WORDS WORTH'S RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT
AS REFLECTED IN THE ECCLESIASTICAL SONNETS

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by
Joe W. Andrews

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Approved by:
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My indebtedness to DR. JAMES V. LOGAN can be appreciated only by Dr. Logan and myself, the two chief witnesses to the patient and helpful advice he gave me in the preparation of this thesis.

My indebtedness to Miss Abbie Totts' excellent critical edition of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets will be obvious to anyone who reads this study.
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CHAPTER I

SCOPE AND PROCEDURE

The *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* contain the final chapter of Wordsworth's religious and philosophical development. That final development was primarily Wordsworth's transition from a poet of nature to a poet of Christianity, his development from the poet who depended on "Powers Which of themselves our minds impress" to the poet who depended upon the orthodox Christian approach to truth. This change from the early to the later Wordsworth was not the mere cautious retreat of a worn-out poet, nor did it involve any simple Tennysonian choice between idealistic and naturalistic evidence. It was rather, first, Wordsworth's attempt to expand his early approach to truth to include problems of Christian theology, and, later, an alteration, but not abandonment, of that early approach.

If the intellectual experiment reflected in Wordsworth's early poetry is, as I think, one of the great phenomena of English literature, then we are entitled to a clear account of how that experiment came out, and that account is to be seen only in the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*. Furthermore, I feel that an important, though not major, explanation of Wordsworth's decline in poetic power is to be found in the
difficulty and uncertainty Wordsworth experienced in his attempt to project his early naturalistic philosophy into fields of theology.

It is the purpose of this paper to show this story of Wordsworth's religious development as it is indicated in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets.

1. Chronology

Abstracting the story of Wordsworth's religious development as reflected in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets involves two problems: first, placing the sonnets in the order in which they were written, and second, determining from the sonnets thus arranged the religious beliefs they reflect. Miss Potts' excellent critical edition of the Sonnets\(^1\) vastly simplifies the problem of chronology.

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Miss Potts, concerned chiefly in her centennial edition of the Sonnets with their literary and esthetic qualities, was entirely justified in writing,

The Ecclesiastical Sonnets, written when Wordsworth was fifty-one years old, should reveal him as a profound thinker and a powerful artist.\(^2\)

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\(^2\) Ibid., p.1.
This paper, however, will treat the emendations she has so carefully listed (and which Wordsworth continued to make at least into his seventy-third year) not as incidental additions to the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, but as an important element of the *Sonnets*. What was conceived by Wordsworth and interpreted by Miss Potts as a poem giving the history of the Church of England will be studied in this paper rather as a poem giving the history of Wordsworth's own religious development.

Wordsworth apparently wrote the first of the sonnets late in 1820 and finished the last of the sonnets in 1843.

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1 Potts, *ibid.*, pp. 27, 32, 112-16.

The sonnets were published as indicated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NUMBER ADDED</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>102</td>
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<tr>
<td>1827</td>
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<td>113</td>
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<tr>
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<td>118</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With each edition after 1822 appeared many alterations to sonnets already published, and the alterations themselves provide important evidence of his religious development.

In order to simplify the problem, I have considered the sonnets grouped according to the date of publication, as they are listed above. Considering the frequency with which the sonnets were published, and the expanse of time covered, I feel that an adequate picture of Wordsworth's
development is provided by this grouping.

The date of the composition of the sonnets would seem on first consideration to give a more accurate picture of Wordsworth's development than the date of publication; but I do not believe this to be the case. First, the pattern of development indicated by most sonnets would be the same regardless of the date chosen. Miss Potts shows 113 of the 132 sonnets to have been written within three years of the date of publication.\(^1\) Thus there can be no serious over-

\(^1\)Potts, *ibid.*, pp. 112-16.

lapping among these sonnets if the publication date is accepted. Three other sonnets\(^2\) are shown probably to have been written within the three-year period before they were published.

The 16 remaining sonnets\(^3\) have no established date of composition. Admittedly, many of these sonnets (especially Sonnets 2.1, 2.10, 2.30, 3.20, and to a lesser extent Sonnets 2.4, 2.33, 3.11, 3.23, 3.24, and 3.25) are vital to the story of Wordsworth's religious development. The publication date for these sonnets, however, may also be accepted as the significant date. Even assuming that they
were written before a previous edition of the sonnets appeared, the very uncertainty indicated by Wordsworth's refusal to publish them at that earlier date justifies us in treating them as evidence of his religious beliefs, not of the earlier date, but of the date of publication. It is the date at which Wordsworth is sufficiently confident of his religious beliefs to allow his statement to be published which is after all the surest guide to the confidence and assurance of his beliefs. The date of his commitment is of more importance than the date of his first toying with the idea. This interpretation is further justified by a comparison of the dated and undated material. The religious development indicated by each undated sonnet parallels that either of a dated sonnet or of an emendation that appears first in the same edition. Since the publication date of each sonnet and emendation is accepted, I think no serious distortion of the development can occur.

2. Religious Evidence

Having placed the Ecclesiastical Sonnets and their emendations in chronological order, I shall then attempt to determine the religious beliefs reflected in them. Wordsworth's religious beliefs, however, are to be seen only in his infrequent and incidental references to them in the pursuit of his more central objectives. While Wordsworth undoubtedly conceived the Ecclesiastical Sonnets as a final statement, both encompassing and transcending
the theme of *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, he did not intend the *Sonnets* to be, as were the other two works, a record of his own individual development. The religious element in the sonnets is further qualified by Wordsworth's caution and exactitude in his dealing with theology. Before attempting to understand his religious beliefs, therefore, we must first understand the background against which his references to church and dogma were made. This background consists of (1) Wordsworth's purpose in writing the sonnets, (2) his caution in dealing with religious material, and (3) his interests in national and social welfare, nature, and architecture, carried over from his earlier works. An examination of each of these is necessary before we can judge adequately of the religious element in the various editions of the sonnets.

**Purpose.**

Of his primary purpose, Wordsworth wrote in the introductory sonnet:

*I, who descended with glad step to chase Cerulean Duddon from his cloud-fed spring, . . .*

*I, who essayed the nobler Stream to trace Of Liberty, and smote the plausible string . . .*

*Now seek upon the heights of Time the source Of a HOLY RIVER . . .*

*Sonnet 1.1*

and in the Fenwick note to the *Sonnets*, Wordsworth stated,
My purpose in writing this Series was, as much as possible, to confine my views to the introduction, progress, and operation of the Church of England, both previous and subsequent to the Reformation.¹

¹Potts, ibid., p.117n.

His primary purpose, then, is clear. He is not writing of theology on the one hand or of statecraft on the other; but of the "HOLY RIVER," the Church of England, both when it was synonymous with the Roman Church and after the Reformation. Such discussion of personal beliefs as are found in the Sonnets are merely incidental and auxiliary materials.

Since the story of the "Holy River" would presumably border theology on the one side and political philosophy on the other, we might expect the Sonnets to contain references to religion and statecraft in approximately equal proportion. The religious element in the Sonnets is further affected, however, by the two other elements mentioned, his caution regarding religious doctrine, and his interest in national and social affairs, in architecture and nature.

Caution.

Wordsworth's caution and exactitude are of course not peculiar to the Ecclesiastical Sonnets. An accurate appraisal of this trait as reflected in the Ecclesiastical
Sonnets is of special importance, however, first because his caution acts both as a barrier and a guide to the study of the religious element in the sonnets, and secondly because it has been over-emphasized, I feel, as an explanation of the dearth of religious material in the earlier sonnets.

Wordsworth's religious development is to be seen partly in his actual statements of dogma. The very caution and exactitude that caused him to treat theology so sparingly makes it possible to accept such personal commitments as he does make at face value.

His religious development, however, is to be seen only partly in direct statements of personal belief. It is to be seen more importantly in the increasing strength, integration, and mastery of those beliefs as reflected in the sonnets. The extent to which Wordsworth's treatment of problems of theology was affected by this caution at the various stages of his composition of the Sonnets is therefore most important. If there is any reason to believe that Wordsworth at any time abandoned his habit of cautious and exact statement, and if the increased boldness in the sonnets resulted merely from Wordsworth's decreased caution, a major basis for judging of his religious development is invalid. Conversely, if it becomes evident that the later sonnets are more positive in their treatment of theology than the earlier ones, but that Wordsworth did not abandon his habit of cautious
and exact statement, then Wordsworth's caution cannot be accepted as the complete explanation of the weakness in the earlier sonnets.

The Ecclesiastical Sonnets as they stand are lacking in both unity and strength, and this inadequacy seems to derive from the paucity of religious and even clerical reference in them. In 1840 Wordsworth gave what might be considered adequate explanation of this weakness when he wrote to a friend:

For my own part, I have been averse to frequent mention of the mysteries of Christian faith; not from a want of a due sense of their momentous nature, but the contrary. I felt it far too deeply to venture on handling the subject as familiarly as many scruple not to do....Besides general reasons for diffidence in treating subjects of Holy Writ, I have some especial ones. I might err in points of faith, and I should not deem my mistakes less to be deprecated because they were expressed in metre. Even Milton, in my humble judgment, has erred, and grievously; and what poet could hope to atone for his apprehensions in the way in which the mighty mind has done?


Wordsworth's own description of himself is so accurate, and at the same time it offers such an easy explanation of the paucity of religious reference in the sonnets, that his explanation has been too generally accepted as final. The weakness of the Sonnets, and Wordsworth's explanation of that weakness fit together to form a picture of a worn-out poet's
religious and esthetic befuddlement. Mr. Sperry has every reason to combine the two pieces of evidence and declare that Wordsworth wisely avoided the

quicksands of doctrinal theology and ecclesiasticism in which he had no interest, where he was by his own confession incompetent, and which to do him justice he did his best to avoid.  

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Now we must temper this picture of Wordsworth's confessed incompetency by remembering that Wordsworth with typical humility placed himself on the lowly level of Milton by that confession. Again, Wordsworth's implied intentional avoidance of ecclesiasticism in the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* certainly requires more explanation than Mr. Sperry gives. Nevertheless, this statement must be accepted as both just and sympathetic on a basis of the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* as they now stand; for the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, taken as a whole, are filled with weaknesses.

When the sonnets are placed in chronological order, however, it is evident that Wordsworth was interested in doctrinal theology and ecclesiasticism, and that his personal commitments on these problems became increasingly numerous and powerful. It is therefore important to study his statements concerning his caution in chronological relationship with his composition of the sonnets to see if he was less cautious in 1843 than in 1820.
Wordsworth's statement of apprehension that he "might err in points of faith" was made in 1840. The Fenwick note stating his intention "to confine my views to the introduction, progress, and operation of the Church of England..." was dictated in 1843.¹ Thus both statements appeared within five years of the 1845 edition, and 18 years after the first edition. If we consider that all but two of the sonnets, at least, were written by 1843, and that the composition of the 1822 edition began apparently in 1820, the lateness of Wordsworth's own comment as to his caution is even more pronounced.

While evidence within the sonnets themselves concerning this caution will be discussed later, an incident that occurred in 1843 further emphasizes his caution in the later years. In 1842 or 1843 Wordsworth wrote Sonnet 3.16, which contained the following passage:

if unsound
Your practice prove, faithless though but in thought,
Bishops and Priests, think what a gulf profound
Awaits you then, if they were rightly taught
Who framed the Ordinance by your lives disowned!
Sonnet 3.16

When the weakness of the final qualifying clause was pointed out to him with the suggestion that if in the next to last line be changed to since, Wordsworth remarked, "Let it be altered as you suggest." First, it is remarkable that

¹ Potts, op. cit., p.117n.
Wordsworth should ever have qualified the remark in the first place, since there is only the slightest statement of doctrine before the qualifying phrase. Secondly, in spite of his remark, "Let it be altered as you suggest," he never changed the qualification. Perhaps he could never convince himself that the framers of the ordinance were rightly taught in all things. Even this explanation, however, does not show why another qualifying phrase could not have been substituted. In view of Wordsworth's habitual pains in correcting his sonnets, the explanation that this is mere oversight is hardly tenable. Furthermore, this sonnet was one of a group sent to Henry Reed for his remarks in 1843, and other sonnets of this group were altered.¹ We must conclude, therefore, that Wordsworth preferred to retain the sonnet with that unfortunate weakness rather than to eliminate the qualification. As late as 1843, Wordsworth was unwilling to gain poetic effect through the sacrifice of his life-long habit of cautious exactitude.

¹ The entire incident is covered in Potts, ibid., pp.31-33, 290, and notes to sonnets included in the letter.

Only by the most capricious interpretation of Wordsworth's character can we say that his statement of caution applies to the earlier sonnets, but that he foxtly added the religious element to the sonnets after 1840 in spite of his life-long
habit of caution. First, this interpretation does not account for the increasing confidence shown before 1840. Secondly, it does not account for the evidence of caution in 1843. We must conclude then that increased boldness in the sonnets can reflect only increased confidence in Wordsworth.

Interests.

In discussing the background of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets against which the evidences of Wordsworth's religious beliefs appear, I have shown that his primary intention was to discuss ecclesiastical history, not personal religion. I have further shown that his approach to his theme was guided by excessive caution in his treatment of "points of faith," and that that caution was at least as great in 1845 as in 1820. The effect of his interest in national and social affairs, in architecture and in nature, remains to be considered.

Whatever their success as an epic study of religious influence in England, the sonnets were conceived more richly by Wordsworth than as a mere history of the church tempered by his reluctance to discuss theological problems. Miss Potts adequately summarizes the interests Wordsworth brought to his subject. Following her quotation of Wordsworth's statement of caution which I have given above, she continues,
The Rev. R. P. Graves has left his memorandum of a talk wherein Wordsworth indicates 'the gradual steps by which [religion as an element in poetry] ...must advance to a power comprehensive and universally admitted.' These steps, like the steps in Wordsworth's own career, are 'defined [they] ...must proceed with vastly more slowness in the case of the progress made by collective minds than... in an individual soul.' No clearer reason could be given for Wordsworth's renunciation of the great themes of Milton and of Dante.... instead he would write a memorial of the progress of religion as an element of poetry, a progress made by collective minds and traceable in ecclesiastical polity and history, in liturgy and cathedrals. Therefore his spiritual and practical concern was unity, threatened alike by anthropomorphism of pagan and idolatrous thought, and by latitudinarianism, which 'will ever successfully lay claim to a divided worship.'

1 Christopher Wordsworth, op. cit., II, 366.

The Sonnets, then, were to demonstrate the "progress made by collective minds..." in developing through the centuries the corporate church as a major element in the life of the country. The historic and organic unity of the church was to be demonstrated. The unity of the "HOLY RIVER" with the culture and welfare of the English nation was to be shown. This unity of the Church of England was to be defended against the inroads of Catholicism and autocracy on the one hand and schism and anarchy on the other.
Furthermore, as Wordsworth reminds us in the opening sonnet, it was the same poet who had written his earlier poetry who now would write of the Holy River. Ecclesiasticism was to be his theme, but it was to be approached through his old interests in nature, architecture, and national and social welfare. This approach is indicated not only in the introductory sonnet, but time after time in the sonnets themselves. In Sonnets 3.37 and 3.38 of 1822 (apparently two of the first sonnets to be written) he explains his approach. In Sonnet 3.37, speaking of the advancement of the country after the Revolution, he speaks with Tennysonian complacency.

But we have felt,
As a loved substance, their futurity:
Good, which they dared not hope for, we have seen;
A state whose generous will through earth is dealt;
A State—which, balancing herself between
Licence and slavish order, dares be free.

Sonnet 3.37

This is now, however, only the background to the problem; in the succeeding sonnet he states the central interest of the entire series.

But liberty, and triumphs on the Main,
And laurelled armies, not to be withstood—
What serve they? if, on transitory good
Intent, and sedulous of abject gain,
The State (ah, surely not preserved in vain!)
Forbear to shape due channels which the Flood
Of sacred truth may enter—

Sonnet 3.38

Another sonnet, appearing in the same year, speaks more forcefully of the close intermixture of the social and
religious problem:

Ungrateful Country, if thou e'er forget
The sons who for thy civil rights have bled!...

But these had fallen for profitless regret
Had not thy holy Church her champions bred,
And claims from other worlds insprited
The star of Liberty to rise. Nor yet
(Grave this within thy heart!) if spiritual things
Be lost, through apathy, or scorn, or fear,
Shalt thou thy humbler franchises support,
However hardly won or justly dear:
What came from heaven to heaven by nature clings,
And, if dissevered thence, its course is short.

Sonnet 3.10

Sonnet after sonnet in fact deals exclusively with national rather than with ecclesiastical affairs. A most remarkable statement of his interests appears in the two sonnets which are placed at the first of Part 3 of the sequence and thus appear as the introduction to the entire final third of the sequence. This two-sonnet address is not to God, not to religion, not even to the Anglican Church, but merely to England. In the first sonnet Wordsworth alludes to the curious dream, wherein he sees a "lovely Maid" dissolve before his eyes; then in the second he writes:

Yet, my beloved Country! I partake
Of kindred agitations for thy sake....

If aught impair thy beauty or destroy,
Or but forbode destruction, I deplore
With filial love the sad vicissitude;
If thou hast fallen, and righteous Heaven restore
The prostrate, then my spring-time is renewed,
And sorrow bartered for exceeding joy.

Sonnet 3.2

His primary interest in writing of the "Holy River," then, is church unity. Behind his concern with church
unity is his powerful concern with the social and national welfare that is intimately connected with the unity of the church.

His interest in architecture and nature, though often reflected in the sonnets, causes no confusion. Considering that he deals with religion more as a social than as a personal problem, however, it will be especially important to distinguish carefully between those religious references which allude to social beliefs, and those which allude to his own beliefs.

Conclusion.

With this understanding of Wordsworth's purpose, caution, and interests, I believe the following rules can be accepted as guides to a chronological study of his religious beliefs.

(1) Wordsworth's description of church dogma merely as cultural fact must be carefully distinguished from his description of church dogma as his personal religious beliefs.

(2) In view of his extreme caution in handling "points of faith," such personal commitments as he does make regarding dogma, when not otherwise qualified, must be accepted as indicating his religious beliefs.

(3) Since his cautious approach to dogma did not decrease during the years in which he wrote the sonnets, any increased boldness in the sonnets requiring religious reference reflects increased certainty in Wordsworth.
(4) The force and integration of his beliefs can be judged by:

(a) his readiness to allude to dogma,
(b) the absence or extent of his qualifications,
and

(c) his ability to use those beliefs in the solution of his problems.

Concerning rule 4(a), it should be recognized that Wordsworth was required in the 1822 edition to cover the mechanical details of his story, and that the later sonnets, free from this requirement, should therefore be more directly pertinent to his theme. The number of religious allusions in his writing as a whole in any given year is, then, of no significance. On the other hand, in judging each allusion individually, the extent to which Wordsworth makes the allusion because of, or in spite of, the context in which it appears is a justifiable method of determining the force of the conviction to which he alludes.
CHAPTER II
THE 1822 EDITION

1. Irrelevant Sonnets

Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of the 1822 edition of the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* is its dearth of religious material. This characteristic is so obvious, and at the same time pertains to so many sonnets of the sequence that are irrelevant to our study, that a recognition of the a-religious aspect of those sonnets will enable us to ignore most of them and concentrate our attention upon the remaining ones. Yet as a background to our more specialized study, the general characteristics of the "irrelevant" sonnets should be understood. While the following statistics are an over-simplification, they nevertheless provide I think adequate perspective to our problem.

Of the 102 sonnets in the 1822 edition, eight\(^1\) have no reference whatever to church or religion, 14\(^2\) have only slight reference, and 29,\(^3\) while referring to clerical or

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\(^1\) Sonnets 1.5, 1.27, 2.38, 2.43, 3.2, 3.3, 3.34, 3.37.

\(^2\) Sonnets 1.9, 1.10, 1.30, 1.31, 2.14, 2.31, 2.35, 2.39, 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 3.8, 3.35, 3.39.

\(^3\) Sonnets 1.1, 1.2, 1.6, 1.7, 1.11, 1.12, 1.13, 1.15, 1.17, 1.34, 2.17, 2.21, 2.27, 2.32, 2.42, 2.44, 2.45, 2.46, 3.4, 3.17, 3.22, 3.32, 3.33, 3.38, 3.41, 3.42, 3.43, 3.44, 3.45.
religious phenomena, offer no positive statement or judgment concerning either the social or the spiritual aspects of the church. Exactly half of the sonnets, then, may be considered generally irrelevant to our study.¹

¹If this division seems not too clear, three borderline sonnets will serve to illustrate the line at which I divided the sonnets. Sonnet 3.18, listed among the 51 "pertinent" sonnets, reads

The learned Pastor dwells, their watchful Lord....

Such genuine state, pre-eminence so free,
As when, arrayed in Christ's authority,
He from the pulpit lifts his awful hand....
Sonnet 3.18

Even this sonnet has only the phrase "Christ's authority" and its concern with the social influence of the church to place it among the 51 pertinent sonnets.

Sonnets 2.17 and 3.43, listed among the sonnets with which we have no especial concern, read

Sonnet 2.17

Sonnet 3.43

Sonnet 2.17 praises Wyclif and Sonnet 3.43 praises a cathedral, and both contain religious terms, but neither contribute otherwise to Wordsworth's theme or to our subject.

The 51 irrelevant sonnets, to most of which we bid good-bye in this section, have the following general subject matter:
4 concern the difficulty of giving an accurate account of history (Sonnets 1.2, 1.5, 3.19, 3.33).

2 deal with the problem of truth (Sonnets 3.4, 3.34).

5 deal with purpose, such as statement of his theme, need for religious certainty, heresy, etc. (Sonnets 1.1, 1.9, 3.12, 3.19).

11 deal with national history (Sonnets 1.7, 1.10, 1.11, 1.16, 1.27, 1.31, 2.42, 2.44, 3.3, 3.22, 3.37).

3 deal with national figures (Sonnets 2.31, 2.32, 2.38).

9 deal with church history (Sonnets 1.12, 1.13, 1.17, 1.30, 1.34, 2.14, 2.27, 2.46, 3.8).

6 deal with religious figures (Sonnets 2.17, 2.21, 2.35, 2.39, 3.5).

4 are introductory passages (1.15, 2.43, 3.1, 3.39).

7 deal with architecture (3.17, 3.41-3.45).

Of the above sonnets, only the seven dealing with architecture seem unusual. Yet if we consider Wordsworth's interests in that subject, and if we allow him the freedom in choice of subject matter to be allowed any artist, this element is not surprising.

If we avoid on the one hand the implication of some abject fear of treating religious material because of the
remarkably large number of sonnets without positive statements regarding religious problems, and on the other hand the equally fallacious implication that all things are explained away by the breakdown of the subject matter of the "irrelevant" sonnets, we have nevertheless vastly simplified our problem, and placed it in adequate perspective with Wordsworth's intentions, interests, and caution. We may now turn our attention to the sonnets which deal directly with church or religion.

2. Unqualified Sonnets

The 51 "pertinent" sonnets of the 1822 edition divide generally into two groups, the unqualified sonnets, and the inadequate or qualified sonnets. The unqualified sonnets, in which Wordsworth makes positive statements concerning the church or religion, show the fields of Wordsworth's definite beliefs and attitudes in 1822. The inadequate or qualified sonnets, in which Wordsworth either avoids religious references obviously required or qualifies the statements he does make, show the fields of his uncertainty in 1822. The unqualified sonnets, which will be discussed first, may be sub-divided into sonnets dealing with (1) dogma, (2) Catholicism, (3) paganism, and (4) social benefits of the church. They will be discussed in that order.

Dogma.

Wordsworth's most positive personal statements on dogma
in the 1822 edition are included in Sonnets 3.47, 1.8, 3.46, and 2.25. Less important references in Sonnets 2.24 and 2.40 are also discussed in this section. No other allusion to dogma in 1822 is more direct than the phrase "Heaven's high will Permits" in the passage:

Nor wants the cause the panic-striking aid
Of hallelujahs tost from hill to hill -
For instant victory. But Heaven's high will
Permits a second and a darker shade
Of Pagan night...
Sonnet 1.11

This is obviously too vague to merit consideration.

Sonnet 3.47 is itself of only the slightest importance, but as the concluding sonnet of the entire sequence, contains a rather full reference to the Scriptures. It begins

Why sleeps the future, as a snake enrolled,
Coil within coil, at noon-tide? For the WORD
Yields, if with unpresumptuous faith explored,
Power at whose touch the sluggard shall unfold
His drowsy rings.
Sonnet 3.47

Wordsworth says the WORD, rightly interpreted, has the power of unfolding the coils of the sleeping future. Whether they unfold the coils through their moral power or through their power of prophecy is not clear in this passage. The rest of the sonnet, however, finds proof of the future in the past that he has depicted, not in the Scriptures:

Look forth! - that Stream behold,
That STREAM upon whose bosom we have passed
Floating at ease while nations have effaced
Nations, and Death has gathered to his fold
Long lines of mighty Kings - look forth, my Soul!
(Nor in this vision be thou slow to trust)...
Sonnet 3.47

and more from the STREAM than the WORD does he find
proof that

The living Waters, less and less by guilt
Stained and polluted, brighten as they roll,
Till they have reached the eternal City—built
For the perfected Spirits of the just!

Sonnet 3.47

While the sonnet is an effective conclusion to the sequence, then, it neither states nor assumes the divinity of the Scriptures.

If Wordsworth's reference to the "WORD" is of little significance concerning his religious beliefs, however, his reference to Christ and the Virgin Mary contained in the remaining three sonnets show that he did accept the dogma of the Divinity of Christ and the Divine Birth in 1822.

In Sonnet 1.8 Wordsworth refers to "Him...whose life-blood flowed, the price of your redemption." The emphasis in this sonnet is not upon theology, but upon the social abuses of the church.

Their radiance through the Woods—may yet suffice
To sap your hardy virtue, and abate
Your love of Him upon whose forehead sate
The crown of thorns; whose life-blood flowed, the price

Of your redemption....

Sonnet 1.8

That His "life-blood flowed" is no more creed than history; and "redemption," especially in this passage, can be interpreted socially as well as spiritually. Furthermore, Wordsworth is speaking primarily not of "Him," but of "Your love of Him." In spite of all this, because of the caution
with which Wordsworth alludes to such phenomena, his belief in the redemption as creed is at least implied.

In Sonnet 3.46 (the next to last in the entire sequence) Wordsworth again writes

Glory to God! and to the Tower who came
In filial duty, clothed with love divine,
That made His human tabernacle shine
Like Ocean burning with purpureal flame;...

Sonnet 3.46

I think we may accept this as proof of Wordsworth's belief in the divinity of Christ.

The correlative belief in the Virgin Birth is stated in Sonnet 2.25, "The Virgin."

Mother! whose virgin bosom was uncorrost
With the least shade of thought to sin allied;
Woman! above all women glorified,
Our tainted nature's solitary boast;

As Miss Batho suggests, Wordsworth in fact seems to have gone beyond the doctrine of the Catholic Church in this passage; for the doctrine of Immaculate Conception was not enunciated until 1857 (James Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics), yet "Our tainted nature" must refer to original sin and "solitary boast" to the Virgin Mary's exemption from it. (Edith Clara Batho, The Later Wordsworth, New York, Macmillan, 1933, p.294).

While there is no qualification of this belief within the sonnet, however, the context in which the sonnet itself appears requires consideration. In Sonnet 2.21, Wordsworth has described the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, and Sonnets 2.22 and 2.23 dealt with various persons affected by the dissolution. In Sonnet 2.24, enlarging his treatment of the dissolution of the monasteries to a treatment of the effect of the break with Rome, Wordsworth describes the expulsion of the various saints from England,
and finally in Sonnet 2.25 he writes of "The Virgin."

The logic of the sequence is obvious: first the personal effects of the dissolution of the monasteries, then the cultural effects of the Reformation, and finally the loss to the people of one of the highest Catholic influences, the veneration of the Virgin Mary. In this light, the wording of the preceding Sonnet 2.24 on the saints is worth studying:

Ye, too, must fly before a chasing hand,
Angels and Saints, in every hamlet mourned!...
Michael, and thou, St. George, whose flaming brand
The Dragon quelled; and valiant Margaret
Whose rival sword a like Opponent slew:
and rapt Cecelia, seraph-haunted Queen
Of harmony; and weeping Magdalene,
Who in the penitential desert met
Gales sweet as those that over Eden blew. ¹

¹An interesting account of this is contained in J. Malet Lambert, Two Thousand Years of Gild Life, Hull, England, 1891, p.102: "The great event of the year was the procession.... The image of St. George, the dragon, and Margaret, the lady of the Gild, were carried with great pomp till 1549.... Curiously enough, while St. George and Lady Margaret were abolished, the dragon survived, for in 1558 there was ordered to be no George or Margaret, "but the dragon to come in and shew himself, as in former years.""

Now while this passage makes unqualified reference to
"St. George, whose flaming brand the Dragon quelled," and a similarly ferocious Margaret, it of course cannot be considered as statement of creed. (Otherwise we must dust off Wordsworth's references to Bacchus and Venus for equally serious consideration!) It can be argued then that the sonnet on the Virgin is likewise a statement of cultural, social influence. The construction of the octet, which
reads simply, "Mother!...Thy Image falls to earth," certainly suggests that interpretation.

The qualification of the sonnet by the context in which it appears, and the fact that Wordsworth may have considered himself merely as addressing the Virgin in whom others believed, suggest that Wordsworth himself did not accept the dogma. The absence of any qualification within the sonnet, however, suggests most strongly his belief in the Divine Birth, and indeed in the Immaculate Conception. The force and degree of Wordsworth's beliefs are of course difficult to determine; but I think after a study of his habit of qualification it will be evident that he at least accepted these dogma in 1822.

The sestet to the sonnet is in some ways more surprising than the octet, and demonstrates a trait of Wordsworth that is reflected in every reference to Catholic creed made in the 1822 edition of the sonnets. The sonnet continues:

Thy Image falls to earth. Yet some, I ween, Not unforgiven the suppliant knee might bend, As to a visible Power, in which did blend All that was mixed and reconciled in Thee Of mother's love with maiden purity, Of high with low, celestial with terrene! Sonnet 2.25

Wordsworth declares his belief that men may be forgiven through the influence of the Virgin Mary, even though her image has been driven from England. ¹ The veneration of the

¹The alternative interpretation, that the men may be forgiven for, not because of this "idolatry" is more consistent with Wordsworth's general attitude, but not so consistent with his eulogy of the Virgin Mary. It has the same implications for this study.
Virgin Mary is Catholic practice, not Protestant, and especially was this true in the early 19th century. Two conclusions are important. First, Wordsworth refuses to reject Catholic dogma. Second, Wordsworth is more interested in the human value that derives from the creed than in its accuracy. This probing of all religions for their value is to be seen throughout the 1822 edition, together with a refusal to reject any single religious doctrine.

The paramount consideration at this time, however, is that this group of sonnets marks Wordsworth's field of religious certainty. He did accept the belief in the divinity of Christ, and he did accept the belief in the Divine Birth.

In Sonnet 2.40 of 1822 appears an allusion to dogma which, if it can be accepted as a reflection of Wordsworth's personal conviction, discredits largely this entire thesis of Wordsworth's religious development during the years under consideration. In it Wordsworth refers to

The Church, the unperverted Gospel's seat;...
Sonnet 2.40

This is the most exact allusion to the validity of Anglican authority that appears in any of the sonnets. Whether the modifies Gospel or seat is not of primary importance. The doctrine stated is most pertinent to Wordsworth's theme of church unity, and equally relevant to this study of his
religious development. It therefore deserves careful consideration. The sonnet reads:

Holy and heavenly Spirits as they were,  
Spotless in life, and eloquent as wise,  
With what entire affection did they prize  
Their new-born Church! labouring with earnest care  
To baffle all that might her strength impair;  
That Church, the unperverted Gospel's seat;  
Sonnet 2.40

The force of the belief reflected in this allusion can be judged finally only in the light of the other sonnets of the sequence. Certain observations can however be made. First, it derives directly from his subject, and therefore does not indicate that Wordsworth attaches any special importance to it. Secondly, it describes the belief of the "Eminent Reformers," about whom he is writing, and not necessarily that of Wordsworth. Finally, it is used to describe the zeal of the reformers, and for no other purpose. He moves directly from his description of this belief to its appeal to the reformers:

In their afflictions a divine retreat;  
Source of their liveliest hope, and tenderest prayer! -  
Sonnet 2.40

and from that consideration he moves again to the reformers' purpose:

The truth exploring with an equal mind,  
In polity and discipline they sought  
Firmly between the two extremes to steer;  
But theirs the wise man's ordinary lot,  
To trace right courses for the stubborn blind,  
And prophesy to ears that will not hear.  
Sonnet 2.40
Considering that the allusion fits perfectly, almost casually into the context of the sonnet, considering that Wordsworth uses it to describe the reformers' zeal and for nothing else, considering Wordsworth's interest in cultural phenomena rather than personal aspects of religion, it must be concluded, tentatively, that this most central allusion is no more indicative of Wordsworth's beliefs than his reference to the saints. (Curiously, the reference to the saints is the only allusion of 1822 that has the force of verbal, as contrasted to substantive, allusion!)

Catholicism.

In addition to the four sonnets in the 1822 edition which show Wordsworth's positive religious beliefs, there are 19 sonnets which deal unqualifiedly with some aspect of Wordsworth's theme and three which show clearly his attitude toward pagan religions. A consideration of these sonnets will serve further to block out a picture of Wordsworth's religious attitude in 1822. Of these 19 sonnets, eight are in unqualified opposition to the Roman Church.

Anti-Catholicism is to be expected in the sonnets; and yet the fact that Wordsworth devotes eight of the 51 sonnets most pertinent to his theme to attacks upon Catholicism is significant, and the reasons for his opposition are enlightening. The entire Sonnet 1.8, quoted in the preceding
section on dogma, is devoted to the evils of "Roman
Refinements," which Wordsworth declares

may yet suffice
To sap your hardy virtue, and abate
Your love of Him...
whose life-blood flowed....
Shun the insidious arts
That Rome provides, less dreading from her frown
Then from her wily praise,...
these, though fondly viewed
as humanising graces, are but parts
and instruments of deadliest servitude!
Sonnet 1.8

Again in Sonnets 2.18-2.20, Wordsworth attacks Catholic
abuses. Sonnet 2.18 is an unqualified attack upon the
"Higher Clergy."

Woe to you, Prelates! rioting in ease...

Who will be served by others on their knees,
Yet will yourselves to God no service pay;...
Sonnet 2.18

While the resolution of this sonnet is a prophecy of the
break with Rome to be described three sonnets later, it is
also concerned, like Sonnet 1.8, with the social influence
of the church.

Alas! of fearful things
'Tis the most fearful when the people's eye
Abuse hath cleared from vain imaginings;
And taught the general voice to prophesy
Of Justice armed, and Pride to be laid low.
Sonnet 2.18

In the second sonnet of the series, Wordsworth attacks
the abuse of monastic power:

And what is Penance with her knotted thong...
If cloistered avarice scruple not to wrong
The pious, humble, useful Secular,
And rob the people of his daily care....

Inversion strange! that to a Monk, who lives
For self, and struggles with himself alone,
The amplest share of heavenly favour gives;
And hath allotted, in the world's esteem
To such a station higher than to him
Who on the good of others builds his own!
Sonnet 2.19

again, the argument is against the social influence of the church. While Wordsworth speaks of "heavenly favour" it is only in unsympathetic description of others' creed; the impact of even the sestet comes from the contrast of the mundane advantages of the monastic and the secular. Wordsworth does not refute the Catholic belief. "Inversion strange" is indeed so vague as to make it possible to interpret the entire sestet not as an attack upon monasticism, but as a sympathetic statement of a paradoxical situation. Whatever his social condemnation of the Roman church, he meticulously avoids the refutation of any point of Roman doctrine, however opposed to the Anglican creed.

The height of this three-sonnet attack is reached in Sonnet 2.20:

Yet more, - round many a Convent's blazing fire
Unhallowed threads of revelry are spun;
There Venus sits disguised like a Nun,
While Bacchus, clothed in semblance of a Friar
Pours out his choicest beverage....
swells a choral strain,
Whose votive burthen is - 'OUR KINGDOM'S HERE!'
Sonnet 2.20

There is no mention of either social or spiritual influence
here. As is so often true in Wordsworth's poetry, this sonnet, as the climax of the series, gains its force from simple, powerful statement of fact; but the social comment of the preceding two sonnets carries over to this one.

The other four of the eight completely anti-Catholic sonnets follow Sonnet 1.35, in which Wordsworth turns his attention from the Crusades to the problem of the overweening power of the church:

but duty summons her [his song] away
To tell — how, finding in the rash distress
Of those Enthusiasts a subservient friend,
To giddier heights hath clomb the Papal sway.
Sonnet 1.35

Four unqualified anti-Catholic sonnets then form the conclusion to Part 1 of the sequence.

Wordsworth typically concerns himself first with the common people.

Realms quake by turns: proud Arbitress of grace,
The Church, by mandate shadowing forth the power
She arrogates o'er heaven's eternal door,
Closes the gates of every sacred place....
no seemly garb is worn,
Nor is a face allowed to meet a face
With natural smiles of greeting. Bells are dumb;
Ditches are graves - funereal rites denied;
And in the church-yard he must take his bride
Who dares be wedded!...
And comfortless despairs the soul benumb.
Sonnet 1.36

Then in Sonnets 1.37 and 1.38 the power of Rome over the state is described.

Saw we not Henry scourged at Becket's Shrine?...
And angry Ocean roars a vain appeal.
Sonnet 1.37
In Sonnet 1.38 he describes the humiliation of Frederick Barbarosa (the factual inaccuracy of which Wordsworth admits in his notes, maintaining however that the parallel treatment by Gregory of Henry IV justifies the extremity of the sonnet)¹ and he concludes Part 1 of the sonnets with

¹Fenwick note on the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, Potts, op. cit., p.245.

Resist - the thunder quails thee: - crouch - rebuff
Shall be thy recompense! from land to land
The ancient thrones of Christendom are stuff
For occupation of a magic wand,
And 'tis the Pope that wields it: - whether rough
Or smooth his front, our world is in his hand;
Sonnet 1.39

Besides the eight sonnets mentioned, and several minor antagonistic allusions, Sonnet 1.28, while not so direct an attack upon the Roman Church as upon the enthusiast and hypocrite, is nevertheless clearly anti-Catholic:

the Enthusiast as a dupe
Shall soar, and as a hypocrite can stoop,
And turn the instruments of good to ill....
Such DUNSTAN: - from the Benedictine coop
Issues the Master Mind....
So vaunt a throng of Followers, filled with pride
In what they see of virtues pushed to extremes,
And sorceries of talent misapplied.
Sonnet 1.28

This opposition to the Roman church is paralleled by his highly critical attitude toward the Anglican church itself. Sonnet 2.28 indeed seems more antagonistic to the English than to the Roman head of the church; for while he
defends the break with

Bulls, pardons, relics, cowls black, white, and grey - Sonnet 2.28

he continues

And yet not choice
But habit rules the unreflecting herd,
and airy bonds are hardest to disown;
Hence, with the spiritual sovereignty transferred
Unto itself, the Crown assumes a voice
Of reckless mastery, hitherto unknown.
Sonnet 2.28

One would expect him to make clear why he distrusts both Anglican and Catholic authority but is writing his sequence presumably in praise of Anglican authority. Certainly this opposition to Anglican authority requires some explanation.

Wordsworth in 1822 never makes clear his attitude toward the Church of England. He has strong praise for Laud as a man, and by implication (but by implication only until the addition of the strong note to the sonnet in 1827!) of Laud's religious position; but there is more censure than praise of Charles I implied in Sonnet 2.44, 1

1I cannot convince myself that the lines
Of headstrong will! Can this be Piety?
No - some fierce Maniac hath usurped her name;
And scourges England struggling to be free...
refer definitely either to Charles or to Cromwell. The title of the sonnet is uncomfortably vague, "Troubles of Charles the First." Miss Potts includes Milton's attack upon Charles as a possible source (Potts, op. cit., p.278).

and of Charles II in Sonnet 3.3, while Sonnet 2.36, on the
Restoration, condemns king and country alike. The highest praise, again, is given William III in Sonnet 3.9; but there is no indication that Wordsworth intended this to apply generally to subsequent English kings.

Wordsworth's primary attack in 1822, then, is not merely against Catholicism, strong as that is. It is equally against the power of central authority. It is more in keeping with the earlier Wordsworth than with the Wordsworth who would compose a sequence in praise of church unity. Certainly, if Wordsworth accepted the Anglican faith in 1822, he accepted it in spite of his opposition to authority.

**Paganism.**

This antagonism to Christian authority becomes increasingly significant when contrasted to the remarkable sympathy Wordsworth shows for other religions in the 1822 sonnets. In Sonnet 3.39, one of the first apparently to be written,¹ is Wordsworth's only implication of the

¹Potts, ibid., pp. 117, 300.

superiority of Christianity over other religions, and the implication is certainly slight. Speaking of the "Church to be Erected," he writes,

Those forest oaks of Druid memory,
Shall long survive, to shelter the Abode
Of genuine faith...

**Sonnet 3.39**

In Sonnet 1.3, on the other hand (whether he was conscious
of the biographical implications of the lines that Miss Potts points out\(^1\) he was nevertheless remarkably non-

\(^1\) Potts, *ibid.*, p.l.

committal in his description of the coming of Christianity to England:

Haughty the [Druid] Bard: can these meek doctrines blight

His transports? Wither his heroic strains?
But all shall be fulfilled; - the Julian spear
A way first opened; and, with Roman chains,
The tidings come of Jesus crucified. . . .

*Sonnet 1.3*

The reference to chains is perhaps not so damning as at first appears.\(^1\) It is difficult to know how much of the


source material to read into the sonnets. Nevertheless, the "Julian spear" and the "Roman chain" form a most uncongenial atmosphere in which to announce the arrival of the new religion, and Wordsworth ends with the somber statement,

They come - they spread - the weak, the suffering, hear;

Receive the faith, and in the hope abide.

*Sonnet 1.3*

The following sonnet, 1.4, contrasts more strongly with the sonnets on Christian religion. Even though Wordsworth is considering an abuse of the Druidical religion (that of excommunication by the priests), and
though he is dealing with a victim of organized society (a subject that usually arouses his ire) and though he states most effectively his picture of the victim of pagan religion in the opening quatrain,

Mercy and Love have met thee on thy road,
Thou wretched Outcast, from the gift of fire
And food cut off by sacerdotal ire,
From every sympathy that Man bestowed!

Sonnet 1.4

even so he refuses to condemn the Druidical religion for the identical action for which he condemns the Christian Church in Sonnet 1.36:

Ye shall it claim our reverence, that to God,
Ancient of days! that to the eternal Sire,
These jealous Ministers of law aspire,
As to the one sole fount whence wisdom flowed,
Justice, and order.

Sonnet 1.4

The most remarkable contrast, however, is in the sestet of the sonnet, with its positive statement concerning the source of truth, in direct contrast to the sonnets dealing with Christianity:

Tremblingly escaped,
As if with prescience of the coming storm,
That intimation when the stars were shaped;
And still, 'mid yon thick woods, the primal truth
Glimmers through many a superstitious form
That fills the Soul with unavailing ruth.

Sonnet 1.4

Not only does Wordsworth deal more sympathetically and pervasively with his problem when dealing with pagan than with Christian religion; truth for him in 1822 still resides not in the Bible, not in the Apostolic Succession,
but, as of old, in nature.

Again, in Sonnet 1.34, although dealing in negatives, he nevertheless says concerning Mohammedanism,

Then blame not those who, by the mightiest lever known to the moral world, Imagination, Upheave, so seems it, from her natural station All Christendom:...

Sonnet 1.34

Sonnets 1.18 and 2.27, while not so central to our present concern, indicate also a similar reluctance to abandon any of his old approaches to truth.

Wordsworth's allusions to nature and paganism appear even stronger when his reasons for including them are contrasted with his reasons for including his statements on Christian dogma. His allusion to the Virgin Mary in Sonnet 2.25, even ignoring the qualifying effect of the context discussed earlier, derives so logically from the material he is discussing that it implies no strong belief by Wordsworth. Similarly, the allusion to Christ in Sonnet 3.46 is almost required by the two-sonnet conclusion to the entire Ecclesiastical Sonnets. In Sonnet 1.4, on the other hand, and to a lesser extent in Sonnets 1.34, 1.18, and 2.27, the references to nature and to pagan religions are to be explained in no manner by the context into which they fit. He leaves his theme, and often writes at cross-purposes to his theme, to make those allusions.

The unqualified sonnets of 1822 thus far reveal the
following: Wordsworth accepted the divinity of Christ and the Divine Birth, and apparently the Immaculate Conception. His acceptance of these creeds, however, was balanced by an equally vital opposition to religious authority. His primary faith in 1822 was still where it was in 1800, in the beneficent power of nature.

Social Benefits.

Of the 51 "pertinent" sonnets, Wordsworth spends ten in unqualified opposition to aspects of Christianity, and in two others he shows himself philosophically more sure in dealing with Druidical than with Christian religion. In nine of the remaining 39 sonnets, however, Wordsworth speaks unqualifiedly of the values he sees in Christianity, and indirectly of his reason for writing the Ecclesiastical Sonnets.

Of the nine sonnets that deal completely with the blessings of the church, three deal exclusively with the scholastic service of the monasteries. If the sonnets are a little barren (Sonnet 2.5 begins "Record we too, with just and faithful pen" and Sonnets 1.25 and 1.26 are not very exciting), Wordsworth nevertheless recognizes that service. Two of the nine sonnets speak of the social and personal service rendered to medieval society. Sonnet 2.6, speaking of the danger and hardship of feudal life, says
How sad would be their durance, if forlorn
Of offices dispensing heavenly grace!

Sonnet 2.6

and Sonnet 2.7 attributes the "wisdom, magnanimity, and love" of the "Fair Court of Edward" to the influence of the church;

For where, but on this River's margin, blow
Those flowers of chivalry....
I see a matchless blazonry unfurled...
The lamb is couching by the lion's side,
And near the flame-eyed eagle sits the dove.

Sonnet 2.7

But if these five sonnets are not qualified, they speak too much "with just and faithful pen." Wordsworth's significant tributes, I believe, are in the remaining four of the nine sonnets.

Of "Augustin" Wordsworth writes

For ever hallowed be this morning fair,
Blest be the unconscious shore on which ye tread,
And blest the silver Cross, which ye, instead
Of martial banner, in procession bear;...

Sonnet 1.14

and lauds him and his followers specifically because they

heeded not the voice of clashing swords,
These good men humble by a few bare words,
And calm with fear of God's divinity.

Sonnet 1.14

Simplicity and service are the attributes Wordsworth praises, combined with the power to "humble" and "calm" the people. Similarly, in Sonnet 1.19, Wordsworth praises the priests simply dressed, simply serving and by their benignity ruling the people:
How beautiful your presence, how benign,
Servants of God! who not a thought will share
With the vain world; who, outwardly as bare
As winter trees, yield no fallacious sign
That the firm soul is clothed with fruit divine:...
evil thoughts are stayed
At his approach, and low-bowed necks entreat
A benediction from his voice or hand;
Whence grace, through which the heart can understand,
And vows, that bind the will, in silence made.

Sonnet 1.19

Neither sonnet mentions ritual, dogma, or vestments, but
only simplicity; each sonnet praises the priests for their
social, moral, and cultural influence; but neither contains
any comment regarding the authenticity of the religion the
priests taught. Sonnet 3.18 finds similar values in the
church:

A genial hearth, a hospitable board,
And a refined rusticity, belong
To the neat mansion, where, his flock among,
The learned Pastor dwells, their watchful Lord.
Though meek and patient as a sheathed sword;
Though pride's least lurking thought appear a wrong
To human kind; though peace be on his tongue,
Gentleness in his heart - can earth afford
Such genuine state, pre-eminence so free,
As when, arrayed in Christ's authority,
He from the pulpit lifts his awful hand;
Conjures, implores, and labours all he can
For re-subjecting the divine command
The stubborn spirit of rebellious man?

Sonnet 3.18

Only one sonnet in the 1822 edition deals unqualifiedly
with the blessings of the church and at the same time
speaks directly of stability; but in view of Wordsworth's
interest in stability that is reflected in so many other
sonnets of the 1822 edition, this is perhaps the most
significant of the nine sonnets to understanding why
Wordsworth wrote the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*. In his encomium to William III, Wordsworth writes,

Calm as an under-current, strong to draw
Millions of waves into itself, and run,
From sea to sea, impervious to the sun
And ploughing storm, the spirit of Nassau
Swerves not...

...diverted by a casual law.
Had mortal action e'er a nobler scope?
The Hero comes to liberate, not defy;
And while he marches on with righteous hope,
Conqueror beloved! expected anxiously!
The vacillating Bondman of the Pope
Shrinks from the verdict of his steadfast eye.

Sonnet 3.9

In 1845 "righteous hope" was changed to "steadfast hope," and I think the phrasing may be accepted as indicative of his intention in 1822.

The unqualified sonnets thus show that Wordsworth opposed the abuses of central authority in the church; that he could or would not state so clearly his confidence in the church as he stated his fear of its abuses; and that he could or would not speak of his personal faith in the divinity of Christ and the Virgin Birth so powerfully as he could and did state his belief in nature and the way to truth. They show that he did recognize the need for stability and direction which the church could afford, and that he was sure of the beneficence of the church, if other problems could be cleared away.

3. Qualified and Inadequate Sonnets

The unqualified sonnets have established certain
definite aspects of Wordsworth's religious beliefs in 1822. The second major group of the pertinent sonnets - the deficient and qualified sonnets - emphasizes Wordsworth's caution and uncertainty. They are of three types: (1) sonnets with obvious deficiencies, (2) sonnets with definite qualifications of dogma, and (3) sonnets relating to the authority-heresy dilemma, central to his theme of church unity. They will be discussed in that order.

Sonnets lacking needed religious material.

Any consideration of the sonnets in which religious allusion is needed and yet absent must at least mention the 51 sonnets originally excluded from our consideration. Too many qualifying factors are involved in the ecclesiastical void that enshrouds the "lost 51" to make the absence of religious allusion in them any significant evidence of Wordsworth's religious beliefs. Some description, however, is fitting.

The mechanics of the long story that Wordsworth had to tell seems to account for many of the poor sonnets. A natural ineptitude for narration may account for others. Certainly, however, Wordsworth's refusal to translate the religious confidence of his sources into his sonnets accounts for much of the flatness of many of the sonnets. Sonnet 1.10, for example, "Struggle of the Britons Against
the Barbarians," is faithful to his sources in every way but one - the assumption of moral rectitude that is to be found in the sources.¹ In other sonnets of this group, 

¹Potts, ibid., pp. 217-18.

the absence of religious material is even more notable considering the exact phrases in the sources that are not translated to the sonnets. In the sources of Sonnet 1.7, for example, phrases appear such as "return lauding God," "The Lord hath showed his salvation," and "by the goodness of God wholly ceased."² The strongest reflection of these

²Ibid., p. 215.

sources in the sonnet is

the survivors of this Storm renewed 
Their holy rites with vocal gratitude:...
Most feelingly instructed 'mid their fear -
That persecution, blind with rage extreme
May not the less, through Heaven's mild countenance
Even in her own despite, both feed and cheer;... Sonnet 1.7

and this weakness culminates in perhaps the weakest line of the sonnets and I think the most vapid statement of Wordsworth's early philosophy he ever made:

For all things are less dreadful than they seem. Sonnet 1.7

Wordsworth would not commit himself, even in his narration of cultural history, to the mere remark that the people
"return lauding God," though he paraphrased generally everything but the actual praise of God; and he stayed entirely clear of any statement such as "The Lord hath showed his salvation," even though it appears in his sources. Surely Wordsworth did not translate even cultural material into his sonnets so readily as might be imagined, where personal commitment might be implied! It is such absences as this that make his positive allusions to dogma the more credible.

Further discussion of the "lost 51" seems pointless.

The absence of religious allusion in many of the more pertinent sonnets is especially significant in view of the context in which they appear. Sonnets 2.22-2.25 for example appear in logical relationship with Sonnets 2.18-2.20. Sonnets 2.18-2.20, already discussed, deal with the causes of the Reformation. Sonnet 2.21 tells of the dissolution of the monasteries, and, by implication, of the Reformation. Sonnets 2.22-2.25 then deal with the effects of the Reformation. Wordsworth speaks plainly and directly in the Sonnets 2.18-2.20, dealing with Catholic abuses; but when he comes to the balancing consideration of the effects of the Reformation (which should presumably seem to him the glorious breaking away of the "true" church from the church of Rome) he abandons his treatment of the central problem and takes refuge in his old medium, the individual victim of social forces - with the significant difference
from the earlier Wordsworth that in these sonnets he implies no universal significance to the individuals.

The first two sonnets of the group on the effect of the Reformation are qualified and diffuse. The first sonnet, on the "lovely Nun (submissive, but more meek...)" who is forced from the monasteries, is admittedly unified and well written. It is an effective tribute, to an individual, and to an individual representative of a class. The octet of Sonnet 2.23, however, immediately qualifies the entire Sonnet 2.22 with a balancing picture of the undeserving monastics who are justly ejected; and then the sestet of the same sonnet (2.23) is used again to balance the octet of that sonnet by a picture of the helpless aged ones who are thrown upon the world. Sonnet 2.22, in other words, is in itself unqualified; but the octet of Sonnet 2.23 qualifies the entire Sonnet 2.22, and then is itself qualified by the sestet that follows.

Sonnet 2.24 then refers to the cultural loss of the saints under Henry VIII, and from this the sequence rises to the sonnet on "The Virgin." But in the sonnets dealing most pertinently on the dissolution, Wordsworth fails to balance the force of the 2.18-220 sonnets with a forceful or even direct account of the effects of the dissolution. This implies a reluctance to state openly the values of the Anglican church. The picture is one of conflicting and unresolved particulars, and Sonnets 2.24 and 2.25 add to
the confusion of unrelated particulars rather than resolving it.

Admittedly, the Ecclesiastical Sonnets do not consist of balanced blocks of sonnets; and it may be argued that the group on the effect of the dissolution of the monasteries contains only Sonnets 2.22 and 2.23, or that the group contains Sonnets 2.27 and 2.28 in addition to the four sonnets discussed. It is nevertheless clear that Wordsworth could be emphatic when he was against a religious phenomenon, but when his theme required that he be for a religious phenomenon he was cautious, to the point of disorganization.

The absence of religious allusion in Sonnet 1.20 is also especially remarkable because of the context in which the sonnet appears. In the preceding Sonnet 1.19, Wordsworth has dealt most sympathetically with "Primitive Saxon Clergy," and the two sonnets that follow Sonnet 1.20 contain Wordsworth's most sympathetic treatment of monasteries. Thus Sonnet 1.20, appearing between these favorable sonnets, is in a most advantageous setting for a statement on religion, or at least on the value of the church.

The first unit of the sonnet seems both to promise and to require such a statement.

Ah, when the Body, round which in love we clung,  
Is chilled by death, does mutual service fail?  
Is tender pity then of no avail?  
Are intercessions of the fervent tongue  
A waste of hope? -

Sonnet 1.20
The second unit of the sonnet neither answers nor avoids the question.

From this sad source have sprung
Rites that console the spirit, under grief
Which ill can brook more rational relief:

Sonnet 1.20

Still, an answer seems forthcoming; but in the last seven lines of the sonnet there is no statement; and in spite of the high praise and sympathetic treatment that surrounds the sonnet, this particular sonnet drops in the seven-line resolution to a warning, and at least qualified antagonism.

Hence, prayers are shaped amiss, and dirges sung
For Souls whose doom is fixed! The way is smooth
For Power that travels with the human heart:
Confession ministers the pang to soothe
In him who at the ghost of guilt doth start.
Ye holy Men, so earnest in your care,
Of your own mighty instruments beware!

Sonnet 1.20

Now granting that Wordsworth's primary interest is church unity and not personal religion, when he states so squarely this universal and essential problem of religion, an answer is required. Yet Wordsworth has completely abandoned the original subject of his sonnet. He has wandered entirely away from the mood of this series of sonnets. We must believe that the absence of any statement regarding immortality, and the substitution therefor of this jarring reiteration of his distrust of clerical power indicates uncertainty on Wordsworth's part, not merely on "points of faith" but on the question of the single greatest service the church can render the individual.
Sonnets with qualified allusions.

More concrete evidence both of Wordsworth's careful honesty and his lack of religious assurance is contained in his outright qualification of references to church dogma.

A qualification which is significant not for what it qualifies, but for its indication of the minute care with which Wordsworth does qualify his statements, is Sonnet 1.24. While Wordsworth in Sonnet 2.24 evidently assumed the reader's knowledge of history to be adequate qualification of the description of the flight of the saints from England, he carefully includes the phrase "as they believe" in Sonnet 1.24, speaking of the real and supposed benefits of monasteries:

Where Piety, as they believe, obtains
From Heaven a general blessing; timely rains
Or needful sunshine; prosperous enterprise,
And peace and equity. - Bold faith! yet rise
The sacred Towers for universal gains.
Sonnet 1.24

Wordsworth's tendency to walk around his subject rather than face it was mentioned in the discussion of Sonnets 2.22 and 2.23 on the dissolution of the monasteries.

This same trait is seen in Sonnet 1.9. Just as Sonnets 2.22 and 2.23 contrast with the preceding group of anti-Catholic sonnets, Sonnet 1.9 contrasts with the anti-Catholic Sonnet 1.8 that precedes it. Wordsworth could rail at the "Temptation" of the Roman church in Sonnet 1.8; but when he attempts to discuss the effect of the Roman
withdrawal, he is unable to state confidently any positive belief. While the sources of the sonnet speak confidently enough of heresy and religious laxness as the cause of the evils that occurred,\(^1\) and while Wordsworth apparently tries to speak in the same vein, he does not do so. If unity is Wordsworth’s central interest in the sonnets, we might expect him to speak as strongly here against heresy as he spoke in the preceding sonnet against “Roman Refinements.” But he speaks without force and then qualifies what he has said. The first three lines speak of heresy:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{That heresies should strike (if truth be scanned} \\
\text{Presumptuously) their roots both wide and deep,} \\
\text{Is natural as dreams to feverish sleep...} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Sonnet 1.9

but his central statement is of little force, and qualified by an ambiguous parenthetical clause. In the next three lines heresies becomes the more comfortable Discord:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Lo! Discord at the altar dares to stand} \\
\text{Uplifting toward high Heaven her fiery brand,} \\
\text{A cherished Priestess of the new-baptized!} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Sonnet 1.9

His subject is still, however, a subject of vital importance to him; and if he feels sure enough of himself he will surely say something of significance; but if there is any causal relationship between the phenomena pictured in the first six lines and his picture of the consequences, the

\(^1\)Potts, ibid., pp. 216-17.
Wordsworth who in his youth could have spoken more directly writes:

But chastisement shall follow peace despised.

Sonnet 1.9

This is the closest Wordsworth comes to an important statement on this excellent illustration of the need for unity of the church. It is significant, I think, that at this central point of his sonnet, what was originally called "heresy" is now vaguely referred to as "peace despised."

The next section continues the history

The fictitious cloud darkens the enervate land
By some abandoned; vain are suppliant cries,
And prayers that would undo her forced farewell;
For she returns not.

Sonnet 1.9

and Wordsworth, in this sonnet touching his most vital problem, adds still another uncoordinated element to finish out his 14 lines:

Awed by her own knell,
She casts the Britons upon strange allies,
Soon to become more dreaded enemies
Then heartless misery called them to repel.

Sonnet 1.9

Wordsworth has approached a problem of central concern to him. His sources state the causal relationship between heresy and the evils that follow.\(^1\) Wordsworth's theme

\(^1\) Potts, ibid., pp. 216-17.

requires that he do the same. He doesn't.
Another example of Wordsworth's walking around his subject is Sonnets 1.21, 1.22, and 1.23. The sympathetic treatment of monasteries in this series was mentioned previously in the discussion of Sonnet 1.20. Sonnets 1.21 and 1.22 are most sympathetic in their discussion of monastic life. Then Sonnet 1.23, entitled "Reproof," qualifies the impression left by the first two sonnets. This is typical of Wordsworth's treatment of monastic life. He varies from his fierce attack on "Monastic Voluptuousness" in Sonnet 2.20 (already discussed) to his recognition of their cultural service in Sonnets 1.5, 2.25, and 2.26, to this most sympathetic treatment in Sonnets 1.21 and 1.22. Wordsworth never, in 1822, draws these many attitudes together. He saw and appreciated many particular truths. He could not, even in the ecclesiastical level, resolve them into a consistent interpretation.

The more central Wordsworth's allusions become, the more carefully are they qualified. Sonnet 2.26, "Apology," following Wordsworth's sequence on the effects of the break with Rome under Henry VIII, attempts to deal justly with the Roman Church. Considering previous evidence, the cautious, grudging qualifications of the opening lines

Not utterly unworthy to endure
Was the supremacy of crafty Roma;

are not surprising; but his qualification of church dogma in the following lines is significant:
While he feels constrained to mention the belief in the Apostolic Succession, he carefully adds the unpoetic phrase "As many hold." But the qualification is significant not merely because it qualifies this statement of creed. Of greater significance is the neutrality of the qualification itself. Even in his qualification he makes no personal commitment. He definitely rejects nothing. He is as obscure as in the qualification, "Inversion strange!" already discussed.

In Sonnet 2.11 he deals in the same manner with the dogma of transubstantiation. In this sonnet appears the blunt statement

The tapers burn; the odorous incense feeds A greedy flame; the pompous mass proceeds; The Priest bestows the appointed consecration, And while the HOST is raised, its elevation An awe and supernatural horror breeds;... This Valdo brooks not... He taught... To adore the Invisible, and Him alone....

Again, while such words as greedy, horror, and pompous imply opposition to the Roman church, Wordsworth will not reject specifically the Catholic creed. He will only say that Valdo rejects it.

Similarly, Wordsworth speaks most sympathetically of high church ceremony in Sonnet 3.40:
Mine ear has rung, my spirit sunk subdued,
Sharing the strong emotion of the crowd,
When each pale brow to dread hosannas bowed
While clouds of incense mounting veiled the rood,
That glimmers like a pine-tree dimly viewed
Through Alpine vapours.
Sonnet 3.40

Then follows a qualification that is utterly non-committal:

Such appalling rite
Our Church prepares not, trusting to the might
Of simple truth with grace divine imbued;
Yet will we not conceal the precious Cross,
Like men ashamed: the Sun with his first smile
Shall greet that symbol crowning the low Pile:...
Sonnet 3.40

Wordsworth was most clear as to his feelings about Catholic influence. He is never clear as to his belief about Catholic doctrine. If we explain this hesitancy in 1822 purely on a basis of his caution, and if we recognize that his caution was at least as pronounced in 1845 as in 1822, we will indeed have difficulty explaining material that appears in the later sonnets.

Wordsworth's evasion and ambiguous qualification in his treatment of religious problems, and even of such ecclesiastical problems as monasticism, have been discussed. Granting, however, that Wordsworth's primary concern was the unity of the Anglican Church, if Wordsworth had been able to resolve this paramount problem in 1822, his inexactitude in matters subordinate to this primary concern would be of minor importance. But Wordsworth was as
varied and uncertain in his approach to this problem as he was in his approach to the others, and his resolution was as weak. The sonnets reflect the same universal interest, the same appreciation of each isolated aspect of the problem. They reflect also only the slightest suggestion of an integrated view of the problem.

His sympathy for Catholics as individuals, and his refusal to reject specifically any Catholic creed in spite of his social antagonism, have been mentioned. In Sonnet 2.26 he praises the Catholic martyrs, Fisher and More.

Of non-conformists under Charles II, in Sonnet 3.6, he says,

Nor shall the eternal roll of praise reject
Those Unconforming; whom one rigorous day
Drives from their Cures, a voluntary prey
To poverty, and grief, and disrespect,...

Sonnet 3.6

and this presumably includes all dissenters, Catholic and Protestant.

His conflicting and confused treatment of Laud, Charles I, Charles II, and William III, contained in Sonnets 2.44, 2.45, 3.3, and 3.9, has also been discussed. No one can object to Wordsworth's varied and careful treatment of his problem. His theme does require, however, some integrated interpretation of these unintegrated aspects of his problem.

In Sonnet 2.29, on the King James translation of the Bible, the aristocratic and the democratic philosophies
lie side by side in the same sonnet, and Wordsworth can at best but balance the one against the other:

But, to outweigh all harm, the Sacred Book,
In dusty sequestration wrapt too long,
Assumes the accents of our native tongue:
And he who guides the plough,...
With understanding spirit now may look
Upon her records, listen to her song...
Transcendent Boon!...
But passions spread like plagues, and thousands wild
With bigotry shall tread the Offering
Beneath their feet, detested and defiled.

Sonnet 2.29

Wordsworth is very conscious of his problem, in 1822. That is the best that can be said for him.

One of the most astounding sonnets related to this subject is Sonnet 3.4, in praise of the Cambridge group of the Restoration and entitled, "Latitudinarianism."

Miss Potts (p.14, supra) declares latitudinarianism to be one of the specific enemies of the unity that was Wordsworth's theme, and quotes Wordsworth himself as evidence. Miss Potts is justified in quoting Wordsworth's 1835 statement in her attempt to describe a general philosophy reflected in the sonnets as a whole. It is obvious, however, that Wordsworth was not far enough advanced in 1822 to recognize it as an enemy, as this sonnet so lamentably illustrates.

Although Wordsworth's lack of integration even concerning his primary interest is all too evident, three sonnets indicate that Wordsworth recognized this deficiency and
show the shape his new integration will take. Sonnet 2.37 is merely the factual description of exiled non-conformists.

But scarcely have they met, Partners in faith, and brothers in distress, Free to pour forth their common thankfulness, Are hope declines: - their union is beset With speculative notions rashly sown, Whence thickly-sprouting growth of poisonous weeds; Their forms are broken staves; their passions, steeds That master them....

Sonnet 2.37

The problem of anarchy, however, is stated.

There are but two indications of any progress in resolving the problem in 1822. Sonnet 2.41 faces the problem of heresy:

Men, who have ceased to reverence, soon defy Their forefathers; lo! sects are formed, and split With morbid restlessness; - the ecstatic fit Spreads wide; though special mysteries multiply, The Saints must govern, is their common cry; And so they labour, deeming Holy writ Disgraced by aught that seems content to sit Beneath the roof of settled Modesty.

Sonnet 2.41

But there is no answer; only the statement of the need for an answer:

The Romanist exults; fresh hope he draws From the confusion, craftily incites The overweening, personates the mad - To heap disgust upon the worthier Cause: Totters the throne; the new-born Church is sad, And every wave against her peace unites.

Sonnet 2.41

Of all the 1822 sonnets, Sonnet 2.40 suggests most strongly an actual resolution of the problem:

The truth exploring with an equal mind, In polity and discipline they have sought Firmly between the two extremes to steer;

Sonnet 2.40
but continues somberly,

But theirs the wise man's ordinary lot,
To trace right courses for the stubborn blind,  
And prophesy to ears that will not hear.  

1 A review of this complete sonnet (p. 29, supra) will indicate more clearly now the extent to which Wordsworth accepted the dogma which might have been used to unify the 1822 edition of the Sonnets.

It is obvious that Wordsworth himself spoke neither boldly nor clearly enough in 1822 to be either seen or heard.

4. Conclusion

Wordsworth in the 1822 edition of the Sonnets deals with three different fields of religious and philosophical thought. Sonnets 2.25 and 3.46, on the Virgin and Christ, and 1.41, on the Druidical religion, show the extremes of dogma and paganism; and between the two fields is the field of uncertainty. In the field of dogma, the sonnet on the Virgin is so placed in the sequence that it may, at least, be interpreted merely as a description of cultural influence. Wordsworth must have been aware of this possible interpretation. On the other hand, the allusion stands unqualified, and in view of Wordsworth's exactitude in his poetry, it must stand as one of his religious beliefs. The reference to Christ is unqualified. In both references, however, Wordsworth sees this dogma entirely in terms of human values. There is no over-all treatment of truth, no
use of the doctrines to solve ecclesiastical problems. His reference to nature as the source of truth, on the other hand, is not mere reference, but actual verbal statement. The statement is not required, but is there in spite of the requirements of his theme, because of his especial consciousness of and dependence upon that belief. Finally, he is able at this level and this level only to speak with assurance regarding the problem of truth.

Surrounding these small and isolated fields of belief is a welter of opposition and uncertainty. There is at the same time his vicious attack upon the social influence of the church and his equally significant refusal to deny a single tenet of any church. There is his confusion even as to the social problem, with which he is chiefly concerned. There is his apparent inability to appreciate, and his obvious failure to use, the doctrine of

The Church, the unperverted Gospel's seat.

His increasing assurance in the field of Christian dogma, his decreasing dependence upon nature as an approach to truth, his increasing assurance in dealing with what in 1822 was the middle field of uncertainty and opposition, and his ability to resolve his problems by use of Christian dogma will indicate Wordsworth's religious development subsequent to 1822.
CHAPTER III
THE 1827 EDITION

In the five years from 1822 to 1827 (the year the second edition of the Sonnets was published) ten sonnets were added, and several alterations were made to the sonnets already written. These additions and alterations, as they appear in the 1827 edition, show several important developments beyond Wordsworth's position in 1822. The change reflected is indeed of such importance that if these sonnets (especially Sonnets 2.30, 3.20, and 3.25) could be considered as reflecting his position in 1822, the picture of Wordsworth's religious development would be considerably changed. The composition date of the 1827 sonnets is unknown; and because of the importance of these sonnets, assurance as to the exact date in Wordsworth's development they represent is of vital importance.

Since the composition date is not known for any of the sonnets added in this edition, we obviously cannot justify this interpretation of chronology by comparing any one sonnet of this particular group with another. Justification lies in the publication date, the nature of the sonnets, and the emendations that appeared in the same year. First, in the absence of any proof to the contrary,
the logical assumption is that they were written after 1822, or they would have been included in that edition.

Secondly, assuming the improbability that they were written before 1822, the important sonnets are so markedly different from the 1822 sonnets in their approach to religion that the religious content is the most obvious and probable reason for their not being included in the 1822 edition. If they were not included in the 1822 edition because of the religious material, then they cannot be accepted as being representative of that year, but must be accepted as belonging to the 1827 emendations. Thirdly, the important 1827 sonnets are so inconsistent with the sonnets of 1822 that it is illogical to assume that they were written during the same period; and even if they were they serve only to emphasize further the uncertainty and inconsistency of that period. Finally, the most concrete vindication of this interpretation is found in the alterations made in the 1827 edition to the 1822 sonnets. The emendations to the 1822 sonnets, few as they are, show the same alterations in Wordsworth's approach to truth that is shown in the sonnets added in that year. Neither evidence nor logic, then, allow for placing the sonnets elsewhere in the picture of Wordsworth's religious development.

The significance of the 1827 edition certainly does not lie in Wordsworth's ability to resolve his primary concern - the problem of church unity. Wordsworth does
give some indication of increasing mastery of this problem, but the indications are very slight. Three sonnets are almost entirely void of any significance. Sonnet 2.34, "Latimer and Ridley," is identical in its approach to the sonnets of the 1822 edition. Sonnet 3.7, "Persecution of the Scottish Covenanters," is similar to Milton's Sonnet "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont" to which Wordsworth refers, and is, I think, a most effective sonnet; but it contains no indication of any solution to the problem of church unity. Sonnet 3.36, on "Emigrant French Clergy," is slightly more pertinent when it states,

Creed and test
Vanish before the unreserved embrace
Of catholic humanity....
Sonnet 3.36

It, like the other two sonnets of this group, is at least not inconsistent with Wordsworth's later integration; but actual indications of that integration are lacking.

Sonnet 2.33, on the other hand, combines two aspects of the problem - Catholicism and instability - and contains Wordsworth's first treatment of the two aspects in a comprehensive manner. Of the reversion to Catholicism under Queen Mary, it says,

0 People keen
For change, to whom the new looks always green!
Rejoicing did they cast upon the ground
Their Gods of wood and stone;...
Again do they invoke
The Creature, to the Creature glory give;
Again with frankincense the altars smoke
Like those the Heathen served; and mass is sung;...
Sonnet 2.33
Again, in Sonnet 3.11, "Sacheverel," Wordsworth treats the problem more comprehensively. Though Sacheverel was of the High Church party, it is not one faction or the other that Wordsworth attacks primarily, but factionalism itself. The sonnet itself does not even make clear to which group Sacheverel himself belonged, but attacks only the central problem:

\[
\text{Sonnet 3.11}
\]

\[
\text{HIGH and LOW,}
\]
\[
\text{Watchwords of Party, on all tongues are rife...}
\]

Granting some indication of progress, however, these five sonnets show Wordsworth far from any comprehensive treatment of the entire problem. A comparison of this Sonnet 3.11 with Sonnet 1.28 of the 1822 edition will show how really slight this advancement is.

If Wordsworth shows little development in 1827 in his attempts directly to resolve the problem of unity vs. heresy, he does nevertheless show himself capable of stating his problem much more clearly and of dealing with it with much greater assurance; and parallel with the increasing clarity in handling his problem is his decreasing dependence on nature and the senses as the primary avenue to truth.

Four of the eleven sonnets added in 1827 deal with liturgy, and are added to the final group of the sequence. A brief description of this final group as it appeared in 1822 will make clearer the contrast between Wordsworth's treatment of liturgy in 1822 and in 1827. Sonnet 3.12,
of 1822, declares,

So have we hurried on with troubled pleasure:
Henceforth, as on the bosom of a stream
That slackens, and spreads wide a watery gleam,
We, nothing loth a lingering course to measure,
May gather up our thoughts...

Sonnet 3.12

From Sonnet 3.12 to the end of the sequence, then, Wordsworth was free from the burden of his story, and could choose both his subject and his treatment of it. This last group, then, should form a more nearly adequate basis for comparison with later editions than any other group of the 1822 edition. Indeed, we should expect that in this section, at least, the most central problems would have been treated in 1822, with the sonnets added later merely adding incidental material.

This, however, is not the case. The group in 1822 consisted of the following sonnets: Six sonnets deal with church architecture, and two with church sites. Five

1 Sonnets 3.17, 3.35, 3.42-3.45.
2 Sonnets 3.39, 3.41.

sonnets of the group have already been discussed, namely:

(1) Sonnets 3.46 and 3.47, the concluding sonnets referring to Scriptures and to Christ; (2) Sonnets 3.37 and 3.38, stating the need of the nation for the church; and (3) Sonnet 3.18, picturing the beneficial effects of rural clergy.
Sonnet 3.34, "Mutability," mentioned by both Harper and Batho as one of the exceptionally good sonnets of the entire sequence, is of little importance to this present subject, except for the fact that it is completely lacking in reference to either church or dogma.

The remaining four sonnets, however, provide an adequate basis for comparing the religious element in the 1822 and the 1827 editions of the sonnets. They deal specifically with services and ceremonies of the church. Sonnet 3.32, "Rural Ceremony," discusses the purely social aspects of a children's procession. Sonnet 3.33, "Regrets," discusses ancient Christmas ceremony, but relates it more to nature than to the church. Although Sonnet 3.22 is entitled "Catechising," there is no reference to the benefits to be derived therefrom, but only a description of the occasion and one of Wordsworth's very infrequent references to his mother. Sonnet 3.19, "The Liturgy," describes Wordsworth's attitude towards liturgy in 1822:

Enough for us to cast a transient glance
The circle through; relinquishing its story
For those whom Heaven hath fitted to advance
And, harp in hand, rehearse the King of Glory -

Sonnet 3.19
As in the rest of the 1822 sonnets, Wordsworth even in this final group could speak of the divinity of Christ and of His birth, and he could speak of the need for religion; but when some reference to doctrine was required, he avoided the subject.

This statement of his attitude toward liturgy in Sonnet 3.19 remained unchanged in 1827, but Wordsworth then added four sonnets to this group, all dealing with liturgy; and in spite of his statement of caution, the added sonnets are much more positive than those of 1822.

Even the weaker two of the four sonnets added are stronger than any dealing with the subject in 1822. Sonnet 3.24, describing the mother of a child receiving confirmation, reads

Tell, if ye may, some star-crowned Muse, or Saint! Tell what rushed in, from what she was relieved - Then, when her Child the hallowing touch received, and such vibration to the Mother went That tears burst forth amain.

Sonnet 3.24

and Sonnet 3.23 says of Confirmation

The Omnipotent will raise Their feeble Souls,...

Sonnet 3.23

The other two added to this group in 1827, however, show a marked difference between Wordsworth's religious attitude in 1822 and 1827. In Sonnet 3.20, "Baptism," Wordsworth writes:

Blest be the Church that, watching o'er the needs Of Infancy, provides a timely shower Whose virtue changes to a Christian Flower The sinful product of a bed of Weeds!
This outright statement of the benefit of baptism is in itself decidedly different from anything in the 1822 edition except regarding Christ and the Virgin Mary, and clearly marks the Wordsworth of 1827 from the Wordsworth of 1822. More significant even than this, however, is the outright rejection of Wordsworth's old dependence on the natural wholesomeness of man. The naturally good state of man has now become "a bed of Weeds!" Nature, when it is unreformed by the church, produces not a reformed Peter Bell, but the Peter Bell of the first of that poem. Wordsworth's dependence for good, at least, has shifted from the influence of nature to the influence of the church. This is not mere repetition of creed, but also rejection of an important earlier attitude. This picture of the need of the individual for the guidance of the church, not stated in the 1822 edition, is reiterated in the other of the four sonnets added to this group in 1827. In Sonnet 3.25, "Confirmation," Wordsworth states,

By chain yet stronger must the Soul be tied;
One duty more, last stage of this ascent,
Brings to thy food, mysterious Sacrament!
The Offspring,...
But not till They, with all that do abide
In Heaven, have lifted up their hearts to laud
And magnify the glorious name of God,
Fountain of Grace, whose Son for sinners died.

Sonnet 3.25

The rejection of nature as the source of the good and the true in Sonnets 3.20 and 3.25 is directly contradictory to Wordsworth's attitude in 1822 that

...yon thick woods maintain the primal truth,
Debased by many a superstitious form.

Sonnet 1.4
Nature is no longer the debased but the debaser. It is no longer the guide to the light, but the obstacle to it. Wordsworth's changing attitude toward both religion and nature as reflected in these sonnets is shown in his emendation of Sonnet 1.4. The lines quoted above were carefully trimmed in the 1827 edition to

And still, 'mid yon thick woods, the primal truth
Glimmers through many a superstitious form...

Sonnet 1.4

His confidence in nature, while not definitely rejected in 1827, is no longer affirmed; and the "superstitious form," which "debased" in 1822, now is treated as at least equal to "yon thick woods."

His increasing concern with dogma again is paralleled by his alterations of Sonnet 2.19. The lines

Inversion strange! that to a Monk, who lives
For self, and struggles with himself alone,
The ampest share of heavenly favour gives;
And hath allotted, in the world's esteem,
To such a station higher than to him
Who on the good of others builds his own!

Sonnet 2.19

are changed by 1827 to

Inversion strange! that, unto One who lives
For self, and struggles with himself alone,
The ampest share of heavenly favour gives;
That to a Monk allots, in the esteem
Of God and man, place higher than to him
Who on the good of others builds his own!

Sonnet 2.19

Perhaps the most significant sonnet of the 1827 edition is Sonnet 2.30. This alone of the sonnets added in 1827 seems not directly related to the surrounding sonnets, and thus reflecting an especial concern of
Wordsworth. In the story of Wordsworth's religious development, Sonnet 1.18 of 1822 and Sonnet 2.30 of 1827 are perhaps the most crucial, for they show Wordsworth's contrasting approaches to truth - naturalistic in the one sonnet, idealistic in the other.

A consideration of Sonnet 1.18 of the 1822 edition is therefore pertinent. It shows Wordsworth's attempt to extend his old approach to truth (re-affirmed in Sonnet 1.4) to the field of religious and Christian truth. Following immediately upon the sonnets that tell the story of the conversion of Edwin and his court, it speaks of the reason for that conversion:

Venerable Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, bk.2, ch. 12, in *The Works of Venerable Bede*, ed. and tr. J. A. Giles, London, 1843, III, 220-229. Miss Potts does not include this among the sources of the sonnet, and none of the phrases apparently is used; but the story of Edwin's vision that preceded his conversion must be the incident commented on in this sonnet.

Nor scorn the aid which Fancy oft doth lend
The Soul's eternal interests to promote:
Death, darkness, danger, are our natural lot;
And evil Spirits may our walk attend
For aught the wisest know or comprehend;
Then be good Spirits free to breathe a note
Of elevation;...

Sonnet 1.18

If the sonnets could be divided according to the inductive or deductive reasoning they reflect, this sonnet would have the highest place among the sonnets written in accordance to the inductive method. Placed against the
background of his earlier philosophy, it appears as the ultimate extension of that philosophy. "Nor scorn the aid which Fancy oft doth lend" has been one of the primary tenets of his philosophy since 1798. The argument for the existence of Spirits is but slightly different from his constant affirmation of Powers. But Wordsworth's problem in these sonnets is the highest truth, not the primary and basic approaches to it; he is required by his theme to deal with it, however he tries to avoid the problem. How his earlier approach to truth served him in his early poetry and in the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* is seen by contrasting the effect of

Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
with the faltering and "imperfect" last lines of this 1822 sonnet:

and who the line
Shall draw, the limits of the power define,
That even imperfect faith to man affords?
Sonnet 1.18

Wordsworth is traveling in higher circles of truth than he did in his earlier sonnets; and the approach that was once most effective is now, if still valid, in obvious need of augmentation. The approach that was once powerful is now apologetic and ineffectual. There is no other approach than this given in 1822.

In contrast to 1822's Sonnet 1.18 (appropriately
entitled "Apology") is 1827's Sonnet 2.30, "The Point at Issue." It is the most central approach to the problem of religion yet stated:

For what contend the wise? - for nothing less
Than that pure Faith dissolve the bonds of Sense;
The Soul restored to God by evidence
Of things not seen,...
Sonnet 2.30

If it were possible to put Wordsworth into categories, we could say that he was to 1822 inductive, and after 1827 intuitive, in his approach to truth. "That pure Faith dissolve the bonds of Sense; The Soul restored to God by evidence of things not seen..." may well have been the source of Tennyson's

Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,...
"In Memoriam," first stanza.

It is obvious that just as Sonnet 1.18 is an approach from the ground up, this sonnet is an approach from the top down. Now if the material in this sonnet were no richer than that in "In Memoriam," if Wordsworth here were merely making a choice between the two approaches to truth, the lyrics of "In Memoriam" would be easily preferable to this. But the Ecclesiastical Sonnets demonstrate not a choice but an organic development from the earlier Wordsworth to the later Wordsworth. How closely he has drawn the two approaches is indicated by the similarity of elements in the two sonnets of 1822 and 1827. Sonnet 2.30 presents the idealistic concept of truth; but it speaks of the
"pure Faith" only as the soul is "restored by evidence
Of things not seen,..." and the "things not seen" are
among other things the "Spirits" of the empirical Sonnet
1.18.

How weakly or firmly the two approaches to truth
meet in these two sonnets is fortunately beyond the scope
of this paper; and the extent to which Wordsworth's
Christian idealism is based upon the Hartlean system is
again a problem I happily avoid. That the final answer to
Wordsworth's great experiment is to be seen in the
Ecclesiastical Sonnets, and cannot be seen except in the
story it tells, is I think demonstrated.

Wordsworth merely defined "The point at Issue" in 1827;
he did not resolve it. The mere statement of the issue,
however, provided the integration that could at least point
the way that his later resolution of other problems
(including the problem of church unity) would take. His
continued definition of faith in the sonnet reflects directly
in his later resolution of heresy. The sonnet continues:

That Faith, which to the Patriarchs did dispense
Sure guidance, ere a ceremonial fence
Was needful round men thirsting to transgress;

Sonnet 2.30

and here his final pronouncement on Catholicism begins to
develop. Again, in the sestet occurs Wordsworth's most
personal and integrated treatment of Christ to date. Though
Sonnet 3.46 of 1822 spoke of Christ as a "Power" with
"filial duty," this sonnet in the sestet combines both
His personal and spiritual attributes much more effectively:

For Faith, more perfect still, with which the Lord
Of all, himself a Spirit, in the youth
Of Christian aspiration, deigned to fill
The temples of their hearts who, with his word
Informed, were resolute to do his will,
And worship him in spirit and in truth.
Sonnet 2.30

By 1827, then, Wordsworth showed little if any
development in his ability to deal with his primary theme,
that of church unity. On the other hand, the basis for the
final resolution of his problem was becoming set, in his
increasing confidence in matters of theology. This develop­
ment is seen both in the sonnets added in 1827 and in the
alteration of statements he had made in 1822. The state­
ments he made in 1827 are both more powerful and more
pertinent to his theme. They extend the field of Wordsworth's
positive Christian doctrine, and indicate a decreasing
dependence on nature-pagan philosophy. He is not sufficiently
integrated, however, to be able to use this doctrine in the
resolution of his primary theme.
CHAPTER IV

THE 1832 - 1842 EMENDATIONS

The alterations to the sonnets during the 15 years between 1827 and 1842 are of no crucial importance to the story of Wordsworth's religious development; but certain changes must be noted.

In 1832 one additional sonnet was published, and two significant alterations to previous sonnets were made. Sonnet 3.21, "Sponsors," has little significance to our study. The most pertinent part of the sonnet reads

Father! to God himself we cannot give
A holier name! than lightly do not bear
Both names conjoined, but of thy spiritual care
Be duly mindful:

Changes to the 1827 Sonnets 2.30 and 3.20, however, are of considerable significance. In Sonnet 3.20 Wordsworth had spoken of "Baptism"

Whose virtue changes to a Christian Flower
The sinful product of a bed of Weeds!
Sonnet 3.20

In 1832 the last line was altered to

A Growth from sinful Nature's bed of weeds!

This even more forceful rejection of nature as in itself a beneficial agent is balanced by Wordsworth's elimination of the words true Faith in Sonnet 2.30. Of the first four lines
of Sonnet 2.30

For what contend the wise? - for nothing less
Than that pure Faith dissolve the bonds of Sense;
The Soul restored to God by evidence
Of things not seen....

Sonnet 2.30

Wordsworth changed the second and third lines to read

Than that the Soul, freed from the bonds of Sense,
And to her God restored by evidence....

Sonnet 2.30

"Pure Faith" has disappeared by 1832, and the entire
dependence is now upon "evidence Of things not seen..."
Nor are the "bonds of Sense" dissolved; the soul is merely
freed from them. This sonnet, if we desire categories, is
still a sonnet based upon an idealistic approach to truth.

In 1798, however, Wordsworth had written,

we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

In 1832, then, Wordsworth even more forcefully rejects nature
as the source of the good and the true; at the same time
his confidence in the "evidence of things not seen" is
emphasized by his elimination of the words true Faith.
His earlier approach to truth has become modified and
reintegrated to adapt itself to a much higher level of
truth than treated by Wordsworth in his earlier poetry.

Of the three sonnets published in 1835, Sonnet 2.13,
praising the rivers,
Praised be the Rivers, from their mountain springs
Shouting to Freedom, 'Plant thy banners here!'
Sonnet 2.13

is of little significance to our study, except as evidence
that he has not left his earlier interests behind. Sonnet
2.12, "The Vaudois," in praise of heretics, shows neither
progress nor retrogression in the treatment of heresy.

Sonnet 2.4, however, is significant partly for the
confidence of his religious allusions, but especially for
its modification of his earlier concept of individual
liberty.

[Marcy cries out] 'Man - whose name
And nature God disdained not; Man - whose soul
Christ died for - cannot forfeit his high claim
To live and move exempt from all control
Which fellow-feeling doth not mitigate!'
Sonnet 2.4

That humility and "fellow-feeling" might mitigate certain
restraints upon the individual is suggested in some sonnets
of 1822. Here, however, although the logic of this sonnet
does not require any modification of his attitude toward
individual liberty, Wordsworth does nevertheless
specifically modify it. The logic of his position in 1822
required this modification. In 1835 he is able to state
it in the sonnets.

In 1837, Wordsworth added only Sonnet 1.32, to
balance his unsympathetic treatment of the Saxons under
Typically, it is with the failure, the outcast, the
defeated, that Wordsworth is concerned. Of the plight of the defeated Saxon warriors, he writes

_Pitiless_

Though men be, there are angels that can feel
For wounds that death alone has power to heal,
For penitent guilt, and innocent distress.
And has a Champion risen in arms to try
His Country's virtue, fought, and breathes no more;
Him in their hearts the people canonize;...
_Sonnet 1.32_

The word _angel_ as Wordsworth uses it is perhaps the most difficult of all his words to understand. This word, with the word _Heaven_, is discussed at length in connection with a sonnet of 1845. Whether the word as used here is more closely allied to his concepts of _power_ and _spirit_ or to a more orthodox interpretation of angels is difficult to determine. It is not capitalized. Certainly there is some slight suggestion of immortality implied in the word; but in the passage as a whole Wordsworth finds more consolation in the influence of the Saxon warrior upon the people than in any concept of immortality.

The three sonnets on Christianity in _America_ (Sonnets 3.13-3.15) were first published in 1842, the year in which many of the 1845 sonnets were written. They are of no significance to a study of Wordsworth's religious development.
CHAPTER V

THE 1845 EDITION

The 1845 edition of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets contains Wordsworth's final statement on religious problems. Miss Potts has shown that six of the eight sonnets appearing first in 1845 were written in the years 1842 and 1843. Wordsworth's letter to Reed, by its failure to mention the two undated Sonnets 2.1 and 2.10, indicates that these two (with Sonnet 3.29 the most mature of the group) were written either before or after the composition of the others added in the 1845 edition; and their very maturity suggests that they were written after. I shall follow the rule, however, of treating the publication date only, and consider all sonnets added in 1845 as of one group.

Sonnet 3.16, the only sonnet in this edition which contains the element of qualification so typical of the earlier sonnets, has already been mentioned in connection
with the incident surrounding his refusal in 1843 to alter the qualification

if they were rightly taught
Who framed the Ordinance by your lives disowned!

Sonnet 3.16

The qualification shows Wordsworth's continued cautious approach to religious creed.

Religious Confidence.

A line in Sonnet 3.16 apparently not affected by the qualification in the sestet is the line addressed to the conscientious bishops and priests,

What perfect glory ye in Heaven shall reap! -

1 The octet of the sonnet ends with that line. Both the sentence and the sense are most sharply broken between the octet and the sestet. By a rather strained construction, Wordsworth may have considered that the qualification in the sestet affected that statement in the octet. If so, the reasons for his keeping that qualification become considerably clearer. The last seven lines read:

What perfect glory ye in Heaven shall reap! -
But, in the solemn Office which ye sought
And undertook premonished, if unsound
Your practice prove, faithless though but in thought,
Bishops and Priests, think what a gulf profound
Awaits you then, if they were rightly taught
Who framed the Ordinance by your lives disowned!

This strained interpretation is not consistent with the evidence in Sonnet 3.28, written slightly earlier than this sonnet and discussed later in this section.

This reference to Heaven, by its assurance, places the Sonnet 3.16 in line with the other sonnets added in 1845. Three other sonnets show Wordsworth's increasing religious confidence. This confidence is shown especially in the increasingly personal attitude toward religion they reflect.
The development in Sonnet 3.26, for example, is best seen when it is contrasted with Sonnet 3.21 of 1832. Sonnet 3.21 had read,

FATHER! to God himself we cannot give a holier name! Sonnet 3.21

Sonnet 3.26, on the marriage ceremony, reads,

Now sanctify the bands O Father! - to the Espoused thy blessings give, That mutually assisted they may live Obedient, as here taught, to thy commands. Sonnet 3.26

The increasingly personal approach to religious problems is shown more clearly in Sonnet 3.27:

WOMAN! the Power who left His throne on high, And deigned to wear the robe of flesh we wear, The Power that through the straits of Infancy Did pass dependent on maternal care, His own humanity with Thee will share,...

Wordsworth's continued use of the word Power from his early writing, through his statement of Christ's divinity in 1822, to this sonnet in 1845, is a remarkable note in his poetry. Certainly nowhere else in the sonnets, however, does he combine both the personal and divine attributes of Christ so intimately as he does in this sonnet.

In Sonnet 3.30, "Forms of Prayer at Sea," Wordsworth writes,

Nor will they implore In vain who, for a rightful cause, give breath To words the Church prescribes aiding the lip For the heart's sake, ere ship with hostile ship Encounters, armed for work of pain and death. Suppliants! the God to whom your cause ye trust Will listen, and ye know that He is just. Sonnet 3.30
Again, how the last two lines forecast the words Tennyson was to write only a few years later:

He thinks he was not made to die;  
And thou hast made him: thou art just.  
"In Memoriam," stanza 3

Wordsworth's treatment of the power of prayer, however, can be easily over-emphasized. Wordsworth treats prayer in this sonnet in much the same manner that he treated the Scriptures in Sonnet 3.47 of 1822. Just as Wordsworth in Sonnet 3.47 avoided any commitment as to the power of the Scriptures to foretell the future, so here he avoids (even disregarding the qualification "for a rightful cause") any statement as to the concrete results of prayer. The difference between Sonnet 3.47 and this sonnet - and between Wordsworth's attitude in 1822 and that noted thus far in 1845 - is that in 1845 Wordsworth would say,

the God to whom your cause ye trust
Will listen...  
Sonnet 3.30

That, in itself, is no insignificant development.

If the sonnets just mentioned are "not insignificant" in reflecting Wordsworth's religious development, it must be admitted that they are more interesting than conclusive evidences of any fundamental change in Wordsworth.

Sonnets 3.28 and 3.31 provide more central examples of Wordsworth's religious convictions. In Sonnet 1.20 of the
1822 edition, although his subject required a statement of belief in immortality, Wordsworth avoided that problem. In 1845, in Sonnets 3.28 and 3.31, he was faced with the same requirement.

Sonnets 3.28, crucial as it is, is perhaps the most difficult to judge of all sonnets in the series. Entitled "Visitation of the Sick," and dealing with confession, it states clearly enough,

When breath departs
From one disbursed so, so comforted,
His Spirit Angels greet;

Sonnet 3.28

and then Wordsworth turns to his almost continual interest in social benefits

T and ours be hope
That, if the Sufferer rise from his sick-bed,
Hence he will gain a firmer mind, to cope
With a bad world, and foil the Tempter's arts.

Sonnet 3.28

Now the statement that Angels greet the departed spirit is a blunt statement of immortality, and as such it must be accepted. It parallels the line of Sonnet 3.16,

What perfect glory ye in Heaven shall reap?

Wordsworth is able to state in 1845 the doctrine of immortality which he could not state in 1822 sonnets that more directly required it. In contrast to other allusions to central Christian doctrine, the 1845 references are not qualified so strongly as his reference to the
Virgin Mary, nor are they required as a build up to the conclusion of the sequence as is his reference to the divinity of Christ in Sonnet 3.46.

A chronological study of Wordsworth's use of the words *Heaven* and *Angel* shows that he used them with increasingly orthodox interpretations. In 1822 he used the word *Heaven* fourteen times;¹ but never as signifying anything more than a moral power.² Between 1822 and 1845, the word as

¹In lines 1.9.5, 1.22.6, 1.24.5, 1.39.8, 2.15.9, 2.18.8, 2.26.5, 2.29.8, 3.2.12, 3.10.13, 3.15.8, 3.41.3, 3.43.6, 3.46.9.

²The most specific uses of the word are:

If thou hast fallen, and righteous Heaven restore
The prostrate,... (Sonnet 3.2)

What came from heaven to heaven by nature clings,...
And, if dissevered thence, its course is short.
(Sonnet 3.10)

To social interests, and to favouring heaven;...
(Sonnet 3.41)

Give all thou canst; high Heaven rejects the lore
Of nicely-calculated less or more;... (Sonnet 3.43)

Earth prompts - Heaven urges; let us seek the light,...
(Sonnet 3.46)

he used it becomes increasingly specific. Immortality is at least implied in an 1827 and an 1842 reference.³

³The references are as follows:
1827: For thus She knelt, and, ere
The summer-leaf had faded, passed to Heaven.
(Sonnet 3.24, lines 13,14).

1827: They, with all that do abide
In Heaven, have lifted up their hearts....
(Sonnet 3.25, lines 5,6).
(1827 references in lines 3.11.11 and 3.20.14 are not significant.)

1835: While Mercy, uttering, through their voice, a sound Echoed in Heaven... (Sonnet 2.4, lines 8,9).

1837: The Saxons... look up to heaven and crave redress... (Sonnet 1.32, lines 1,4).

1842: and won a meed Of praise from Heaven. (Sonnet 3.15, lines 7,8).

In 1845 he uses the word twice:

All promises vouchsafed by Heaven will shine In light confirmed...
Sonnet 2.10 line 12

and

What perfect glory ye in Heaven shall reap! - Sonnet 3.16 line 8

The first reference is his most exact interpretation of the moral power of Heaven; the second is his most definite statement of immortality by use of the word.

Wordsworth's use of the word Angel also becomes more exact. Angel is used four times in the 1822 edition, the

\[1\] in lines 1.2.10, 1.13,5, 2.24.2, 3.5.4.

most specific use being:

If there be prophets... they can tell....
Did holy Paul a while in Britain dwell,
Or He, whose bonds dropped off, whose prison doors
Flew open, by an Angel's voice unbarred?
Sonnet 1.2

In 1837 occurs the passage:

Pitiless
Though men be, there are angels that can feel
For wounds that death alone has power to heal...
Sonnet 1.32
In 1845 *angel* occurs in three passages:

How soon - alas! did Man, created pure -
By Angels guarded,...
Sonnet 2.1

Ah! wherefore yields it to a foul constraint
Black as clouds its beams dispersed, while shone,
By men and angels blast, the glorious light?
Sonnet 2.38

and

His Spirit Angels greet;...
Sonnet 3.28

Considered in the light of his use of the words at the time the passages under consideration were written, the statement of immortality shows that Wordsworth had advanced considerably over his position in 1822. Certainly they are Wordsworth's most positive statements of immortality.

Granting that these references give specific evidences of development over 1822, however, the question in 1845 as in 1822 is not so much his mere ability to repeat doctrine as his readiness and ability to allude to it and to use it in the solution of his problems. In this light, the references to immortality are quite weak. They derive as directly from his subject as do the allusions in Sonnets 2.25 and 3.46, and no important use is made of them.

However we may interpret Wordsworth's statements regarding immortality in Sonnets 3.28 and 3.16, Sonnet 3.31 of 1845 seems to avoid the problem of immortality as carefully as do the earlier sonnets. The Sonnet, "Funeral
Service," considers exclusively the service as it affects the mortal remains and the persons attending the service:

From the Baptismal hour, through weal and woe,
The Church extends her care to thought and deed;
Nor quits the Body when the Soul is freed,
The mortal weight cast off to be laid low.
Sonnet 3.31

As such, any consideration of immortality may be considered irrelevant; but the question of immortality is most closely allied to the subject of this quatrain, and the second quatrain broaches that most central problem even more directly:

Blest Rite for him who hears in faith, 'I know That my Redeemer liveth,' - hears each word That follows - striking on some kindred chord Deep in the thankful heart; - yet tears will flow.

A central statement as to the authenticity of that faith seems required. He approaches the problem still more closely in the first of the sestet:

Man is as grass that springeth up at morn,
Grows green, and is cut down and withereth Ere nightfall - truth that well may claim a sigh, Its natural echo;...

and Wordsworth reiterates the hope, but without any comment as to its validity:

but hope comes reborn At Jesu's bidding. We rejoice, 'O Death Where is thy Sting? - 0 Grave where is thy Victory?'

The other sonnets touching the problem of immortality show that Wordsworth accepted that creed, and in 1845 he was considerably more confident concerning that dogma than in
1822. How strongly he felt that truth, and how great was his religious development regarding it, is a difficult question. So far as the thesis of this paper is concerned, the mere fact that his allusions to immortality are possible of such varied interpretations indicates the development of Wordsworth over 1822. Certainly, also, Wordsworth even in 1845 was not as a poet sufficiently conscious of immortality to utilize it effectively in his poetry.

Religious Maturity.

The sonnets of the 1845 edition discussed thus far demonstrate a marked religious development in Wordsworth since 1822. This development is to be seen both in his more confident, personal, and positive attitude toward Christian theology, and in his statements regarding immortality (written within three years of his pronouncement of caution on "points of faith" and the same year as the Fenwick notes). The sonnets discussed thus far, however, do not show that Wordsworth has mastered his personal theological problems sufficiently to be able to use his religious beliefs in resolving important church issues. His religious comments have been largely incidental to his theme, and they have been treated incidentally. They have contained no final, positive, resounding statement typical of the Wordsworth in 1800 who was sure of the truth on the level at which he was then dealing with it.
Four sonnets relative to the paramount unity-heresy dilemma were added in 1845, and show Wordsworth for the first time confident enough of his position to reject doctrine. Sonnet 2.2 begins

From false assumption rose, and fondly hailed
By superstition, spread the Papal power;...
Sonnet 2.2

and thereby cuts cleanly through the evasions and uncertainties that filled so much of his previous sonnets. The rest of Sonnet 2.2, excepting the last two lines, follows in praise of Catholicism. There is, however, this significant difference from his early treatment of the subject. Having abstracted the good attributes of the Roman church from its doctrinal fallacy and social abuses, he is for the first time able to deal positively with its blessings, and through them with his theme.

With this confidence, Wordsworth writes for the first time in 1845 an entire sonnet on the value of unity. Sonnet 2.9 is added after the inconclusive Sonnet 2.8 of 1822, which deals with the returning "Crusaders." Against this background of failure and wasted effort of the Crusades, Wordsworth added Sonnets 2.9 and 2.10 in 1845. In Sonnet 2.9 Wordsworth treats more centrally and more pervasively than in any sonnet before 1845 the problem of unity.
As faith thus sanctified the warrior's crest
While from the Papal Unity there came,
What feebler means had failed to give, one aim
Diffused through all the regions of the West;...
Sonnet 2.9

The second quatrain deals with the "Art" and "outward frame" that Rome provided, and then the sestet speaks most effectively, through his old medium of architecture.

The sestet of Sonnet 2.9 can best be compared with the excellent Sonnet 3.43 of 1822, also on architecture. Esthetic honors I think go to the sonnet of 1822, as an individual sonnet. This earlier sonnet is especially fitting for comparison because it is the most central to Wordsworth's theme of all his 1822 sonnets on architecture. I think Sonnet 3.43 is unsurpassed as an expression of the spirit of Gothic art, and religiously it rises to such lines as

Give all thou canst; high Heaven rejects the Lore
Of nicely-calculated less or more;...
Sonnet 3.43

and

These lofty pillars, spread that branching roof...
Like thoughts whose very sweetness yieldeth proof
That they were born for immortality.
Sonnet 3.43

This is certainly effective, and not without religious significance; it fails to touch Wordsworth's theme, however, nearly so effectively as the sestet of Sonnet 2.9 of 1845:

Hail countless Temples! that so well befit
Your ministry; that, as ye rise and take
Form, spirit and character from holy writ,
Give to devotion, wheresoe'er awake,
Pinions of high and higher sweep, and make
The unconverted soul with awe submit.
Sonnet 2.9

The richness of imagery may not be so great in the Wordsworth of 73 years as the Wordsworth of 51; but both the early and the later Wordsworth are integrated in Sonnet 2.9; and Sonnet 2.9, with Sonnet 2.2, reflects for the first time a Wordsworth who has resolved his own religious problems and can thus treat adequately the ecclesiastical problems related to them.

The second sonnet added to his treatment of the Crusades, Sonnet 2.10, discusses the problem of mutability; and the problem of heresy and wasted effort is included. Again, the sonnet compares with the 1822 Sonnet, "Mutability." Certainly Wordsworth in 1822 could write effectively of mutability. In that Sonnet (3.34) there is, however, no mention of his theme; it contains no mention of religion or church, and curiously enough only the vaguest suggestion of his central concern, unity. It is an excellent sonnet, of very little consequence to the sequence he was writing. Sonnet 2.10, on the other hand, speaks not merely of the basic theme of the sequence; within its lines the Mores and Cranmers, the Scottish Covenanters and the "Non-conforming" for the first time find explanation:
Where long and deeply hath been fixed the root
In the blest soil of gospel truth, the Tree,
(Blighted or scathed though many branches be,
Put forth to wither, many a hopeful shoot)
Can never cease to bear celestial fruit.
Witness the Church that oft-times, with effect
Dear to the saints, strives earnestly to eject
Her bane, her vital energies recruit.

Sonnet 2.10

Here in 1845 the majesty of the Ecclesiastical Sonnets as Wordsworth conceived them begins to show above the isolated particulars with which he has been dealing. The defeated Saxon warriors, the Crusaders, the Catholic priests, the Latitudinarians, Charles II, William III, for the first time find an explanation, whether in the "Blighted and scathed" branches, or the shoots of ecclesiasticism "Put forth to wither," or in the more comfortable element of the tree that

strives earnestly to eject
Her bane, her vital energies recruit.

They are now become interrelated parts of that slow "progress made by collective minds" in the development of Anglican unity. For the first time, the units of his story become focused and significant. The resolution is Wordsworth's mature interpretation:

Lamenting, do not hopelessly repine
When such good work is doomed to be undone,
The conquests lost that were so hardly won: -
All promises vouchsafed by Heaven will shine
In light confirmed while years their course shall run,
Confirmed alike in progress and decline.

Sonnet 2.10
This is not the profoundly optimistic Wordsworth of 1798, nor the ineffectually optimistic Wordsworth of 1822 who wrote

For all things are less dreadful than they seem.  
Sonnet 1.7

It is however an eminently mature and wholesome Wordsworth of 1845.

The core of his final position, and the final interpretation of the story told in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets, is in Sonnet 2.1. For himself, he has solved the problem of creed:

How soon - alas! did Man, created pure -  
By Angels guarded, deviate from the line  
Prescribed to duty: - woe ful forfeiture  
He made by wilful breach of law divine.  
Sonnet 2.1

The doctrine of the Fall of Man is not merely accepted. From it derives his solution of the problem of church unity. For the first time Wordsworth deals in a coordinated manner with the Reformation:

With like perverseness did the Church abjure  
Obedience to her Lord, and haste to twine,  
'Mid Heaven-born flowers that shall for aye endure,  
Weeds on whose front the world had fixed her sign.  
Sonnet 2.1

Within this quatrain are included the Apostolic Succession, the apostacy of the Roman church, the continuation of the "Heaven-born flowers" through the Anglican Church (perhaps through others, including Catholic, but the continuation nevertheless of the "flowers that shall for aye endure");
and yet there is both less and more within these lines. Church dogma is more implied than stated. As in his earlier use of the Hartlean system, Wordsworth now writes both within and transcending the framework of Christian dogma. He writes here, not toward any particular point of theology; he uses the theological doctrine within whose framework he finds the solution to his problem of unity; yet in his resolution Wordsworth typically includes men of all faiths.

Oh man, - if with thy trials thus it fares, 
If good can smooth the way to evil choice, 
From all rash censure be the mind kept free; 
He only judges right who weighs, compares, 
And, in the sternest sentence which his voice Pronounces, ne'er abandons Charity. 
Sonnet 2.1

This is the first suggestion in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets of a maturity equal to that of Troilus and Cressseyde, and Paradise Lost; but in Wordsworth’s defense and to his great credit, no other poet in the English language started so basically and solidly in the field of epistemology and built so solidly into and through Christian dogma. We may wish that this mature Wordsworth had written the entire Ecclesiastical Sonnets; we may be grateful that Wordsworth built so carefully and honestly throughout his life, and left us a record of this illuminating experiment.

A final note is missing. Heretofore in the Ecclesiastical Sonnets Wordsworth has never shown enough confidence in his religious beliefs to write defiantly and scornfully in
their defense. He could rail against the church; he could never write powerfully in defense of church or church doctrine. Sonnet 2.39, "The Commination Service," shows Wordsworth in 1845 as confident regarding religious problems as he had ever been about nature and society.

Shun not this rite, neglected, yea abhorred,  
By some of unreflecting mind, as calling  
Man to curse man, (thought monstrous and appalling).  
Go thou and hear the threatenings of the Lord;...  
Sonnet 3.29

Spiritually, this is merely a mature statement of the theme of "Peter Bell;" but it is mature, and both the early and later philosophies of Wordsworth are integrated within these lines.

Listening within his Temple see his sword  
Unsheathed in wrath to strike the offender's head,  
Thy own, if sorrow for thy sin be dead,  
Guilt unrepented, pardon unimplored.  
Sonnet 3.29

This is the first time Wordsworth could write as powerfully of religious ritual as he once wrote of nature and society. His impatient thunder in the resolution bespeaks a different Wordsworth from the one we have seen between 1820 and 1842.

Two aspects bears Truth needful for salvation;  
Who knows not that? - yet would this delicate age  
Look only on the Gospel's brighter page:  
Let light and dark duly our thoughts employ;  
So shall the fearful words of Commination  
Yield timely fruit of peace and love and joy.  
Sonnet 3.29

It cannot be denied, I feel, that Wordsworth's conscientious ponderings "On man, on nature, and on human life," to use Arnold's quotation of him, have carried him
through his period of uncertainty reflected in the 1822 edition of the *Sonnets* and placed him within an altered and mature philosophy in 1845.
No one can deny that Wordsworth's handling of his theme became more effective as his work with the sonnets progressed. It is equally clear that this effectiveness resulted from his increasingly confident treatment of theology. I have shown that this increasing confidence can be explained in no way as the result of any decreasing caution or exactitude. There are then two grounds on which the changes in the sonnets can be explained - esthetic and religious.

Miss Potts has explained on esthetic grounds the motives for the emendations to the sonnets.\(^1\) My study, accepting the esthetic motives largely as she described them, has treated Wordsworth's emendations purely in the light of his religious development. Our two separate explanations are generally, then, complementary rather than conflicting.

Miss Potts' two interpretations most closely related to the story of Wordsworth's religious development, however, require more detailed consideration. Of the crucial 1827 edition, she says

\(^1\)Potts, *ibid.*, pp. 44-70, especially 44-58.
But 10 other sonnets were added to the edition of 1827, where the plot would best support a renewed caution against the perils of idolatry, cruelty, and fanaticism (2.30, 2.33, 2.34, 3.7, 2.11, 3.36... or where the liturgical theme might be expanded with a possible gain in dignity or repose (3.20, 3.23, 3.24, 3.25...).

A comparison of these with other poems first published in 1827 shows that the poet's access of zeal for spiritual freedom was shaped into a clear definition of the means whereby he thought it was to be secured: Faith and Grace.1

1Potts, ibid., pp.44-5.

Certainly no one can challenge the accuracy of her description. Whether her explanation of those alterations is the complete explanation and the explanation most pertinent to us today is the only issue, if there be one, between us.

With a more fundamental explanation suggested by Miss Potts, however, I do take issue. In her discussion of Henry Reed's influence upon the 1842 and 1845 emendations to the sonnets, especially the sonnets on liturgy and the American church, Miss Potts says:

Any exhaustive 'appeal to common human-heartedness' [Reed's suggestion] would in 1822 have been apt to arouse Wordsworth's suspicions, for Eccl. Son. 1.8, 1.23, 1.26, 2.3, 2.5, 2.20, 2.36, 2.37, were so many attempts either to transcend common human-heartedness or to define its perils. The warning in 1.20 should not have been forgotten: 'The way is smooth for Power that travels with the human heart...Ye holy Men, so earnest in your care of your own mighty instruments beware!'2

2Ibid., pp. 56-7.
This passage, while an adequate interpretation of the esthetic qualities in which Miss Potts is interested, is entirely erroneous, I feel, in its implications concerning Wordsworth's religious development. The interpretation implied, and too generally accepted, is (1) that Wordsworth, until 1822, tried to avoid discussing the emotional appeal of the church, and when he did mention it he tried to "transcend" it or "define its perils;" and (2) that later, as his intellectual powers declined, he became oblivious to the dangers of the emotional appeal of the church. The issue is perhaps most clearly stated when Miss Potts says, "The warning in 1.20 should not have been forgotten: 'The way is smooth for Power that travels with the human heart....'"

Certainly if Wordsworth did consider the emotional appeal of the church an evil in 1822, or if he did fail to appreciate its dangers in 1845, his development was not so much spiritual progress as intellectual decline.

First, Wordsworth did not consider the emotional appeal of the church an evil in 1822. The appeal to the emotions, whether through nature or the church, was one of the universal traits of Wordsworth's poetry, from 1798 to 1845. It was an integral part of Wordsworth. He could not treat it in the religious field in 1822 with the assurance that he had shown in 1800 when dealing with it in the field of nature. He did recognize its validity.
and importance. The actual development in Wordsworth can best be seen in the light of Miss Potts' description of his attitude toward the attributes of the church:

If infidelity, tyranny, and schism are the recurring perils of the pure Church, faith, justice and peace, mercy and humility, and unity, are its eternal triumphs. Evidence of this might be found in almost every sonnet of the series.¹

¹Potts, ibid., p.63.

Wordsworth was as much the poet of the emotions in 1822 as in 1800. "Common human-heartedness" ("faith, justice and peace, mercy and humility" - or the "Power that travels with the human heart") was as Reed said, "the very element in which your [Wordsworth's] poetry moves and has its being."² These elements, as Miss Potts suggests, are

²Ibid., p.57.

reflected as directly in the 1822 sonnets³ as in The Prelude or in 1845's Sonnets 3.9 and 3.26-3.31.

Wordsworth would have been suspicious of any "exhaustive appeal to common human-heartedness" in 1822; but he was not suspicious of the emotional appeal itself. He was then unable to treat the dichotomy Miss Potts describes with any perspective. He was then unable to
correlate the emotional appeal with the perils of the church. It is his inability to resolve these elements, and not his antagonism to emotional appeal as such that vitiated so many of the 1822 sonnets.

Secondly, he never did forget the warning in Sonnet 1.20. Sonnet 1.20 of 1822 reads:

The way is smooth
For Power that travels with the human heart:...
Ye holy Men, so earnest in your care,
Of your own mighty instruments beware!

Sonnet 1.20

Sonnet 3.16 of 1845 reads:

Bishops and Priests...if deep...
in your hearts the sense of duty lie;...
What perfect glory ye in Heaven shall reap! -
But... if unsound
Your practice prove, faithless though but in thought,
Bishops and Priests, think what a gulf profound
Awaits you then, if they were rightly taught
Who framed the Ordinance by your lives disowned!

Sonnet 3.16

In 1845 Wordsworth showed the same consciousness of the dangers from abused emotional powers of the church that he showed in 1822.

In 1822 he did not try to transcend "human-heartedness." He relied on this trait as strongly then as in 1800 or 1845. In 1845 he did transcend the negative approach of uncertainty, qualification, and distrust, to rise intellectually and spiritually to the sonnets of the last edition.

Miss Potts apparently leans more toward the thesis of this paper than toward the interpretation implied in
her passage on "common human-heartedness;" for in the following sentence, she says,

More probably Wordsworth's own increasing faith in social rather than individual channels of religious feeling inclined him to this further versification "of offices dispensing heavenly grace" (2.6.14).¹

¹ Potts, ibid., p. 57.

Miss Potts herself then (1) does recognize a change in Wordsworth's religious attitude, and (2) gives more credence to "Wordsworth's own increasing faith in social rather than individual channels of religious feeling" than to his altered attitude toward "common human-heartedness" as the explanation for that change. This is the only suggestion of religious development in Miss Potts' discussion of the Sonnets; but religious development was of course not her theme. Certainly, as I have already shown, the religious explanation of Wordsworth's emendations are in no way in conflict with her esthetic interpretations.

Wordsworth, then, in spite of his intentions and interests, has left definite evidence of a most remarkable religious development between 1820 and 1843. He was apparently as confused about religious problems in 1820 as he was confused about social and philosophical problems in 1795. He wrote excellent sonnets in the first edition. Sonnets 3.34, "Mutability," 3.35, "Old Abbies," and 3.43-3.45 on King's College Chapel are excellent. He could
write well on religious history as in Sonnet 1.13, and on the need for religious certainty, as in Sonnet 1.16. He could write with good effect on the influence of Christ and the Virgin Mary. Of the 102 sonnets in the 1822 edition, however, there is not one single sonnet that deals effectively with his central theme or uses even the most elemental Christian belief in the service of that theme. He was, however, most carefully and cautiously probing all particulars of his problem. He was doggedly re-affirming his old faith as a poet, even though (witness Sonnet 1.18) it would not serve him in the field of ecclesiasticism.

By 1827 he had altered his approach from a primary dependence on nature to an approach both more intuitive and yet based on many elements of his old philosophy. In 1845 he had apparently mastered the Christian system as in 1800 he had mastered the Hartlean system. Finally, at about the age of 73, he was not so good a poet as he was at the age of 30; but he did write excellent, powerful, human poetry. In 1822, the more closely his poetry touched upon ecclesiastical problems related to personal religion, the poorer it was. In 1845, the more closely his poetry touched ecclesiastical and religious problems, the better it was. He certainly did not save the sonnets as an esthetic unit in 1845; but he contributed more to the success of the sequence than during his early years of uncertainty,
and he did resolve the conflict between authority and heresy. More importantly, he left a final record of the results of the intellectual and spiritual experiment described in The Prelude and The Excursion.
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