

## Editorial

THIS number of *ARIEL* includes articles on William Wordsworth (1770–1850) by Professor Alastair Thomson, Mr R. S. Woof and the Rev. H. A. L. Rice and a review by Mrs Moorman, to whose masterly *William Wordsworth: a Biography* so many general readers and students of Wordsworth are indebted. Included in these contributions are fresh aperçus and, perhaps surprisingly, fresh material. Yet the emergence of new material should not surprise us. There is a wealth of written material in an island uninvasioned for over nine hundred years, whose archives have been seriously disturbed only by the dissolution of the monasteries, the barbarities of the civil war and the aerial bombings of the late war.

There is also a strong oral tradition, whose richness is not always apparent. For instance, in 1939 or 1940, Mr Kenneth Severs was approached in the taproom of The Golden Rule at Ambleside by a labourer who said to him, 'You look as if you might know something of poetry' and began to recite *Alastor* and many poems of Wordsworth. It turned out that he was a deep-sea fisherman who had learned this poetry by heart in night watches. He went on to tell Mr Severs how his grandfather had told him that when those 'queer people' — Wordsworth and his sister and their friends — walked down from Grasmere to Ambleside the locals threw mud and stones at them. 'They were a queer lot,' he said. Fresh matter here, perhaps, for a biographer or a hippy historian, pondering the reactions of the 'common man' to the 'poet'.

Our business in literary criticism lies largely with the uncommon man who can create lasting delight — or disturbance — both for his contemporaries and for future readers. And the concern of those very uncommon seventeenth-century poets not only with the mud and stones but the more exalted elements of creation is also examined in this issue by Professor Duncan, Mrs Vendler, Dr Gransden and Dr King. The impulse of George Herbert and Lovelace has something in common with that of

Wordsworth. They wished to understand more fully and to state their ideas precisely, clearly. Ben Jonson and Andrew Marvell delighted *inter alia* in gardens and estates; their listing the separate units of these which gave them pleasure was a rehearsal for Wordsworth's so simply yet impressively itemizing the objects upon which his imagination brooded.

While the earlier poets delighted in the individual items which gave the English garden its rich variety they could not but write with an awareness of tradition: the allegory of a medieval garden, the precision of the garden in the emblem tradition, then the Spenserian bowers — and the moral of that perpetual spring, which unlike the fruitful union of spring and harvest in Paradise, never became more than static, sterile. Elizabethan and later Caroline love poets excitedly drew parallels between a woman's and a garden's charms. Donne and Herbert worked out thoughts in terms of garden imagery. There was the order Ben Jonson (anticipating the wealth of Marvell's garden, even to the rhyming of peach and reach) praised in Penshurst, an order of perspective, of social harmony and of plenteous profusion:

The earely cherry, with the later plum,  
Fig, grape, and quince, each in his time doth come:  
The blushing apricot, and woolly peach  
Hang on thy walls, that every child may reach

This tradition moved on in Waller's very different 'At Penshurst' with its distanced praise of symmetry, poised and polished. And the order and balance continued even as capabilities were landscaped, until Wordsworth took an even larger view than the eighteenth-century landscapers, looked beyond the hedgerows, assimilating and being assimilated by the spaciousness of nature, its chime and symphony.

Assimilation has its different forms. That deep-sea fisherman at Ambleside had an advantage over many a modern child untaught in the pleasures of an accurately ordered and well-stocked mind, since his appreciation of poetry led him to assimilate it. For him the pleasure not only of recognition but recall. In the dark watches of the night, ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples, were stored in the bright places of his memory. No lecturer instructed him.

A.N.J.