ruined walls' [*Exc.* i. 871-916]. These were composed in '95 at Racedown".—I. F. But MS. A of *The Ruined Cottage*, which must belong to 1795 *circa*, has the central part of Margaret's story, the unhappy events leading to her husband's breakdown, MS. B, 348-413 and 430-9 (v. pp. 389-92 *infra*), *Exc.* i. 502-70, 582-91.

1797. In June 1797 S. T. C. quotes *Exc.* i. 880-916 in a letter.

1797-8. Passages describing "Margaret during her affliction" (v. I. F.). W. places next in date, as composed at Racedown or Alfoxden, lines at the close of Book IV "For the man who in this spirit ... intellectual soul" [*Exc.* iv. 1207-75]—I. F. This passage appears first in Addendum to MS. B, 3-58, 92-9 (v. pp. 400-3 *infra*), and is quoted by S. T. C. in a letter of March 1798. In MS. B the passage included *Exc.* iv. 958-68.

MS. B and B 2 of *The Ruined Cottage* (v. *infra*) belong to the winter 1797–8. In the *Alfoxden* note-book which W. used between Jan. 20 and March 5, 1798, there are jottings for the pedlar's character (v. note to *Exc.* i. 422–33) and for "Objects that have no power to hold articulate language", *Exc.* iv. 1204–7 (v. note).

1798–9. In the *Christabel* note-book lines corresponding to *Exc.* iii. 69–73 (v. Appendix B, iv. i *supra*, p. 342) probably belong to late Spring 1798. MS. 18A contains a fragment about the factory lad corresponding to *Exc.* viii. 292–305, 315–33 (v. *app. crit.* and note) and a fragment "There is an active principle ..." corresponding to *Exc.* ix. 1–26, 124–52 (v. *app. crit.* and note).

The lines used as Prospectus to *Exc.*, "On Man, on Nature, and on human life ...", were probably written in 1798.

1799–1800. MS. 2 of *Peter Bell* has lines describing Margaret of R. C. (*Exc.* i. 513), including some hitherto unpublished (v. note pp. 413–14. *infra*).

1800. MS. R, which comprises rough drafts for *Recluse* i, written early in 1800, includes "Happy is he who lives ..." (*Exc.* iv. 332–72) and the two stories introduced in *Exc.* vi. 1080–187, those of W. Armathwaite (complete), and the widowed family from l. 1149.

1804 (or earlier). MS. Y, containing chiefly passages for *Prel.*, has (a) *Exc.* ii. 1–26 originally written as opening of *Prel.* viii (v. *Prel.*, E. de S., p. lii); (b) deleted passage written for *Prel.* viii. 497 *et seq.* (v. *Prel.*, E. de S., p. 581), incident of solitary lamb, *Exc.* iv. 402–12; (c) description of snow-white ram reflected in pool, *Exc.* ix. 437–48 (v. note *infra*); (d) first draft of "We live by admiration hope and love", *Exc.* iv. 763 *et seq.* (v. note *infra*); (e) lines about the Indian looking out from an eminence, *Exc.* iii. 928–40 (v. note *infra*).

When in 1804 W. began to shape in his mind the section of *The Recluse* which was in the issue to be published as *The Excursion*, he had decided to use *The Pedlar* as his starting-point; v. his letter to Sir G. Beaumont of Dec. 25, 1804: "Of this poem [*The Recluse*] that of the Pedlar is part, and I may have written of it altogether about 2,000 lines." These 2,000 lines would be accounted for by *The Ruined Cottage*, just under 1,000, and the first book of *The Recluse* (v. Appendix A), a little over 1,000 (the last line of *Recl.* MS. B is numbered 1047; v. p. 476*infra*).

In June 1805 *The Prelude* was finished, but he was slow to get under way with *The Recluse*, and did not get to work in earnest upon it till the summer of 1806, as the following evidence from letters shows:

(1) Aug. 7, 1805. "My Brother has not resumed his great work since the finishing of the poem on his own life, and he now begins to be anxious to get forward again." (D. W. to Lady Beaumont.)

(2) Dec. 25, 1805. "... He is very anxious to get forward with *The Recluse* and is reading for the nourishment of his mind, preparatory to beginning." (D. W. to Lady Beaumont.)

(3) Jan. 19, 1806. "My Brother, though not actually employed in his great work, is not idle, for he almost daily produces something, and his thoughts are employed upon *The Recluse*." (D. W. to Lady Beaumont.)

(4) July 23, 1806. "Wm. goes on rapidly with *The Recluse*." (D.W. to C. Clarkson.)

(5) Aug. 1, 1806. "Within this last month I have returned to *The Recluse* and have written 700 additional lines." (W. W. to Sir G. Beaumont.)

(6) Sept. 8, 1806. "I have been busily employed lately; I wrote one book of *The Recluse* nearly 1,000 lines, then had a rest, last week began again, and have written 300 more: I hope all tolerably well, and certainly with good views." (W. W. to Sir G. Beaumont; v. *M.Y.*, p. 62.)

It is not clear whether the 700 lines mentioned in (5) are to be included in the 1,000 mentioned in (6). I incline to think, after long study of the MSS., that they are additional to the 1,000. The precise reference to "one book", and the 300 more lines written in the first week of September (6), would fit very closely the first constructive draft of Book II and the lines 1-324 of Book III of which there is a consecutive fair copy in MS. *P.*(v. *infra*, p. 410), followed by a more or less rough draft of the rest of Book III. What, then, would the 700 additional lines of (5) represent? I believe these would be the rough drafts of passages of Book IV found in MS. 58, a small notebook similar in form to MS. X and MS. Y of *The Prelude* (v. *Prel.*, E. de S., pp. xxxi and xxxii). It is mainly occupied with these rough drafts, in separate groups, of lines afterwards incorporated in Book IV, but pages near the beginning contain drafts of v. 1-225, and at the end drafts of ii. 152-320, in a version earlier than MS. P. These have clearly been written in *after* the passages of Book IV. We may suppose then that W. was occupied in July, and earlier, with the planning of Books II, III, and IV and had written, in the rough, a good deal of these three books; and further that in August and September he wrote a first constructive draft of Book II and the first 300 lines of Book III.

After this bout of work he seems to have done very little to *The Excursion* for the next three years. He was diverted from it by many distractions: Coleridge's return and the anxieties consequent upon it; the removal to Coleorton (Nov. 1806); the preparation for press of the volumes of 1807 and the composition of some of their contents, including *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle*; the return to Gras-mere (June 1807); the composition of *The White Doe of Rylstone* (winter 1807-8); a visit to London (March 1808); the removal to Allan Bank (June 1808); his excited interest in the Spanish War and his composition of his pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra (winter of 1808); his translation of epitaphs of Chiabrera, and the writing of two essays for *The Friend* (1809-10). But on Feb. 28, 1810, D. W. wrote to Lady Beaumont: "He is deeply engaged in composition. Before he turns to any other labour I hope he will have finished three books of *The Recluse*. He seldom writes less than 50 lines every day." In the same letter she writes: "The essay [on Epitaphs in the *The Friend*] of this week is by my brother ... he has written two more essays on the same subject which will appear when there is need." The subject matter of Books V, VI, and VII of *The Excursion*, the "authentic epitaphs" (v. 651), given by the Pastor of some of his parishioners, is clearly related to W.'s broodings over the general subject of Epitaphs, and it is significant that he appended his first essay on Epitaphs as a note to Book V, and that in his third essay (publ. by Grosart, 1876) he quotes the Pastor's account of the Deaf Man (v. note to vii. 395).

His second bout of constructive work dates then from the winter of 1809-1810, and was continued through 1811-13. The final pulling together and revision was going on early in 1814 (v. D. W.'s letter to C. Clarkson, April 24, 1814; *M.Y.*, p. 590). Conjectural chronology of the separate books is given in the introductory notes to these, *infra*. Apart from the labour he devoted to composition, shown in draft after draft of particular passages in the MSS., he spent much pains throughout his life in revising the printed text of *The Excursion*. The more important revisions were made in the editions of 1827, 1837, and 1845. On Oct. 24, 1828, he wrote to Barron Field: "I am much pleased that you think the alterations of *The Excursion* improvements. My sister thinks them so invariably" (*L.Y.*, p. 313). For his alterations for ed. 1845 v. notes to l. 51, 792 and 934-55, *infra*. p. 3. *Prospectus*: On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life, *etc.*] Of the *Prospectus* there are three extant MSS. MS. 1 is found, as an independent fragment, in a small note-book, with thin blue cardboard cover, similar to those used for drafts of *The Prelude*. This note-book was used in 1808 for accounts of the money expended on the Green Family (v. *George and Sarah Green*, by D. W., Oxford, 1936, p. 11). The date of the MS. is uncertain, but it represents an earlier stage of the text than MS. 2, and thus was probably written before the rest of *The Recluse* Book I. It is quite likely that it is a fair copy of a draft of lines written as early as 1798, at Alfoxden.

¹ *The Prelude*, published 1850.

² Thus it is described on the title-page of 1814.

¹ W. never received the notes. From a letter of S. T. C. to W. W. of May 1, 1805, D. W. transcribes the following: "my Ideas respecting your *Recluse* were burnt as a Plague-garment, and all my long letters to you and Sir George Beaumont sunk to the bottom of the Sea!" *E.L.*, p. 508.

¹ *The Recluse*. Home at Grasmere. First published in 1888. *Vide* Appendix A, p. 313 *supra*, and note, p. 475.

² *Collected Letters of S. T. C.*, edited Griggs, vol. i, p. 327.

³ In the two earliest complete MSS. B and D the poem ends at this line.

¹ *v.* the first fragmentary MS., A, described *infra* p. 377.

² This revised form of the poem has survived in MS. B.

³ *Collected Letters of S. T. C.*, edited Griggs, i. 397.

⁴ *v.* also D. W.'s journal for Feb. 13 where *The Pedlar* and *The Recluse* are referred to as two poems.

There is no complete consecutive MS. of this Book. Lines **1-331** are not found in any extant note-book, but drafts of most of the remainder, in separate groups of lines, not in the order in which they were finally published, and generally without connecting links, survive in a note-book, MS. 58, already referred to (*v.* prefatory note, p. 371 *supra*). Since this note-book was subsequently used for early drafts of passages of Book II, it is clear that Book IV was largely conceived before Book II was completed, and the first draft of many important passages probably date from 1806. Other passages forming the basis of II. 1150-1295 are found in a later MS., MS. 60 probably written in 1809-10, though some of these look like fair copies of earlier drafts. But perhaps the most interesting of all date back to a much earlier period, 1797-1800. And this is not surprising, since in this Book W. draws together the central ideas of his philosophy, rising to the "highth of his great argument". *v.* prefatory note on Chronology of *Exc.*, p. 369 *supra*, and notes to II. 332-72, 402-12, 763-5, 958-68, 1158-87, 1204-97, and 1207 *infra*.

2-13

Thinking in solitude, from time to time
I find sweet passions traversing my soul
Like music: unto these where'er I may
I would give *etc.*

MS. 1: *so* MS. 2 *corr. but* (2, 3) I often feel Delightful passions

13. numerous verse] *Paradise Lost*, v. 150.

14/15 Hope for this earth, and hope beyond the grave MS. 2

15-17 *not in* MS. 1

15 *not in* MS. 2

17 Of virtue and of MS. 2

18 widest] various MS. 1

20-2

and consists

With being limitless, the one great Life

MSS. 1, 2

23. "fit audience let me find though few!"] from Milton's address to Urania, *P.L.* vii. 30-1:

still govern thou my Song
Urania, and fit audience find, though few.

24-5

Fit audience find though few! Thus pray'd the Bard,
Holiest of Men

MSS. 1, 2: 1814 as *text, but* Holiest of Men

29 Deep, and ascend aloft, and [] worlds MS. 1

32 by personal Form MS. 1: in personal forms MS. 2

34. empyreal thrones] *P.L.* ii. 43: "O progeny of Heaven, empyreal thrones."

35-6

The darkest pit
Of the profoundest Hell, night, chaos, death

MS. 1

39 us...we] me...I MS. 1

40 Into my soul, into the soul of man MS. 1

42-4

Beauty, whose living home is the green earth
Surpassing far what hath by special craft
Of delicate Poets, been call'd forth, and shap'd

MS. 1

47 An] My MS. 1

48-76

Elysian, blessed island[s] in the deep
Of choice seclusion, wherefore need they be
A history, or but a dream when minds
Once wedded to this outward frame of things
In love, find these the growth of common day.
Such pleasant haunts foregoing if my Song
Must turn elsewhere and travel near the tribes
And Fellowships of men, and see ill sights
Of passions ravenous from each other's rage,
Insult and injury and wrong and strife
Must hear

etc. MS. 1

48-9

Elysian, fortunate fields, islands like those
In the deep Ocean, wherefore

MS. 2

50-5 MS. 2 as MS. 1

56 MS. 2 as *text but* blessed

57 Would sing in solitude MS. 2

58-63

 would proclaim
Speaking of nothing more than what we are
How exquisitely

etc. MS. 2

64-76 MS. 2 *as text but* 71 *my great for our high, and* 75 *as MS. 1 v. app. crit.* 48-76

79. cf. *P.L.* viii. 241:

fast shut

The dismal Gates, and barricado'd strong.

80-6

to these sounds

Let me find meaning more akin to that

Which to God's ear they carry, that even these

Hearing, I be not heartless or forlorn.

Come thou, prophetic Spirit, soul of Man

Thou human Soul of the wide earth, that hast

Thy metropolitan

etc. MS. 1: *so MS. 2 but* May these sounds ...Hearing *as text as text*

83 Descend] Come thou 1814

83-5. Descend, prophetic Spirit ... things to come]:

"Not my own fears, nor the prophetic Soul

Of the wide world dreaming on things to come." Shakespeare's

Sonnets.—W.

87-94

unto me vouchsafe

Thy foresight, teach me to discern and part

Inherent things from casual, what is fix'd

From fleeting, that my song may live, and be

Even as a light hung up in heaven to cheer

The world in times to come. And if with this

I mingle humbler matter

etc. MS. 1: *so MSS. 2, 3 but* guidance (*corr. to succour* MS. 2) *for* foresight, *verse for* song, *Mankind for* The world, *and* blend more lowly *for* mingle humbler

88-93

that the body of my verse

By the mutations of the world untouch'd

And by its ferments undisturbed may shine

Even as a light hung up in heaven

etc. MS. 2 *alt. draft*

90-3. Shedding benignant influence ... sphere] Cf. Milton, *P.L.* vii. 375:

the Pleiades before him danc'd
Shedding sweet influence.

The rest of the passage is reminiscent of

P.L. x. 660-2.

98/9

With all his little realties of life MSS. 1, 2, 3

In part a Fellow-citizen, in part

An outlaw, and a Borderer of his age

MS. 1

99-107

O great God,
To less than thee I cannot make this prayer.
Innocent mighty Spirit let my life
Express *etc.*
Desires more wise *etc.*
My heart *etc.*
Be with me and uphold me to the end

MS. 1

100-2

With highest things may [] then great God
Thou who art breath and being, way and guide
And power, and understanding, may my life

MS. 2: *so* MS. 3 *but*

101 Almighty being who art light and law.

106-7 MS. 2 as MS. 1